

# THE 2000 CENSUS

## SCHOOLS: They're among the first places immigrant children go

FROM A1

It's one example of how schools around the state are adapting to an increasingly diverse reality.

According to the U.S. Census data released last week, the children of Washington are more racially and ethnically varied than ever.

Washington's children are 12 percent Hispanic, 4 percent black, 5 percent Asian, 2 percent American Indian and 5 percent multiracial. Seventy-one percent of the state's children are white, down from 82 percent a decade ago.

Those numbers offer a snapshot of what Washington will look like in the coming generation. What the data can't tell us, though, is whether ours will be a more integrated or divided state.

"You're getting all these divisions in society," said James Banks, director of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington. "In terms of class divisions and race divisions, I think we're really in trouble as a nation, and I'm very worried about what's going to happen as a nation if we don't do something to bring everyone together."

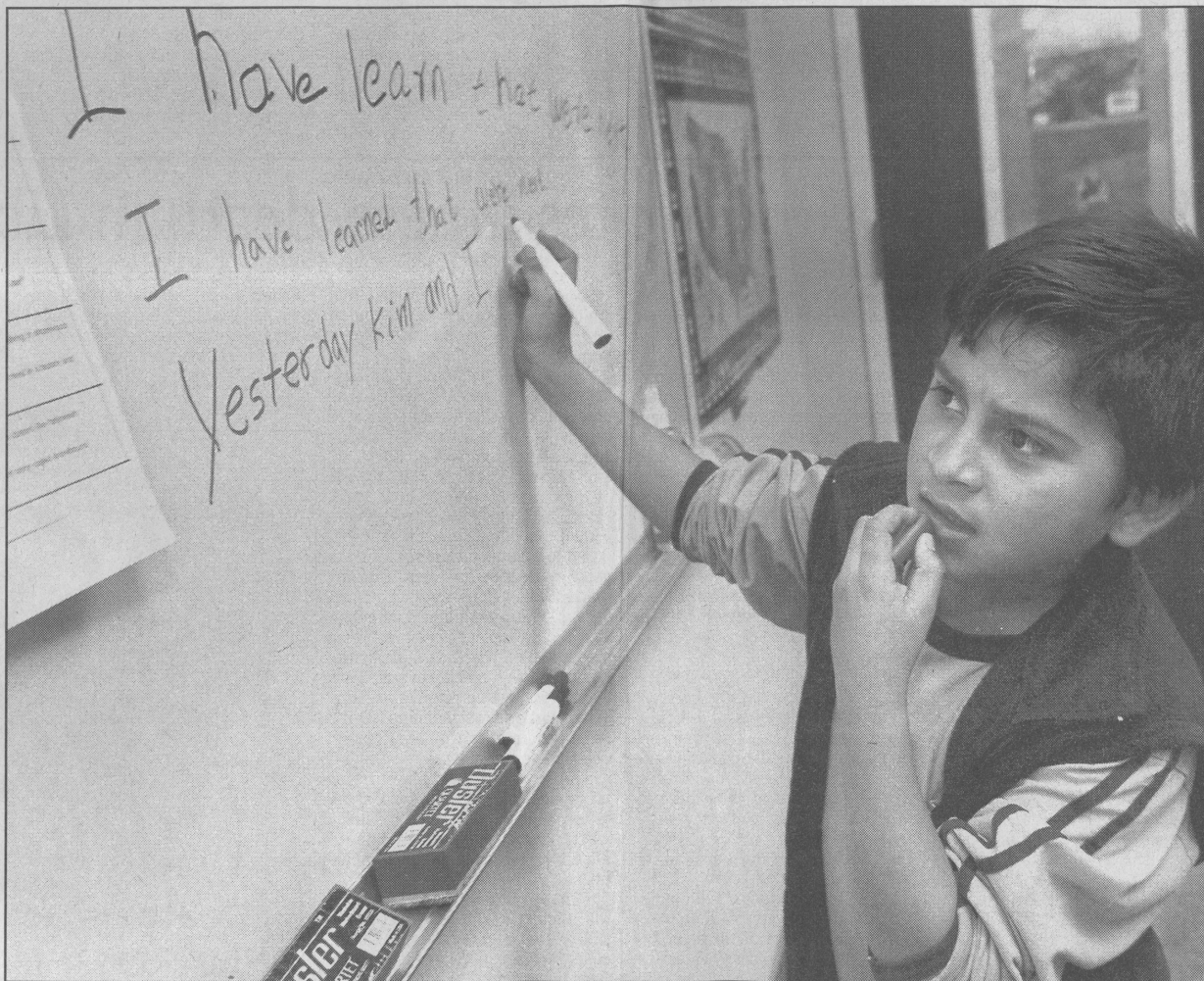
### The key role of schools

When it comes to children, people often look to the schools for answers.

They're among the first places immigrant children go, and in the classroom, diversity can be either an asset or a problem.

"I think the schools are going to play an important role, because that's one of the few places where people come together," Banks said.

Last fall, more than 25 percent of the state's schoolchildren were racial and ethnic minorities, up from 18 percent in 1990. Specifically, 11 percent were Hispanic, 8 percent Asian, 6 percent black and 3 percent American Indian.



Juan Rodriguez, 9, is learning English at Pioneer Elementary School in Sunnyside. When pupils begin in the fall, only Spanish is spoken. In the spring, it's English. Washington's superintendent of public instruction recently reported that pupils with limited English perform better when taught in both languages.

RENEE C. BYER / P-I PHOTOS

In the fall, Hispanic enrollment topped 75 percent in Mabton, Palisades, Granger, Wahluke, Sunnyside, Grandview and Toppenish schools.

The new state tests, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, have lent a greater urgency to the task of getting immigrant children up to speed.

At Pioneer Elementary School in Sunnyside, the pupils least likely to meet WASL standards spend most of their day in a small room presided over by Dora Garza, a motherly – but no-nonsense – bilingual instructional aide.

"This is wrong," she bluntly tells one pupil, pointing at a line on his grammar work sheet. "You don't say, I had give."

The criticism doesn't seem to faze the boy, one of four in Garza's class on a recent school day.

"I what' him two quarters," Garza adds. Then, she repeats the sentence in Spanish.

When the correct answer clicks in the boy's head, he beams.

"Oh!" he says. "I gave him two quarters."

Garza hasn't invented any new teaching methods in her 25 years in the classroom, but her techniques do work.

A dozen pupils worked with her for a year before taking the WASL test last spring. Ten met the state reading standard, a percentage far higher than for the state as a whole.

She starts the school year speaking mostly Spanish, then slowly adds more English to the mix. By spring, it's English only.

She builds confidence by praising the children a lot. She plays multiplication bingo to make numbers fun. She has the luxury of working with small groups of pupils. She buys them birthday presents. And she tells them she, too, came to Washington state from Mexico and worked beside her parents in the fields.