

# Ensuring America's Future by Improving Latino Higher Educational Outcomes

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A country's most precious resource is its human resource. As our nation's fastest growing and youngest ethnic group, Latinos already make up nearly one quarter of elementary, middle, and high school students in the country. In today's knowledge economy, a college education is an economic necessity for a competitive workforce and essential for individuals to thrive in the workforce and to fully participate in civic life. However, not enough Latino students are graduating from college. This context provides a clear and powerful opportunity for leadership to implement field tested solutions and improve educational outcomes that will help fuel the nation's economy. Consider the following profile of Latinos in college and the workforce.

## Profile of Latinos and College

**Latino enrollment in college is growing.** In 2012, Latinos were the second largest racial/ethnic group enrolled at the undergraduate level—16% of the undergraduate population (2.8 million). Further, Latino college enrollment is projected to increase more than other groups in the next ten years. Between 2011 and 2022, Latino enrollment is projected to increase 27% compared to 26% for African Americans, 7% for Whites, and 7% for Asian/Pacific Islanders

**While Latinos' enrollment in college is growing, Latino adults still have lower levels of educational attainment than other adults.** In 2013, 15% of Latino adults had earned a baccalaureate degree or higher, compared to 22% of African American, 32% of White, and 53% of Asian adults. This represents a clear and large opportunity to increase Latino college success.

## Profile of Latinos in the Workforce

**Latino participation in the workforce is growing.** In the next 10 years, Latino labor force participation is projected to increase higher than that of any other racial/ethnic group. In 2022, 66% of Latino adults are projected to participate in the labor force—the highest participation rate of any other racial/ethnic group.

**Latinos in the workforce have the lowest levels of education.** In 2013, 70% of Latino adults in the workforce had completed high school, compared to 90% for Whites, African Americans, and Asians in the workforce.

**Latinos working in health professions are concentrated in lower paying jobs.** Health is one of the fastest growing occupational areas. In 2013, Latinos represented 16% of those employed in healthcare support occupations, such as home health aides

and personal care aides, and only 7% of those employed in the practitioner and technical occupations, such as physicians and dentists.

**Latinos are severely underrepresented in and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) professions.** STEM is the other fastest growing occupational area of need in the nation. Latinos in the STEM workforce were more likely to be in lower paying service occupations in 2013—such as electromechanical assemblers, telecommunications line installers and repairers, and mechanics and service technicians—than higher paying professional occupations—such architectural and engineering managers and computer and information systems managers.

### Economic implications of the Latino profile

**To meet national college completion goals, it is essential to increase Latino college completion.** Given the projected growth and youth of the Latino population, along with the current college education levels of adults, and accelerated increase in college completion is needed to meet the national goals. And there are signs Latinos are up to the challenge. For 2012, Latinos were projected to earn over 330,000 degrees to be on track for progress toward the national goals—they surpassed this goal and earned over 470,000 degrees and certificates.

**Latinos were overrepresented in service occupations due to low levels of college education.** In 2012, Latinos represented 15% of the total workforce, but represented 49% of agricultural workers, 44% of grounds maintenance workers, and 43% of housekeeping workers. Comparatively, they represented 21% of management and professionals.

**As a result, Latino children are also significantly more likely to live in poverty (along with African Americans) compared to others.** In 2012, 33% of Hispanic families with children under 18 lived below the poverty level. In comparison, 39% of African American families, 14% of Asian families, and 13% of White families with children under 18 lived below the poverty level.

### **Challenge and Opportunity**

Our analysis has shown Latinos will have to earn 5.5 million college degrees over the next six years for the U.S. to regain world leadership in educational attainment. Real progress for America requires bringing together education leaders, policy makers, Latino advocacy, community, business, media and philanthropic leaders, and many others to exchange ideas, form consensus and to take aligned actions to improve Latino college success. Ten years ago, *Excelencia* in Education was launched to address that challenge.

Founded in 2004 in Washington, DC as a national not-for-profit organization, *Excelencia* in Education has become a trusted information source on the status of Latino educational achievement, a major resource for influencing policy at the institutional,

state, and national levels, and a widely recognized advocate for expanding evidence-based practices to accelerate Latino student success in higher education. Simply put, *Excelencia* in Education accelerates Latino student success in higher education.

Some believe a focus on race and ethnicity divides us as a society. Instead, *Excelencia* in Education uses data and analysis to identify factors that influence the success of specific student populations to establish base line information from which to develop more effective policies, engage diverse stakeholders and enhance the active and tactical responses needed to better serve Latino and all students. Recognizing racial and ethnic data trends to respond to all students' educational needs advances the development of solutions, innovation and large-scale positive change.

The organization's name, *Excelencia* in Education, is intentionally bilingual. *Excelencia* is a simple cognate – a reader does not have to know Spanish to recognize the word means “excellence.” The organization's name reflects the commitment to Latino students, to quality education, and to the potential for Latino talent, drive and energy to ensure America's continued bright future.

The nation can make a measurable difference in increasing Latino student success in higher education by informing decision makers, showing them what can be done, and holding them accountable; by working within institutions to provide incentives and compel action; and by creating a supportive community of action-oriented advocates.

By understanding the data trends for Latino and other post-traditional students, educators, policymakers and investors are better equipped to respond to today's students and future workforce. For example, while many of the education strategies in higher education assume a traditional college student, institution, and pathway to graduation, this profile is out of date. Today, less than 20% of college students fit a “traditional” profile—enrolled full time in college in the fall after high school graduation, academically prepared, living on campus, and earning a baccalaureate degree in four years. Consider the following comparison of the traditional student profile with the profile of today's post-traditional students.



| Traditional student profile  | Post-traditional student profile  |
|--|---|
| College-ready  | May need academic prep or remediation                                       |
| Enroll in a college or university full-time  | Enroll at a community college and/or part-time                              |
| Enroll the fall after high school graduation   | Delay initial college enrollment while entering the workforce               |
| Live on-campus   | Live off-campus with their parents or with their own dependants             |
| Complete a bachelor degree in four years   | Take more than four years to complete a degree                              |
| Parents have college degree  | First in family to enroll in college  |
| White, non-Hispanic  | Latino, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander                            |
| Do not work while enrolled   | Work 30 hours or more a week  |
| Make college choices based on financial aid, academic programs offered, & institutional prestige | Make college choices based on cost of attendance, location, & accessibility |

From : *Using a Latino Lens to Reimagine Aid Design and Delivery*, *Excellencia in Education* (2013)

Strategies in higher education that address the real world context of Latino and other post-traditional students are needed to improve and ensure America's economic future.

## STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE LATINOS' COLLEGE OUTCOMES

### **Invest in the replication/scaling up of evidence-based strategies that increase college and career readiness as well as college completion.**

There are programs and policies at colleges and communities across the nation with concrete evidence they increase Latino college preparation, persistence, and completion. However, these programs often serve a small number of students and rarely promote their successes for a national audience. This lack of awareness for what is working creates a distinct opportunity to identify national efforts and inventories that, in turn, recognize effective programs for Latinos. One example of such an inventory is the Growing What Works database (<http://www.edexcelencia.org/what-works>). Resources such as this can guide education leaders, policymakers, funders, and others looking for what works and what is replicable to accelerate Latino college success.

### **Increase financial literacy and opportunities for financial aid to make college more affordable.**

College affordability and financial aid certainly influences college choice and can either help or hinder college completion for Latinos and other post-traditional students. Public policy discussions across the nation mirror the struggles of Latino families and students to get a handle on college affordability. As this debate continues, those compelled to take action should consider the overt opportunity to

increase Latino families' financial understanding of overall costs, as well as the various sources (i.e. federal, state, institutional) and types (i.e. grants, loans, scholarships, work-study) of financial aid available.

**Incentivize colleges and universities to “serve” Latino students by enrolling, retaining, AND graduating them.**

As the visibility of the Latino community's youth, growth, and potential economic contributions has increased, the college enrollment of Latinos has also grown. While enrollment is essential (students cannot graduate if they are not enrolled), too often colleges' and communities' goals assume once Latino students enroll, they will graduate. In fact, data do not support this assumption. Too many Latinos are enrolling without completing a college degree. The growth and concentrated enrollment of Latinos in higher education creates an increased opportunity to go beyond enrollment as the primary goal and to focus efforts on retaining and graduating more Latinos. This requires working with communities and colleges to ensure campus climate, academic affairs, and support services are aligned to increase the success of Latino students.

**Leverage change in public policy to be more inclusive of Latino and other post-traditional students and their diverse pathways to success.**

Policy efforts at the federal, state, and institutional levels rarely consider the increasingly diverse experiences or pathways of Latino and other post-traditional students to earn a college degree. This lack of consideration creates a clear opportunity to both inform public policy—through research and advocacy—and to compel a more explicit strategy for adapting programs and practices that are more inclusive of Latino students as a way to increase the education of the national workforce and citizenry. Often this leveraging also requires working with partners from every sector of the economy to help build a sense of urgency for bolstering Latino student success and make it a priority in federal, state, and institutional policy.

**Develop partnerships with colleges and employers to link Latinos with workforce opportunities.**

Graduating more Latinos with a college education is not the only end goal. Linking educated Latinos with quality and competitive positions in the evolving U.S. economy must also be accomplished. Yet, too often employers in competitive fields recruit from a very limited pool institutions and communities across the nation. There is a clear opportunity to be intentional in increasing the awareness of the college graduating Latinos in key workforce areas of need as well as developing relationships and recruitment strategies with these institutions to ensure a diversified and competitive workforce for the present and future economic well-being of the nation.