

# TAKING STOCK: HIGHER EDUCATION AND LATINOS



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This brief was developed with the support of Lumina Foundation for Education and Jobs for the Future. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions and insights by elected officials and students, and service providers who participated in focus groups and discussions. We also thank staff from the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) and National Conference for State Legislatures (NCSL) for their collaboration in making the focus groups with elected officials possible, and the Hispanic College Fund and Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute for making focus groups with students possible.

The brief benefited from input and review from Sarita Brown, President of *Excelencia* in Education, Nancy Hoffman, Vice President of Youth Transitions at Jobs for the Future, Idalia Fernandez, President of Hispanic College Fund, Greg Kinzl, Director of Research at Institute for Higher Education Policy, and, Candi CdeBaca, intern at *Excelencia* in Education. The author is solely responsible for any errors in content.

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the reviewers, Lumina Foundation, Jobs for the Future, their officers or employees.

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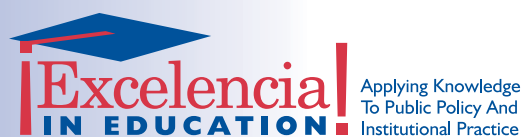
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A PDF version is available on the web at [www.EdExcelencia.org](http://www.EdExcelencia.org)



*Excelencia* in Education accelerates Latino student success in higher education by linking research, policy and practice and by promoting policies and institutional practices that support greater Latino higher educational achievement. A national, not-for-profit organization, *Excelencia* is building a network of results-oriented educators and policymakers to address America's need for a highly educated workforce and engaged civic leadership. For more information, visit: [www.EdExcelencia.org](http://www.EdExcelencia.org).

\*The terms Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably in this document

# FOREWORD

**D**ecember 2009 represents the end of a decade, and is a good time to take stock—especially since this is the decade when America discovered Latinos. For many, the discovery began with the results of 2000 census and has led different sectors in our country, and particularly our educational system, to begin to pay attention to Latino students.

At the same time, Latino students have navigated their higher educational options making individual, pragmatic choices and producing distinctive trends in Latino college participation. Responding to these trends has led thoughtful educators and policymakers to consider what and who needs to change to more effectively serve Latino students and thus expand the country's human capital.

Aware this process of discovery was underway, *Excelencia* in Education secured a grant from Lumina Foundation for Education to examine higher education's capacity and affordability to serve Latino students. The resulting multi-stage project provided the means to engage Latino and other state level elected officials; national and regional organizations providing college preparation, support services and scholarships; and selected groups of Latino college students in discussions about both higher education and policy, as well as the current status of Latino students in both. Their input, blended with our synthesis and analysis of the current state of higher education highlights critical policy considerations affecting today's Latino students, and orients this brief towards action, and identifies the steps necessary to accelerate Latino student success in higher education.

*Excelencia* in Education presents this information just as the national policy discussion by the Obama Administration and significant foundations turns its focus on college completion and when higher educational systems and state budgets are being repeatedly cut, and with more cuts expected.

The nation's potential success in reaching its degree completion goals will rely on our ability to accelerate the degree completion of Latino students. When preparing to meet such a challenge, it is important to take stock of the tools, resources, and assets available. *Excelencia* looks forward to working on this challenge in the coming decade and to meeting the country's college completion goals by accelerating Latino student success in higher education.

**Sarita E. Brown**

*President*

*Excelencia* in Education

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leaders in the current federal administration as well as key foundations focused on higher education have recognized the importance of an educated workforce and have articulated goals to increase our nation's collective degree completion. The projected population growth of Latinos, their current educational attainment levels, and their relative youth all signal the need to pay more attention to this group in higher education. A review of the data clearly shows that the nation's success in reaching its degree completion goals will rely on its ability to accelerate the degree completion of Latinos.

*Excelexencia* in Education's mission is to accelerate Latino student success in higher education. This brief takes what we know from national data and combines it with what we hear from elected officials, service providers, and Latino students and puts this information together to articulate what we can do to address critical policy issues affecting Latino students in the current higher education context.

**What we know:** The general profile of Latinos in education emphasizes a minority of the population yet drives the majority of public policy for Latinos. Policymakers seeking to improve Latino higher educational outcomes should consider positioning issues and developing strategies to accelerate Latino student success based on a more representative profile of Latino students.

**What we hear:** Listening to the stakeholders in higher education yielded the following points:

- The economic downturn presents challenges to maintaining access and success for elected officials, service providers, and students.
- Elected officials seem more focused on persistence in college while service providers are more focused on college access.
- Both Latino students and elected officials note that spending more money in higher education does not necessarily mean getting more for the investment.
- Elected officials believe that improving accountability for the public's investment in

higher education must be balanced with providing access to a quality education.

- Students do not consider accountability measures such as graduation rates or college rankings as factors influencing their college choice.
- Many Latino students value higher education and balance work and family responsibilities to get their education.
- Service providers consider programs tailored to serve Latinos the most effective in engaging Latino students.

**What we can do:** Suggested steps to accelerate Latino student success include the following:

- Develop a media campaign emphasizing the societal and economic benefits for raising the degree completion rate overall, and for Latinos specifically.
- Create a national acceleration plan specifically tailored to improve the success of Hispanic students in higher education and track degree completion goals and measures of progress.
- Focus on the strategic alignment of educational support efforts from the state to community level to increase accountability and effectiveness.
- Replicate or expand institutional practices that are improving Hispanic student success.
- Increase both support to and the accountability of institutions enrolling large numbers of Latino students to improve academic quality, retention, and degree completion.



# INTRODUCTION

Our country's most precious resource is its human capital, and in today's knowledge driven economy a college degree is critical to the success of a competitive workforce. Leaders in the current federal administration as well as large foundations have recognized the importance of an educated workforce and have articulated goals to increase our collective degree completion. For example, the Obama Administration has articulated a goal to reform higher education and to re-establish the United States by 2020 among the top ranking nations for college degree attainment. Lumina Foundation for Education has stated an objective for the nation to increase the number of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials from 39 percent to 60 percent by the year 2025. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has posited a goal to double the number of young people who, by the time they are 26, earn a postsecondary degree or certificate. Meeting these goals will require significant increased participation of all groups, but especially Latino students, and much greater clarity about the policy roadmap to reach this level of educational attainment.

Taking stock of the current higher education context is critical to guiding effective public policy. In the current environment, institutions of higher education are confronting multiple challenges:

**Diversity:** The number of nontraditional students—low-income, first-generation, commuting, part-time, students of color, and older—with diverse needs is growing.

**Capacity:** The number of seats available for students is being constrained in several states at the same time more high school students are graduating college-ready and unemployed workers are also seeking to be retrained.

**Resources:** The financial constraints on higher education are escalating as the federal and state governments are limited by the economic recession and private sources of support are reprioritizing their investments.

**Affordability:** college costs have continued to increase and more students are relying on loans to pay for college or choosing to either attend lower cost institutions or delay enrollment.

**Competition:** Attention to the United States' drop in the international rankings of adults with college degrees, along with increased accountability has shifted some policymakers' and funders' attention from access to degree completion.

Latinos' projected population growth, current educational attainment levels, and relative youth signal a need for more attention of this group in higher education. To understand the Latino educational situation through a broad lens, the data gathered for this analysis from 2006 to 2009 includes focus groups and interviews with those shaping policies at the higher education level, students enrolled or graduating from higher education, as well as from those providing direct services to students and communities. Uniformly, the groups indicate the impact of the economic downturn is eroding access and diminishing the limited focus on degree completion that existed. The groups are also pretty uniform in their assessment that, while funding and resource levels are critical to meeting higher education's challenges, equally important is how resources are used. Challenges in accountability, retention, state-level engagement, capacity, and affordability are also mentioned as issues for stakeholders to consider in a broad policy context as well as for Latinos specifically.

The focus of this brief is to reconcile what we know with what we hear to inform what we can do to address the realities facing Latino students in a manner integrated into the broader policy agenda and discussions in higher education. This brief takes stock of the current higher education environment and integrates the perspectives of elected officials, students, and service providers from interviews and focus groups with data to better understand the role of Latinos in the future access, persistence, and completion of higher education in the United States and shares recommendations for policy. The summaries in this brief are not representative of all elected officials, service providers, or Latino students, but do share an important perspective rarely integrated into policy considerations about the current higher education context for Latino college students—an important population for all higher education stakeholders.



## WHAT WE KNOW

**W**hile some believe a focus on race and ethnicity divides us as a society, *Excelencia* in Education believes that acknowledging racial and ethnic trends describes our society in constructive ways. The use of data and objective analysis to identify factors affecting the success of specific student populations establishes a base of information from which to develop more effective policies; engage diverse stakeholders; and, enhance active, tactical responses necessary to better serve Latino students and others, as well.

Latinos make up a growing share of the college-age population. Too often, however, conversations in higher education rarely mention Latinos. In the rare instances when Latinos are included, gross generalizations, basic misperceptions, and limited facts—often based on individual experiences, a media story, or clichés shared by others—limit constructive policy discussions. The following section provides an overview of Latinos in higher education based on data and representative analysis to address varying perspectives on these students.

### THE PROFILE OF LATINOS

Public policy perceptions of Latinos are guided by a very limited profile, which, in turn, guides a limited policy agenda. For example, it is commonly assumed that the majority of Latinos are immigrants, high school dropouts, and English language learners (ELL) who do not value education. While Latinos are more likely than other ethnic groups to fit this profile, the majority of Latinos do not fit this profile. In fact, the majority of Latinos in the U.S. are native-born, high school graduates, English language dominant, and greatly value higher education. Consider these facts:

- In 2007, 87 percent of Hispanics enrolled in K-12 education were native-born. Overall, 60 percent of Hispanics were native-born (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).
- More than 80 percent of Latino school-age children spoke English with no difficulty. (Planty, M., et al, 2009).

- Analysis on Latino high school dropouts varies from 21 percent (Planty, M., et al, 2009) to over 40 percent in other studies. While either of these calculations is high, Census data show that in 2008, 67 percent of Latinos 18-24 years-of-age and 62 percent of Latinos 25 years-of-age and over had completed high school (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

Citing current data about Latinos puts the profile of Latinos in perspective. Clarifying this profile of Latinos does not imply the issues of immigration, language acquisition, and high school completion are not important or relevant policy issues. In fact, these are critical issues to address. However, it is not accurate to characterize the majority of Latinos in education today by this limited profile and doing so can marginalize policy efforts to serve the population well.

Another generalization of Latinos is that they do not value education. This misperception is based on the assumption that if Latinos valued education, they would not have the lowest educational attainment levels compared to other racial/ethnic groups. However, in surveys conducted by the Public Agenda, higher education was more highly “prized and respected” among Hispanic parents than among parents in general and Latino parents believed it was important for their children to get a college education (Public Agenda, 2008). Additionally, in another survey conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center during the 2008 presidential campaign, 93 percent of Latino voters rated education as the most important issue for the campaign (Lopez, M.H. and Minushkin, S., 2008).



Others have heard Latino parents limit their children's college options, or encourage their students to work instead of enrolling in college straight out of high school. For them, this supports the view that Latinos do not value education. Also frequently cited are stories of Latino students offered full tuition to attend a selective institution that rejected this opportunity to instead enroll at their local community college so that they can stay close to home and help support their family. In reality, the opportunity cost—the forgone income—of

## PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Beyond a limited profile of students, conversations about Latinos in higher education at the national policy level generally are limited to two topics: Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)<sup>1</sup> and undocumented students. While addressing both HSIs and undocumented students in public policy is important, these topics only capture a portion of the current context for Latino participation in higher education. Consider the following facts about HSIs and undocumented students:

- In 2007, there were over 2 million Hispanics enrolled in degree-granting institutions, representing 11 percent of all students (Snyder, T.D., et al, 2009).
- In 2007, just over half of Latino undergraduates were enrolled at HSIs (Santiago, 2008).
- In 2007, there were 265 HSIs located in 16 states (Santiago, 2008).
- Over 98 percent of Latinos in higher education were either native-born U.S. citizens (88 percent) or legal residents (11 percent). Less than two percent of Latino students in higher education may be undocumented (Santiago, D. & Cunningham, A., 2005).
- While many undocumented students come from Mexico and other Latin American countries, almost 25 percent come from other countries (Gonzalez, R., 2009).

The critical issues for the many Latino students who are not enrolled at HSIs or who are not undocumented are less frequently addressed in policy discussions. And yet, these issues are relevant for a larger group of Latinos. For example, many

enrolling in college is a real cost for many low-income families, regardless of race/ethnicity, and balancing responsibilities is a challenge. However, many Latino students attempt to balance family responsibilities with earning a college degree and decide to enroll closer to home while working.

Policymakers seeking to improve Latino higher educational outcomes should contextualize positioning issues and developing strategies to accelerate Latino success with this more accurate profile in mind.

Latino students confront serious challenges to college access and participation due to academic preparation, affordability, and capacity issues. Consider the following additional issues that Latinos confront based on national data:

- Latino students are more likely than other undergraduates to be first-generation college students (58 vs. 46 percent). As the first in their family to go to college, the systemic knowledge and support systems may be more limited than for others.
- Latino students were more likely than other undergraduates to be enrolled part-time (51 vs. 47 percent). Research shows that students enrolled part-time are less likely to complete a degree in a timely manner than students enrolled full-time.
- Latinos were more likely to enroll in community colleges than public colleges or universities (42 vs. 25 percent). While providing greater access, community colleges are often funded at much lower levels than public colleges or universities.
- A significantly higher proportion of Latinos had low family incomes and thus significantly lower Expected Family Contributions (EFCs) to pay for college than other students (34 vs. 25 percent). (Santiago, D. & Cunningham, A., 2005)

As stated earlier, policymakers seeking to improve Latino higher educational outcomes should contextualize positioning issues and developing strategies to accelerate Latino success with this more accurate profile in mind.



<sup>1</sup> HSIs are defined as public or private nonprofit degree-granting institutions with enrollments of 25 percent or more full-time equivalent Hispanic undergraduate students in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008.

## SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

It is more commonly and accurately known that Latinos have lower educational attainment levels than other groups in the U.S. However, to ‘take stock’ of Latinos and their educational attainment, consider data on the following three cohorts: recent graduates, young adults, and adults 25 and over.

**TABLE 1. PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG ADULTS (18-24) EARNING AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2008**

Young adults: 18 to 24 years-of-age	Percentage with associate degree or higher
All	14
Hispanic	8
White, non-Hispanic	15
Black	9
Asian	25

Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement

**TABLE 2. PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS (25 AND OVER) EARNING AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2008**

Young adults: 18 to 24 years-of-age	Percentage with associate degree or higher
All	38
Hispanic	19
White, non-Hispanic	39
Black	29
Asian	59

Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement

## AFFORDABILITY

As with other issues in higher education, misperceptions on the patterns and strategies of how Latinos pay for college are rarely discussed in policy circles or linked to conversations on college affordability. For example, there is a general misperception that Latinos get less financial aid to pay for college because they are less likely to apply for financial aid. However, the data do not bear this out. Consider the following on how Latinos pay for college from national data:

- Latino undergraduates were more likely to apply for federal financial aid than all undergraduates (65 percent vs. 58 percent).
- Latino students received a lower average financial aid award than all undergraduates (\$5,468 vs. \$5,980).

- Recent graduates: In 2008, 12 percent of associate degrees and 8 percent of bachelor degrees awarded were earned by Latino students (Planty, M., et al, 2009).
- Young adults: Latino young adults were less likely to have earned an associate degree or higher than other young adults. In 2008, 8 percent of Latinos 18-24 years-of-age had earned a degree, compared to 14 percent of all young adults (Table 1).
- Adults ages 25 and over: Latino adults were also less likely to have earned an associate degree or higher than other adults. In 2008, 19 percent of Latinos, 29 percent of blacks, 39 percent of whites, and 59 percent of Asians ages 25 and over had earned an associate’s degree or higher (Table 2) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

College success and degree completion have historically received less attention in policy conversations about higher education than access and participation. What is becoming clearer in policy conversations is that access to college is a necessary, but not sufficient, component to degree completion for many students, including Latinos. Among the institutional practices with evidence of improving Latino student success are efforts to create learning communities, provide supplemental instruction, identify and restructure “gatekeeper” courses, and expand academic and support services by more assertively targeting Latino and other nontraditional students.

- On average, Latinos paid lower tuition and fees than all undergraduates (\$4,510 vs. \$5,801).
- Cumulatively, Latinos borrowed less for their undergraduate education than all students (\$5,607 vs. \$7,063).
- Latinos received much lower average institutional grants than all undergraduates (\$682 vs. \$988) but slightly higher state grants than all undergraduates (\$421 vs. \$406). (Santiago, D. & Cunningham, A., 2005)

It bears repeating that policymakers seeking to improve Latino higher educational outcomes should contextualize positioning issues and developing strategies to accelerate Latino success with this more accurate profile in mind.

## WHAT WE HEAR

Meeting the current challenges in higher education has recently gained a level of attention in public policy generally reserved for K-12 education. However, who is being served is rarely mentioned in discussions about the challenges. To take stock of the current higher education context, *Excelencia in Education* conducted focus groups with Latino and non-Latino elected officials, national and regional community-based organizations providing college preparation and support services to all students, and selected Latino students. The following is a summary of what we heard and learned from these discussions about higher education's current capacity to serve Latino students.

### HEARING FROM ELECTED OFFICIALS

*Excelencia in Education* partnered with Communication Works, a public affairs firm, to facilitate listening sessions with two groups of elected officials. One group was comprised of 20 Latino leaders from eight states (California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, New York, Texas, Virginia, and Washington) conducted in collaboration with the National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO) Education Fund. This group included current and former state legislators, higher education leaders and faculty members, school board members, and community leaders. The second focus group was conducted in collaboration with the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and included non-Latino state legislators from three states (Colorado, Minnesota, and Montana).

These two diverse groups of elected officials discussed college costs, access, accountability, educational transitions, opportunity, success, state responsibilities, and funding priorities.

Interestingly, the two groups voiced similar perspectives on the following key points related to higher education and issues affecting Latino student success in higher education:

**The economic downturn presents serious challenges for maintaining student access and success.** Elected officials express worries about the impact of the deepening recession, particularly on low-income and first-generation college students and students of color. Many feel the likely responses to the worsening fiscal situation—rising tuition and reductions in student

aid—will force many students to “trade down” (i.e. attend lower cost institutions, attend part-time, increase the number of hours worked) or even “trade out” (i.e. delay or forgo enrolling in college). Additionally, both groups single out programs and institutions that serve a large number of students from historically underrepresented groups (e.g. support services, community/technical/tribal colleges, Hispanic-Serving Institutions) as being particularly vulnerable, given how they have fared in previous recessions.

**Spending more does not necessarily mean getting more.** Both groups voice a desire to ensure higher education receives sufficient investment, but rank increasing funding in the middle tier of their policy priorities. Similarly, both groups rate reducing the price of higher education for low-income students and increasing grants/reducing loan burdens for students in the middle tier of priorities. Participants agree college affordability is a serious issue for students, families, and policymakers, but think money is not the only issue affecting student success. Participants assert simply spending more will not guarantee better results for Latino students.

**In the context of so many competing priorities, improving accountability for the public's investment in higher education must be balanced with providing access to a quality education.** Neither group prioritizes accountability as a top-tier policy issue. The NCSL group generally agrees existing accountability systems are sufficiently gauging the public's return



*“...colleges and universities focus more on enrolling students from underrepresented groups than on making sure that these students stay enrolled and eventually receive a certificate or degree.”*

on investment in higher education. The NALEO group expresses concern that calls for greater accountability will lead to increased administrative burdens without improving opportunities for Latino students, similar to their observations of “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) and its impact on struggling and failing schools.

**Retaining, graduating, and helping students make transitions between levels of education are top priorities for improvement.**

Both groups feel that students—especially low-income and first-generation students and students of color—do not receive sufficient guidance and support as they move from high school to college and from two-year institutions to four-year institutions, which they feel contributed to higher dropout rates. Additionally, both groups express the view that colleges and universities focus more on enrolling students from underrepresented groups than on making sure that these students stay enrolled and eventually receive a certificate or degree. This view is stridently expressed by several Latino elected officials who think Latino students “fell off the radar screen” once enrolled.

**Improving success rates for current students is more important than bringing in large numbers of new students.**

Both groups recognize the need to increase the number of college graduates to meet workforce needs, but feel that expanding access without improving chances of success would be counterproductive. Additionally, Latino elected officials voice the concern that if states expand higher education capacity without an explicit commitment to equity, Latino students and students from other historically underrepresented groups will be left behind.

**State-level engagement of issues regarding Latino students is narrow and weak.**

Both groups express a similar opinion about what state legislatures address when focusing on Latino students. They either focus on K-12 performance (largely due to NCLB) or the impact of immigration and the impact of undocumented students. Both groups of elected officials share the opinion that Latino student success in higher education is not even on the “radar screen.” Moreover, several note immigration issues and reform have had a negative impact on state policy discussions, taint-

ing them with racist overtones. While both groups agree the lack of focus on college success for Latino students is due in part to a lack of Latino representation in state legislatures, Latino elected officials also see the historical dominance of a black/white issues in the equity agenda as a contributing factor.

There are two significant differences between the two groups:

**Improving opportunities for part-time students and working adults is more important for some than for others.**

The non-Latino group rate this a top-tier policy priority, arguing that more emphasis needs to be placed on distance and workplace-based education, particularly to accommodate students from rural areas. By contrast, the Latino group assigns part-time and working adults’ interests to the bottom tier of policy priorities. This is striking given the Latino group had expressed concerns about the impact of the recession on commuter students.

**Alignment between funding and public priorities for higher education is needed.**

The non-Latino group think funding and priorities are generally aligned, though they express concern that growing fiscal constraints could cause some priorities to be underfunded—or even unfunded. Participants in this discussion voice the perspective that state leaders are doing the best they could to balance priorities and available funding.

By contrast, the Latino elected officials say that funding and priorities are not aligned. This group cites under funding of programs and institutions serving a growing number of Latino students and students from other historically underrepresented groups (e.g. community colleges) and inefficiencies arising from a lack of coordination between education and workforce policies as the basis for their views. Participants in this group express frustration with state-level decision-making processes, arguing there is a lack of political will to make hard choices about reallocation and many key decisions are made in “fact-free zones” where data about what is needed and what works are trumped by anecdote, emotion, and well established personal networks.

Interestingly, both groups struggle in their efforts to rank public priorities for higher education. Each group was given a list of seven public priorities for higher education and most participants rate all seven priorities as very important. Given the worsening fiscal situation,

## HEARING FROM LATINO STUDENTS

Latinos are the youngest and fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. In today's higher education climate, it is imperative institutional leaders and decision makers have a better understanding of Latino students today in order to shape the policies and practices to serve college students in the future. To include Latino students' perspectives of college affordability and opportunity, several focus groups and interviews were conducted with over 80 Latino students. Some of their key points about higher education are as follows:

**The economic downturn is affecting college choices and persistence.** Most of the Latino students participating in focus groups and interviews consider college costs when deciding which college to attend. For those who enroll in local and open access institutions, the “sticker price” is one of their primary elements determining enrollment. For these students, knowing the sticker price allows them to plan their work and attendance patterns to pay for their education on a semester to semester basis. However, with the recent increase in gas prices and economic downturn, students share stories of having to choose between taking more courses or paying for gas to get to class, and college presidents note having students who have to choose between their metro fare to get to classes or a meal. For Latinos who enroll in more selective institutions, the financial aid packages offered are critical in their decision-making between institutions; students generally go where they receive the most financial aid. These students tend to have more information about college options and are more willing to piece together diverse financing options that minimize their need to work or adjust attendance patterns.

these numbers suggest education leaders and policymakers will struggle in their efforts to make strategic decisions about investing public resources. How can difficult choices be made if public priorities for higher education are all equally important?

**Students do not believe a quality education has to cost more.** Many Latino students do not ascribe to conventional assumptions that the cost of an education represents the quality of the institution. In several focus groups, students mention their belief they could get a good education anywhere, if they are motivated. Several students share the perspective that the first two years of college are basic and therefore prefer to go to a lower-cost institution and then pay more (including borrowing) for their final two years of college. Other students share their perspective that “college was college.” They do not see significant distinctions between institutions' quality. These students refuse to pay more than what they see is necessary to secure a quality education. In fact, several high-achieving Latino students who choose to attend local and open admission institutions think the quality of education at the institution they select is comparable to other, more selective and distant colleges and universities. Thus, for many students at HSIs, community colleges, and other local institutions, their college choices are based on practical factors, such as cost, proximity to the family, and campus climate.

**Current accountability measures that are the focus of institutional leaders do not influence students' college choices.** None of the students in the focus groups consider measures like graduation rates, yield rates, or research funding levels in selecting their college. Overall, Latinos are more likely to make their choices based on location, cost, financial aid packages offered, and program offerings than on the measures of institutional success generally discussed for public policy.



*“...effective strategies to serve Latinos are “add-ons” to be considered only with additional resources rather than a necessary adaptation to serve current students.”*

### **Students value higher education and balance work, family, and education to persist.**

Whether parents had gone to college or not, they are clear motivators for their students’ pursuit of a college education. Further, many of the students interviewed are either the first in their family to go to college, or have an older sibling who is the first in the family to go to college. Many of these stu-

dents also work and either live at home with their parents, or their own families, while enrolled. For these students, their persistence in college is the result of balancing work, family, and education. They are working to “have it all” and few are aware of research indicating a decreased likelihood of completion for those who attend college in “nontraditional” patterns.

### **HEARING FROM SERVICE PROVIDERS**

National, regional, and community-based organizations are also involved in diverse efforts to serve and support students in higher education. *Excelencia* in Education convened representatives from ten organizations for an in-depth conversation exploring their perspectives about current patterns of Latino participation and success in higher education. Participating organizations included the Hispanic Scholarship Foundation, the Institute for Higher Education Policy, the National College Access Network (with information from five member organizations), the Council for Opportunity in Education, the American Council on Education, the National Council for Community, and Education Partnerships (NCCEP), the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, the National Hispanic Press Foundation, TG, and the Texas Education Agency. A meta-analysis of information provided by the organizations focuses on how current programs and services impact Latino students’ college going and success. Among their key points are the following:

**Access to higher education is a priority for service providers.** The priority areas for these organizations are college preparation, outreach, and access. For example, multiple organizations target middle and high school students for information on how to prepare academically for college, as well as information on financial aid, and college options. Most identify translation of their information into Spanish as a useful outreach strategy. Several organizations also provide college scholarships to eligible students. Few specifically target students already enrolled in

colleges and universities and most focus their efforts on preparation for college and access, not retention or completion.

**Limited resources challenge expansion of services to Latino students.** The participating service providers all recognize the growing Latino population in their communities and express concern about their limited resources available to expand services to this growing population. While expressing their design and professional capacities to better serve Latinos in their communities, some service providers identify financial constraints to serve all of those eligible at the service level desired. This perspective reflects the view by some service providers that effective strategies to serve Latinos are “add-ons” to be considered only with additional resources rather than a necessary adaptation to serve current students.

**Tailoring programs most effectively engages Latino students.** Several of the service organizations offer peer counseling, community outreach activities, financial aid workshops, coaching/mentorship programs, and parent engagement activities. These organizations recognize college decisions for Latino students—more than other students—require family involvement to ensure college-track participation. By engaging parents, the entire family has the same accurate information from which to make informed college decisions. Other tailored services include going out to the community to offer services rather than waiting for students to come to the service organizations for programs, information, or support.

## WHAT WE CAN DO

Following are practical recommendations to move policy conversations and higher education agendas forward that link “what we know” with “what we hear,” with a specific focus on how to integrate discussions about Latino student success into the broader policy conversation, rather than limiting attention to a separate, disconnected conversation. This includes reconciling broad perceptions of Latinos in higher education with the reality (data) and identifying issues where the implications for Latinos are not being discussed sufficiently.

### **Provide clarity about the Latino student profile and policy environments that affect Latino student success.**

As the higher education context continues to evolve, stakeholders at the federal, state, institutional, and community levels should remain clear on the current environment and its effects on Latino and other student success. This requires a continual monitoring of data on the growing Latino community, as well as students’ college choices and evolving patterns of access, persistence, and completion in an equally evolving policy environment.

### **Delineate specific degree completion goals and measures of progress and disaggregate both by race/ethnicity.**

The Obama Administration and others have noted the U.S. has fallen behind other developed countries in international rankings of college degree attainment and have established goals to return to the top of these rankings. Strategic information is critical to improve the public policies and institutional practices required to accelerate college degree completion. This information can engage stakeholders in relevant and resourceful ways to improve their efforts toward meeting the specific goals of degree completion. Moreover, by centralizing information dissemination and engagement strategies, stakeholders are able to sustain attention, investment, and action on the goals of college access and degree completion.

**Create a national acceleration plan specifically for Hispanic participation and success in higher education integrated to broader strategic plans.** Data show that the degree completion goals for the U.S. are not at-

tainable without a tactical plan that includes Latinos. There are numerous programs in institutions across the country being developed to address access and success for Hispanic students. While this is commendable, a strategic plan to meet our national goals of degree completion generally, and specifically with Latinos and other nontraditional students at the core has not been articulated. Various stakeholders working in collaboration can design such a strategic plan.

### **Engage stakeholders in critical sectors.**

This might mean recruiting key stakeholder organizations with significant policy connections such as elected officials at the local, state, and federal levels, community-based organizations, higher education associations and organizations, Latino organizations, workforce groups, media representatives, and philanthropic leaders to assert a common vision of degree attainment. This engagement will help to align the work of diverse stakeholders to produce a purposeful, strategic focus on Latino student success in higher education and enable achievement of the overarching goal to increase college degree attainment.

**Focus on strategic alignment of limited resources with common efforts.** Although philanthropic and political leaders have begun speaking publicly about the urgent need to close the gap between Latinos and other students in college degree attainment, the challenges to achieving this goal continue to increase. It is more critical now than ever to emphasize the need for increased degree completion to policymakers as they work to maintain current higher education opportunities in the face of shrinking



budgets. In the present economic climate, successfully expanding U.S. college degree production by accelerating Latino college degree attainment will require a two-pronged, simultaneous approach. The first is to immediately identify and disseminate innovative, effective actions currently being employed by institutions and communities. At the same time, stakeholders must vigorously reinforce the case for longer-term investments in more effective higher education policies and practices.

**Replicate or expand institutional practices that are working for Hispanic students.** There is a clear need to identify and replicate what is working to accelerate student degree completion for Hispanic and other non-traditional groups in higher education. A growing number of institutions across the country have become effective laboratories implementing and evaluating what works to enroll and

graduate Latino students. Practices that have proven to be effective in serving Hispanic students can be expanded or replicated in other institutions in an effort to accelerate participation and success of Hispanic students.

**Increase support to institutions enrolling and graduating large numbers of Latino students.** A growing number of colleges located in large and growing Latino communities are taking the responsibility of educating the Latino community in their service areas, and have made a compelling case for the returns to their community. Given the limited financial support to public institutions of higher education, and the projected population growth, a national plan to accelerate Latino degree completion has the opportunity and obligation to meet the institutions' efforts to serve a large and fast growing segment of the Latino community with significant additional support.

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## ABOUT EXCELENCIA IN EDUCATION

Launched five years ago, *Excelencia* in Education is a non-profit that accelerates Latino student success by linking research, policy and practice and by building a network of results-oriented educators and policymakers focused on education policies and institutional practices that support Latino academic achievement. *Excelencia* in Education supports and engages campus leaders and policymakers in accelerating higher educational success of our diverse Latino populations and thus grow this country's human capital.

*Excelencia* in Education has become a trusted advisor to leaders in Washington, DC and in states with the largest and fastest growing Latino populations. The organization has worked closely with state officials and educational institutions and organizations in Texas, Florida, New York, California, and New Mexico to develop consensus around strategies that research shows can have a significant impact on Latino student outcomes in higher education. *Excelencia's* work has also been supported by major national and regional philanthropies and corporations, including the Ford Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education, TG, Univision, USA Funds, Verizon Communications, and Walmart Foundation, as well as various institutions of higher education and individual contributors.

Equally significant, *Excelencia* in Education regularly benchmarks strategies used in high-performing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Emerging HSIs, and other high-performing institutions. For example, linking analysis of student outcomes with promising institutional practices sustains the growth of the Examples of *Excelencia* initiative and led to the compilation of over 100 program profiles now available on-line through a searchable data base. In September 2009, *Excelencia* further extended its What Works portfolio through support to 20 institutions receiving SEMILLAS (Seeding Educational Models that Impact and Leverage Latino Academic Success) grants.

*Excelencia* in Education has developed issue briefs, policy analyses, and informational tools that help policymakers and institutional leaders advance Latino student success. The research, which is available on our Website, has been

widely disseminated and broadly cited by the U.S. Department of Education and key national education, policy, and advocacy organizations that promote higher educational attainment. *Excelencia's* work and staff are routinely referenced by media outlets addressing higher education issues.

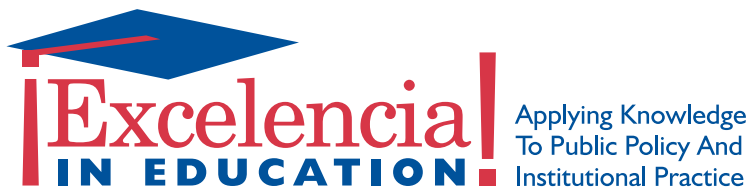
The organization has built an e-network of more than 14,000 institutional leaders, policymakers, practitioners, and citizens who regularly receive *Excelencia* postings, policy briefs, and alerts. A new and expanded website premiered in September 2009 with an on-line interactive platform to further support campus, community, state, and national improvement of Latino student success. *Excelencia's* capacity for outreach and action is greatly enhanced through partnerships with major policy, higher education, business and Latino-serving groups including: Business Champions, Hispanic College Fund, Hispanic Scholarship Fund, the Institute for Higher Education Policy, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, National Latino Elected and Appointed (NALEO) Educational Fund and National College Access Network (NCAN).

### Upcoming publications by *Excelencia* in Education include:

- Refining Measures of Success at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)
- Florida Policy Options for Accelerating Latino Student Success in Higher Education
- Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Serving Latino Students

We invite you to visit our Website to learn more about *Excelencia* and how our work supports your efforts to improve Latino student success at [www.EdExcelencia.org](http://www.EdExcelencia.org)





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