

July 2017

Pathway Programs: An Approach to Increasing Latino Student Degree Attainment

Excelencia in Education is dedicated to bringing attention to practices that work for Latino students through [Examples of Excelencia](#); the only national effort to recognize evidence based-practices serving Latino students in higher education. Programs from [Examples of Excelencia](#) populate our [Growing What Works database](#) – a national database that shares evidence-based programs that serve Latino students. We aim to inform policy and practice by sharing models and strategies of what works for Latinos and other post-traditional students

We have consistently received submissions from [Pathway programs](#) and have featured them in the Growing What Works database.

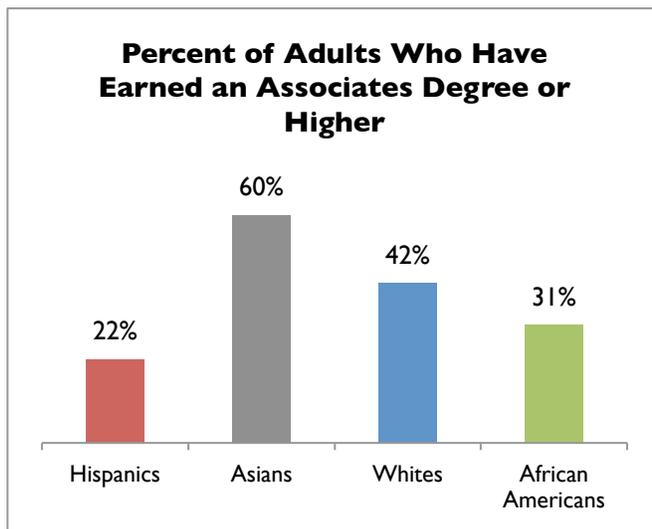
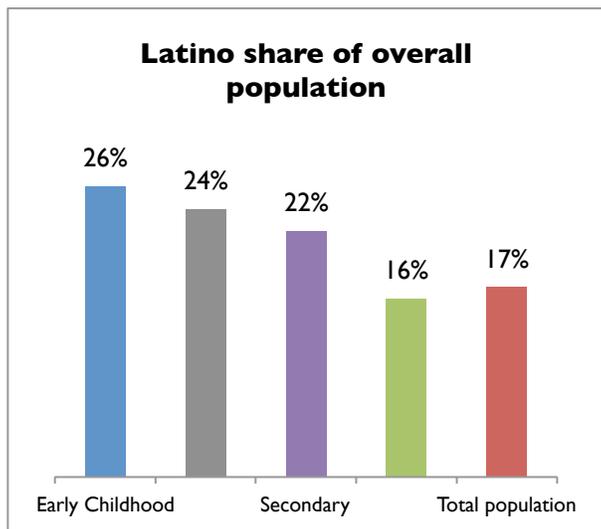
Why Pathways?

Programs that support Latino students while they earn a high school diploma and make the transition to college are key to increasing Latinos' degree attainment. More Latino students are going to college than ever before, but graduation rates are not rising at the same pace. Pathway programs align academic and student support services through transitions between educational institutions and typically provide students with guaranteed admission at a partner institution. Pathway programs recognize today's college students' needs, making them beneficial to Latino students.

Excelencia in Education has previously recognized pathway programs with evidence of success based on college admission, transfer, and graduation rates. By creating community partnerships, streamlining admissions, and providing program support, pathway programs address the obstacles to graduation that Latino students encounter. In this piece, we provide information about the condition of Latinos in higher education and why pathway programs work for them, a successful practices overview, effective pathway programs examples, and resources for more information on Latino students and pathway programs.

Latino Students in the College Pathway

Latino students are not graduating from college at the same rate as their peers. Currently, Latinos make up 25 percent of K-12 students but only 16 percent of students in higher education. Although Latinos' college going rate has increased, going to college doesn't guarantee a degree. *Excelencia in Education's 2015 Factbook* showed only 22 percent of Latino adults had earned an associate's degree or higher, compared to 60 percent of Asians, 46 percent of Whites, and 31 percent of African Americans. Latinos' college going choices can create a barrier to graduation. According to *Excelencia's 2015 Factbook*, 46 percent of Latino students enroll in community college. However, the majority of community college students do not successfully make the transition to a four-year school to earn a bachelor's degree. Supporting students through transitions between schools can help increase degree attainment and the level of the highest degree earned.



Pathway Programs Recognize Latino Students' Needs

According to the 2013 *Excelencia* paper “Using a Latino Lens to Reimagine Aid Design and Delivery,” Latino students make college choices based on cost of attendance, location, and accessibility. Pathway programs often partner with community colleges, which typically offer lower tuition than four-year institutions. Guaranteeing admission to a nearby college helps Latino students because they tend to go to college where they live. Finally, by providing students guaranteed admission based on clear requirements, colleges become more accessible.

The reasons pathway programs are successful include the following:

- **Pathway programs use cohort model elements.** Students in a cohort model program progress through an academic program together by taking the same classes. Cohort model programs tend to be smaller, but pathway programs with large student populations use cohort model elements to build a community between students. Latino students value social support from family and their community. Latinos can receive support from their classmates, and they are more likely to trust their contemporaries.
- **Pathway programs' clarity increases students' likelihood of graduating.** The majority of Latino students are first-generation college students and often the first in their families to attend college. First-generation students benefit from high school and college program alignment because it increases knowledge and awareness of college opportunities. High school teachers can encourage students to participate in pathway programs, providing a clearer path for students who may not attend college without the additional support. Once in college, this alignment helps students transition to a four-year college by providing clear requirements for admission and ensuring students take classes that count towards a degree.
- **Pathway programs reach out to students instead of waiting for students to come to them.** For students who prefer to stay close to home, these programs provide an opportunity attain a degree by connecting them to the resources near them. Latino students are more likely to live at home and work while enrolled. Pathway programs keep these characteristics in mind and provide a support structure to help students be successful in college.

Pathways Successful Practices

Each pathway program is unique, but some common practices have emerged among the most successful programs, including community partnerships, streamlined access for students, and designated program advisors. Successful pathway programs collaborate with other community members, and their partnerships allow students to receive support throughout their educational careers. School districts can target students early through recruitment for the program. Rather than leaving students uncertain about their potential for college until their senior year, providing information on guaranteed admission programs lets students know that going to college is possible. Programs usually work with local school districts to recruit students. Local community colleges work with a four-year school to help students make the transition between the two-year and four-year school. Sharing the workload among program partners also allows programs to grow and serve more students.

Successful programs streamline enrollment. Clear admissions processes are important so students can access services and the program can scale up. Meeting students' needs makes it easier for students to participate in and benefit from the program. Some programs make applying as simple as checking a box on an application while others determine program admission based on potential for success in college, not just grades and test scores. These admission requirements target students who may not have gone to college or graduated without the program.

Pathway programs provide students with a designated program advisor. These advisors provide a single place to access resources and reduce confusion when students begin at their new school. Students avoid navigating a fragmented college campus to find the right service because pathway advisors often provide a single place for students to get help on admissions, advising, tutoring, and more. Pathway programs often provide guaranteed admission from a two-year to a four-year school if a student meets academic requirements. The pathways advisor ensures students take courses that will transfer between schools. Providing students an academic plan for coursework reduces the likelihood of encountering issues when transferring credits to a four-year college, an issue that community college students often face.

Common Successful Practices

- **Community partnerships:** collaborate with school districts, community colleges, and four-year institutions
- **Streamlined access:** application processes are clear
- **Designated program advisors:** students have a clear idea of who to ask for help

Pathway Programs in Action

Every year, *Excelencia* in Education recognizes programs at the associate, baccalaureate, graduate, and community-based levels through Examples of *Excelencia*, the only national initiative to identify and promote programs and departments at the forefront of advancing educational achievement for Latino students in higher education. The programs selected as the Example in each category use evidence-based practices that advance Latino student success. Past Examples of *Excelencia* and other programs are featured in *Excelencia's* Growing What Works database, which includes evidence-based practices that serve Latino students and accelerate Latino student success. Since 2005, *Excelencia* in Education has received 1,500 nominations for Examples of *Excelencia* and has recognized 16 pathway programs.

The following four programs are some examples of effective pathway programs that have shown gains for Latino students at various points along the educational pipeline. **Pathway to the Baccalaureate** and the **Compact for Success** work with students starting in high school or earlier to provide guaranteed admission to a community college or four-year university. **DirectConnect** and the **Combined BA/MD Program** work with students as they begin their postsecondary studies. The Combined BA/MD Program also supports students through their graduate education. The featured programs have designated advisors for

their students, partner with community members, and make applying to the program as streamlined as possible.

The four selected pathway programs are briefly summarized below. For more information, please visit the Growing What Works database at <http://www.edexcelencia.org/growing-what-works>.

High School to College		
Program	Summary	Evidence of effectiveness
<p>Pathway to the Baccalaureate (Northern Virginia) [2016 Example of <i>Excelencia</i>]</p>	<p>Pathway to the Baccalaureate works with students from 60 high schools across Northern Virginia and Washington, DC. Students attend Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) upon high school graduation and are guaranteed admission to George Mason University (GMU) if they meet program requirements. High school counselors help students apply to the program and for financial aid. A dedicated Pathway counselor provides one-stop counseling and support at NOVA, including help with the transfer process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fifty-five percent of students in the program self-identify as Latino. • Pathway to the Baccalaureate students have a 97 percent on-time high school graduation rate. Of those students, 88 percent transition to postsecondary education. • Eighty-one percent of students who attend NOVA persist on an annual basis. • Students are eligible transfer to GMU to earn their bachelor’s degrees, and 82 percent of students who transfer to GMU earn a bachelor’s degree within three years.
<p>Compact for Success (San Diego, California) [2007 Example of <i>Excelencia</i>]</p>	<p>The Compact for Success engages students starting in middle school. Students who enter the Sweetwater Union High School District and San Ysidro School District by seventh grade are guaranteed admission to San Diego State University (SDSU) upon completing program requirements. At SDSU, students receive support through the Compact Scholars program where they have a dedicated advisor, take classes together, and have community events regularly. The Compact for Success engages the community by bringing together teachers and faculty members. When the program began, teachers in the partnership school districts worked with SDSU faculty to develop a curriculum that prepares students for college courses’ rigor.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 50 percent of each cohort identifies as Latino. • School districts that participate in the Compact for Success have seen a 124 percent increase in applications to San Diego State University and a 70 percent increase in admittances. • As of 2013, the program has awarded guaranteed admission to over 10,000 students.

College to Graduation

Program	Summary	Evidence of effectiveness
<p>DirectConnect (Central Florida) [2012 Example of <i>Excelencia</i>]</p>	<p>DirectConnect is a transfer initiative between the University of Central Florida (UCF) and four Central Florida colleges: Valencia College, Brevard and Lake-Sumter Community Colleges, and Seminole State College. The program guarantees admission to UCF for students who complete an associate’s degree. DirectConnect students work with an advisor who designs an academic plan for completing their associate’s degree. The colleges and UCF share facilities and staff to create a smooth transition from community college to a four-year college.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DirectConnect’s Latino student graduation rates over the last decade have increased from 34 percent to 46 percent and have outpaced the rate for all students. • Sixty-five percent of transfer students who graduated with a bachelor’s degree from UCF in 2012 were DirectConnect participants, and 95 percent of DirectConnect students graduated within four years of transferring. • Seventeen percent of DirectConnect’s graduates are Latino, compared to 14 percent of graduates from other schools.
<p>The Combined BA/MD Program (Albuquerque, New Mexico) [2015 and 2016 Examples Finalist]</p>	<p>Every year, the Combined BA/MD Program admits 28 students from New Mexico high schools or who are living on the Navajo Nation. Students have a place reserved at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, creating a pathway from undergraduate to a graduate school. Students receive full-cost scholarships, targeted academic advising, cohort only classes, and summer opportunities. During their summer practicum, students live and work in a rural community where they shadow local physicians and work on community engagement with local health organizations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Combined BA/MD Program has 41 medical school graduates from the first three cohorts, 30 percent of whom are Hispanic. • Twenty-six of the graduates are doing post graduate work in New Mexico and will stay in the state to practice.

Resources

- To learn more about Latino college completion, check out *Excelencia*’s 2015 Factbook: <http://www.edexcelencia.org/research/2015-factbook>
- To learn more about the programs highlighted in this brief and additional programs accelerating Latino student success, check out the Growing What Works database: <http://www.edexcelencia.org/growing-what-works>
- To read *Excelencia*’s report “Using a Latino Lens to Reimagine Aid Design and Delivery,” visit <http://www.edexcelencia.org/research/using-latino-lens-reimagine-aid-design-and-delivery>.

Excelencia in Education accelerates Latino student success in higher education by promoting Latino student achievement, conducting analysis to inform educational policies, and advancing institutional practices while collaborating with those committed and ready to meet the mission. Launched in 2004 in the nation's capital, *Excelencia* is building a network of results-oriented educators and policymakers to address the U.S. economy's need for a highly educated workforce and engaged civic leadership. For more information, visit: www.EdExcelencia.org.

Excelencia in Education
1156 15th St., NW, Suite 1001 | Washington, DC 20005
(202) 785-7350 | www.EdExcelencia.org