

Supporting Latinos in Higher Education: Priorities for Reconciliation

As part of the upcoming budget reconciliation legislation, UnidosUS urges Congress to provide:

- **\$62 billion in College Completion grants.**
- **Include funding to create or strengthen articulation agreements for states participating in free community college partnership.**
- **Ensure that all postsecondary students, including those participating in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and other undocumented students, have access to federal student aid.**

These provisions are vital to ensuring that the budget reconciliation bill meets the needs of Latino students seeking a postsecondary education.

Within the next decade, Latinos are projected to be one out of every [five](#) students in higher education in the United States. The COVID-19 public health crisis, and subsequent school closures and moves to virtual instruction, have disrupted the education of millions of Latino students from early childhood through college, threatening further growth of Latinos with postsecondary degrees and credentials.

Pre-pandemic, Latinos had the largest attainment growth of any other racial or ethnic group. Between 1990 and 2016 Latino enrollment in postsecondary programs increased by 337%—going from 782,400 to 3.4 million students. COVID-19 has now put those gains in jeopardy, causing the first decline in Latino enrollment in over a decade, with fall 2020 seeing a [20% drop](#). This was higher than the national fall enrollment [drop of 13%](#). Enrolled Latino students in the 2019 cohort experienced a 3.2 percentage point [drop](#) in their persistence and retention rates—this is much higher than their white, Asian, and Black counterparts. The Latino transfer-out rate also fell by 1.7 percentage points [to 6.6%](#), the lowest transfer-out rate compared to all other racial/ethnic groups in the same cohort. More recent Spring 2021 data shows a continuous downward enrollment trend. Spring undergraduate enrollment for Latinos declined by [7.3%](#), compared to the overall undergraduate enrollment drop of 5.9%.

To ensure that Latino students can enroll, re-enroll, attend, and graduate from institutions of higher education, we urge Congress to include three critical priorities in the upcoming FY 2022 budget reconciliation bill:

\$62 Billion for Student Completion Grants

Supporting students persistence and completion is critical to expanding access and affordability to higher education. For this reason, **we urge Congress to fund a \$62 billion investment for completion grants for student supports as proposed by the Biden administration.** Congress can ensure that colleges have the resources to provide evidence-

based academic and culturally relevant services, such as direct support services, career coaching and networking opportunities, and career pathways through programs that serve and assist individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Latinos, as well as first-generation college students and students impacted by poverty. This would be a first-of-its-kind federal investment that would signal a major move to change the focus of federal higher education policy from simply getting students *into* college to making sure they successfully get *through* college and earn a degree. This is a critical shift, given that less than half of Latino students who start higher education don't complete their program of study.

Require States to Create or Strengthen Articulation Agreements

Many students start their postsecondary education at two-year colleges with plans to later transfer to a four-year college to attain their bachelor's degree. However, they are often faced with loss of credits, time, and money when they attempt to transfer schools. There is a clear need to have seamless articulation agreements to ensure that students who have earned college credit, including an associates degree, do not lose credits if they transfer to another institution to work toward their bachelor's degree. **We urge Congress to include funding for any state participating in a free community college federal/state partnership to create or strengthen its articulation agreement between its public two-year and four-year institutions of higher education to ensure the seamless transfer of credits.**

Ensure All Students Have Access to Federal Student Aid

UnidosUS strongly supports the ability of undocumented students, including those participating in DACA and other DREAMers, to have access to federal student aid and support services, including any new such authorities funded through the FY 2022 budget reconciliation legislation. We urge Congress to ensure that this is accomplished as part of this budget reconciliation package. These students are too often cut off from critical federal aid that can enable them to enroll in and succeed in college. This relief will provide undocumented Latino students with the additional resources needed to overcome hardships they are currently facing as they aim to complete their degree.

Other Critical Areas

In addition to the above priorities, we are also strongly supportive of proposals that would increase funding for higher education and resources for postsecondary students across other authorities—including funding for TRIO, GEAR UP, HEP and CAMP, a doubling of the maximum federal Pell Grant, tuition free college proposals, and the cancelation of student loan debt.

About UnidosUS

UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. 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.

For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our country stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit www.unidosus.org, or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).