

## Census Data: Face Of The Future: Hispanic population changing Oklahoma

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**By 2020, at least one in four children in the state will be Hispanic, figures suggest.**

The face of Oklahoma's children is changing.

The makeup of the state's young population is changing from mostly white to frequently Hispanic, and if the pace continues, at least a quarter of Oklahoma children by the year 2020 will be Hispanic.

The number of Hispanic youths in Oklahoma has increased by more than 32 percent since 2000, while the population of non-Hispanic youths decreased by 2.6 percent, according to recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

"I see everything changing," said Nilda Reyes, director of equity and diversity at Tulsa Public Schools.



[JAMES GIBBARD / TULSA WORLD](#)

Daniel Vesley teaches the English-language learners course to fifth-graders at Newcomer International School. The number of Hispanic youths in Oklahoma has increased by more than 32 percent since 2000.

The recent Census report showed an obvious increase in the state's Hispanic population overall, about 38 percent. At the same time, the number of non-Hispanic people in Oklahoma increased by just 1.8 percent.

A Tulsa World analysis of the Census figures shows the Hispanic growth is even heavier in the youngest age groups.

The number of 10-year-old Hispanics, for example, increased 30.5 percent between 2000 and 2006. The non-Hispanic group of 10-year-olds decreased by 10.5 percent.

Hispanics accounted for 6.9 percent of the state's population.

The Census data do not distinguish between Hispanics born in the United States and elsewhere or legal status, but many of the Hispanic children are legal citizens, born in the U.S.

Of the 37 million foreign-born people in the United States, only a sliver are unauthorized children, according to the Pew Hispanic Center.

Yet the numbers foretell a blossoming Hispanic population as the children move into working and voting ages.

"The ghost of deportation, either their parents or themselves, was present during their school years, listening to the media constantly attack undocumented," said Sebastian Lantos, member of the Oklahoma Governor's Advisory Council on Latin American and Hispanic Affairs.

"What they could see, though, was their parents' hard work. Have these experiences created in children of undocumented parents an interest in voting and politics?"

Already, the Hispanic youth population has forced local schools to alter practices.

In Tulsa Public Schools, the Hispanic population is 20 percent at the elementary level, 17 percent in middle school and 14 percent in high school, Reyes said.

The district has the Newcomer International School devoted to students learning English, and it plans to extend that next year to middle and high school, she said.

The district also began offering free Spanish instruction to teachers last year, and already, one class is four.

District officials are considering a pilot program at six elementary schools in which teachers will switch every other day between instruction in Spanish and English, Reyes said.

"The Hispanic population is coming," she said. "The issue isn't as much the Hispanics, it's what we do with them because they are citizens, and we come together as a melting pot."

The dramatic demographic shift also has family-focused service providers -- from the library to the health department -- learning Spanish and the cultural traditions of this growing population.

"If somebody says they're bilingual, they're practically hired," said Grace Guerrero, Hispanic resource coordinator with Family and Children's Services. "There's just not enough people. I have so many children, and so many are Hispanic."

Guerrero's east Tulsa office is near where much of the city's Hispanic population lives. The area's Mexican restaurants and Spanish-language stores mirror nearby schools where Guerrero estimates enrollment is at least 50 percent Hispanic.

"It is a struggle," she said. "The teachers are struggling. The hospitals are struggling. The grocery stores. How do you meet the needs of all these children?"

Hispanics aren't having children at a significantly greater rate than non-Hispanics, however.

The increase is mostly because Hispanics in the United States are younger and of childbearing age, said Don Hernandez of the Center for Social Demographic Analysis.

"The people who immigrate are almost inevitably young because almost only young people are willing to take the chance of immigrating," said Hernandez, a sociology professor at the University of Albany, State University of New York.

"Immigrating is very difficult, and the economic benefits of immigrating don't necessarily come out right away. So you have to live a while for it to pay off."

Only 5.3 percent of Hispanics were 65 or older, compared with 14 percent of non-Hispanic whites in the U.S. Census.