

AAUW wants Latinas to go to college

Comments

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University women are hoping to get Latina girls to think beyond high school and consider college.

To do that, several chapters of the American Association of University Women organized a Dare to Dream conference held Saturday at Elmhurst College.

Attending were 15 girls and 9 of their mothers from Hester Junior High in Franklin Park and 62 girls and 50 mothers from Mannheim Middle School in Melrose Park.

A similar project has been tried in California. Dorothy Valintis and Connie Baker found out about it at a national AAUW conference in 2007.

"This is a population that is under-represented in colleges and in professional careers," Valintis said. "We felt this was a real mission that we could get our teeth into."

The need is there. Valintis said that nationally the dropout rate for Latino girls is six times that for Caucasian girls. Two-thirds of Latinos live in poverty despite earning more money than in their native countries.

"The young Latinas often have to help run the household and babysit younger siblings," Valintis said. "When they are old enough, they are expected to get jobs to contribute to the family."

Also, prior schooling in their native countries have not prepared students to be successful in American schools, Valintis said.

"I think part of it is not seeing role models at an early age," said Cynthia George, bilingual coordinator for Mannheim School District 83.

At the Mannheim district, 68 percent of students are of Latino descent. The conference featured professional Latina women who spoke about their own challenges, as well as Latina college students. All the sessions for the mothers took place in Spanish.

The AAUW is has also contacted local high schools about starting a mentoring program for Latina girls. The organization aims to make the conference an annual event.