Where are Latinos Males in the Postsecondary Pipeline?

The Colorado Department of Higher Education (2020) reported only 29.9% of Latinx and 41.3% of African American/Black adults have earned some type of college credential compared to 64.2% of White adults.

Nathan Cadena, COO, Denver Scholarship Foundation
TeRay Esquibel, ED, Ednium Alumni Collective
DSF Founder Tim Marquez, and community supporters Marco Abarca and Federico Pena convened with DSF regarding the lack of presence of Latino males in “college” (postsecondary pathways). DSF and DPS data concurred with national research for more than the past decade—Latino males are outnumbered in postsecondary representation across the board, including 2:1 by their Latina/female community members.

**ISSUE:** Persistently low enrollment and/or completion 10 years prior to the pandemic
Engaged with DPS Career Connect Intern, HS Junior rising senior (DC21/TJ) Favio Matute, to research key factors that have influenced this alarming trend over the past decade. Favio worked with national studies, Colorado (CDHE, CDE, DPS) reports, Advisor sources, and discussed DSF Data with Data and Evaluation. Favio’s summer project produced themes and helped shape questions for impending “roundtable discussions” with DPS Latino alumni.

**Literature Themes**

Although Latino males have been “absent” in higher ed for over a decade, COVID was especially harsh showing 2020 national LatinX college enrollment dropped 20 percent.

**Cultural/Gender conflicts & familial responsibility**
- Authority and financial responsibilities in LI household
- Lured to wage earning opportunities
- Financial Aid (cost to attend college) concerns, and fear of student loan debt
- Unaddressed emotional health issues and lack of support
- Long-term ROI compared to immediate lost wage potential

**Lack of academic interest and efficacy**
- Less engagement in P-12 education/academic conflict
- Less engaged in college-prep programming
- Athletics outcomes focused
- Middle GPAs lack interest or positive outlook
- Connectivity to long-term pathways, with sustainable growth options

**Locally in DPS, Less engaged w/ HS & DSF Future Centers**
- Less responsive to consistent outreach
- Language norms in higher education conflict with those of home community
- Low motivation to engage with dominant culture/populated institutions
- Barriers to accessing technology and supplies
- Barriers navigating institutional language and systems, including faculty and staff

**ISSUES:**
- Cultural/Familial responsibilities
- Lured into workforce
- Concerns of long-term ROI
- Less engaged w/ college prep
- Barriers to engage w/ traditional institutions

Sources: DPS/DSF Summer 2021 Intern Lit Review, DPS/DSF College Access Notes Tracker Data system, DSF TRIO and College Access Annual Performance Reporting
Fall 2021 Preparation

Considering how the situation applies to Denver/DPS, Explored partnerships with Ednium to gather research roundtable participants, connecting w/ DSF Alumni and stop-outs, and Ednium’s deeper community reach for additional voices. Engaged with DEAN (Denver Educational Attainment Network) to co-sponsor discussions, with a particular interest of formal decision-making experiences that influence(d) planning and supports.

Roundtable Participants & Discussion

- Identify Male (ages 22-30)
- LI in HS (FRL or EFC >1.5xPell)
- Facilitated by DSF and Ednium Latino/Male identify

Research Process and Themes explored:
- Life timeline Exercise (Impactful life events that influenced pathway)
- Introduce current Identity w/ gallery follow up
- Identity Formation (Gender, Position, family, Scholar, training)
- Life events timeline, and influence (decision-making)
- Personal ecosystem (network past and present)
- Definitions and Expectations of success
- Formal and informal decision-making for academic and career pathways
- Life support & outcomes
- Internal and External influences
- Network and Social capital
- Civic engagement, and interest
- Community role
- Looking forward (personal and community expectations)

Roundtables w/ DPS

Latino Alumni groups:

1. College Graduates
2. College Stop Outs
3. Did Not Attend College
College Grads
- Participants were confident and participatory in group setting
- Academic decisions positively reinforced
- Parental figures concerned about peers and decisions from early age (regardless of FG status)
- A sense of belonging was sought strategically
- Success happened in systems navigation, difficult experiences, and significant network established
- Pursued higher education regardless of price tag (supported by families)
- Didn’t want to continue the cycle of working labor
- Sports (activity) driven from early age
- Consistent familial culture and support, even if they didn’t understand the collegiate landscape
- Expectation and college going culture in their K-12 buildings and friend/peer groups
- It only took one teacher to notice them or challenge them to foster want for success
- Career interests and college disposition varied according to Exposure experience.

Stopped Out
- Explored colleges far from home community, or out-of-state
- Decisions positively reinforced- parental figures concerned about peers and decisions from early
- At college, wanted intentional connection
- In HS, wanted more explicit guidance
- Strong advocacy for alternative or defined path based on Financial situations, Interests, Ability
- Systems navigation and Loans education would have kept students in college
- Mental health supports (stigma)
- College represented a Leave of Absence from family related duties
- Culture Shock, in environments vastly different from Denver and DPS, including Race, Workload and courses
- Information access felt limited in a culturally unfamiliar environment
- Access to education and impact of next steps
- Had some misleading advice with college (cousin, sister, friend, partner, etc...)

Never Attended
- General discomfort w/ sharing format at onset
- Decisions positively reinforced- parental figures concerned about peers and decisions early age
- In School system- No one told them they “could” (academically) thrive
- Early feeling/reinforcement of Not smart enough
- Early message of “Didn’t have the money”
- Early parent engagement later fell off as economic situation of families worsened
- College going culture was generally felt to be forced within schools, not intentional/genuine
- Success measured by their ability to provide
- Systems navigation ability from a young age
- Mental health supports needed
- Familial situations/ primary investment
- Business Owners
- Work ethic leads to “freedom” of time
- Parents who are strong advocates/involved w children
- Strong advocates for college going in future generations

Key Takeaways from All Groups:
- Intentional conversations, at pivotal points, in pre-adolescence and adolescence are the difference makers, with: Family, Friends, Teachers, Trusted adults
- Community/informal network among all participants is critical to survival and cultural identity
- Generally High school did not prepare them for: college culture and coursework rigor, broad career connectivity, finances and wealth planning
- Success is commonly defined by monetary means, allowing for “freedom” of time
- Acknowledged a professional/formal “network” as an investment in social capital
- Alternatives to traditional college were not commonly explored or expressed as pathways of value
- Mental and emotional health was a commonly reflected upon as an unaddressed issue among all groups
- HS Counselor did not inquire about career goals. Faculty inquired if performed well in classroom. FC Advisor asked about career goals.
**Taking Action**

The purpose of this exercise is to take action and move the needle in the direction that is best for our students, Scholars, and communities.

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**Immediate Opportunities**

- Parent Engagement (tiered strategy by grade/school levels)
- Reconvene Latino males, and expand to: Parents of P-20 students and stop-outs, Advisors/Counselors, Latina Female counterparts, Black student groups
- Activating Assets of Cultural Wealth (Dr. Yosso): Social, Aspirational, Familial, Linguistic, Navigational, Resistant
- Extract best practices from TRIO (FNE and NW schools) and SPP Programs (Bruce, Lincoln, JFK)
- Curriculum recommendations (cultural and financial/economic literacy) w Alumni Partners
- Pointed VIP (Virtual Insight Panel)
- Continual engagement with civic-invested Alumni to influence curriculum and DPS experiences
- Articulate KPIs within multi-year Strategic Plan
- Expand services for >25yrs including technical and graduate programs

**Future Opportunities**

- DSF, Ednium, and Partners:
  - Data tracking systems (Analysis) identifying key subsets of students and communities
  - Direct service- making immediate service and intervention adjustments to better serve Latino males, and addl student subgroups that show opportunity for improvements
  - Collaborating with DPS Counseling, College and Career Readiness, and Family Engagement to align messaging to larger district and parents regarding the importance of this issue for Latinos at all grade levels
  - Internal and partner strategic goals to direct financial and service resources to intentionally impact this group
  - Include in annual strategic goals by HS and EGTC, CCD, CUDenver, MSU
  - Colorado Career and Technical Ed Council (CCCS VPs)
  - Tri-Institutional recruiter convening
  - Measure life outcomes for all students

**Expand**

- Continue to share issue with stakeholders & community at-large
- Engage private sector, community and PSI partners to advocate for community supports
- Develop and foster Parent messaging common among partners and communities
- Business Leader opportunities
- Elected officials to champion all opportunities for supports

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## Recommendations - Discussion

| Strategy | What Strategic Goals and Objectives (Recruitment and Retention) are currently in place to address these issues?  
|          | What Strategic Goals and Objectives (Recruitment and Retention) can be built out or improved to address these issues? |
| Resources | What human and financial resources can be allocated to support addressing this issue? |
| Implementation | Name timelines and priorities that can be implemented in the near future |
Questions and Discussions

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