

\$750 million education fund to benefit island

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As part of White House initiatives to improve academic performance and promote excellence in education, a \$750 million fund for innovation in education will be available for school districts and nonprofit organizations in Puerto Rico.

The official announcement will be made by the White House within the next month, said Juan Sepúlveda, executive director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.

"This is a real issue. How do you facilitate getting the resources at the local level quickly enough so they can do something right now? This is a sizeable amount of money," Sepúlveda said.

Sepúlveda, who visited the island to participate in town hall-style community meetings designed to gather input on the status of Hispanic education, said a persistent concern of the communities he has visited is that government funds — both state and federal — are not reaching the areas where they are needed most.

"If you are a local school district, you don't have to worry about the state anymore because you are going to be able to apply directly in Wash-

ington, D.C. ... If you are a nonprofit organization working with a local school district you can apply to D.C.," Sepúlveda said.

"We've heard a lot of people say things like 'the state is not helping us,' they are getting in the way, so our response was to say, 'we want you to be innovative and creative, so here is a pot of money that allows you to directly fund the best ideas.' But we are going to hold you accountable, so you can't say the state is not helping anymore," Sepúlveda said.

According to Sepúlveda, there are several details that have to be worked out before the program is officially announced, but he stressed that programs already under way will benefit from the fund.

According to U.S. Department of Education statistics, Latinos represent 20 percent of K-12 students.

"Latinos and American Indians are the two groups that have the worst numbers in the United States today. We have the highest percentage of dropouts ... We have the highest percentage of at-risk students, students who are in the school system and go to class day in and day out, but pretty much have dropped out," he said.

For the education specialist there is no "Latino solution for this situation."

"We have to be smart enough to

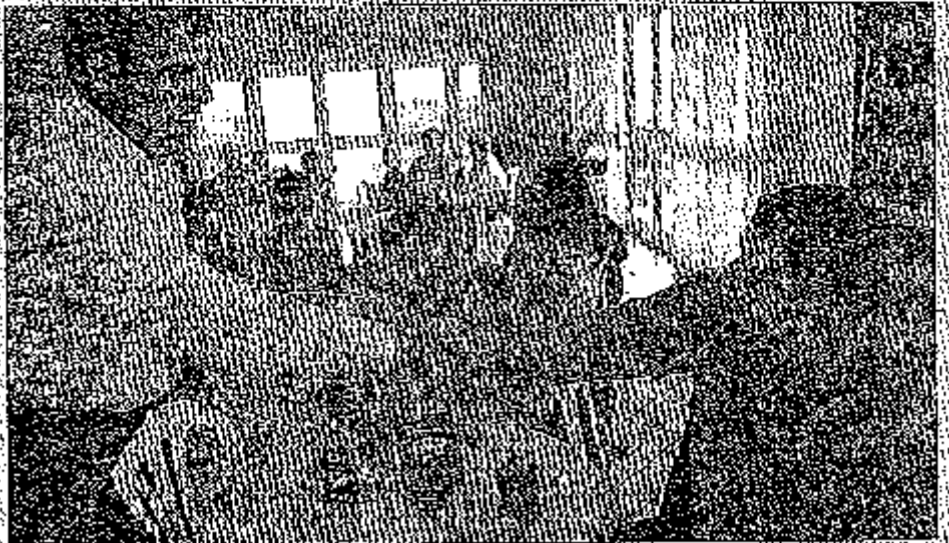


Daily Sun/Chris Siro

Juan Sepúlveda, executive Director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans

go underneath the big umbrella of the Latino term ... There is not going to be a Latino answer to these problems, but maybe a combination; a Mexican-American one, a Salvadoran-Mexican — depending on the community and where they live," Sepúlveda said, referring to the several nationalities included in the term "Latino," as understood in the United States today.

Bringing families to the table



New Progressive Party Sen. Roberto Arango greets Mira Rivera and her son, Jonathan Román Rivera, residents of the La Fera community in San Juan, during a special dinner in Puerto de Terro on Sunday. A hundred families gathered to celebrate "Family Day at the Table" during a special dinner sponsored by SuperMax Supermarkets.