Adult guidance for College: Parent and Educator Support for Latino College-goers

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Why this topic?

- Since 2003, Latinos are largest minority group in the United States
- In several states (Texas, Georgia, other), among the fastest growing student population
- Underrepresented in college in most states, severely in some
  - Texas *Closing the Gaps* projects Latino student under-enrollment in college without aggressive intervention (120K)
  - “Pipeline” model for college-going vs. “stage assumption” model
Studies with pipeline focus

- Going to college begins before freshman year
- Shaped by “getting ready” activities (Attinasi, 1989)
  - Anticipatory socialization
  - Fraternal and mentor modeling
  - Latinos student access to fraternal/parent modeling
- Influenced by school arrangements
  - McDonough (1997) and Cooper, Denner,& Lopez (1999)
    - Opportunity structure of school contexts/counseling
    - The role of teachers in aspirations and college transition
    - General school culture (high minority vs. other schools)
  - Kirst & Venezia (2001) - discussion of junior and high school structures that influence transition to college
Parents & College Access

- Parents and families also shape college expectations and aspirations
- Parents a constant throughout K-16
- May not be able to be sole providers of college-related information to children
- Tornatzky, Cutler, Lee (2002) study of Latino parent college knowledge
  - Class (SES) differences
  - Immigration generational status differences
School and Parent Guidance

- Pre-college “adult guidance” for students needs to happen throughout pipeline
- College-going guidance usually viewed as responsibility of parents or schools
- For first generation students, school and parent partnership is key
- School adult guidance (teachers and administrators) can fill information gaps to support high K-16 educational aspirations
Research with SATX Parents

- Collaboration with UTSA’s First Generation College Student Program (FGCSP)
- Students in program qualified as low-SES and first generation college-goers
- Program provided resources for research
  - Funds to gather information from parents
  - Access to intake database information on families
Three research questions

- Questions
  - What do low SES Latino parents in SA area who did not go to college know about college?
  - What are these Latino parents doing with their children to help them succeed in K-12 and prepare for college?
  - What information and other resources do Latino parents need to provide better adult guidance about college to their children?
Methodology

- Focus groups
- Parents from multiple area districts
- Distance between sites extensive
- Focus groups allowed us to speak with multiple parents at a time
- The collective group minimized power differentials that might be perceived by parents
- Required extensive advance preparation
Five thematic strands but today, Adult guidance

- Educators do not appear to provide targeted college information for children in these families
- When children get college information, according to parents, students themselves take the lead to obtain or shape it
- Parents report having multi-generational gaps in college process and content knowledge
- As a result, children likely to navigate the school to college pathway without important college-related information
Some findings: adult guidance and college knowledge

- Parents without college do not know enough about the college sector as structure.
- They have questions about differences between universities, colleges, community colleges, private and public institutions, other.
- Parents expect/assume information is provided to children in schools to support college and career choice.
- Unclear if schools are addressing this in effective ways.
She would always tell us, ‘look, mi’jita (daughter),’, it’s not that we are not interested. But we, your father and I have worked so hard for you to get this education. All we can do is support you. And the rest, you’re on your own.’ . . . She had no idea. I mean, she just went to first grade. My father, like I said, was always working. . . . But the [college] information is not there.
College knowledge is multi-layered, ex. h.s. coursework

MO: Do you know very much about the college preparatory curriculum?
Marina: No. I don’t. (laughter)
Veronica: I didn’t know that thing existed. (laughs)
Analisa: We didn’t go [to college]. Our parents didn’t graduate high school, so . . .
Student self-efficacy required to access college and succeed

“... my son David wants to go into law enforcement and he says, “I’m going to take Mr. Flores this year.” My daughter two years ago said, “I’m going to go into nursing.” My other ones don’t know what they want to do yet, but I know that once they decide, they will go in that direction.”
Conclusions

- These parents lack key information about college and assume schools are filling that gap
- Information missing because parents have not been through the process of going to college
- Lacking also because parents often are Spanish speakers and school personnel are not proficient enough to be responsive to parent questions
- Research suggests common sense action/policy levers around adult guidance for college and partnering with parents
What teachers/schools can do

- Create mechanisms so that low-SES Latino children get information about college throughout K-16, especially early in elementary school.
- Create systematic processes for getting college information to *all* students (not just high achievers) in appropriate ways.
- Embrace parental willingness to work for improved college access for their children.
- Systematically bring Latino parents into closer partnership with schools throughout pipeline to achieve college access objectives.
Questions? Comments?

I can address questions in the session Q & A period.