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NILSL

Policy Memorandum: A Financial Dilemma: Addressing the Pathways for Latinos in Higher Education

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Who We Are

Victor Ruiz, Executive Director of Esperanza Inc. in Cleveland, Ohio. Our mission is centered on improving the academic achievement of Hispanic students in Greater Cleveland. We do this by providing Latinx children and their families with support services as well as by advocating on their behalf, so that they can graduate high school, pursue, and successfully complete postsecondary education. Our work has proven to be successful, with Cleveland's Latinx youth having one of the strongest high school graduation rates in the state of Ohio. Considering that less than 10 years ago, seven out of 10 of our youth were dropping out of high school, we still have a lot of work to do, because fewer than 40% of our Latinx youth graduate with a postsecondary degree.

Sergio Jara Arroyos, Director of Alumni Strategy and Engagement at Teach For America (TFA) Los Angeles. A former Title I early childhood educator (ECE) in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Denver, Colorado, Sergio grew up in the Yakima Valley in Washington as a migrant farmworker, following the harvest. Sergio became the first person in his family to attend university, navigating the complexities both leading up and during higher education. After working in the classroom, Sergio became a grassroots organizer focusing on school board campaigns to ensure that students and families have access to an equitable education. As a member of the TFA, he develops leadership development programs for educators of color and LGBTQIA+ educators. LA Unified Schools has 123,579 students who are learning how to speak English proficiently. Of the total student population in LAUSD, 73.4% are Latino.

As fellows with UnidosUS through the National Institute of Latino School Leaders (NILSL) program, we are representative of the work being done in our home communities, while also advocating at the national level. This fellowship is focused on bridging the divide between policy and practice and training effective advocates for policy efforts that lead to increased educational outcomes for Latino and EL students.

Our Ask

- Federal funding has not kept up with the growth in HSIs (Hispanic-Serving institutions). Due to the tremendous growth in HSIs, we are asking for an increase in funding to HSIs by \$20 million to partially meet the growing demand. This amount represents about a 10% increase from current funding levels.
- In order to gain clarity on allocation of funds to academic and social support services, we are asking to establish transparency measures for institutions receiving Title V Section A funding.
- In order to encourage high-quality programming and establish best practices (for HSIs, emerging HSIs, and non-HSIs), we ask for a requirement that Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) to set targets, track, and report on student services.

The Need

While Hispanic enrollment at HSIs has increased from 22% to 37% since 2000, the graduation rate for Hispanics within six years was 10% points lower than that of Whites.¹ This gap is wider for four-year graduation rates at 14%. Latinx students have unique barriers to attaining undergraduate degrees, including the following:

- **Affordability:** Latinos borrow less for their education than any other racial/ethnic demographic group, with an average loan amount of \$6,571 for Latino students versus an average of \$6,720 for all students.²
- **Access and retention:** Forty-one percent of Latinx students attend two-year institutions, which can make their path towards a four-year degree longer. Another 30% attend private institutions (for and not-for-profit), which can be more expensive and not provide as many support services.³
- **Availability of support services:** We all know that support services are critical to student success. Unfortunately, only 29% of HSIs use their funding for student support services. Additional uses of funds include faculty development and improving facilities for distance learning.⁴

While growth in enrollment is encouraging, student completion is not: only 24% of Latinx students attain an associate's degree or higher, compared to 44% of all U.S. adults.⁵ COVID-19 has further exacerbated pre-existing barriers and access to Latinx students.

Analysis done by Excelencia in Education on recent CARES Act funding revealed the following:

- Although Latino students' needs were reflected in the formula and the amount allocated to HSIs, the scale of their need was undercounted.⁶
- By allocating funds based on FTE, institutions that enroll high concentrations of students part-time received less funding per student than institutions with more full-time students.⁷

As a result of HSIs having a higher proportion of part-time students, the funding received from the CARES Act was significantly lower than at non-HSI schools. As a result of limited funding, HSIs are unable to provide adequate support to Latinx students, leading to delays and declines in Hispanic student completion rates.

The Impact

We believe that by increasing funding to HSIs, we'll be able to build institutional capacity while improving the quality of education. Additionally, greater transparency of funding allocation and target benchmarks of best practices will allow us to ensure HSIs go beyond enrollment thresholds and focus on degree completion. While Latinx students' enrollment continues to increase, limited funding to HSIs risks the Latinx's contribution to civic engagement, a strong economy, and our democracy. Hispanic-serving institutions play a crucial role in our higher education ecosystem. HSIs provide pathways to evolve the conversation of enrollment to completion for Hispanic students in higher education.

Endnotes

- 1 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Table 326.10, Graduation rate from first institution attended for first-time, full-time bachelor's degree- seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity, time to completion, sex, control of institution, and acceptance rate: Selected cohort entry years, 1996 through 2010," *Digest of Educational Statistics*, 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_326.10.asp?current=yes (accessed January 31, 2021).
- 2 Excelencia in Education, "Latinos in Higher Education: Compilation of Fast Facts," April 2019, <https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/publications/latinos-higher-education-compilation-fast-facts> (accessed January 31, 2021).
- 3 Excelencia in Education, "Latinos in Higher Education: Compilation of Fast Facts."
- 4 Excelencia in Education, "Latinos in Higher Education: Compilation of Fast Facts."
- 5 Excelencia in Education, "Latinos in Higher Education: Compilation of Fast Facts."
- 6 Excelencia in Education, "Hispanic Serving Institutions and the CARES ACT: Preliminary Analysis of Funding," June 2020, <https://www.edexcelencia.org/HSIs-and-CARES-Act-Preliminary-Analysis-Funding-PDF> (accessed January 31, 2021).
- 7 Excelencia in Education, "Hispanic Serving Institutions and the CARES ACT."