

Major Report on Latino Student Success Released at MDC

Florida Policy Options to Accelerate Latino Student Success in Higher Education issued by *Excelencia in Education*



(L-R) Deborah Santiago - vice president of Policy and Research of Excelencia in Education, Dr. Eduardo J. Padrón – president of Miami Dade College, Miami-Dade County School Board Member Marta Pérez – District 8, and Sarita Brown - president of Excelencia in Education.

Miami, April 6, 2010 - College officials, faculty, students, school board members, congressional aides, and community leaders gathered at **Miami Dade College's (MDC) Wolfson Campus** today for the release of Washington-based *Excelencia in Education's* report, ***Florida Policy Options to Accelerate Latino Student Success in Higher Education***. Making the announcement were MDC president, **Dr. Eduardo J. Padrón**, **Sarita Brown** - president of *Excelencia in Education*, and **Deborah Santiago** – vice president of Policy and Research of *Excelencia in Education* and the comprehensive report's author.

This report provides policy recommendations, based on recent research and discussions, to improve the educational attainment of Florida's workforce, with a focus on Latinos. Given that a large portion of the demographic growth in Florida through 2030 will be Hispanic, the state's economic competitiveness will be highly dependent on the educational attainment of this population.

However, the educational attainment of Hispanics in Florida is low. In 2008, about 23 percent of Hispanics 25 and older in Florida had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. In order to remain economically competitive, Florida's economy will require a more educated workforce than

currently exists. Even then, Latino college attainment in Florida is better than the national Latino average, but it still lags behind Florida's overall average for college degree attainment.

“It is no surprise we are here at Miami Dade College to make this important announcement,” **said Brown**. “This institution's president and employees are leaders in educating underrepresented groups.”

“This report may focus on Hispanics, but it's really about all Americans. Raising the college degree attainment for Hispanics helps across the board. It's an issue of national security and national economic health,” **added Dr. Padrón**. “We are blessed to have a model at Miami Dade College, thanks to our wonderful faculty, employees and students, which is based on access and excellence that should be replicated across the nation.”

Several goals centering on college readiness were proffered in the report.

Goal: Ensure all students and parents understand the long-term benefits of a higher education degree and the steps necessary to prepare for college.

This includes providing new parents an informational packet after the birth of their child, like other informational packets they receive, regarding college readiness. Instituting a semester-long elective course in middle schools for students on how to prepare, apply, select, and pay for college. Launch a sustained campaign aimed toward parents and students on the importance of college readiness and completion.

Goal: Make college accessible and affordable for students from all economic backgrounds.

Studies show public colleges and universities will be challenged to provide access as the K-12 population grows. Further, reports show higher education has become less affordable for students and their families in Florida. To increase access and make college more affordable for Latinos and students from all economic backgrounds it is recommended to transition eligibility of the Bright Futures Scholarship to prepare students for college earlier and require both need-based and merit criteria. The report also urges the expansion of links to private scholarships and grants to pay for college in Florida's data system and also to market the First Generation Scholarship Program to more intentionally target students from economically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities to increase their application for federal and private financial aid resources. Create financial incentives for low-income students to remain continuously enrolled in higher education until degree completion.

Goal: Increase the number of Floridians - especially those from underrepresented groups - who have a postsecondary degree.

Develop an outreach plan to engage Floridians who do not have a high school diploma and develop strategies to encourage completion of a diploma or GED. Increase state support of colleges and universities that enroll large percentages of students from underrepresented groups. Identify and disseminate examples of institutional practices that have been successful in providing college opportunities to Latinos and other underrepresented students and graduating

them in a timely manner. Encourage institutions to conduct an internal evaluation of student access, persistence, and completion that focuses on the performance of Latino and other underrepresented students. Institute community-wide campaigns to encourage college enrollment and encourage all sectors of the community to embrace the challenge, recognizing that college achievement is essential to strong civic and economic development.

“For the United States to regain its #1 position in college degree attainment, Latino and other minority degree completion is a must,” **stated Santiago**. “The conversations and, more importantly, the plans must begin from birth and be sustained through high school.”

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The entire report can be obtained in PDF format at www.EdExcelencia.org.