

REPRESENTATIVE ROBERTO R. ALONZO'S

capitol report



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Pictures: Rep. Alonzo shows his support for education funding during various rallies of teachers, students, and parents at the State Capitol.



*Demographer Expert Murdock Says Hispanic Growth Costs State & Schools More**

In recent testimony (Tuesday, October 23, 2012) during the Texas school finance trial taking place in Austin before the 250th Judicial District Civil Court with Judge John Dietz presiding, demographics expert and nationally well-renowned statistician, Dr. Steve Murdock, testified that a rapidly growing Hispanic enrollment will require the State of Texas and school districts alike to spend more money because so many of the students come from poor families.

During his testimony, Murdock indicated that while white enrollment in Texas schools is down 10.2 percent over the last decade, the Hispanic student population is up 50.3 percent. Moreover, Hispanics currently make up 53 percent of children in the state's schools, and by 2050, it is projected that that student population will be 64 percent Hispanic and just 15.5 percent white. *"If this is the case, there is no doubt that the state of Texas's educational system in general, and policymakers in particular will have to make adjustments to keep up with that changing demographic picture,"* said Rep. Alonzo. *"Moreover, that is a challenge lawmakers will be faced with when we return to Austin for the start of the 83rd legislative session in early January 2013,"* continued Rep. Alonzo.

Continuing his predictions, Dr. Murdock made it clear that during those changing trends, the number of students from low-income families has also jumped sharply. According to the latest census data, 26.8 percent of Hispanics in Texas in general, and 27.7 percent in Dallas specifically, live below the poverty level. When looking at the white population however, the data shows that only 9.5 percent of whites in Texas in general, and 8.9 percent in Dallas live below the poverty level.

"So what do those numbers translate to?" asked Rep. Alonzo. According to Murdock, that means significantly higher spending because children from economically disadvantaged families [traditionally] require more instruction and remedial help to catch up to their counterparts from middle-income families. Also according to Murdock, data reveals that there are increasingly two [different] populations in Texas and across the United States; (1) an aging group of white residents where the average age of a woman is 41 - near the end of child-bearing age; and (2) a second group which includes a rapidly growing minority population - boosted by immigration and fertility - where the average age of a woman in that category is 25 years old. Thus, as Murdock sees it, our future's demography is increasingly tied to the minority population. Moreover, he says that how well they do in terms of education will determine how well Texas does in the future. To back up his statement, Murdock cited education level as the key factor in how much a person can earn and pay in taxes to support schools. In his testimony, Murdock also made it clear that "education is the single best predictor of socioeconomic advancement."

It is important to note that two-thirds of the state's approximately 1,100 school districts have joined in the lawsuit. Moreover, it is further important to note that this legal dispute came to a head when the last GOP-controlled legislature cut education funding by \$5.4 billion last year - an annual reduction of \$500 per student and a move that Rep. Alonzo did not support.

There were some other alarming statistics that Murdock shared with the court panel. He indicated that the consequences of not improving the educational level of Hispanics will be severe to the state in many respects, but primarily economically. Moreover, he also noted that Texas ranks dead last among the states in the percentage of population without high school diplomas. Among Hispanics, 37.8 percent have less than a high school education, compared to 9.3 percent of whites and 17.9 percent of whites and African-Americans, respectively. In short, those less-educated residents earn less, pay less in taxes and have children who are more expensive to educate, so it is urgent that access to education become a priority. Furthermore, Texas is not spending what it takes to properly educate lower-income children. A leading study cited by Murdock shows that Texas ranks 42nd among states nationally in spending on instruction. And it ranks 43rd in total spending per pupil.

[* Information used herein excerpted in part from a number of sources and US census data, including article by Terrence Stutz, *Dallas Morning News*, 2012, October 24]