

Maricopa Community Colleges: A Critical Partner in Latino Student Success

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Arizona must prioritize the educational success and degree attainment of our students in order to secure the future economic viability of our state. As native Arizonans, we know that the most important thing we can do for the future is to increase the postsecondary degree attainment rate. This is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty, ensuring a strong, qualified workforce pipeline and putting Arizona back on the path toward economic prosperity. While we know that we must increase degree attainment across the board, we see significant opportunity within the Latino community.

Arizona is experiencing a Latino student achievement gap. Latino students trail their White peers in almost every education assessment category. Only 69 percent of Arizona Latinos graduated high school on time compared to more than 76 percent of non-Latinos,¹ 65 percent of Latino adults lack post-high school training and only nine percent of Latino adults have a bachelor's degree or higher.²

These statistics are even more sobering when you consider that the Latino population is the fastest growing population group in the nation. Arizona has the fourth largest concentration of Latinos behind New Mexico, California and Texas.³ Between 2001-2010, Arizona's Latino population grew by 46 percent while the non-Latino population grew by 17 percent.⁴ At 44 percent, Latinos already make up the largest proportion of the state's population of children and there are more Latino children than White children in the state's public schools.⁵

The sheer number of Latino students in our state's K-12 and postsecondary education systems today is a sign of things to come. Latinos will make up the majority of Arizona's workforce pipeline tomorrow and far into the future. Improving Latino college success will contribute to Arizona's ability to expand, attract and retain vital growth industries, and ultimately, to transform Arizona from a low-skill, service economy to a high-skill, knowledge-based economy. The seismic shift in Arizona's population requires that we consider how we are preparing students to lead our state successfully into the future.

¹ Morrison Institute for Public Policy, *Dropped? Latino Education and Arizona's Economic Future* (2012), page 24; <https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/products/dropped-latino-education-and-arizonas-economic-future>

² Morrison Institute for Public Policy, *Dropped? Latino Education and Arizona's Economic Future* (2012), page 22; <https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/products/dropped-latino-education-and-arizonas-economic-future>

³ Mark Lopez and Anna Brown, *Mapping the Latino Population, By State, County, and City* (2013), Pew Hispanic Center; http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2013/08/latino_populations_in_the_states_counties_and_cities_FINAL.pdf

⁴ Morrison Institute for Public Policy, *Dropped? Latino Education and Arizona's Economic Future* (2012), page 24; <https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/products/dropped-latino-education-and-arizonas-economic-future>

⁵ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Race for Results: Building a Path to Opportunity for all Children*. <http://www.aecf.org/resources/race-for-results/>

The Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce estimates that by 2018, 61 percent of Arizona's jobs will require some form of postsecondary training.⁶ Many low-skill jobs require more advanced skills than in the past and well-paying, high-skill jobs demand some form of postsecondary education. Furthermore, by 2020, Arizona is projected to fall short of market demand for degreed professionals by 900,000.⁷ As stated above, 65 percent of Arizona Latinos have no education beyond high school.

The good news is that the state has started to make a concerted effort to improve Latino degree attainment. With one of the best community college systems in the nation, we are poised to make significant strides over the coming years. The Maricopa Community Colleges enroll more Latino undergraduate students than do Arizona's three state universities combined (Arizona State University, the University of Arizona, and Northern Arizona University). Of the more than 192,000 students who attended one of the Maricopa Community Colleges in the 2014 fiscal year, over 46,000 of them were Latino.⁸

The Maricopa County Community Colleges District is one of the largest community college districts in the United States. It is made up of 10 colleges, two skill centers, a Corporate College and numerous education centers. Collectively, the Maricopa Community Colleges offer five types of associate's degrees, certificates of completion in approximately 900 programs, and over 2500 academic and 6500 occupational courses. They awarded more than 10,500 associate's degrees and more than 9,100 occupational certificates last year alone.⁹

The Maricopa Community Colleges also play a critical role in Arizona's workforce development. In fact, the District is the largest provider of health care workers and job training in Arizona, making the colleges a major resource for business and industry. The value to the state can be measured by an estimated \$3 billion annual impact in direct and indirect economic benefits to Maricopa County alone. The Maricopa Corporate College also contributes to economic development by providing customized training for employers ranging from Amazon to Walgreens.¹⁰

Community colleges play a pivotal role in engaging Latino students and preparing them for the future workplace, yet the community college structure is threatened by lack of funding. In fact, the latest proposed state budget completely eliminates all state funding for the Maricopa Community Colleges. To put that in perspective, over the past eight years, nearly \$70 million dollars has been cut from their budget. The steep drop in aid has led the colleges to increase tuition and property taxes. Cutting funding to Arizona's higher education institutions is not the right solution to our economic challenges.

⁶ <http://cew.georgetown.edu>.

⁷ 14 Lumina Foundation, A Stronger Arizona through Higher Education (2013), page 2; http://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger_nation_2013/downloads/pdfs/arizona-brief-2013.pdf

⁸ Maricopa Community Colleges

⁹ Maricopa Community Colleges

¹⁰ <http://www.expectmorearizona.org/blog/2015/01/27/preparing-future/>

Community colleges have traditionally been an attractive option for Latino students because of their affordability and flexibility. The impact of decreased community college funding will disproportionately impact an increasing number of Arizona's Latino population and ultimately be detrimental to our state.

The negative consequences of the Latino educational achievement gap will affect all Arizonans, regardless of race, ethnicity or age. In addition, progress cannot be made without a willingness for all sectors of our community – business, government, philanthropy, education – to work together to ensure more students have opportunities to complete a postsecondary certificate or degree. It must be a top priority on our state's agenda. If we don't, we close the door on opportunity, and step into a future of economic and social peril.

Paul J. Luna and Tommy Espinoza are both native Arizonans with significant ties to the philanthropic, education and business communities. Luna was born in Miami, Arizona, graduated as a first-generation college student from Stanford University and is the President and CEO of Helios Education Foundation, which is focused on creating opportunities for individuals in Arizona and Florida to succeed in postsecondary education. Espinoza is President and CEO of the largest Latino Community Development Financial Institution loan fund in the U.S which creates financing solutions that increase opportunities for the Latino community and low-income families in the areas of affordable housing, education and health care. Data sources available at www.helios.org.