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College-ready, Set, Graduate

Hispanics in Education and the President's 2020 College Completion Goal

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Executive Summary:

At his first address to a joint session of Congress and throughout his first two years in office, President Obama shared his goal of regaining our nation's standing as the global leader with college graduates by the year 2020. Leading foundations like the Lumina Foundation for Education and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have further highlighted the US need to increase college-going and completion rates to 60 percent from current national average levels that now hover in the 30s. Recent analysis by the American Council on Education (ACE) indicates educational attainment continues to flat-line in the U.S.; and, with this lack of progress in degree attainment the implications for our global competitiveness, innovation, research, and security are clear.

With direct implications for our recovering economy and projected labor workforce numbers, at present, one in three individuals entering the job market is Hispanic/Latino. It is expected that this number will grow to one in two in the next twenty years. Furthermore, four in ten new jobs this decade will require advanced training, or a college education. By 2020, the same year the Administration has set for our national goal, it is projected that 80 percent of jobs will require advanced training or a college degree.

Figures show that the United States will not meet this goal if we do not significantly increase degree completion rates

amongst Latinos. This brief outlines: educational degree attainment levels for the Hispanic/Latino community in the U.S.; highlights problems researchers have identified; and, offers comprehensive policy recommendations to guide the country's largest, youngest, and fastest growing minority group to meet and achieve the nation's graduation goal.

We have known for the past decade, when the Pew Hispanic Research Center reported that Latino high school graduates lag behind every other population group in attaining college degrees (2002), that academic preparation, understanding of college advancement and graduation requirements, and financial aid policies play important roles in college graduation for Latinos in higher education. Data driven recommendations are offered supporting 'cradle to career' initiatives. Further, at a time of limited resources and budget constraints, utilizing current appropriations and partnerships will be essential to moving the needle towards the 2020 benchmark.

Introduction

Using data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the U.S. Census Bureau, and recognized by many as an authoritative national source of information on advances made by students of color in higher education, *Minorities in*

Higher Education 2010—Twenty-fourth Status Report, the American Council on Education (ACE), shows that young Hispanics¹ have made no appreciable progress in postsecondary attainment over the past 20 years. These attainment rates indicate stagnation, and indicate today's young adults are no better educated than the baby boom generation. Further, NCES data indicates that graduation rates, more broadly, have fallen at one-third of 4four-year colleges².

At a time when states are financially stressed, coordination of resources and promising practices are essential to outreach, prepare, and support all students from cradle to career, through the competitive U.S. higher education superhighway.

According to the Digest of Education Statistics, in 2007, 13 percent of Hispanics age 25 years and older had earned a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 19 percent of Blacks and 32 percent of Whites of the same age group³. With the Pew Hispanic Research Center indicating over 48 million Hispanics in 2008⁴ (over 15 percent of the total U.S. population), Hispanics have been recognized as the largest, fastest growing, and youngest minority group of the U.S. population. These two trends are both worrisome and promising. They are a cause for concern because as the largest and youngest growing group we should be doing more to ensure individual success and better educational outcomes; at the same time, promising

because Pew also reports that amongst young Hispanics, 90 percent feel college is important to future success⁵.

With a goal of fostering and expanding our country's human capital and at a time when federal policy discussions are beginning to form with administration officials, agencies, foundations, and leaders in both the public and private sector, we have a collective responsibility to educate the next generation of Latino students and our future workforce.

The U.S. population is dwarfed compared to emerging economies like China and India⁶ (U.S. Department of State, 2010); thus, it is imperative that we do all we can to develop all of our human capital and ensure our continued standing in the world through continued productivity, research, and innovation—as well as advance our society through breakthrough discoveries. The numbers show that there is no way that we, as a country, will be able to meet the goal and challenge President Obama has set for the country if we are not doing more to improve educational outcomes of Hispanics in the U.S.⁷.

Background and Significance

The Education of Latinos and the larger U.S. Population

Educational Attainment

According to the White House⁸ (2010), as the nation's largest minority group, Latinos number more than 11 million students in America's public elementary and secondary schools and constitute more than 22 percent of all pre-K–12 students. More than one in five students enrolled in America's schools is Latino—this number expected to grow. Yet, only about half of all Latino students earn their high school diploma on time; those who do complete high school are only half as likely as their peers to be prepared for college. Consequently, only 13 percent of Latinos hold a bachelor's degree, and just 4 percent have completed graduate or professional degree programs⁹.

Population

It is important to contextualize the Hispanic bachelor's degree completion and persistence in higher education in relation to the larger population. With the release of final 2010 Census report forthcoming, figures show that Hispanics accounted for more than half the nation's population growth between 2000 and 2010¹⁰. Based on state-by-state data released over the past two months, the number of Hispanics jumped to more than 50 million due to high birth rates and other factors. Similarly, population counts from the previous decade, the 2000 U.S. Census, indicate that the Latino population grew by more than 57 percent between 1990 and 2000, compared to a 13 percent increase for the total population¹¹. While the rate of growth for the U.S. population as a whole was 2.5 percent, the Latino population grew 10 percent and is expected to maintain its growth with the 2010 census—demographers indicate the first round of census figures offers a clear window to the decades ahead. At an estimated 52.4 million, Hispanics in the United States and Puerto Rico as of July 2009, make Hispanics the nation's largest ethnic or race minority¹² (U.S. Census, 2010). Furthermore, the 2050-projected Hispanic population will be 132.8 million and will constitute 30 percent of the nation's population during this period¹³ (U.S. Census, 2010.) Demographer Dowell Myers at the USC School of Policy, Planning, and Development states that by all projections, the Latino population will continue to grow at a much faster rate than the U.S. population in the foreseeable future.

The nation's growing Latino populations represents the largest minority group in the United States, and are fast becoming a majority population in many states and cities across the country. Though California and Texas are home to nearly half of the Latino population in the country, it is important to note the demographic changes (and relocation due to local, state, and national economic downturn). Nationwide, Census numbers indicate Hispanic growth was most dramatic in states that have not traditionally had large Hispanic communities, particu-

larly in the South. For example, numbers more than doubled in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina and Tennessee; and, almost doubled in many other states including Virginia.¹⁴ This is causing increases in new regions and areas across the country that previously was home to few Latinos, including North Carolina, Georgia, and Arkansas, which have all experienced a 300% increase in their Latino population¹⁵. This speaks to the urgency and spreading of a complex problem.

In his first address to a joint session of Congress, President Barack Obama clearly stated his bold goal for the U.S. to have the largest proportion of college graduates in the world and his commitment to increase investment in scientific research to further fund innovation and education. Especially in these difficult budget times, he stated that there is no better anti-poverty plan than to invest in education to “lay a new foundation for lasting growth” and to recover the loss of over 7.5 million jobs in the last two years.

Education Disparities

Scholars and researchers have long sought to understand the disparities in educational attainment of Latinos in the United States. At any given point in the educational pipeline, Latinos do not perform as well as their White counterparts¹⁶. The Census reveals that compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the U.S., Latinos continue to attain less at every level of education. How can this be explained? There is an assumption that educational opportunity and conditions are the same for all students; however, Latinos (in high concentrations) attend schools whose conditions are some of the most inadequate in the U.S.¹⁷. Although these are not new findings, conditions have not significantly improved. As a nation, we have made little collective progress in addressing them.

A recent report by the Civil Rights Project (formerly housed at Harvard, and now at UCLA) has found that today's youth are attending schools that are more segregated than when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated¹⁸. In fact, predominantly minority elementary schools

continue to be larger, more segregated, and provide fewer educational dollars per pupil than non-minority White schools¹⁹. Overall, students are still disproportionately found in large, overcrowded, ethnically segregated, and lower financed schools²⁰ (Civil Rights Project, 2010.)

Clearly, as a result of the aforementioned, if or when Latinos reach the college segment of the pipeline they are at a distinct disadvantage. Researchers and policy makers have examined the educational pipeline and speak to the leaks of Latinos starting from K-12 and continuing through college, and graduate and professional schools. At the higher education segment, U.S. colleges and universities have seen an increase in Latino enrollment, yet those increases are not proportionate to the overall population increase in the last twenty years. Upon further inspection, the most significant enrollment increase is the community college segment of the pipeline.

A National Center for Education Statistics Report found that in 2009, Latinos constituted 16 percent of all community college students—and earned close to 12 percent of all the associate degrees (A.A.) granted²¹. Further, figures note that accessing higher education through enrollment in community colleges is a path often chosen by first-generation and minority college students, with transfer to four-year programs remaining problematic. In fact, an Education Testing Service (ETS) report found that opportunities to continue beyond the A.A. degree are often missing because of miscommunication and misunderstandings regarding prerequisites for majors, degrees, and transfers²². Furthermore, at the postsecondary level, wide research has shown that Latino students experience institutional and interpersonal difficulties that lead to negative school outcomes, stopping out, dropping out, and not completing.

College Enrollment

As the country has experienced Hispanic population increases, so have their college student enrollments. However, enrollment numbers paint a stark portrait of its students' profile. Federal statistics indicate

Hispanic students are more likely than other students to be enrolled part-time. In 2006-07, 43percent of Hispanic undergraduates were enrolled part-time, compared to 35 percent of white, 38 percent of black, 37 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 40percent of Native American/Alaska Native undergraduates²³. In many cases this prolongs progress, inhibits transfer, and compromises completion.

Further, the majority of Latino students were employed while enrolled in college. In 2006, close to 50 percent of Hispanic students enrolled full-time and 80 percent of those enrolled part-time were employed²⁴. Research indicates that students who work more can have an adverse effect on educational outcomes, and in fact can hinder attendance and persistence. Of those enrolled full-time, the majority (26 percent) worked 20-34 hours a week. Similarly, the majority of those enrolled part-time (44 percent) worked 35 or more hours a week²⁵. These statistics highlight the continued importance of previous policy recommendations aimed at supporting low-income and minority students through financial aid policies and recommendations.

Concentrations

In 2006-07, just over half of Hispanics (51 percent) were enrolled in two-year institutions or less-than-two-year institutions²⁶.

When looking at a national portrait

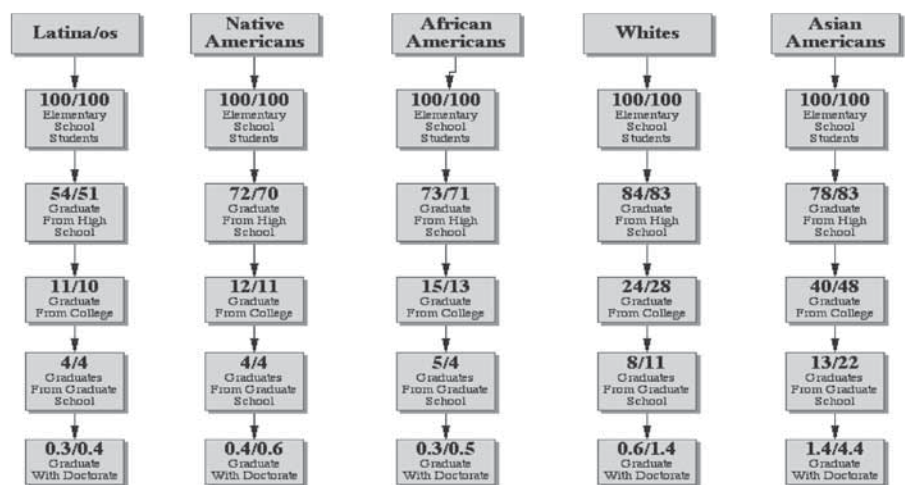
of Hispanic college students you find that 70 percent of Latino undergraduates in 2006-07 were concentrated in four states—California, Texas, Florida, and New York—and Puerto Rico²⁷. California enrolled the most Latinos in higher education. In 2006-07, California enrolled one-third (613,000) of all Hispanic college students²⁸. Further, about half of Latino undergraduates are enrolled in the 7 percent of institutions of higher education identified as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)²⁹.

Gender Gap: Latino Males

National Center for Education Statistics data analysis shows that 60 percent of Hispanics enrolled in higher education were women. This is similar to the average for all students in higher education³⁰ and further highlights a looming problem for our future U.S. workforce.

More recently, *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* (2009), highlighted the issue amongst Latino males in particular, and cautioned that a “failure to educate a fast-growing segment of the U.S. workforce—Latino males—may put the country at a global economic disadvantage³¹” (Disappearing Act, September 17, 2009.)

Experts dubbed it “a silent crisis,” since Latino males are more likely to drop out of high school and are not likely to finish college—further widening the gender gap more than any other racial and



Note: The first number in each box represents females; the second, males.
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000).

ethnic group. Amongst Hispanic men, analysis shows that for every 100 males who start their education at the elementary level, on average only ten will graduate college. This is even lower than the current 13 percent Hispanic national college completion average (see Figure 1).

At the moment, Latinos make up approximately 15 percent of the U.S. population, a figure that is expected to double in 30 years³². Ultimately, the lack of educational attainment for this segment of the population has the potential to have dire economic implications for the nation and for its competitiveness. U.S. labor statistics indicate one of every three people entering the work force today is Hispanic, and the projection for 2020, the same year President Obama hopes to have the most college educated population in the world, that number will be one of two³³.

Return of Investment

Especially in light of our country's current negative economic state, Baum & Payea (2005) found that average high school graduates paid \$6,500 on local, state, and federal taxes—only 55 percent of the \$11,800 in taxes paid by the baccalaureate degree recipient counterparts³⁴—this perhaps is reason enough to further examine and improve student degree completion for all students.

By addressing the pervasive achievement gap and leaks in the pipeline for Latinos, and persistence at the postsecondary level and graduate school we will be assuming responsibility to ensure that our general population and country are able to join the educated and labor force ready to compete in the growing global economy. Especially in difficult budgetary times, such as those the U.S. is facing, we need to match resources to strategy, bold initiatives, and a focused national campaign to invest in our future that will drive our country and economy forward.

Policy Recommendations

We need a comprehensive plan that will improve opportunity, preparation, and outcomes for the nation's current and growing Hispanic population –improving

college preparation and completion rates. Comprehensive policy recommendations will move us all closer to accomplishing the President's challenge and goal for degree attainment. Reviewing the problems that scholars and researchers have identified from early learning to high school graduation, and college completion, the following recommendations will cover individuals "cradle to career."

■ Coordinated federal, state, and institutional efforts helping Latino families navigate the college application and financial aid process.

Policy advocates, legislators, and the Administration have recognized the complexities of applying for college and aid. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated that, "we need to make the college-going process easier and more convenient, and to send a clear message to young people as well as adults that college is within their reach." Simplifying the financial aid process is an important step toward reaching that goal.

Along with that, college materials and supplements, like voting materials, should be translated in the same languages that voting and other federal and state documents are and made available (if even online) so that families can better understand both the college application and financial aid processes better.

Moreover, aligned with the notion of "cradle to career" and in line with recommendations in the past by *Excelencia in Education*, college-access and other college materials created by the Department of Education as well as state colleges and universities can be distributed to parents at time of birth (along with Social Security, Birth Certificate forms, etc;) by hospitals to facilitate a college-going culture from birth—through cradle to career. There is no better process than preparation, and this will ensure that parents and families have the information necessary to begin to plan from birth.

■ Strengthen and support federal academic preparation programs

and continued outreach efforts. In times of budget cuts and diminishing state funding for public colleges and universities, institutions often target funding to such efforts to protect academic programs. Research has demonstrated the positive relationship between academic preparation and positive educational outcomes, persistence, and degree completion. There is a need to assess promising practices with record of success and partner with foundations, community organizations, school districts, and colleges and universities that already receive federal monies. Coordination between K–12 and our local colleges and universities could further promote a college-going culture for students and families.

Further, we can learn from the characteristics of programming and aim to increase participation in academic enrichment and preparation programs (i.e. federal TRIO programs) that have demonstrated success for low-income and Hispanic families.

Moreover, student-initiated outreach and retention programs have demonstrated a proven record of achievement that fosters support systems to meet the needs of students amongst their peers. The Department and foundations could promote funding opportunities and grants directly to further coordinate such programs that also promote student engagement. Such efforts would not only help students remain more engaged—which has shown to facilitate college completion— but at the same time provide direct financial support to students.

■ **Partnerships with community colleges to facilitate transfer rates.** As scholars have called for, leadership and vision is needed to prioritize the transfer function as the central mission of community colleges. With the help of Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden, we need to continue to focus attention and resources on community college students. Hispanics are over-represented in this particular segment of higher

education and often not eligible to transfer because of miscommunication on requirements and prerequisites. This too is an area where the federal government and the Department of Education can maintain low-cost, user-friendly web-based programs that can help students access this information in course, programs, and transfer planning to ensure that they are aptly prepared with requirements to transfer directly to accredited four-year schools.

■ **Mentoring programs for Latinos.**

Experts also say there is a lack of Hispanic role models, particularly for Hispanic males, at the K–12 level and higher education. Trends indicate that there are several factors that cause Latino males not to become engaged in school. One is not having role models or anyone they can turn to discuss goals or aspirations—and receive the support and motivation to persist. It is clear that there is a lack of engagement between Latino males in higher education.

Much like historical champions of education including the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy, who long supported service programs, and Rep. Ruben Hinojosa’s financial support for Hispanic and Minority Serving Institutions, our country can and should further invest in mentoring service programs. Such efforts and programs can be tied to federal work study—a form of federal financial aid—where Latino college students and others can provide service as role models and mentor younger generation of Latinos from 3rd grade into higher education. This effort can expand current AmeriCorps and VISTA’s goals through the Social Innovation Fund, an initiative enacted under the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009. This Act stands to yield greater impact on urgent national challenges such as this. The Social Innovation Fund targets millions of public-private dollars to expand effective solutions across three issue areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures and youth development and school support. Aligned with its mission, this work

will directly impact thousands of low-income families, first-generation college students and create a catalog of proven approaches that can be replicated in communities across the country.

■ **Continue to improve funding streams to support higher education.**

As Assistant Education Secretary for Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development Carmel Martin has said, we need to improve funding streams in education. For higher education, we need to expand funding opportunities and work with other higher education funding agencies including National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF) and others to further understand the experience of Latinos in higher education specifically in critical areas such as science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM.) We need to ensure that the Latino population growth also translates into increased participation in higher education and particularly graduate from science, technology, engineering, and math programs. We need to better understand and explore the challenges, practices, and policies, at the national, state, and institutional level to vastly improve Latino college access, retention, and graduation rates in these crucial areas that will help sustain our leadership, innovation, competitiveness, and standing in the world.

■ **Expansion of Purview of the Office of Postsecondary Education.**

As the office responsible for formulating federal postsecondary education policy and administering programs that address critical national needs, the Office of Postsecondary Education is responsible for increasing access to quality postsecondary education. The office should adopt in their mission—and commit to ensuring that we are moving towards achieving the Administration’s 2020 Goal.

Using existing and discretionary monies, commitments, and grant monies from different offices within the Department of Education, the Office

of Postsecondary Education can work with the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education to oversee and incentivize improvements, benchmarks, and outcomes at the elementary and secondary level working to improve preparation. Finally, the Office could also work with individual colleges and universities to improve postsecondary degree-completion by promoting a national campaign challenge for those who pledge significant commitments to increase their completion rates—and more importantly accomplish local-institutional goals through proactive advising and better integration into campus life and resources.

Conclusion

The ACE status report presented troubling data indicating persisting historic patterns of low attainment for U.S. Hispanics. Hispanics aged 25–34 are falling behind their already-struggling older peers. It warned that for the future of these students and our nation, we must take this opportunity to act—“failure to do so and costs of leaving behind generations of the fastest growing population in this country are too great.”

We have a collective responsibility of educating the next generation of Latino students. To further engage the country behind this commitment, a national campaign can highlight the need as well as long-term impact of falling short.

From the end of World War II to the beginning of the century in 2001 when President Bill Clinton left office, through Republican and Democrat-led Congresses and Administrations, through good and bad economic times, the U.S. always ranked first in the world in one category: the percentage of young Americans with a bachelor’s degree. In one decade we fell to 10th—and according to OECD and the Secretary of Education we are now tied for 9th with four other countries³⁵. The United States is tied at ninth with Israel, Belgium and Australia—which can put us down as low as 12th. In this time, other nations saw how increased educational

attainment benefitted us, as a country and economy, and started preparing and sending more of their kids to college. It appears that domestically, we have distracted ourselves with competition, and rising costs of education, attendance, and tuition. We need to re-examine and identify specifically why we are no longer the leading force and beacon of opportunity when it comes to education—when throughout history it has served as a vehicle to harness progress, research, innovation, business, and our economy.

In today's global economy, educating every American student to graduate from high school prepared for college and for a career is a national imperative. The President has articulated this as the goal of America to once again have the highest proportion of college graduates by the year 2020 (White House, 2010). Today, a higher education is not just a pathway to opportunity — it is a prerequisite. Over the next decade, nearly eight in ten new job openings in the U.S. will require some workforce training or postsecondary education. At the same time, of the thirty fastest growing occupations in America, half will require at least a four-year college degree. Thus, rising levels of education — especially for the youngest and fastest growing demographic in the country, our Hispanic population, are critical to creating shared economic growth while ensuring that we regain and remain leader amongst our partners, allies, and neighbors. Closing the achievement gap in the U.S. and increasing the percentage of Latinos with a college degree will make us a stronger America. We can do more. We must do more.

Endnotes

- 1 Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably throughout this document to refer to non-white Hispanics
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- 12 U.S. Census (2010) Facts for Features: Hispanic Heritage Month 2010: Sept. 15-Oct. 15. Available online: www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_edition/cb10-ff17.html
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- 21 NCES, Indicator 23: 2010
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- 25 *ibid*.
- 26 NCES, IPEDS, Enrollment Surveys, 2006-07
- 27 *ibid*.
- 28 *ibid*.
- 29 *ibid*.
- 30 *ibid*.
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- 32 http://articles.cnn.com/2008-08-13/us/census.minorities_1_hispanic-population-census-bureau-white-population?_s=PM:US
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