



FLORIDA

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POLICY OPTIONS

to

ACCELERATE LATINO

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STUDENT SUCCESS IN

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HIGHER EDUCATION



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Applying Knowledge  
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FLORIDA  
POLICY OPTIONS  
TO ACCELERATE LATINO  
STUDENT SUCCESS IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION

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*Excelencia* in Education accelerates Latino student success in higher education by linking research, policy and practice and by promoting policies and institutional practices that support greater Latino higher educational achievement. A national, not-for-profit organization, *Excelencia* is building a network of results-oriented educators and policymakers to address America's need for a highly educated workforce and engaged civic leadership. For more information, visit: [www.EdExcelencia.org](http://www.EdExcelencia.org).

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*\*The terms Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably in this document.*

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*The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the reviewers, USA Funds, the Lumina Foundation for Education, their officers or employees.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## FOREWORD

Over the next 15 years, the United States will experience a profound demographic shift as the baby boomer generation retires. In Florida this process has already begun. Following in their footsteps in the workplace will be today's young people of high school and college age, an increasing number of whom are Latino. To ensure the high caliber of tomorrow's workforce and civic leadership, Florida and the country must act today to address the educational achievement of our fastest growing community.

In response to this challenge, *Excelencia* in Education was launched in 2004 with the aim of accelerating Latino achievement in higher education. *Excelencia's* strategy is to apply the results of research and analysis to public policy and institutional practice. This policy brief is one example of our work. It demonstrates our belief that federal, state, and institutional policy makers play a critical part in Latino students' pursuit of—and success in—higher education.

*Florida Policy Options to Accelerate Latino Student Success in Higher Education* is our third examination of a state's higher educational achievement levels, current policies, and institutional strengths to determine practical, short and long-term options to strengthen the state's human capital. This brief, like our others in California and Texas—important, vital states with large Latino populations—synthesizes public data and the input we received from key stakeholders to produce recommendations for serious consideration and immediate use.



The project was made possible through support from USA Funds and The Lumina Foundation for Education. Through their combined investments, *Excelencia* in Education will have the means to work over the next several months with ENLACE Florida, the Florida Hispanic Legislative Caucus and others to engage Florida's higher education policymakers to react to the ideas and recommendations offered in this brief as they shape future directions for Florida's higher education policy agenda and strengthen the states' economy.

**Sarita E. Brown**  
*President*  
*Excelencia* in Education

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to remain economically competitive, Florida's economy will require a more educated workforce than currently exists. In 2008, 37 percent of Floridians 25 to 64 years of age had earned an associate's degree or higher. Given that a large portion of the demographic growth in Florida through 2030 will be Hispanic, the state's economic competitiveness will be highly dependent on the educational attainment of this population. However, the educational attainment of Hispanics in Florida is low. In 2008, about 23 percent of Hispanics 25 and over in Florida had earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

Public policy in Florida has been an important tool for improving the educational preparation and opportunity for many Floridians. However, without concerted statewide efforts it will continue to be difficult to substantially expand opportunities to accelerate higher education attainment and workforce preparation. Given the current policy context and economic limitations for Florida, the recommendations in this brief require little new resources but more direct intentionality in serving underrepresented populations. The recommendations are focused on college readiness, access, and success and are grouped into three goals to stimulate conversations for policy consideration.

**Goal: Ensure all students and parents understand the long-term benefits of a higher education degree and the steps necessary to prepare for college.** Florida has one of the most advanced education data systems in the country and has invested substantial resources in developing information for college-goers. To ensure this information reaches the Latino community,

- Provide all new parents with an informational packet on preparing, saving, choosing, and paying for college at maternity wards.
- Offer a semester-long elective course in middle schools for students on how to prepare, apply, select, and pay for college.
- Partner with Spanish-language media outlets to share information on the pathway to college and local resources to assist in college-going.
- Disseminate charts to English and Spanish media outlets that show lifetime earnings by educational-attainment level and professions.
- Identify parents from underrepresented communities who are college graduates and parents who have children enrolled in college and enlist them to assist with implementing outreach programs.
- Promote the establishment of K–16 partnerships that focus on student success and work directly with community-based organizations.
- Ensure parents and students gain knowledge of the college learning environment via direct contact with college personnel on campus several years prior to enrollment.



**Goal: Make college accessible and affordable for students from all economic backgrounds. Studies show public colleges and universities will be challenged to provide access as the K-12 population grows.** Further, reports show higher education has become less affordable for students and their families in Florida. To increase access and make college more affordable for Latinos and students from all economic backgrounds,

- Transition eligibility of the Bright Futures Scholarship to prepare students for college earlier and require both need-based and merit criteria.
- Expand links to private scholarships and grants to pay for college in Florida's data system.
- Market the First Generation Scholarship Program to more intentionally target students from economically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities to increase their application of federal and private financial aid resources to pay for college.
- Create financial incentives for low-income students to remain continuously enrolled in higher education until degree completion.
- Expand state tax incentives for employers to support their employees' higher education.
- Expand need-based funding from the state of Florida for low-income students.
- Charge leaders of public higher education institutions in Florida to develop a coordinated action plan to increase capacity and improve access for all Floridians.

**Goal: Increase the number of Floridians — especially those from underrepresented groups — who have a postsecondary degree.**

- Develop an outreach plan to engage Floridians who do not have a high school diploma and develop strategies to encourage completion of a diploma or GED.



- Increase state support of colleges and universities that enroll large percentages of students from underrepresented groups.
- Encourage institutions to set degree-attainment goals based on existing baseline data, and create institutional incentives for meeting or exceeding these goals.
- Identify and disseminate examples of institutional practices that have been successful in providing college opportunities to Latinos and other underrepresented students and graduating them in a timely manner.
- Encourage institutions to conduct an internal evaluation of student access, persistence, and completion that focuses on the performance of Latino and other underrepresented students.
- Institute community-wide campaigns to encourage college enrollment and encourage all sectors of the community to embrace the challenge, recognizing that college achievement is essential to strong civic and economic development.

## OVERVIEW

Florida policy makers and institutional leaders are making critical policy, programmatic, and budgetary decisions affecting K-12 and higher education. These decisions are occurring at a time when five critical trends are converging in the state.

1. Economic competition increasingly requires more “knowledge workers” for Florida to continue its high level of global competitiveness.
2. A higher education degree is increasingly becoming the education level necessary for a competitive workforce in Florida.
3. The Latino population is projected to experience the largest growth of all segments of Florida’s population.
4. Educational attainment levels for Latinos in Florida are significantly lower than the population overall.
5. Increasing numbers of low-income and first-generation potential college students, many of whom are Latino, are preparing for a higher education.

The purpose of this brief is to offer policy recommendations, based on recent research and discussions, to improve the educational attainment of Florida’s workforce, especially Latinos. Understanding the Florida context is fundamental to drafting appropriate recommendations for addressing the state’s and the nation’s vital need for human capital and community leadership. In the last three years alone, several studies have been released that detail these five converging trends in Florida, and these studies are referenced throughout the brief. They provide solid research and broad recommendations for action.

Although this brief summarizes the most salient findings from these studies, the emphasis is less on the research and more on specific policy recommendations for higher education that can foster conversations with state legislators, public officials, education stakeholders, and college/university leaders to improve the educational attainment of all Floridians. The policy recommendations in this brief were also informed by conversations with several state legislators and their staff, institutional leaders, representatives from private foundations in Florida, and the author’s participation in the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund’s Policy Institutes on Higher Education Access and Success held in Florida March 2007 and April 2008.



## WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US

Research has shown that higher levels of educational attainment improve civic engagement, personal earnings, and business competitiveness in communities (IHEP, 2005). Recent studies from diverse sources have also made the case that in this “knowledge” economy, Florida’s competitive ability will decrease if more residents do not earn a college education. Even more specifically, these studies have highlighted the need to increase the rate at which Latinos and other underrepresented groups in Florida attain higher education—so that Florida’s economy and competitiveness will not deteriorate. The following quotes summarize the converging trends of demographic shifts, workforce needs, and educational attainment in Florida.

*Florida may be faced with potential labor shortfalls in fields where skilled individuals are most needed. Florida educators should continue to encourage their students to achieve the highest level of preparation for college, in order to meet Florida Workforce demands.*

– ACT(2008). College and Workforce Training Readiness. *The Future Workforce of Florida.*

*Ensure Workforce Florida and its partners are doing all they can to -access, inform and deliver talent in value niches such as: rural Florida; ex-offenders; Hispanic communities; and any community, organization, or center for education and training that has limited access to resources, technology, and capital. The perspectives and aspirations of “under-30s” are vital to developing marketing and communications, helping companies attract and retain talent, and helping communities attract and retain talent.*

–Workforce Florida, Inc., 2007

*“A successful higher education system builds a better future for Florida by opening doors to economic opportunity and security,” said Governor Crist. “By increasing access to a high-quality college degree, we are ensuring our state is able to meet its talent potential and compete in an increasingly competitive marketplace.”*

–Governor of Florida website posting, January 21,2010

*Florida’s fairly low performance in educating its young population could limit the state’s access to a competitive workforce and weaken its economy.*

– *Measuring Up: 2008, The State Report Card on Higher Education*



The demographic, educational, and economic trends identified in these studies will have a profound impact on Florida’s economic competitiveness and social prosperity. What follows is a brief overview of some of the most recent and relevant data on Florida’s demographics, college enrollment, financial aid, degree attainment, and workforce needs—with a focus on Latinos—that provides additional context for the proposed statewide policy options.

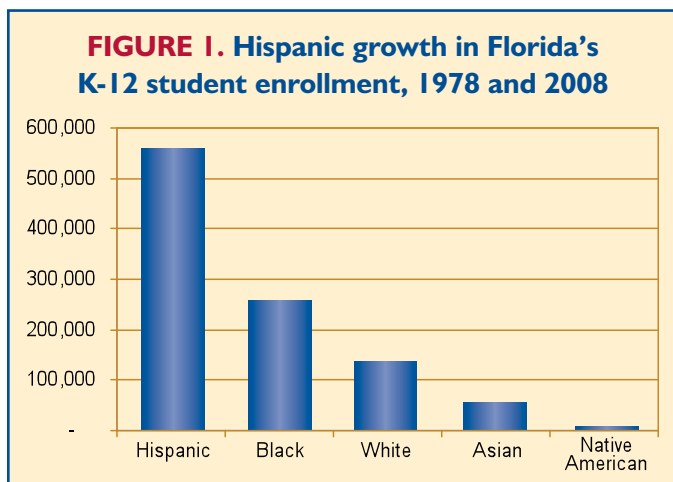
### Demographics

Among Florida’s school-age and college-age populations, the number of Latinos is large and growing, and that growth is expected to continue.

- In 2007, Latinos represented 23 percent of Florida’s school-age children (age 5–18). Over 80 percent of these Hispanic students are U.S. born. (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008).
- In 2008-09, Hispanics represented the largest percentage of English Language Learners (ELL) students (26 percent) in Florida, followed by Asians (16 percent). Over the past ten years, the percentage of Hispanic students who are ELL has decreased (from 28 to 26 percent). (Florida Department of Education, 2009)



- From 1978 to 2008, Hispanic students had the largest numeric gains in school enrollment of any racial/ethnic group. Table 1. (Florida Department of Education, 2009)
- Latinos represented 22 percent of public high school graduates in 2007-08. (Florida Department of Education, 2009).
- Only 78 percent of Hispanics and 84 percent of blacks have a high school credential, compared with 90 percent of whites. (The National Center on Public Policy in Higher Education, 2009)
- Hispanics represented 24 percent of Florida's college-age population (18-29 years-of-age) in 2007. (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008)
- In 2006 white students were the majority in the K-12 schools (56 percent), but in 2018 white students will be the minority (40 percent). Black enrollment is projected to decline slightly (20 to 18 percent), while Hispanic enrollment is projected to increase from 21 to 36 percent in K-12 schools. (Pappas, 2007)

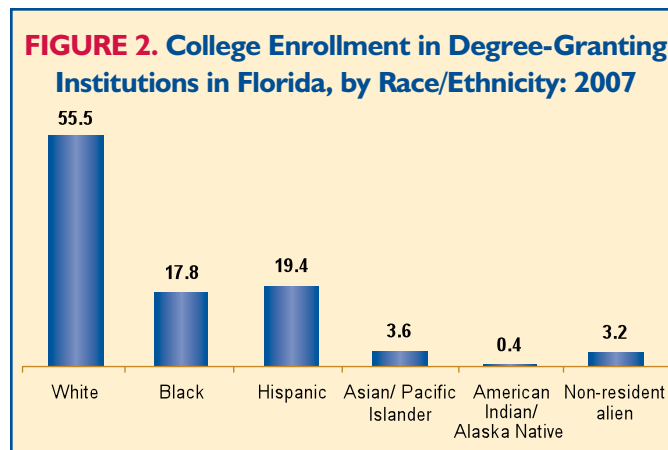


### College Prep and Enrollment

The data consistently show minority students graduate from high school at lower rates than do white students, participate in higher education at lower rates, and graduate from higher education at lower rates in Florida.

- In 2005, white students in Florida had an average SAT of 1043, compared to Hispanics, who had an average SAT of 961, and Blacks who had an average of 856. (Pappas Consulting Group, 2007)
- Among young adults, 29 percent of Hispanics and 30 percent of blacks are enrolled in college, compared with 37 percent of whites. (The National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, 2009)

- In 2007, Hispanics represented 19 percent of students enrolled in degree-granting institutions in Florida. (Figure 2) (U.S. Department of Education, 2009)
- In 2008, Florida was ranked with a “C” in college preparation and a “D” in college participation in the biannual Measuring Up: 2008 State Report Card on Higher Education (The National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, 2009)



Source: Digest of Education Statistics, 2008.

### Financial Aid

Higher education has become less affordable for many across the country, and Florida is no exception. In the 2008 Measuring Up report, Florida was rated an “F” in college affordability. (The National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, 2009) Further, Latinos’ knowledge of financial aid options to pay for college is low, a fact that affects their college choices, persistence, and degree completion.

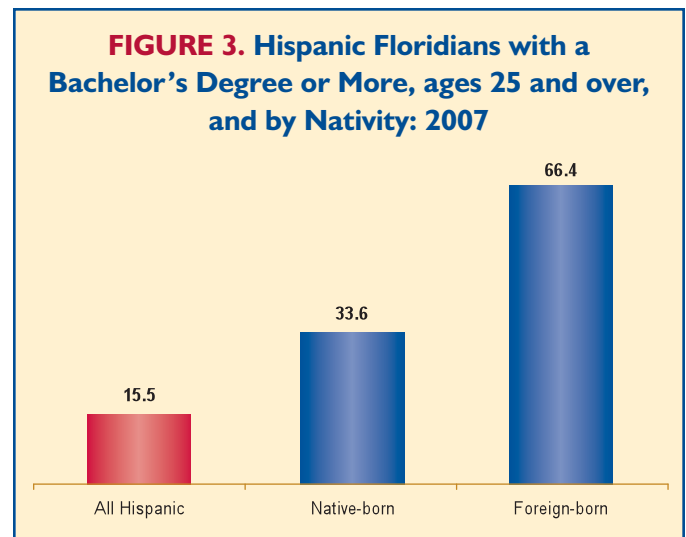
- Poor and working-class families in Florida would spend almost 25 percent of their income, even after aid, to pay for costs at a public four-year college. (The National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, 2009)
- Financial aid to low-income students is low. For every dollar in Pell Grant aid to students, the state spends only 21 cents. (The National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, 2009)
- Knowledge about college was low among Latino parents surveyed, especially among parents with lower incomes and educational backgrounds as well as among first-generation immigrants (Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002).
- Three-fourths of young adults not enrolled in college would have been more likely to attend college had they been exposed to better information about financial aid, especially during their K–12 education (TRPI, 2004).

- More than half of all Latino parents and 43 percent of Latino young adults could not name a single source of financial aid to pay for college (TRPI, 2004).

### Degree Attainment

Latinos are the largest and fastest growing ethnic group in Florida, but they have lower levels of educational attainment in the state. However, Florida performs well—and has improved—in awarding certificates and degrees relative to the number of students enrolled (Measuring Up: 2008).

- The 2006 report from the Florida Council of 100, “Preparing for the Future,” indicates that Florida ranks 43rd for bachelors degrees per 1,000 residents (age 18–44), 33rd for graduate degrees, and 47th for graduates in science and technologies. (Pappas Consulting Group, 2007).
- About 16 percent of Hispanics in Florida ages 25 and over had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher by 2007 compared to about 24 percent of all Floridians 25 and over. (Figure 4) (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008)
- Of Hispanics with a bachelor’s degree in Florida, over two-thirds were earned by foreign-born adults. (Figure 3) (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2008

- In 2008, 53 percent of college students complete a bachelor’s degree within six years. However, 44 percent of blacks and 49 percent of Hispanics graduate within six years, compared with 57 percent of whites. (The National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, 2009)

## REFRAMING THE POLICY FOCUS TO SUCCESS

Despite compelling research indicating the negative effects of a population with low levels of degree attainment, under current policies and practices significant segments of Florida’s population, especially Latinos, are struggling to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. The focus of legislative and most institutional policies regarding higher education in Florida is to ensure equal opportunity for Floridians to access higher education. These policies translate into efforts to improve academic preparation, access to programs, and merit-based financial aid. While these policy goals are critical to addressing Florida’s educational workforce needs, they are not sufficient.

Although not every Floridian may aspire to a college education, the state’s primary education policy objective should be to provide the education and resources needed to

complete a higher degree. By meeting this objective, Florida would ensure the state’s workforce competitiveness and also provide Floridians with the means to derive the individual and societal benefits of a higher education—both intrinsic and economic.

Policy actions that support degree attainment, such as college preparation, access, and retention, are not mutually exclusive objectives. Indeed, clarity of purpose strengthens the drive needed for policy actions. Setting goals beyond preparation and access will encourage policies of retention and completion that can help reach the ultimate goal of degree attainment. Emphasizing degree attainment does not minimize the need for policy to improve access; rather, it broadens the explicit expectations so that policy makers and institutional leaders can also focus on retention and on degree attainment.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

What can policy makers do to address the converging demographic, economic, and educational trends that influence Florida's future? They must be willing and able to talk about disparities in higher education attainment by ethnicity, gender, national origin, and race. The changing demographics in Florida show that the impact of the Latino population on Florida's workforce and economic prosperity will continue to grow in importance and must be addressed.

Providing clear access and effective educational programs to Latinos and other underrepresented communities is paramount to creating an educated and skilled workforce. Meeting this need does not exclude any group from statewide policies supporting increased degree attainment. Quite the contrary, in order for Florida to remain economically competitive, all Floridians must have access to similar programs. Policy recommendations that benefit Latinos in Florida also benefit other Floridians. And all Floridians benefit from education policies that seek to increase degree attainment and address the specific strengths and needs of the most underrepresented groups.

Many activities are taking place in Florida to improve educational preparation and opportunity for Floridians. However, without concerted statewide efforts, it will continue to be difficult to substantially expand opportunities to accelerate higher education attainment and workforce preparation. Given the current policy context and economic

limitations in Florida today, the following policy recommendations are grouped into three goals, all of which are consistent with the spirit of the increasing college readiness, access, and student success.

1. Ensure all Floridians understand the long-term benefits of higher education and steps to prepare for college.
2. Make college accessible and affordable.
3. Increase the degree attainment of all Floridians, especially those from underrepresented groups.

The recommendations offered in this brief are designed to stimulate discussion and deliberation over the next several months and lead to policy actions by elected officials and institutional leaders of higher education. The recommendations are diverse in their focus and strategy and provide a variety of areas for intervention and action to meet the educational needs of Florida's growing future workforce. Most recommendations require little new resources. Some of the recommendations use existing structures in new ways; others require investing funds in new ways. Before proposing policy actions based on these recommendations, a cost-benefit analysis should be conducted. This analysis and others should be added to the statewide deliberations, which may also address tactical issues such as who is best positioned to advance the policy actions (e.g., state elected officials or leaders of higher education institutions).



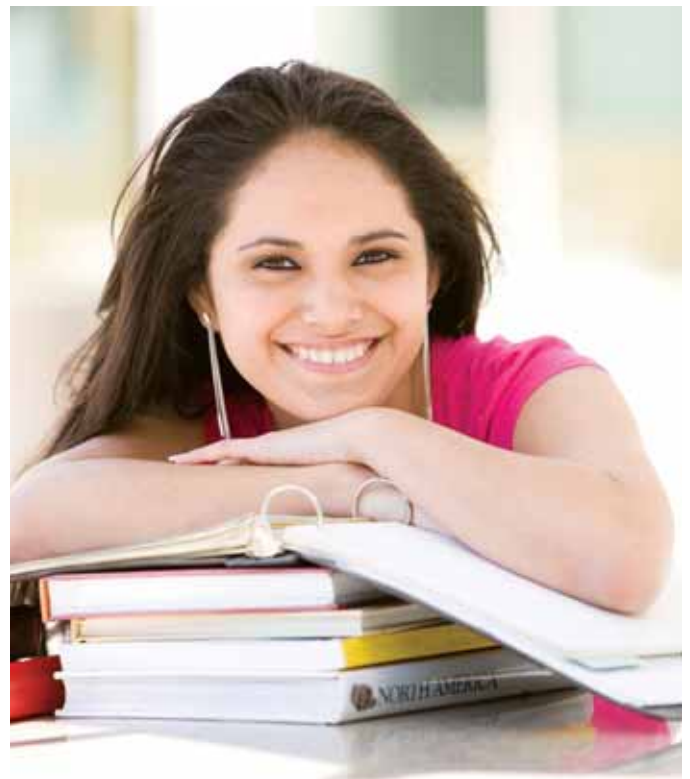
**Ensure that all students and parents understand the long-term benefits of a higher education degree and the steps necessary to prepare for college.**

While it is never too late to share information about college opportunities, providing that information early in a student's life is critical to their families' educational planning and goals. Therefore, the first two policy recommendations include information-sharing at different points early in a student's life.

While sharing early knowledge about college information is important, it is also critical to engage parents and community members in efforts to improve educational attainment for Latinos and others in Florida. Strategies that target all students are generally more successful in garnering public support. However, marketing research has shown that African Americans and Latinos often do not hear/recognize messages as information or opportunities available specifically for them unless the message is overtly "speaking" to them (Lake, 2004). Therefore, the following policy recommendations encourage identifying ways to directly reach these underserved communities by engaging parents as well as community partners and by disseminating specific information linking educational attainment with workforce benefits.

**Provide all new parents with an informational packet on preparing, saving, and paying for college at maternity wards.** The approach would help parents begin early college planning by increasing their awareness of college as an option for their children and suggesting practical ways to prepare and save for their children's education. In 2007, 23 percent of new births in Florida were to Hispanic parents (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008). Further, with the high percentage of foreign-born Latino adults, this recommendation would be most helpful for parents who were not educated in the U.S. system and thus are unfamiliar with many college choices and methods of financing offered.

Florida's FACTS.org website, ENLACE of Florida's efforts in the Know How 2 Go campaign, and most public institutions have already developed most of the information needed to create a packet of college information. Further, many public hospitals and statewide programs already offer materials to new parents for an infant's healthcare. Following the birth of a child, families could continue to receive this information in their primary family language by way of the private sector—particularly print and broadcast media and hometown associations—and the public sector, particularly county offices of education and school districts.



**Offer a semester-long elective course for middle-school students on how to prepare for, apply to, select, and pay for college.** National research has shown that Latino parents and students have high aspirations of going to college, but lower levels of actually access and completion. Research also shows the sooner students learn about their college options, the more likely they are to be appropriately prepared. One approach to begin informing young under-represented students about higher education is to offer an elective course in middle school that provides detailed information about preparing, selecting, applying, and paying for college. This information goes beyond the traditional two-hour evening workshops. Initially, these course offerings could be targeted to school districts with a high enrollment of Latino and other low-income and first-generation potential college-goers, as well as schools with low Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) rankings.

**Partner with Spanish-language media outlets to share information on the pathway to college and local resources to assist in college-going.** Local media are often the most trusted news sources in communities. And given the concentration of Spanish speakers in parts of Florida, the Spanish-language media are a critical link to reaching out to Latino communities. These community outlets can serve as partners in the dissemination of important information about the pathway to college as well as resources available to students.

**Disseminate charts to English and Spanish media outlets that show lifetime earnings by educational attainment level and professions.** Latinos in the workforce are heavily concentrated in manual labor and unskilled professions. Sharing information on the monetary benefits of a higher education degree can encourage individuals who are debating whether to invest in furthering their education and incur the opportunity costs. For example, a Census Bureau report determined that, at the national level, the average earnings gap between adults with a bachelor's degree and those with only a high school diploma is about \$23,000 per year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Working with local and national media outlets that reach underrepresented communities to disseminate information on such earnings and degree attainment can inform and raise the educational planning and goals of Latino students.

**Identify parents who are college graduates and parents who have children enrolled in college and enlist them to assist with outreach programs to underrepresented communities.** Even if parents have not attended college, they can play a major role in encouraging students. Further, in the Latino community, information on any number of issues is often spread through informal and social networks, rather than formal networks traditionally used by institutions of higher education. For example, Latino students who participated in several focus groups held in Florida reported that their sources of information about college choices were mainly friends or other community members who had attended college.

Parents, particularly those who did not attend college themselves, can learn how to improve their children's education and put them on a path to college. In this way, parents and communities are playing a more involved role in informing and reaching out to the Latino community about college opportunities.

**Promote the establishment of K–16 partnerships that focus on student success and work directly with community-based organizations.** Research has consistently shown that educational attainment is improved both by concerted community engagement in education and by aligning elementary and secondary education with higher education. A few communities in Florida with strong educational partnerships could serve as models for this policy recommendation. For example, ENLACE Florida is a statewide college access network promoting college-readiness, access, and success for underrepresented students in Florida. This initiative is based in Tampa, and led by a

team of community-based representatives at community colleges and universities across the state. The goal is to strengthen the educational pipeline and increase opportunities for Latinos, and other underrepresented youth to enter and complete college. The initiative involves a coalition of partnerships between universities, community colleges, K-12 schools, community-based organizations, students, and parents. These partnerships are focused on developing and implementing changes to current policies, structures, and institutions that will substantially improve the educational achievement and rate of college attendance of all students, but particularly of Latino students. The ENLACE partnership is grounded in the culture and assets of Latino students at all levels of the educational pipeline, but especially in secondary and postsecondary education.

### **Make college accessible and affordable for students from all economic backgrounds.**

The cost of college is a well-known barrier to accessing and completing a higher education for many students, including Latinos. Further, the capacity strains on public colleges and universities in Florida to provide access to their institutions is also projected to increase. The following policy recommendations focus on creating incentives for students to prepare for college early and enroll continuously as well as incentives for employers to support the education of their employees.





**Transition eligibility of the Bright Futures Scholarship to prepare students for college earlier and require both need-based and merit criteria.** The Bright Futures Scholarship has been very successful in providing merit aid to students to attend college. However the program could have an even greater impact on the college plans and opportunities available to low-income and underrepresented students if there were clarity about the scholarship earlier. For example, with Florida's sophisticated student data system, an approach similar to the 21st Century Scholars program could be created. Students can enroll in the Scholars Program as early middle school, and, as part of the program, students could receive academic support and other services to help students prepare for college. The students would also be informed of the criteria for getting a Bright Futures Scholarship early enough to influence their educational decisions. This information could create a critical incentive for students, who would realize that college is an affordable option and could then better plan for their future.

This idea is similar to Indiana's 21st Century Scholars Program. Students can enroll in the Scholars Program as early as the seventh grade, and the state agrees to pay the student's tuition at any public institution in Indiana, or an equal amount at a private institution, as long as the student agrees (1) to graduate from high school with at least a 2.5 grade point average, (2) not to use drugs or alcohol or

commit a crime, and (3) to apply for federal and other state aid when he/she is a senior in high school. These additional requirements could be added to the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship to ensure financial aid at the federal and private level is accessed by needy and merit-based students. Evaluation of the Indiana Program (from 1990 to 2002) showed that students who participated were much more likely to enroll in college than those who did not take part (Indiana Education Policy Center, 2002).

**Market the First Generation scholarship program to more intentionally target students from economically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities to increase their application and attainment of federal and private financial aid resources to pay for college.** For many low-income and first-generation students in Florida and throughout the nation, baccalaureate-granting institutions do not seem affordable. While community colleges provide more affordable access to higher education, data show that the persistence and completion rates of students from all backgrounds is higher at baccalaureate-granting institutions. To encourage more low-income, first-generation college students to enroll in universities, institutions may consider marketing of the existing First Generation scholarships to students at a select number of high schools in economically disadvantaged and historically underserved Florida communities. Economic conditions and community participation levels are used to identify those

high schools most in need of university assistance. This approach has the benefit of targeting aid to communities who most need it and is thus based on the community rather than on the individual. For students enrolled at these schools, the university guarantees that a specific number of scholarships will be awarded to first-generation graduating seniors. Again, the awareness in the community of financial aid opportunities targeting students with need and who would be first in their family to go to college provides a meaningful incentive to prepare for college and vital financial support to facilitate their college completion.

This recommendation is similar to a strategy to address college affordability at the University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin) Longhorn Opportunity Scholarship created in 1999. These scholarships are \$5,000 per year for up to four years of study, thus providing a major source of funds to cover a large portion of mandatory tuition and fees. The number of scholarships, which varies per high school, is based on the level of the school's under-representation at The University of Texas.

**Expand links to private scholarships and grants available to pay for college in Florida's data system.** Paying for college is a critical component for both college access and completion. While Florida's main portal of information on college offers students links to resources from federal and state aid, there is currently very little information on private scholarships and grants. Expanding the list of these potential resources will direct students to more funding options and can improve efforts to match students with the many scholarships available.

**Create financial incentives for students to remain continuously enrolled in higher education until degree completion.** Research shows that students who are continuously enrolled are more likely to complete their college education. Yet many Latinos tend to stop out or enroll part time in order to work and save money to pay for their education—in other words, “pay as they go.” This approach contributes to the length of time it takes them to complete a degree and also increases the probability that they will not complete any degree. Financial incentives to encourage continuous enrollment could include a modest tuition discount for each semester students are continuously enrolled, or raising the amount of institutional grants and financial aid by a nominal percentage for each semester continuously enrolled.

**Expand state tax incentives for employers to support their employees' education.** Not being able to work and incurring debt to attend college has very real opportunity

costs for Latino and other low-income students. This is especially true for Latino males and may actively limit their college options and success. Since the opportunity cost for attending college can be so high for many low-income Latino students, one way to encourage continued education is to provide state tax incentives to employers of students or their parents who are interested in continuing their education. This may help to offset some of the opportunity costs for students attending college and would ensure their employer's support to continue their education while working.

**Charge leaders of public higher education institutions in Florida to develop a coordinated action plan to increase capacity and improve access for all Floridians.**

Currently, Florida does not have a comprehensive education strategic plan that might increase efficiency in the state's higher education system by reducing system redundancies while providing low-cost access to more students. While numerous efforts have been undertaken to address disparities in the degree attainment by underrepresented groups, disparities remain. A comprehensive plan could improve coordination and clarity of a statewide plan to ensure the common goal of Florida's colleges and the State University System (educating Floridians and maximizing degree attainment for those seeking to complete a college degree). A coordinated action plan could include ways the systems might coordinate their outreach, preparation, and transfer activities to improve alignment that supports and simplifies access and support services for all students.



**Increase the number of Floridians—especially those from underrepresented groups—who have a post-secondary degree.**

Institutions have a critical role in higher education policy in regard to access and degree attainment. The following policy recommendations focus on increasing institutional support and outreach, establishing degree attainment goals, increasing and disseminating promising practices, and using data-driven guidance to improve the educational attainment of Florida’s current and future workforce.

**Develop an accelerated outreach plan to engage Floridians who do not have a high school diploma, and develop strategies to encourage completion of a diploma or GED.** In 2007, about 23 percent of Hispanics 25 and over in Florida had not earned a high school diploma (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008). This has a double-edged impact. Not only does this mean that many Latinos in the workforce do not have the educational preparation for higher education, it also means many Latino students have parents who have not successfully navigated the U.S. education system. A multitude of organizations, from the Department of Education, to community colleges, private industry councils, and community-based organizations offer adult education programs throughout the state. These organizations could work with national and local television (e.g., Univision and Telemundo), radio stations, and newspapers (e.g., Miami Herald), as well as community-based organizations in an effort to encourage more adults to complete their high school education or GED. This could benefit parents by increasing their workforce opportunities while also improving the parents’ information and efforts to engage in their children’s education.

**Increase state support to colleges and universities that enroll large percentages of students from underrepresented groups.** Examining where low-income and first-generation students are concentrated, particularly at community colleges, and investing in improving the quality of education and support services at those institutions will lead to improved educational attainment by those underserved groups. Low-income and first-generation college students, many of whom are Latino, are concentrated in a small number of institutions in Florida. This provides an opportunity to target limited resources to institutions enrolling the highest concentration of otherwise underserved students. HSIs are defined in federal law as accredited and degree-granting public or private nonprofit institutions of

higher education with 25 percent or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent student enrollment (Higher Education Act, as amended in 2008). In Florida there were 11 HSIs in 2006-07. These institutions can be provided incentives based on their success at sustaining the highest graduation rates for Latinos and producing the largest absolute numbers of Latino graduates.

■ Charge leaders of the public and private higher education systems in Florida to develop a coordinated action plan to improve the degree attainment for all Floridians—especially underrepresented groups.

**Identify and disseminate examples of institutional practices that have been successful in providing college opportunities and graduating their students in a timely manner (three or six years).** Currently, institutional leaders in Florida do not have a central repository of information about programs that are improving the educational persistence or attainment of underrepresented students. At the national level, “Examples of Excelencia” was created by Excelencia in Education to (1) identify and honor the success of higher education programs and departments throughout the country that are making a positive difference in accelerating access and success for Latinos in higher education and (2) collect and disseminate information on what is working to those interested in serving Latinos. A parallel effort to identify what works for underrepresented students in Florida could be developed to serve as an information source for those looking to improve their efforts to enroll, retain, and graduate underrepresented students.

**Encourage institutions to conduct an internal evaluation of student access, persistence, and completion that focuses on the performance of Latino and other underrepresented students.** Too often, institutions do not disaggregate their institutional data to determine the performance and persistence of their students by race or ethnicity for internal decision making. Yet, without this disaggregation, targeted and meaningful interventions are limited. One example to consider is the Latino Student Success framework created by Excelencia in Education. Institutions can use this framework to develop an institutional profile of their Latino students or of any other racial/ethnic group using existing data. These tools work with institution leaders to examine their existing data to identify the strengths and needs of their students’ performance. Findings can be used in internal decision making aimed at increasing student retention and success.



## SUMMARY

In order to remain economically competitive, Florida's economy will require a more educated workforce than currently exists. Multiple research studies on Florida conclude that the state's economic competitiveness will be highly dependent on the educational attainment of Latinos. A concerted statewide effort is needed to expand substantially the activities that are accelerating higher-education attainment for the current and future workforce — especially Latino achievement in higher education. Discussions about the ideas provided in this brief can jumpstart the development of a statewide effort.



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