

OUR TOWNS

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Education a concern among Hispanics

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AURORA — Hispanic families need to be concerned with everything from immunizations to language when it comes to receiving an education.

These and issues concerning education in the Hispanic community were the focus of a forum hosted by Univision Chicago, a Spanish-speaking television station, at East Aurora High School Saturday morning.

Hispanic families from the area were encouraged to join a panel of six experts in the fields of education, health and community relations to learn more about education.

One discussion centered around what immunizations are required for public schools in Aurora. Audience members ex-

pressed concern about difficulties obtaining medical records after recently immigrating and were worried about how it would affect their children when it was time to register.

Taylor said if documentation is not available upon registration, they will have six weeks to obtain that information.

The dialogue, which was recorded for television, was conducted in Spanish, with the only exceptions being the two panel members who did not speak Spanish: Pamela Taylor, family nurse practitioner, and Dr. Jerome Roberts, East Aurora school superintendent. Translations were provided.

"I am glad for this experience ... it provides an opportunity for me to empathize with how (Spanish speakers) feel in an English-speaking society,"

Roberts said.

Topics discussed included health and nutrition for students, registering for public schools, how to help students get into college and how to support recent immigrants who are not familiar with the education system.

Moderating the discussion were Univision's Enrique Rodriguez and Paula Gomez.

Panelists included Roberts; Taylor; Eva Serrano, director of Community and School Partnerships at Aurora University; Jesse Ruiz, president of the Illinois State Board of Education; Sunny Chico, president of SPC Consulting; and Elizabeth Cervantes, social worker at East High.

Many parents were concerned about getting their children to eat the right kinds of food.

The panel emphasized that

children who go to school hungry or dehydrated cannot focus properly in the classroom, so eating breakfast and bringing water are both essential.

Panelists also encouraged parents to take active roles in their children's education by asking them what they are learning at school, by having the children read to them and by keeping children on a schedule.

"Also, keep an eye on who your children are spending time with," Chico added. "My daughter is in her 20s, and as long as she is living in my house, I need to know where she is."

The tone of the event changed slightly when Serrano spoke candidly of Latino education.

"We have a very strong crisis in education in the Latino community," Serrano said. "Adults

need to change their train of thought. We want our kids to work, but education should be their No. 1 job."

Ruiz also reminded parents they need not be concerned about legal status when it comes to education.

"In Illinois, students have the right to education regardless of legal status," Ruiz said. "Public schools will admit students without a Social Security number and will provide bilingual services."

The issue of bilingual education brought conflicting opinions from the audience. Some felt it helped to ease the transition of Spanish-speaking students into an English-speaking society, while others felt it actually hindered the learning process.

"Many families want their

children to learn English at school and speak Spanish at home," said one audience member. "I am a bilingual teacher, and I know bilingual students are only required to speak English 90 minutes of the day — 90 minutes out of 24 hours is not enough to learn it."

Roberts encouraged everyone present to utilize resources available to them, from teachers to counselors and public libraries. He said summer vacation is not a vacation from studying, and children should still read and practice skills they need for school. He also emphasized the importance of parental expectations when it comes to college.

"If you want your children to go to college, start talking about it in elementary school," Roberts said. "They need to know it's expected of them."