

Investing in Latino Student Success

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Submitted by

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Introduction

Good morning. My name is Amalia Chamorro, and I am the Director of Education Policy for UnidosUS. UnidosUS, (previously known National Council of La Raza), is the nation’s largest Hispanic* civil rights and advocacy organization and has built a stronger country by creating opportunities for Latinos for more than 50 years. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels. I would like to thank Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro and Ranking Member Tom Cole for inviting me to participate in this hearing to share from a Latino perspective our priorities for appropriations and investments in education as part of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies’ Public Witness Day.

UnidosUS requests the following funding for the Department of Education: \$2 billion for Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), \$70 million for a new grant program (Newcomer Family Success Program), and under the Higher Education Act (HEA)—doubling the Pell Grant, \$1.2 billion for TRIO programs, \$400 million for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), \$50 million for the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), \$350 million for the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (DHSI) Program (Title V of the HEA), and \$100 million for Teacher Quality Partnership Grants.

UnidosUS has published reports, provided testimony, and engaged in advocacy for Latino student success, such as the bipartisan passage of ESSA, as well as the reauthorization of HEA. UnidosUS has conducted original research on the experiences of Latino students, and has authored numerous publications, including *A Generation at Risk: The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on UnidosUS-Affiliated Classrooms and Educators* (2020); *Following Their Dreams in an Inequitable System: Latino Students Share Their College Experience* (2020); *A Path Forward for Latinos: Laying the Groundwork for Equity in Higher Education* (2020); and *Guiding Questions and Critical Action Items for School Reopenings* (2020).

UnidosUS submits this testimony to provide background on the persistent effects of historical, systemic, and structural bias in our education system and how this has contributed to a disproportionate impact on Latino students in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This testimony also provides recommendations to consider for federal funding that equitably invests in the most vulnerable families and communities in our nation.

* The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. This document may also refer to this population as “Latinx” to represent the diversity of gender identities and expressions that are present in the community.

Background

Latino students make up one in four students in our public school system,^{*} and there are nearly five million English learners (ELs) enrolled in our schools—nearly 75% of whom are students whose home language is Spanish.[†] The U.S. public school system is now a majority-minority system, which makes equity in education more important than ever. Latino students have made progress in the past decade: the high school dropout rate for Hispanics is at a record low, the college enrollment gap between Latinos and Whites is narrowing, and more Latinos are earning a bachelor's degree.[‡]

However, past austerity measures and declining investments in education, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, show that there is still much work to be done to close opportunity gaps and provide a high-quality education for all students. A 2020 report, *Students of Color Caught in the Homework Gap*, finds that one in three Latino households lack high speed internet. A federal survey of pandemic learning shows that as of March 2021, 47% of Latino students and 41% of ELs remain in remote instructional mode compared to 19% White students.[§] This inequity significantly harms students of color and undermines the ideal of education as the great equalizer of our society.

Today, students and their families face the highest cost of college in history, caused in part by decreased investments in higher education, rising costs of living, stagnant wages, and a shift to a debt-based college financing system. There are an estimated 3.6 million Latinos enrolled in colleges and universities, a number that was expected to grow before the pandemic by 1 million by 2026. The face of our next generation of leaders is changing, and the federal government must ensure that they are ready for the economy of today and the future. This requires federal investments that aim to improve access and outcomes from early childhood education through postsecondary completion. Failure to invest in the education of Latinos will imperil our country's competitive edge and economic prosperity.

Investing in ELs

ELs make up 10% of K-12 public school students in the United States and are one of the fastest growing student populations. The number of ELs in the United States [grew 28.1%](#) between the 2000–01 school year and the 2016–17 school year.^{**} As of 2017, there were 5 million English

^{*} U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics, 2015* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2015), Table 203.50, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_203.50.asp?current=yes (accessed January 2017).

[†] National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education - English Language Learners in Public Schools*. Institute of Education Sciences Report. (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp#:~:text=\(Last%20Updated%3A%20May%202020\),%2C%20or%203.8%20million%20students](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp#:~:text=(Last%20Updated%3A%20May%202020),%2C%20or%203.8%20million%20students) (accessed April 2021).

[‡] Jens Manuel Krogstad, "5 Facts About Latinos and Education," *Pew Research Center*, July 28, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/28/5-facts-about-latinos-and-education/> (accessed January 2017).

[§] Institute of Education Sciences, "Monthly School Survey Dashboard," <https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/> (accessed May 16, 2021).

^{**} U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, *English Learners: Demographic Trends* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

learners enrolled in public schools. Most ELs (3.8 million) are Latino—76.5%—followed by 10.7% Asian, 6.6% White, and 4.3% Black.*

Title III is the federal formula grant program intended to support ELs in every state and territory. Grants are based on each state’s share of EL students and recent immigrant student population. Federal funding has been relatively flat since the inception of Title III in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002, fluctuating between \$664 million in 2002 and \$797 million in FY21—the highest funding level appropriated to date—yet this breaks down to only \$159 per EL. When adjusting for inflation, Title III funding has decreased by 12.3% since 2010.†

As stated in a recent op-ed in [The 74](#) by UnidosUS, SchoolHouse Connection, and National Center for Learning Disabilities, “For students facing the greatest barriers to school success and long-term stability, the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act was a positive step forward. Yet, even with these dedicated funds, there are still significant unmet needs for underserved children, such as English learners.” In a [survey by Next 100](#), two-thirds of educators report that their EL students are not doing well or are only doing slightly well academically. Sixty-four percent of educators responded they have not felt well-supported to provide ELs with the services they need to succeed academically.

Furthermore, a report from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences’s Commission on Language Learning—*America’s Languages, Investing in Language Learning for the 21st Century*—asserts that as a country the United States needs bilingual and biliterate citizens for national security, to promote economic growth, and to advance social justice.‡

Last week, UnidosUS and the National Association for Bilingual Education circulated a letter to Congress that was also signed by 120 partner organizations requesting **\$2 billion for Title III**. Increasing funding for the main federal program that is dedicated to support ELs would help to rectify years of underinvestment and provide for more equitable funding for one of the highest-need student populations. Should Title III funding continue to fail to reflect the rate of EL growth and both address the needs and recognize the assets of ELs, millions of students will continue to be denied a high-quality education and will be inhibited from reaching their potential and maximizing their contributions to the United States’ economy.

Promoting Newcomer Family Success

UnidosUS also requests that Congress provide new funding of **\$70 million** for the Department of Education to establish a new grant program, Newcomer Family Success Program, to address significant disparities experienced by immigrant parents and their young (0-4 years) and school-age children. The COVID-19 pandemic has inarguably exacerbated longstanding disparities that undermine the economic mobility and integration of immigrant parents in the United States and

* National Center for Education Statistics, *English Learners in Public Schools* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

† UnidosUS calculation based on Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI inflation calculator and U.S. Department of Education and NCES data.

‡ American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Commission on Language Learning, *America’s Languages, Investing in Language Learning for the 21st Century* (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2017.)

their children’s prospects for success in school and beyond. With early childhood, K-12, and adult education systems possessing only minimal capacity to address integration skills and topics critical to two-generation success, programs specifically responsive to the needs of low-income newcomer families that face additional barriers such as limited English proficiency, low parental formal education, digital access or digital literacy challenges and/or linguistic isolation are needed in order to lift the trajectories of immigrant parents and their children.

The grant program would support funding for programs that provide adult immigrant parents and caregivers with digital literacy and independent learning skills, integration knowledge and system navigation support, skills, and strategies for supporting children’s school readiness and ongoing school success, and the development of family integration success plans, which will in turn serve as an onramp to other local resources and programming.

Supporting Success in Higher Education

Higher education is one of the surest pathways to economic and social mobility in this country, but unfortunately it remains out of reach for too many students who are Latino, are the first in their family to attend college, and come from low-income backgrounds. Latino students have a strong desire to further their education, and place high value on going to college. Over the past decade, the Hispanic college enrollment rate among 18–24-year-old high school graduates increased 10%.^{*} At the same time, just over half (55%) of Latino students complete a degree within six years, compared to 64% of their White peers.[†] Since COVID-19, Latino undergraduate enrollment declined 6%[‡] compared to a 1.7% growth in fall 2019. This is the first decline in Latino postsecondary enrollment in a decade. To ensure that the postsecondary system better meets the needs of Latino students, UnidosUS requests the following:

- **Double the maximum federal Pell Grant.** Almost half of Latino college students receive Pell. Doubling Pell would increase the maximum Pell Grant for which a student would be eligible for during award year 2022–2023 to \$12,990. Doubling the Pell Grant would also restore the purchasing power to half the cost of college for a bachelor’s degree at an in-state, public institution.
- **\$1.2 billion for federal TRIO programs.** Federal TRIO programs include five discretionary grants that provide tutoring, rigorous coursework, and guidance to first-generation low-income students as they apply to and persist through college. The TRIO programs serve more than 800,000 students annually, and 19% of TRIO program participants are Latino.

^{*} U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics, 2015* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2015), Table 302.60 (accessed January 2017).

[†] U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics, 2015* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2019), Table 326.10 (accessed February 2021).

[‡] National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Regular Updates on Higher Education Enrollment*, <https://nscresearchcenter.org/stay-informed/> (accessed May 16, 2021).

- **\$400 million for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP).** GEAR UP helps disadvantaged students prepare for, enroll in, and complete college. The program serves nearly 700,000 students annually, and more than one-third of participants are Latino.
- **\$50 million for the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP).** HEP and CAMP assist migrant and farmworker students obtain a GED and complete their first academic year in a postsecondary institution. Together, HEP and CAMP are estimated to serve more than 8,000 students annually and have proven to be highly successful in reaching program objectives.
- **\$350 million for the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (DHSI) Program (Title V of the Higher Education Act).** DHSI helps Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) expand educational opportunities for Hispanic students. HSIs make up 18% of all institutions of higher education and enroll 67% of Latino undergraduate students.*
- **\$100 million for Teacher Quality Partnership Grants.** More than half of public K-12 students are students of color, but nearly 80% of the teacher workforce is White. The largest demographic mismatch exists between Latino students and teachers—more than a quarter of students are Latino compared to only 9% of teachers. This investment would help recruit, prepare, and certify more teachers of color.

Conclusion

Federal investments in the education of Latinos will affect the nation's future economic recovery and the United States' status as a global leader. Latinos are projected to comprise 30% of the nation's workforce by 2050 and will require some type of degree or credential to participate and contribute to our rebuilding efforts. To forge a more equitable path for Latinos to succeed in educational attainment, Congress must prioritize funding for those with the highest needs.

* *Excelencia* in Education. (2021). Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs): 2019 -20. Washington, D.C.: *Excelencia* in Education.