

Workforce Preparation

Excelencia in Education’s mission is to accelerate Latino student success in higher education—which would increase the number of Latinos entering the workforce with a postsecondary degree. Latinos’ labor force participation over the next decade is expected to increase. Yet Latinos are overrepresented in the workforce in jobs that are essential, vulnerable, and lower in pay. As their representation in the country grows, policymakers must ensure Latinos are prepared to enter and succeed as civic leaders in a competitive workforce.

How can federal and state policy support Latinos’ workforce preparation?

1. **Leverage existing federal programs, such as Federal Work-Study, to support experiential learning opportunities for students.**

Experiential learning opportunities—opportunities that allow students to apply their learning such as internships—support student success during and after postsecondary education, but are often unpaid opportunities. Leveraging existing programs can help make these opportunities available to Latino students or support institutions as they transform their curriculum to include more applied learning in their classes. Federal Work-Study could also be better leveraged to make these opportunities available to Latino students.

Increasing funding to already existing federal programs can help Latino students gain these experiences outside the classroom. Latino students are already active participants in the workforce. Of Latino students who work, 56 percent of those students work more than 30 hours, and in some cases overtime.¹ However, internships are often unpaid, and Latinos are both underrepresented in internships overall and overrepresented in unpaid internships. While Latinos made up seven percent of recent graduates in a 2023 survey, they made up eight percent of students who did not have an internship and seven percent of those in an unpaid internship.² By leveraging existing funding, Latinos won’t have to choose between earning a paycheck and getting an applied learning experience.

Experiential learning is important for competitive entry into the workforce and can help Latino students navigate new systems. Almost half of Latino students are first-generation students and might be the first in their families to enter their profession. They may not have built-in social networks, but internships and on-the-job learning can help them build those networks and navigate new workplaces. Even with a degree, Latinos are still less likely to be employed in the highest-paying occupations. Only 25 percent of Latinos are employed in management, professional, and related occupations, compared to Asians (58%), Whites (43%), and African-Americans (34%).³ Experiential learning opportunities can ensure students don’t enter the workforce without any experience in their field.

2. **Make workforce development an allowable activity for federal Title V grants to support institutions in creating workforce programs.**

The Title V program, the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) program, can target resources to institutions enrolling large numbers of Latino students and can be updated to include workforce preparation. There are 16 allowable activities in Title V to improve institutional capacity, but none explicitly focus on workforce development.

HSIs enroll the overwhelming majority of Latinos in higher education. *Excelencia*’s research on HSI graduates has shown that they are more likely to feel fulfilled in their work and have higher levels of well-being.⁴ However, the same graduates stated that their institutions could have done more to prepare them for the workforce. By providing the funding through Title V, HSIs can be supported in building their workforce development capacities with funding to, for example, set up scholarships for students pursuing internships, partnerships with local non-profits, or supporting their career services work.

3. **Incentivize engagement between employers and the institutions serving Latino students.**

To best prepare Latino students for the workforce, institutions need to know their community and national workforce demands. At the same time, employers are looking to diversify so their employees better reflect the national population. The pipeline between these two needs can be improved. One way is through coordination between HSIs, which graduate two-thirds of Latino graduates, and employers committed to diversifying their employee base. Employers can inform HSIs' workforce preparation, and institutions can cultivate a prepared and diverse group of graduates.

Just as Latino students attend school close to home, Latino graduates stay close to their institution after graduating. Among Latino graduates, 83 percent were employed in the same state as their bachelor's degree institution, the highest of all racial/ethnic groups (overall, 77% of students stay in-state).⁵ As communities continue to recover from economic challenges, institutions of higher education will be key in making this recovery possible.

States and the federal government have workforce preparation programs in place that provide grants or funding to institutions. By providing priority or additional funding for those employers partnering with HSIs, employers can be incentivized to partner with new institutions and reach a larger number of Latino students.

¹ *Excelencia in Education* analysis of U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019-20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study

² National Association of Colleges and Employees. (August 2022). *The Class Of 2023: Inequity Continues to Underpin Internship Participation and Pay Status*. Bethlehem, PA: National Association of Colleges and Employees.

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (January 2023). Labor force characteristics by race and ethnicity, 2021.

⁴ *Excelencia in Education* and Gallup. (September 2018). *Examining Life Outcomes Among Graduates of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)*. Washington, DC: *Excelencia in Education*. <https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/publications/examining-life-outcomes-among-graduates-hispanic-serving-institutions#:~:text=Latino%20graduates%20of%20Hispanic%20Serving,%2C%20personal%2C%20and%20social%20lives>.

⁵ *Excelencia in Education* analysis of U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Baccalaureate and Beyond: 2016/2017 (B&B).