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Authors

Davila Jr., Omar

Berumen, Juan G.

Baquedano-López, Patricia

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Fostering Academic Success among Latino Men in Higher Education

By Omar Davila Jr., Juan G. Berumen, and Patricia Baquedano-López

The Bay Area Latino Males in Higher Education Initiative

University of California, Berkeley

Context and Importance of the Problem

As Latinos become the largest minority group in the US, our nation's schools are also changing. This trend is remarkably evident in California, where Latinos are the majority of K-12 public school students (53.3%) and are the fastest growing segment of high school and college students (California Department of Education, 2014). Similarly, Latino students have grown faster than any other racial and ethnic group in the Bay Area of Northern California, and in 2013, over a third of K-12 students were Latino (California Department of Education, 2014). The California State University (CSU) campuses in the Bay Area experienced similar trends, as the number of Latino students more than doubled in the last decade. If this trend continues, Latinos could be close to half of the students at Bay Area four-year institutions by early 2020 (César E. Chávez Institute, 2015).

Latino males, however, experience a significant gap in college degree attainment despite the increase in college enrollment rates. In 2013, only 9 percent of Latino men enrolled in college obtained their bachelor's degree compared to 21 percent of white men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Furthermore, Latina women obtain 60% of bachelor's degrees conferred to all Latinos in the US (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Latino males also experience this marginal status beyond the academic sphere. One in six Latino males born in 2013 (compared to one in seventeen of white males) can expect to spend time in prison (The Sentencing Project, 2013). Based on our analysis of these trends we make an urgent call to action

to policy makers to address the barriers that impinge on the academic trajectories of Latino men. A four-fold rationale served as the catalyst for this report:

Reason #1: We have an obligation to recognize the right to education for everyone.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, a multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, recognizes education as a human right for everyone, including a higher education. Article 13 specifically states that higher education shall be made equally accessible to all.

Reason #2: California's economy depends on the high educational attainment of Latinos.

If the current trend persists, 41 percent of jobs in 2025 will require at least a bachelor's degree (Johnson, 2015). Given that Latinos are the largest ethnic group in California and only 11% have earned a bachelor's degree, California will not be able to maintain its economic growth without improving college graduation rates for Latinos.

Reason #3: California's tax system benefits holders of better paying jobs.

According to the United States Census Bureau in 2011, bachelor's degree holders earn approximately \$2.4 million over their careers. This is more than double the \$936,000 for someone who never attended high school and about \$1 million more than someone who graduated from high school (Julian, 2012). Increases in earning power for Latino men can result in higher tax revenue for the state, contribute to social security, and lessen the pressure on social welfare programs.

Reason #4: Higher levels of education for Latinos positively influences communities in California. The empowerment of Latino men fulfills a critical role in securing upwardly mobile families and communities (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011).

This policy brief is a response to the current state of Latino men. A team of scholars, community leaders, and activists collaborated to assess the status of Latino men in education and to review existing literature surrounding this issue. The team evaluates the current logic guiding interventions for Latino men and offers a solution to achieve the often-elusive goal of ameliorating structural forces. Given the demographic impact of Latinos in California, it is particularly important to create effective interventions. California's future depends on these efforts.

Critique of Policy Options

Few policy efforts attempt to address the academic performance of Latino men on a large, systemic scale. In recent years, smaller scale efforts such as outreach programs and support groups have been established to provide academic and social support. These programs laid the foundation for national interventions, such as My Brother's Keeper. This White House initiative casts a broad net, seeking to raise the academic achievement of young men of color and reduce the overrepresentation of young men of color in the prison system (My Brother's Keeper Task Force, 2014). This national effort addresses the whole student—cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally—aiming for students to read at grade level by grade 3, keep youth safe from neighborhood violence, graduate from high school, graduate from post-secondary institutions, and enter their profession successfully. The initiative incentivizes collaboration between the community, political leaders, and the private sector. These collaborations connect men of color with mentors and support networks to acquire jobs or pursue a higher education, and enter the middle class (My Brother's Keeper Task Force, 2014).

While My Brother's Keeper highlights important obstacles in the academic pathways of men of color, its reach is not enough to include the issues that Latino men experience. Historically, Latino men have faced a myriad of challenges from racism to highly segregated schools and neighborhoods compounded by immigration status. My Brother's Keeper engages a mentoring system as the key in the initiative, but as we know, these efforts mostly operate on an individual-level, helping only those who have access to these resources. Individual mentoring helps provide information that is often unavailable, but it may not be sufficient to offer Latino men the necessary skills and social capital to succeed academically and financially. Future policy and interventions must go beyond mentoring and be intentional in transforming entire communities, creating leaders, and developing local economies. Previous research has shown that even when poor and rich students have the same academic qualifications going into college, poor students are still less likely to graduate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). This is particularly important when considering Latino men in higher education, as they disproportionately grow up in poverty (Ponjuan & Sáenz, 2011). A holistic intervention that transforms the conditions Latino men experience is necessary. Otherwise, the current academic trend will persist, and only the few Latino men who can access the available resources will succeed.

The team evaluates the current logic guiding interventions for Latino men and offers a solution to achieve the often-elusive goal of ameliorating structural forces

Policy Recommendations

Improving the academic success of Latino men requires policy intervention in many arenas. This policy brief highlights the nexus between labor markets, schools, and prisons, as these represent the primary societal institutions shaping the lives of Latino men. An effective, systemic intervention for Latino men transforms the conditions they grow up in and provide them with opportunities

necessary for academic success. Developing civic capacity in marginalized communities is one fruitful avenue. Noguera and Wells (2011) remind us that civic capacity is defined as “... the creation of a series of strategic partnerships between schools, businesses, universities, hospitals, local government, and a broad array of neighborhood-based organizations” (p. 16). These partnerships seek to eliminate the effects of growing up in poverty, equip students with the necessary skill sets, and ease financial pressures on schools. Below we posit a Sustainable Model of Academic Success for Latino Men, which can be achieved

via investments in civic capacity at the high school and college level. The model centers on five key tenets: (1) College Know-How, (2) College Readiness, (3) Financial Support, (4) Social and Emotional Wellbeing, and (5) Curriculum and Activities. Ideally, all interventions should implement these tenets simultaneously. This model strives to improve the conditions Latino men experience and equip students with the necessary skills—developing leaders who return to their communities and support other Latino men—to create a cycle of opportunity.

A Sustainable Model of Academic Success for Latino Men				
College Know-How	College Readiness	Financial Support	Social and Emotional Wellbeing	Curriculum and Activities
High Schools -Develop academic plans (courses, objectives, graduation requirements, etc.) -Provide benchmarks and requirements for successful entry into post-secondary institutions -Provide information regarding possible career pathways Community Colleges -Develop academic plans for successful entry into four-year universities -Provide information regarding possible career pathways Four-Year Colleges and Universities -Develop academic plans for graduation -Provide information regarding possible graduate schools and careers -Provide information regarding internships, fellowships, summer programs, research opportunities, and internships	All Levels -Provide after-school programs and mentoring for students to receive academic support -Provide workshops on leadership development and public speaking -Provide workshops on professional and scientific writing styles High Schools -Provide support for the SAT and the ACT Four-Year Colleges and Universities -Provide support for the GMAT, GRE, and other required examinations for graduate school	All Levels <i>A centralized system that provides the following:</i> -Applying for FAFSA -Information regarding scholarships and grants -Provide workshops on successful scholarship writing -Provide workshops on successful interview completion Parents and Families -A centralized system that provides the following: -Provide information for job training and employment opportunities -Provide information for parents and families to receive financial support from school and/or government	All Levels -Establish support groups and cultural centers for students to debrief their experiences and connect with other students -Allow students to voice their opinions and participate in the development of school policies and projects	All Levels -Courses that center the experiences of Latino men, their background and culture, such as Ethnic Studies -Employ social justice and Critical pedagogy, and pay particular attention to intersection of class, race, gender, and sexuality -Provide opportunities for students to work in marginalized communities via service learning or community service -Conduct research projects on issues pertaining marginalized communities, and present findings to students, faculty, community, and other stakeholders

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About the Authors

Omar Davila Jr. is a Ph.D. student at the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley. His research interests lie at the nexus of race, educational equity, and community empowerment. Omar is also a Graduate Student Research Associate at the Center for Latino Policy Research, where he is leading the Bay Area Latino Males in Higher Education Initiative. Before attending UC Berkeley, Omar was a McNair Scholar and a visiting scholar at Yale University and Michigan State University.

Juan G. Berumen received his Ph.D. in Educational Policy Studies from Indiana University. Juan has assessed policy implementation at San Francisco State University for the César Chávez Institute, conducted policy research for a state assembly campaign, and consulted for community-based organizations and schools. Juan is currently an Adjunct faculty member at the University of San Francisco.

Patricia Baquedano-López is Chair of the Center for Latino Policy Research and Associate Professor of Education at the Graduate School of Education. She is co-editor (with P. Portes, S. Salas, and P. Mellom) of the recent volume *U.S. Latinos and Education Policy: Research-based Directions for Change*.

Policy Brief

Mailing Address: 2420 Bowditch Street #5670, Berkeley, CA 94720-5670

www.clpr.berkeley.edu

