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# Education Chief Calls For Bilingual Schools

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Study says high school dropout rate of Latinos is 25%

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Latino students are twice as likely as African Americans and three times as likely as whites to drop out of high school, the Education Department said yesterday in a study suggesting that the nation's education system is ill-equipped to deal with the fastest-growing group of schoolchildren.

Education Secretary Richard Riley called for public school districts to create in the next five years 1,000 new dual-language schools, which would instruct children in English and in a native language such as Spanish.

"If we see to it that immigrants and their children can speak only English and nothing more, then we will have missed one of the greatest opportunities of this new century," Riley said. "It is high time we begin to treat language skills as the asset they are."

In 1997, 25.3 percent of Latinos age 16 to 24 dropped out of high school, compared with 13.4 percent of African Americans and 7.6 percent of whites.

The study also said that 11 percent of Latinos age 25 to 29 possessed at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 14.2 percent of African Americans and 32.6 percent of whites.

Riley said dual language instruc-

tion has proven to help Latino children do better academically as well as preserve children's heritage and promote the bilingualism all students need in a global economy.

Dual-language instruction is one of three main, often hotly debated approaches to teaching the nation's 3 million limited English proficient students, of which nearly 75 percent are Latino. These students, designated by school tests and other measures as non-English speakers, also are taught in English-only classes or completely in their native languages. Conservative critics of dual-language schools said yesterday that such instruction doesn't necessarily give non-English speakers the language immersion necessary to improve.

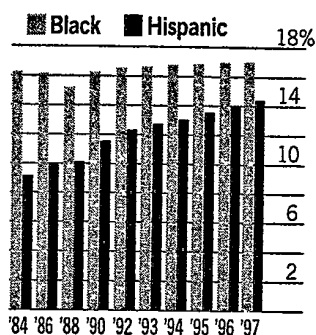
"You are basically using Hispanic kids to help teach English-speaking kids Spanish," said Jorge Amselle of the Center for Equal Opportunity, a Washington-based group that advocates putting non-English speaking children in English-only classes as quickly as possible.

Although Latino children are more likely than other kids to come from poor families where they don't have good access to health care and preschool classes that would make them better students, statistics recounted by Riley indicated that language is the chief barrier to learning.

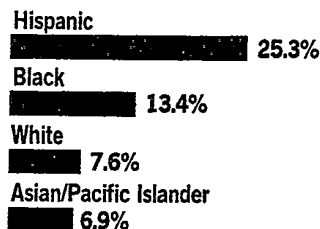
The dropout rates for Latinos — a

## A GROWING MINORITY

The Hispanic population has increased rapidly and predictions indicate that by 2000, more than 20 percent of children will be Hispanic. Here is the percent of enrollment in elementary and secondary schools among the two largest minorities:



Hispanics are also more likely to drop out of school. The percent of 16- to 24-year-olds who were not enrolled or had not completed high school in October 1997:



Source: U.S. Department of Education

Associated Press Graphics

third of whom leave school overall — are linked to language difficulties. Nearly half of foreign-born Latino students drop out, while 16 percent of Latino students born in the United States leave school, Riley said.