

STRATEGIES ACHIEVING RESULTS: Convening Proceedings

A Unique Convening of Stakeholders

On February 19 and 20, 2004, stakeholders in philanthropy and policymaking concerned with improving the educational achievement of Latino students came together in Washington, DC, for an exchange of ideas and information. “Higher Expectations: Improving Achievement & Opportunity for Hispanic Students” was the first of what are hoped to be ongoing regional meetings focused on Latino student achievement involving these two stakeholder groups. Members of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, Grantmakers for Education, and Hispanics in Philanthropy participated in this initial convening.

The convening provided more than 150 participants with informational tools to enhance their own efforts, and included presentations from researchers and practitioners involved in programs funded and identified by foundations as models that support Hispanic student success. Grantmakers and Latino policymakers in attendance met in small-group sessions through-

out the convening, drawing upon the presentations to discuss how they might leverage each others’ efforts to increase educational achievement for Latinos in communities across the country. Separate sessions also were held to orient policymakers to the priorities of foundations and grantmakers to regulations governing the engagement of philanthropies in policy work.

The Higher Expectations convening was sponsored by Lumina Foundation for Education, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Nellie Mae Education Foundation, State Farm®, and Washington Mutual. Sarita Brown, senior fellow, Pew Hispanic Center and president, Excelencia in Education, oversaw development of the convening content and design and will lead the organization of ongoing regional convenings and the dissemination of information from these meetings. Critical challenges for improving Latino educational success and strategies that are achieving results are described below.

Current Status of Latino K-16 Educational Achievement & Community Attitudes

Sarita Brown, President, Excelencia in Education, Inc. and Senior Fellow, Pew Hispanic Center
Roberto Suro, Director, Pew Hispanic Center

Sarita Brown opened the convening with a view of the educational status of Hispanic students, pre-K to 12. While beginning and ending her comments with the disparity in educational attainment for Latinos 18 years and older, Brown focused on improvements in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and math scores among Latinos and the growing numbers of Hispanic high school graduates going to college. Yet, Latinos

face continuing gaps in opportunity and achievement resulting in a shortage of well-educated workers in the U.S. economy.

There has been no improvement in the high school dropout rate of Latinos over a 30-year period. Latino students are less likely to take advanced academic courses and are still underrepresented in colleges and universities. While college enrollment of Latinos is increasing faster than that of any other racial or ethnic group, only 29 percent of Latinos have some postsecondary-level education, a significantly lower percentage than among blacks and whites.

CONVENORS

Brown charged the Higher Expectations participants with the task of identifying and developing strategies to address these and other gaps so that the highest expectations for Hispanic youth are realized. “Our job as individuals and as groups is to pick where and how to improve Latino achievement and then to get to work,” she said.

Roberto Suro presented findings of a recent Pew national survey of Latino views on education. Latino parents are strong supporters of education for their children, and, in general, are satisfied with the schools their children attend. The majority believe that they know a lot about the curriculum and academic goals of their child’s grade, and 95 percent believe it is

very important that children get a college education.

A substantial majority of Latinos support setting performance standards for public schools and standardized testing as a measure of student ability. They believe ensuring that students have quality teachers is of paramount importance, and support investing in schools as a remedy for failing schools.

Convening participants were puzzled about how to reconcile Brown’s and Suro’s presentations. As one member of the audience asked, “If Latinos are so far behind, why do Latinos think everything is ok?” www.edexcelencia.org and www.pewhispanic.org

Why Increasing Latino Achievement is Good for the Nation

An evening program, moderated by Roberto Suro of the Pew Hispanic Center, included comments from Congressman Rubén Hinojosa (D-Texas); Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrión, Jr.; Martha D. Lamkin, President, Lumina Foundation for Education; and Susan Sclafani, Assistant Secretary for Adult and Vocational Education and Counselor to the Secretary, U.S. Department of Education.

In his remarks, Suro reminded the audience that the GI Bill of Rights of 1944 was drafted in a guest room at the Mayflower Hotel, where now, nearly fifty years later, they were convening that evening to consider ways to broaden participation in education for another critically important and growing group in the nation, Hispanics. Congressman Hinojosa, in taped remarks, stated, “The time is right for a national graduation challenge,” and called upon

policymakers, foundations, communities, and educators at all levels to come together to improve high school graduation rates. Adolfo Carrión, Jr., described his growing, increasingly diverse, and substantially first-generation Latino constituency in the Bronx and cautioned that educational efforts must be designed so that unequal or insufficient funding or accountability strategies do not result in inadvertent discrimination. Lumina Foundation for Education President Martha Lamkin said that it is critical that we work closely as a society to close the gaps in educational achievement between Latinos and other groups or risk potentially devastating economic and social consequences. And Susan Sclafani of the U.S. Department of Education outlined efforts in elementary, secondary, and adult and vocational education that the Department has undertaken to close the achievement gap.

A University for La Gente

Juliet Garcia, President, The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College

Juliet Garcia shared the remarkable history of the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, which has, in just over a decade, transformed itself from a small community college into one of the nation’s exemplary Hispanic-serving universities. It has become a leading producer of Hispanic baccalaureate degrees in mathematics, foreign languages, and other fields.

Key to the institution’s success, stressed Garcia, has been its commitment to civic engagement. Too often, higher education’s public mission gives way to the quest for top-tier rankings, research centers, football trophies, and such. UT-Brownsville now boasts the faculty and resources of a major university, yet

has remained true to its community-college values, maintaining an ethic of public service to local needs.

The university would not exist, Garcia said, without the strong support and personal involvement of the area’s politicians, business leaders, and others. For its part, the school encourages graduates to be active participants in the civic life of southwest Texas. Indeed, many have gone on to serve as public officials. Now, the task is to cast a wider net – reaching out to other parts of Texas and beyond – to find the additional resources needed, if the school is to continue to improve and expand. www.utb.edu

It Takes a Village to Make a Graduate

Sara Lundquist, Vice President, Student Services, Santa Ana Community College (CA)

Odette Ramos, Director, Baltimore Indicators Alliance

To address Latino achievement, stakeholders must assess the current condition of education. Two communities receiving foundation support and interested in improving educational achievement used community mapping strategies to take stock of areas of need and local resources.

For more than 20 years, Santa Ana Community College has turned to local partners to help serve the area's Latino student population, which now makes up 92 percent of the region's public school enrollment. By reaching out to business, parents, clergy, and other community leaders, the college has gained valuable insights into the needs of its Latino students and become an integral part of their support system.

The college recently sponsored a series of educational forums, bringing together more than 500 community members to discuss the transition from high school to college, college financial aid, and other topics. A consensus "blueprint for change" emerged from these meetings, through which the college and local organizations can work together to improve students' educational outcomes. For example, they have joined together to lobby for a core curriculum in the schools; to create classroom materials for instruction in math, language arts, and the humanities; to secure new funding for teacher development; and to introduce students to the culture and rigors of college.

When community advocacy groups learn to make better use of data, said Odette Ramos, they will become much more effective in designing and promoting their housing initiatives, public health programs, educational services, or any other projects. According to Ramos, that's a lesson that many social reformers desperately need to learn. To identify community needs correctly, to respond sensibly, and to persuade funding agencies to support their work, organizers must have a firm command of the evidence. They must have reliable data, and they must know how to interpret and explain local facts, figures, and trends.

Ramos told the story of the Vital Signs project, which has conducted a detailed community audit of Baltimore. Sponsored by an alliance of neighborhood organizations, the project collects detailed, street-level information on local demographics, income distributions, health trends, housing conditions, and so on, in order to build a resource that few, if any other, cities can boast. Not only does the database allow community organizations to make strong, empirically based proposals for reforms, but it also allows them to set common benchmarks for progress – when everybody uses the same yardstick, it becomes much easier to measure change. www.wkkfweb.org/ENLACE/mainfacts.htm and www.bnial.org

Pre-K Programs Should be Written in Stone

Ramona Paul, Assistant State Superintendent, Professional Services Division, Oklahoma State Department of Education

Ramona Paul shared the details of recent early childhood legislation in Oklahoma, one of only a dozen states that have mandated a universal pre-K program and, more important, one of only a few states to provide the funding necessary to enroll all children. The results for Hispanic children have been "phenomenal," she said, demonstrated by a Georgetown University study: While there was a 16 percent increase in test scores among all pre-K students, Hispanic pre-K students experienced a nearly 60 percent increase. Hispanic children enrolled in the full-day program increased their language development about 74 percent.

The lesson to be drawn from Oklahoma's success, Paul argued, is that it's not enough to mandate a statewide pre-K program—it's also essential to write the program into the state's education framework, so as to ensure consistent funding. Where early childhood education becomes just a line item in the overall budget, its resources will inevitably be shrunk, if not cut altogether. For Oklahoma's pre-K curriculum guidelines and the Georgetown University study, "The Effects of Universal Pre-K in Oklahoma," see: www.sde.state.ok.us/home/defaultie.html.

Researchers Agree: Dual-language Instruction Works Best

Deborah Short, Director, Language Education and Academic Development, Center for Applied Linguistics

For students not yet fluent in English, dual-language immersion is especially effective, reported literacy researcher Deborah Short. Non-native speakers should neither be taught in an English-only setting nor primarily in a home language. Most studies come down strongly in favor of a balanced approach, combining intensive English language instruction with teaching of academic subjects in students' native language. This two-pronged approach encourages rapid mastery of English and has been found to close the achievement gap that separates native English speakers from second-language learners.

If the dual-language immersion model were widely implemented, educational outcomes would no doubt improve for the many

non-native English speakers enrolled in the nation's schools. However, Short acknowledged, too few teachers are currently prepared to work in a dual-language setting, and preparing them will take many years.

Several other strategies should be pursued in the meantime: schools can provide explicit instruction in academic literacy; they can perform thorough and ongoing language assessments; and they can help teachers learn some basic strategies for teaching non-native English speakers. For now, the goal should be to embrace "language across the curriculum," Short concluded, and all teachers should share the responsibility. www.cal.org/topics/k12ed.html

A New School for New Citizens

Claire Sylvan, Executive Director, International High School, LaGuardia Community College (NY)

LaGuardia Community College in 1985 created International High School, devoted entirely to the education of recent immigrants. Since then, three more campuses have been opened, and two more are in the works.

The entry requirements for the International High Schools are highly selective, but in an unusual way: students must be recent immigrants, and they must score in the bottom 20% of the city's language assessment. The result is a student body that is highly motivated, having applied especially to study in this program, and extraordinarily diverse—the original Queens

campus enrolls students from 60 countries, with 40 languages represented (Spanish most prominently).

Using a teacher-designed curriculum emphasizing rigorous academics, constant reinforcement of English language skills, a thriving internship program, and a supportive climate, International has put together an impressive record of student achievement. Most of its students are low-income, and many enter at below-grade level. Yet, the school graduates 90 percent of its students, 90 percent of whom go on to college. www.lagcc.cuny.edu/IHS

The Details are in the Data

Estela Bensimon, Professor of Education, University of Southern California

Most colleges and universities praise the ideals of campus diversity. Take a harder look, though, and one often finds that those institutions aren't quite the bastions of equity they should be, noted Estela Bensimon. For instance, a college might succeed in attracting greater numbers of minority students but fail to do anything about a decline in minority graduation rates; it might applaud an overall rise in minority grade point averages yet fail to see that the grades of Latina students have been flat.

By studying institutional data and interviewing students, one may quickly discover disturbing inequities on just about any

college campus. The problem, said Bensimon, is that few colleges know how to evaluate themselves in these ways, and even fewer make a serious effort to do so.

But if colleges and universities are serious about equity – if they truly mean to graduate higher numbers of minority students, to encourage higher rates of transfer to four-year programs, to confront the loss of first-year Latino students frustrated by dead-end remedial classes – then, they must begin to study their own data, to disaggregate the numbers, and to recognize the stories that those numbers tell. www.usc.edu/dept/education/CUE/projects/ds/diversityscorecard.html

Building Community in the Community College

Edwina Stoll, Professor of Communication & Director, LINC Program, De Anza Community College (CA)

According to Edwina Stoll, one of the surest ways to improve the performance of Latino community college students is to borrow the learning community model typically associated with four-year colleges.

Enrollment at De Anza community college is like that of many other two-year colleges in California. It includes a large number of Latino students, who are primarily low-income, adult, and employed part- or full-time. Many have returned to study five or six years after finishing high school, and most are the first in their families to pursue a college education.

Efforts to build a sense of community have been critical to student success. De Anza has found that students thrive in a learning community model, with its emphasis on group cohesion, collaborative teaching and learning, interdisciplinary studies, and supportive, explicit instruction in the habits of successful college students. Stoll claims the result has been a significant increase in retention, academic performance, and progress toward the associate's degree. www.learningcommons.evergreen.edu

Latino Students are Gearing Up for College

Hector Garza, President, National Council for Community and Education Partnerships

Federally funded GEAR UP and W.K. Kellogg-funded ENLACE are fairly new initiatives that already suggest some key lessons for anybody working to help Latino and other students to prepare for and succeed at college. GEAR UP, with roughly \$300 million in annual funding, was authorized by Congress in 1998; ENLACE, with \$28 million in funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, was created in 1997.

Most important, said Hector Garza, both programs promote college readiness, which must begin in the middle grades, or even sooner, and be reinforced throughout high school.

Research clearly shows that student achievement patterns are set early in life, and even the most ambitious students can lose sight of their goals as they pass into their high school years. In order to raise the aspirations and academic skills of Latino students, said Garza, advocates must encourage the whole community to become involved, including schools and colleges, family members, clergy, business leaders, and everyone else who might contribute to building a strong local culture of academic achievement. www.edpartnerships.org and www.ed.gov/programs/gearup

Ongoing Activities and Information

Excelencia in Education, Inc., is providing the leadership and technical assistance for regional convenings of policymakers, grantmakers, and other stakeholders as well as disseminating information about strategies that are successful in improving Latino student achievement. Leaders in New York City,

Colorado, California, and the New England region are already in discussion about regional convenings. Check the *Excelencia* Web site for updates on convening outcomes and information about programs and strategies for increasing Latino educational success. www.edexcelencia.org