

Testimony prepared for the Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

By: Amalia Chamorro, Director of Education Policy, UnidosUS

Addressing: The U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services

## Investing in Student Success

### **Introduction:**

UnidosUS, formerly known as National Council of La Raza (NCLR), serves as the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. For more than 50 years, we have challenged the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos through our unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico. We believe in an America where economic, political, and social progress is a reality for all Latinos – and access to educational opportunity is central to this vision.

The Education Policy Project at UnidosUS champions policies that ensure Latinos and English learners (ELs) have access to a high-quality education from early childhood through college, career and technical training, and beyond. To support these goals, we urge the Subcommittee to include the following provisions in appropriations legislation for FY 2025:

- **\$16.48 billion for Head Start**, including Head Start Preschool, Early Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, and American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start. These programs provide early learning, school readiness, health, and family well-being services to low-income families with young children and expecting parents.
- **\$2 billion for the English Language Acquisition Program (Title III, ESEA)**. This program provides ELs access to the resources they need to attain English language proficiency and meet the same challenging academic standards that their non-EL peers must meet.
- **\$200 million for Postsecondary Student Success Grants (PSSG)**. This program provides evidence-based and culturally relevant academic services that support postsecondary student retention and completion.

Investing in the education of Latino students is essential to ensuring the economic, academic, and social prosperity of the United States. In the United States, one in four babies born are Latino.<sup>1</sup> These students represent 28% of all K-12 public school students<sup>2</sup> and one in every five

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<sup>1</sup> Hamilton, B. E. et al. (2024, April 25). *Births: Provisional Data for 2023*. (35). NCHS Vital Statistics Rapid Release Reports. <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/151797>

<sup>2</sup> UnidosUS. (2023, October 19). *Accelerating Latino Student Recovery: An Agenda to Strengthen Our Schools and Help All Students Succeed*. UnidosUS. [https://unidosus.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/unidosus\\_acceleratinglatinostudentrecovery.pdf](https://unidosus.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/unidosus_acceleratinglatinostudentrecovery.pdf)

postsecondary students.<sup>3</sup> Among this group are our nation's future leaders, scientists, business owners, and other professionals who will make invaluable contributions to our communities and economy.

### **Setting the Next Generation Up for Success:**

Children who participate in high-quality early childhood programs experience better outcomes in school readiness, cognitive development, and social-emotional development.<sup>4</sup> However, the enrollment rate of Latino three- to five-year-olds in school was 48.6% in 2021, the second lowest of all racial and ethnic groups for which data was captured.<sup>5</sup>

Head Start programs provide early learning, school readiness, health, and family well-being services to low-income families with young children and pregnant women.<sup>6</sup> Almost 40% of families enrolled in Head Start identify as Hispanic or Latino,<sup>7</sup> and one in every five children and pregnant women served by Head Start speaks Spanish as their primary language.<sup>8</sup>

Research shows that Head Start results in higher levels of educational attainment, lower rates of teen pregnancy, and reduced criminal activity for the children of participating pregnant women.<sup>9</sup> Head Start also uniquely supports many Latino families who have a clear desire for their children to be bilingual and maintain their cultural and linguistic heritage.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) state that teaching practices for dual language learners “must recognize bilingualism and biliteracy as strengths and implement research-based teaching practices that support their development.”<sup>11</sup> Growing up bilingual brings advantages such as being able to communicate with all family members, fostering positive multi-generational family dynamics, having a healthier identity, and greater access to jobs.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2023, September). *Hispanic Heritage Month Fast Facts*. National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=1142>

<sup>4</sup> Fibla, L. et al. (2022, February 23). *Bilingual Language Development in Infancy: What Can We Do to Support Bilingual Families?* Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 9(1), 35-43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322211069312>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Table 202.25., Percentage of 3- to 5-year-old children enrolled in school, by race/ethnicity and state: 2021*. Digest of Education Statistics. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22\\_202.25.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_202.25.asp?current=yes).

<sup>6</sup> Including Head Start Preschool, Early Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, and American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start programs.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2023, November 8). *Head Start Program Facts: Fiscal Year 2022*. Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/data-ongoing-monitoring/article/head-start-program-facts-fiscal-year-2022>

<sup>8</sup> National Head Start Association. (n.d.). *Celebrating Head Start Hispanic and Latino Heritage*. <https://nhsa.org/hispanic-heritage/>

<sup>9</sup> Barr, A., Gibbs, C. R. (2022, December). *Breaking the Cycle? Intergenerational Effects of an Antipoverty Program in Early Childhood*. Journal of Political Economy, 130 (12). <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/720764>

<sup>10</sup> Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors, UnidosUS, (2024, February 27). *National Latino Family Report 2024: Strength, Resilience, and Aspiration*. UnidosUS. [https://unidosus.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/abriendopuertas\\_unidosus\\_nationallatinofamilyreport2024.pdf](https://unidosus.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/abriendopuertas_unidosus_nationallatinofamilyreport2024.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (n.d.). *Head Start Policy and Regulations, 1302.31 Teaching and the learning environment*. Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-31-teaching-learning-environment>

<sup>12</sup> Bialystok, E. (2018). *Bilingual Education for Young Children: Review of the Effects and Consequences*. International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 21 (6), 666–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2016.1203859>; and Müller, L.-M., Howard, K., Wilson, E., Gibson,

Unfortunately, current funding levels limit Head Start to serving only 51% of eligible preschool-age children and a mere 10% of eligible infants and toddlers.<sup>13</sup> **Investing \$16.48 billion in Head Start would help expand program capacity to enroll more eligible children and families, ensuring they can reap the short- and long-term benefits.**

### **Investing in English Learners (ELs):**

In 2020, there were more than 5.1 million ELs enrolled in public schools, accounting for one in ten of all K-12 public school students.<sup>14</sup> More than three-quarters of all ELs are U.S.-born. These students bring rich linguistic diversity to the classroom, with over 75% speaking Spanish as a first language.<sup>15</sup> Given their significant numbers, ELs are a vital part of our educational system and future workforce.

Nearly all ELs (96.5%), participate in language instruction educational programs supported by the English Language Acquisition (ELA) program.<sup>16</sup> Authorized by Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the ELA provides resources to help ELs attain English language proficiency and meet the same challenging academic standards as their non-EL peers. Specifically, ELA funds provide targeted resources such as enhanced language instruction, community engagement programs, and professional development for teachers and staff working with ELs.

A wealth of evidence shows that providing ELs with an adequate education requires additional per-pupil funding compared to non-EL students.<sup>17</sup> However, Title III has been chronically underfunded and has not kept pace with the growing EL population. Insufficient funding has contributed to persistent opportunity gaps. In fact, ELs are more likely to attend schools with less experienced teachers.<sup>18</sup> They are also underrepresented in advanced courses and gifted and talented programs.<sup>19</sup>

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J., & Katsos, N. (2020, June 12). *Bilingualism in the family and child well-being: A scoping review*. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 24(5-6), 1049-1070. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006920920939>

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2022, March). *Report to Congress on Head Start Eligibility*. Administration for Children and Families. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ohs/report-to-congress-hs-eligibility-2022.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2022, August 01). *English Learners: Demographic Trends*. National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/fact-sheet-english-learners-demographic-trends-august-2022-1>

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2024, January 25). *English Learner Educational Experiences and Opportunities: A Report Using Federal Datasets*. National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/report-english-learner-educational-experiences-and-opportunities-a-report-using-federal-0>

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2023, May). *The Biennial Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Title III State Formula Grant Program: School Years 2018–2020*. National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. <https://ncela.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/OELABiennialReportSYs2018-20c-508.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2024, January 25). *English Learner Educational Experiences and Opportunities: A Report Using Federal Datasets*. National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/report-english-learner-educational-experiences-and-opportunities-a-report-using-federal-0>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

In FY 2024, Title III was level funded at \$890 million, providing an average of only \$173 per EL student. Without a bold increase in funding for Title III, per-pupil funding will continue to decrease due to the growing number of EL students and inflationary pressures. **Appropriating \$2 billion for Title III will provide a more adequate average of \$400 per EL student, allowing them greater access to the evidence-based language instruction they need.**

### **Supporting Success in Higher Education:**

Latino students have a strong desire to further their education and place high value on going to college. In fact, they account for one in five postsecondary students, 3.7 million total.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, higher education remains out of reach for too many of these students, who often come from a low-income background and are the first in their family to attend college. Consider that 59.3% of Latino students complete a degree within six years, compared to 68% of their White peers.<sup>21</sup>

Created to improve postsecondary student outcomes, the Postsecondary Student Success Grants (PSSG) program funds enable higher education institutions to implement, scale, and rigorously evaluate evidence-based initiatives that promote recruitment, retention, and completion.<sup>22</sup> Randomized control trials reveal positive impacts on short-term outcomes, such as degree completion in community and four-year colleges.<sup>23</sup> For example, FY 2023 grantee Long Beach City College, a California-based Hispanic-Serving Institution, used the grant to fund its Success and Completion Achievement Network (SCAN), which provided mentorship and academic advising to students who did not enroll in college immediately after high school. The program provides mentorship support and academic advising for students to successfully navigate college towards degree completion.<sup>24</sup>

In FY 2024, PSSG was level funded at \$45 million. **Increasing the investment to \$200 million in FY 2025 would significantly expand these effective initiatives across more institutions, boosting retention and completion rates nationwide.** This investment in developing a more skilled and prepared workforce is crucial for our nation's economic future.

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2023, September). *Hispanic Heritage Month Fast Facts*. National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=1142>

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. (2024, January). Graduation Rates component, Spring 2002 through Spring 2014 and Winter 2014-15 through Winter 2021-22 (final data) and Winter 2022-23 (provisional data); and Admissions component, IPEDS Winter 2015 (final data). [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23\\_326.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_326.10.asp)

<sup>22</sup> The Institute for College Access & Success. (n.d.). *Comprehensive Approaches to Student Success: Design Principles*. The Institute for College Access & Success. <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CASS-design-principles.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> The Institute for College Access and Success. *Why the Postsecondary Student Success Grant Program Matters*. The Institute for College Access and Success. <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Why-the-Postsecondary-Student-Success-Grant-Program-Matters.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Long Beach City College SCAN Program Abstract. U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/pssp/abstracts/p116m230040-long-beach-city-college-scan-program.pdf>

## **Conclusion:**

Latinos are projected to comprise more than 30% of our nation's workforce by 2060.<sup>25</sup> Federal investments in programs that help advance the education of Latinos are vital to our nation's economic future and status as a global leader. Strengthening opportunities for Latinos is not just a matter of fairness; it's an investment in a stronger, more prosperous America for all.

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<sup>25</sup> Perez, L., Sichel, B., Chui, B., Calvo, A. P. (2021, December). *The economic state of Latinos in America: The American dream deferred*. McKinsey & Company.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/sustainable%20inclusive%20growth/the%20economic%20state%20of%20latinos%20in%20america%20the%20american%20dream%20deferred/the-economic-state-of-latinos-in-america-v2.pdf>