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Ensuring America's Future

Ensuring America's Future (EAF), an initiative led by Excelencia in Education, has recently released its Roadmap for Ensuring America's Future—a collaborative report among 60 national partners to stimulate dialog in communities across the nation around increasing Latino college completion (For a complete list of partners, see <http://www.edexcelencia.org/initiatives/EAF/Roadmap>).



Excelencia has been working since 2004 to accelerate student success in higher education through the application of research and knowledge to public policy and institutional practice. The Ensuring America's Future initiative seeks

to further that cause, as shown through its Roadmap, which cites two central areas for concern:

- The Latino population has and continues to grow rapidly across the nation. Between 2005 and 2022, the number of Hispanic

high school graduates is projected to increase 88% while that of white graduates is projected to decline by 15%.

- The educational attainment of Latinos is significantly lower than other groups. As of 2008, only 19% of Hispanics over 25 in the

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Funding Woes in Washington

As expected, the first few months of the 112th congress have proven to be rife with divisive political clashes over budget and appropriations.

While in the midst of work on the FY 2012 budget, congress has continued ongoing debate surrounding budget appropriations for the remainder of FY2011. As of April 14th there were seven short-term continuing resolutions to stave off a government shutdown—a rather disconcerting trend considering the annual due date for decisions on appropriations is September 30th. Initially caught in a stalemate, Democrats and Republicans finally settled on a spending cut of \$37.8 billion on appropriations through September.

2012

Despite the drama of FY2011, the Obama administration and Congress have not forgotten about FY2012. Obama released his FY2012 budget recommendations mid-February and House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) drafted the House GOP's proposal in early April. Obama's budget takes a page out of his FY2011 playbook with continued support for a number of education programs that are viewed as essential to the country's economic success. The \$77.4 billion spending plan aims to consolidate 38 different programs into 11 broader competitive funding streams and increase funding to programs like Title I (\$300 million increase), IDEA (\$200 million increase), PELL, Race to the Top, and Investing in Innovation. It would also establish new programs such as the Early Learning Challenge Fund, a program that would provide competitive grants to help states improve early childhood care and the Presidential Teaching Fellows program, which would offer formula grants to states to award scholarships to strong teacher preparation programs. (For detailed budget analysis see <http://www.edweek.org/media/21budget-chart1.pdf>)

As far as educational programs for the Hispanic community go, Obama's proposal has not changed dramatically from its 2011 budget request. The Hispanic Education Coalition, a union of 25 national organizations dedicated to improving educational opportunities to Latinos across the country requested a number of increases to programs targeting the Hispanic population, none

of which were completely met. Addressing the educational needs of Hispanics and English Language Learners, the administration requested more money than FY2011 for programs such as the federal TRIO programs, which offer student services to marginalized youth progressing through the academic pipeline, adult basic literacy grants, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) development. Programs with a decrease in proposed funding are Head Start, language acquisition grants within Title III of ESEA, and undergraduate support through Hispanic-Serving Institutions.



2011

While many have interpreted the president's continued prioritization of education as modest and necessary to ensure the nation's economic growth, Republican leadership has endorsed a dramatically different plan, pushing dramatic cuts that would significantly reduce the size of the federal government. Under the final April 14th bipartisan appropriations deal, the Department of Education's discretionary budget decreased \$1.3 billion to a total of \$68.5 billion. This comes after both parties vied for position in an effort to reconcile a \$61 billion difference in opinion. The Republican controlled House passed a bill that

would have cut \$5 billion from the Department of Education earlier in the year, but the bill died in the democratically controlled Senate. While not as painful as the original GOP budget, the April 14th funding bill makes cuts to several programs and leaves a number of cuts up to individual federal departments. Education programs marked for elimination include Striving Readers, Education Technology State Grants, the National Writing Project, Teach for America grants, Reading is Fundamental, Arts in Education, and LEAP among others. Many programs benefiting the Latino community have yet to be decided upon, because Secretary Arne Duncan, US Department of Education, has little flexibility in allocating money to individual programs.

Although federal policy offers considerable frustration, fiscal drama is by no means unique to Washington DC. While still significant, federal funding accounts for only 8% of K–12 education revenue whereas approximately 48% comes from the state and 44% comes from the district (Cavanagh, 2011a). 46 states and the District of Columbia have had budget shortfalls in FY2011 and at least 34 states and DC have cut funding to K–12 or early childhood programs since 2008. Many district schools have been sustained through federal support under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and the Education Jobs Fund, but most districts are headed toward a funding cliff as federal funds become exhausted (Cavanagh, 2011). The stimulus funding went to supporting teacher and employee salaries, Title I funding, and special education programs. In its absence—a prospect that is just around the corner—many are bracing for schools limited to only core classes staffed by fewer teachers and administrators. Governor Rick Scott of Florida has already proposed a \$0.8 billion dollar cut in K–12 spending for FY2011–2012. When compounded with the drying up of Race to the top funding, this would result in a decrease of approximately 10% of K–12 spending. Texas lawmakers have proposed a budget that could eliminate up to 65,000 jobs, according to a Texas Association of School Administrators estimate (Cavanagh, 2011b). The current struggle between state legislatures and teachers' unions are a conse-

Program	FY 2010 (in millions unless otherwise noted)	FY 2011 (in millions unless otherwise noted)	FY 2012 HEC Request (in millions unless otherwise noted)	FY 2012 Presidential Budget (in millions unless otherwise noted)
William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Programs	\$66.45	unspecified	\$100.00	\$0.00
Head Start	\$7.2 Billion	\$7.57 billion	\$10.9 billion	\$8.1 billion including early head start
Title III of the ESEA: Language Acquisition State Grants	\$750.00	\$735.00	\$850.00	\$750.00
Title I, Part C, ESEA: Migrant Education Program	\$394.77	unspecified	\$475.00	\$394.77
Federal TRIO Programs	\$853.00	unspecified	\$937.00	\$920.09
Special Programs for Migrant Students (HEA IV-A-5): High School Equivalency Program (HEP) and College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)	\$36.67	unspecified	\$50.00	\$36.67
Hispanic-Serving Institutions	Title V, Part A of the HEA: undergraduate support \$117.43 Title V, Part B of the HEA: graduate support \$10.5	unspecified	Title V, Part A of the HEA: undergraduate support \$175 Title V, Part B of the HEA: graduate support \$100	Title V, Part A of the HEA: Undergraduate support \$117.43; Title V, Part B of the HEA: graduate support \$10.50
Adult Basic Literacy Education Grants (Title II of the Workforce Investment Act)	\$628.22	unspecified	\$750.00	\$635.00
Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs	\$323.21	unspecified	\$400.00	\$323.21
Development of STEM and Articulation programs (371-b-2-B.)	\$0.00		\$0.00	\$100.00

quence of this struggle. Fearful of union resistance, state legislatures across the country are pushing to limit union influence in an effort to make these drastic cuts.

Despite the relative shelter schools have been granted through federal stimulus money over the last few years, it is growing increasingly clear that education is currently on the cutting block within many agendas. Maintaining anything but the most basic

components of our public education system may prove to be an uphill battle over the next few years as belts tighten. The political implications of this course adjustment are far-reaching. As to whether education will remain a bi-partisan issue as under No Child Left Behind or take a turn for overtly political will be of central concern as we near NCLB's tenth birthday and once again consider reauthorization.

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To Brazil and Back

As the group leader prayed, I squinted with my head bowed in the direction of what looked like a block party. Although the prayer was in Portuguese, I caught the gist—he was praying for the hundreds of people on the adjacent four blocks and for a little girl that was born with the misfortune of a mother addicted to crack. Mid-day on a Wednesday these four city blocks were overrun by Sao Paulo's most destitute citizens, gathering for the sole purpose of participating in the city's drug scene. Some came only to buy crack, others to sell, but most had nowhere else to go.

The trip leader about to lead us through what has been informally named *Cracolândia*, had been working with street children in the area for decades and had established a reputation in the community. As we sheepishly followed him, gripped by a combination of fear and sadness, he explained that we were looking for the little girl that he had not seen for almost a month. Unfortunately, it was all too common for children to fall prey to the culture of the street that was only lightly monitored by the police or ministry of health in Brazil.

Walking home, the four of us processed the experience in silence. The night before we had gone to one of Sao Paulo's most famous *Churrascarias*, where we were served some of the finest meat in the city. We dined with Brazilian lawyers and businessmen who spoke of the convenience of flying helicopters to work and the problems the business community has with government regulation. The dichotomy between rich and poor in the world's 7th largest economy was all too glaring. The Gini-coefficient of inequality, an indicator of income inequality, illustrates the extent of the problem. Brazil is the 10th most unequal country in the world, just behind Honduras and South Africa (UNDP, 2011). This inequality has been a persistent problem since the 1980s, coined "the lost decade," in which economic crisis forced many Latin American countries into debt and harsh government policies that widened the gap between rich and poor. As Brazil prepares for the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics, government leaders are trying to tackle the massive problem through a number of measures, including the nation's schools. However, the country's public education system has remained weak in comparison to many of its neighbors. The 2000 OECD-led *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)* placed Brazil dead last. Nine years later, the country has performed markedly better, but

still falls behind several other Latin American countries (Economist, 2010). Professional development is lacking in both state and municipal schools and pupil teacher ratios are difficult to keep low. Access to schools is limited to many in poor areas. In visiting

While I had a chance to witness many obstacles in the Brazilian education system, I was also able to see many people making a significant impact.

Heliopolis, one of the largest favelas with a population of 200,000, an educator informed us that there are approximately 9,000 children without access to a school. In response to the public sector's lack of support, private schooling has been a fallback, primarily for those who can afford it. Private entities, such as oil companies, media outlets, and national banks, have also developed corporate social responsibility wings that run schools serving many of the poorest communities. Yet difficult working conditions and insufficient professional development often create a classroom culture that lacked academic rigor. Low income students are not interested in learning because they have little chance to succeed in many of the formal schools.

While I had a chance to witness many obstacles in the Brazilian education system, I was also able to see many people making a significant impact. The final day of the trip, a friend introduced me to the *Círculo de Leitura*—an afterschool reading program that promotes classic literature, develops leadership skills amongst students and teachers, and expands access to educational resources to over 1,400 of the poorest public schools

across the country. Running the main center out of the founder's house, the program sends teachers into public schools to implement reading circles in interested classrooms. After a series of lessons, the teachers then invite interested students to participate in day long weekend sessions at the main center, often an hour commute from the students' homes. During our two hour visit we sat in on a reading circle, comprised of 13 to 17 year old students. I was amazed at the level of engagement by all students and the ease in which students related classic literature to their own lives. While the rhetoric of many classrooms emphasizes student-centered learning, teachers in this program truly acted as facilitators, extending students' thinking in a non-threatening and constructive manner. It has also encouraged participants to take leadership roles, developing blogs and creating circles in their own schools.

A few things struck me about the success of this program. First, these students proved that a sound program can thrive in the most difficult of circumstances. Many of these students gave up their weekend to attend the center, forfeiting time to work or socialize. One might expect the program to flounder when asking for such a commitment, especially when child and adolescent labor is a significant concern, yet the program has flourished as it has gradually expanded over the last decade. Second, the empowerment of the students was also evident. As we spoke to them, many discussed the pride of their families as well as the leadership roles they had taken on in their own communities and schools. Many students in the circles eventually become paid educators that lead discussions or "multipliers" that document group activities. During our visit, we were interviewed by their student blogger who has taken a keen interest in journalism. These leadership roles are not only an important tool for sustainably broadening the program's reach, but they are also critical in fighting for social change in a country so



dramatically divided. The Workers' Party has long been an advocate for grassroots social movements and programs like these foster that sense of community that enable such efforts.

In reflecting on my experience there, I kept coming back to one central question: how might this apply to the United States? One could say that you can't compare the education systems of the two countries and in many ways that is true—Brazil has a populist party in power that has seen broad support, standardized testing is not nearly as prominent, public education is weaker, and access is not great. However, in terms of inequality the U.S. is not far behind Brazil. The U.S. ranks 62nd of 141 countries in terms of Gini coefficients, in between Morocco and Georgia (UNDP, 2009). As of 2008, the richest 1% of Americans held \$16.8 trillion, almost \$2 trillion more than the bottom 90% (Nation, 2008). Race and class tensions still persist in both our societies despite a surface level acceptance of equality. Consequently, I feel justified in comparing the struggles of marginalized communities in the two countries.

In the U.S., literacy has come under the current fiscal crisis. With last week's budget resolution has come drastic cuts to education, including the potential elimination of virtually every federally funded literacy

program (i.e. \$250 million Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program; \$67 million Even-Start Family Literacy Program; \$26 million National Writing Project; \$19 million Literacy Through School Library Program; \$25 million Reading is Fundamental Program, \$19 million Improving Literacy Through School Libraries). This does not bode well for schools amidst equally dramatic cuts to state education budgets. Yet a lack of money doesn't necessarily have to shut the door on our efforts to foster a culture of reading and academic rigor. There is an extensive and growing body of knowledge on the benefits of literature circles as a means of promoting that culture. Sandra Okura DaLie writes, "learning is not neat and tidy, something to be regimented by straight rows, silence, and wrong or right answers," (DaLie, 2001). *Círculo de Leitura* demonstrates that the simple act of reading amongst friends in a living room can empower students to think critically as well as assume leadership roles in their community. Through student-centered pedagogy, this informal approach can often benefit the student more than any regimented reading curriculum that stresses individual cognitive skills. The magic of this program is not in any funding structure or policy framework. It is in the dedication of the teacher and the student upon the realization that reading is a

tool for empowerment, no matter what the setting. So, as government funded programs fall to the periphery, don't discount the power of these circles in informal settings to not only teach necessary literacy skills, but to also engage marginalized communities in the U.S. as it has in Brazil.

Andrew Valent is an education policy fellow at LULAC who is currently studying international education in Washington DC. His two week trip to Brazil was part of a semester long course designed to introduce students to a variety of programs, including Círculo de Leitura."

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Ford Driving Dreams

South Division students take MATC class for college credit, preparation Funded by Ford, program aims to get more Hispanics to college

Andrew Acosta, 17, wants to be a doctor of sports medicine. Juan Santana, 18, hopes to be a dentist.

Yireisy Frias, 17, a senior with a 4.0 grade-point average, hasn't decided on a career. But she hopes to enroll at Milwaukee Area Technical College when she graduates and then get a college degree.

They are among 10 South Division High School students who are getting a jump on their academic futures through a pilot program started in January that allows the students to take a class at MATC and earn



college credit while completing their high school studies.

The initiative, called Driving Dreams through Education, is one of 10 funded across the country by the Ford Motor Co. Ford has awarded a \$20,000, two-year grant

to the League of United Latin American Citizens to administer the program developed by LULAC, MATC and Milwaukee Public Schools. Next school year, the program will pay for 10 more students to participate.

The goal of the Ford program is to find innovative solutions to increase the high school graduation rates of Hispanic students and encourage students to continue to a postsecondary education after graduation, said Darryl Morin, the state director of LULAC.

"Some 7,000 students drop out every day in this country, but these kids won't drop out and they will finish high school and go on to finish college," MPS Superintendent Gregory Thornton said.

By Georgia Pabst of the Journal Sentinel
April 3, 2011 | (1) Comments

"You are trailblazers, and we need to make that trail nice and wide for others," Thornton told the students and other officials who gathered last week to showcase the program.

He called the program "a great investment," especially in these times when budgets and tax dollars are so tight. "I thank LULAC for stepping up," he said.

Morin said he's looking for other corporate partners to invest and expand the program.

Out of 100 Latino children who start kindergarten, only 10 will go on to college, said Heidi Ramirez, chief academic officer for MPS.

"With this program, these kids won't have that fate," she said.

She used her three favorite Spanish words that she said describe the program and the opportunity it presents.

There's *orgullo*, or pride.

There's *gratis*, which means the program is free. "One of the largest obstacles facing Hispanics is having the resources to pay for college," she said.

And there's *adelante*, which means "go forward."

MATC President Michael Burke said he will track the students as they complete the course. Of the 10 students, two are seniors and eight are juniors.

Students take a bus from South Division to MATC four days a week for the class, which starts at 3 p.m. It's a 200-level course in English grammar and composition that's worth three credits. On two days, students receive in-class instruction, and on the other two days, they receive support and tutor-

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ing to assist them with the course and their writing skills, said Arturo Martinez, associate dean at MATC.

The juniors will be eligible to return next

year and could earn a total of six college credits in all, he said.

The students said they were selected for the class by guidance counselors who also consulted with their parents to make sure the entire family was committed.

"This program has been an eye-opener for me, and I thank you for the opportunity," Acosta said. "We can be somebody. I have many dreams. It's also making me become a better writer."

He said he also likes being on the MATC campus and knowing that he has freedom, along with responsibility.

For Frias, just getting to MATC is a new experience.

"It's the first time I've ever ridden the bus," she said. "The class is giving me a head start on college."

Santana, echoing a sentiment the others shared, said: "It's a challenge. I can say I'm a college student and a high school student. I'm working on my future."

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Ensuring America's Future

Continued from front page.

United States had earned a postsecondary degree compared to 29% of African Americans, 39% of whites, and 59% of Asians.

In order to reach the nation's degree attainment goals by 2020 and close the equity gaps, Latinos will need to earn 5.5 million degrees over the next nine years. In order to meet that goal, Ensuring America's Future has focused on a few priority areas. First, the initiative stresses the enormous benefits to the United States of supporting Hispanic college completion. It also aims to inform, organize, and track the progress of Latino college completion. Through a number of metrics, the Roadmap profiles the Latino student population and identifies specific benchmarks for closing the achievement gap by 2020. Additionally, Ensuring America's Future promotes engaged discussion by national, state, community, and institutional stakeholders in Latino college completion. Last, the initiative supports a culture of collaboration by highlighting and disseminating promising practices.

The Roadmap, released in March, includes several useful items for understanding the plight of Latinos in higher education as well as tools for moving forward. Four central priorities are addressed: college preparation, access, persistence, and college completion. In highlighting these target areas, the Road-

map includes several helpful tools. It provides a detailed profile of Latino undergraduate students to help inform policy. EAF points out that Latinos in the United States are primarily native-born, high school graduates, and English language dominant—contrary to much public perception. Also included is benchmarking data that helps clarify what goals must be met in anticipation of reaching Obama's 2020 push to be the top ranked country in degree attainment in the world.

Last, the Roadmap details specific policy recommendations for all levels of governance, which are complemented by examples of partner efforts that situate those recommendations in specific contexts. The Roadmap advocates for institutional initiatives geared toward non-traditional students, as many as 49% of Latino students attend community colleges. It also encourages colleges and universities to create policies that increase retention and improve need-based aid. One such university is the *Universidad de Sagrado Corazón*, which offers main courses online as a backup system for students with unexpected work schedule changes during the semester. The Ensuring America's Future plan also pushes community-based organizations to support degree attainment and to inform their communities about pathways to college and necessary learning outcomes. Another partner in EAF, *Prepárate*, a conference developed by the College Board, provides information for teachers, counselors, administrators on engaging and preparing Latino students for college. Last, it argues that the government's focus on access (i.e. PELL grants and Stafford loans) and support programs (e.g. TRIO and GEAR Up) should be complemented with support programs for retention, participation in practices that produce both persistence and high quality learning, and degree attainment. The following are recommendations that pertain to specific groups:

What Community Leaders Can Do:

- Inform the community about pathways to college and support degree attainment
- Develop partnerships between school districts and higher education institutions to improve college-readiness and participation rates

- Review workforce preparation programs and consider expansion
- Establish community partnerships to compliment institutional efforts to increase success in postsecondary education

What College Leaders Can Do:

- Implement high impact practices with proven benefits to increase student learning outcomes
- Measure progress in student preparation, access, persistence, and degree attainment
- Increase student retention efforts for working students in good standing
- Increase early college high schools and dual enrollment programs
- Guarantee need-based aid for qualified students

What State Leaders Can Do:

- Support a rigorous public high school curriculum
- Require a simplified transfer pathway to colleges and universities
- Make college accessible and affordable for students of all economic backgrounds
- Build state databases that track equity and success in degree attainment
- Develop a state plan that includes strategies to ensure access to a quality postsecondary education and support to degree attainment

What Federal Leaders Can Do:

- Require appropriate training and materials for default management and financial literacy.
- Link support for capacity building at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and emerging HSIs with degree attainment.
- Align efforts on work-study program offerings in partnerships with states.
- Support the development of diagnostic assessments and aligned targeted curriculum to improve delivery of remedial coursework to increase retention rates
- Collect data on certificates leading to a living wage in the National Household Community Survey
- Provide opportunities for undocumented students who are U.S. high school graduates and college-ready to complete college

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