

# Championing Latino Success

## When Latino Students Succeed, We All Succeed



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# Join Our Celebration

It is core to ACT's mission to help all people achieve education and workplace success. ACT promotes solutions that make a difference in people's lives.

ACT's commitment to advancing and celebrating equity, access, and opportunity for all is embedded in our DNA. More than 60 years ago, ACT's founders believed that our signature standardized college admissions test would broaden access to college for underrepresented students and help diversify college campuses. This foresight is now ACT's mission—a vision to help more people learn, measure their progress, and improve their navigation through life's transitions.

One way that we've delivered on our mission is by showing up and working alongside the Latino student population and its advocates. For many years, ACT has been identifying and addressing key challenges to Latino student success in education and working to ensure that all Latino students have equitable opportunities to thrive. It's an honor and a privilege to celebrate the collaborations that make progress possible.

**We know that we cannot do this work alone.** That's why ACT collaborates across the Latino community and with organizations that work in direct service to Latino students, educators, and institutions. We know that the Latino population is rapidly growing. Their success is our success.

Join me in celebrating three such relationships with organizations that have been instrumental in their service to Latino students and their success:

The **Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS)** is developing an exemplary cadre of K–12 superintendents and administrators who are highly prepared to lead districts toward equity, excellence, and achievement for all students, with an emphasis on marginalized students.

**Excelencia in Education (Excelencia)** is accelerating Latino success in higher education—and mobilizing, supporting, and recognizing higher education institutions that intentionally serve Latino students and demonstrate positive outcomes.

**Univision** is engaging Latino students, families, and communities with back-to-school campaigns, education fairs, parent workshops, videos, vignettes, and social media engagement to promote the importance of college and provide expertise and resources to help students to get there.

We are very proud to support, collaborate with, and learn from ALAS, *Excelencia*, and Univision. They share ACT's lived value of helping all people achieve education and workplace success. We have much more to do—and we are eager to work alongside other organizations and leaders like these.

Please join me in celebrating our joint accomplishments over the past decade—and consider how your organizations might build on our collective commitment to long-term Latino student success.



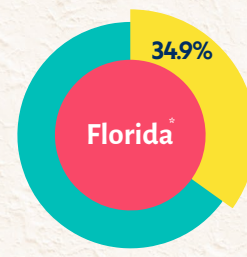
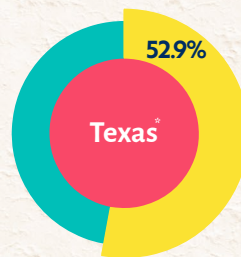
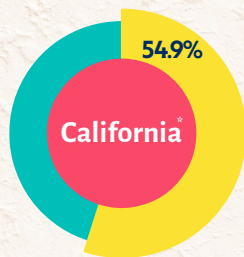
**Janet Godwin**  
CEO, ACT

# ACT's Commitment to Latino Student Success

Today, more than one in four students in U.S. public elementary and secondary schools and more than one in five college students are Latino, making them one of the largest groups on school and college campuses nationwide. Already, the Latino student population in elementary and secondary schools tops 50 percent in California (54.9 percent)<sup>1</sup> and Texas (52.9 percent).<sup>2</sup> In Florida,<sup>3</sup> Latino students constitute 34.9 percent of the school-age population. The Latino student population is projected to rise in this decade and beyond.

“Each of us has a piece of the puzzle. Alone, we’re not going to make a difference. Locking arms, we can provide more cohesive services and insights and make a real difference in people’s lives.”

—Janet Godwin, CEO, ACT



## Latino Students Constitute Significant Shares of K–12 and Postsecondary Education Populations

27%

More than one in four students in public elementary and secondary schools are Latino.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Condition of Education 2020*.

20.3%

More than one in five students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions are Latino.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*.

ACT has prioritized collaborations and work in service to Latino student success because it is critical for students themselves and for the wellbeing and prosperity of our country. Ensuring that Latino students have access to and through postsecondary education is vitally important for informed civic participation and for good-paying jobs and rewarding careers that require specialized knowledge and skills. Earning a college degree or credential lifts up families and communities and strengthens the talent pool for employers.

Most Latino students aspire to go to college. In fact, Latino students are increasingly likely to stay in school,<sup>4</sup> enroll in college,<sup>5</sup> and earn college degrees.<sup>6</sup> Latino student success is *all of our success!*

Many Latino students face significant barriers to college access and success, including inadequate academic and social and emotional preparation, difficulty navigating the application and financial aid processes, and adjusting to a college culture.<sup>7</sup> For first-generation students who want to go to college and their families, language barriers, lack of role models and advisors, and unfamiliarity with the milestones that pave the way to college education may pose additional obstacles.

## Holistic Support for Latino Student Success

ALAS, *Excelencia*, and Univision bring incredible passion, expertise, and reach to ACT's own efforts to improve Latino student outcomes. ACT believes in these organizations and their work—and ACT is looking for deeper engagement to support Latino students in the future.

This work is intentional. ACT, along with colleagues in other organizations, relies on data, evidence, research, and best practices to innovate and create solutions that work for Latino students. This work is bold. It's not just talk, it's action. Half measures won't eliminate the systemic, institutional, and personal challenges that can discourage Latino students at critical junctures on their paths to education and career success.

Toward that end, ACT is now collaborating with Texas A&M International University's School of Education, which aims to increase the number of high-quality Latino teachers entering the pipeline, address teacher shortages, and diversify the teaching workforce. This relationship will serve as a model for teacher preparation programs nationwide. In addition, as part of a longstanding collaboration with [Region One Education Service Center in South Texas](#), ACT researchers are investigating the potential benefits of social and emotional skills on the college and career readiness of Latino students.

ACT's work has begun to scratch the surface of how to support, engage with, and advance Latino students on trajectories that will lead to their success. The work is significant, meaningful, and far-reaching—and it offers room for growth. Read more about how we are working with this dynamic and diverse population and join us in this critical work.

“One of the biggest benefits of our state and district testing programs is that students who never thought of themselves as going to college show up to school one day, take an ACT test, get their score, and say, ‘Wow! I learned a lot in high school. I hadn’t thought about applying to college, but I think I will now because I am ready.’”

—Janet Godwin, CEO, ACT

Along with allies, ACT strives to make a difference in the lives of Latino students—and their families and communities—by:

- ▶ **building a more personalized Latino student experience**, illuminating pathways to college, breaking down barriers, and supporting student success in postsecondary education and beyond;
- ▶ **strengthening the capacity of states, districts, and higher education institutions** to provide targeted support to Latino students throughout their K–12 and postsecondary years; and
- ▶ **increasing the representation of Latino people** in positions of leadership in education and in the legislative and policy arenas.

# Accelerating Student Success in Higher Education

## Excelencia in Education: 2007 ▶ Present

“We have an entire database of what works for Latino students in higher education. There are no excuses for inaction.”

—Deborah Santiago, co-founder and CEO, *Excelencia in Education*



## Serving Latino Students with Intentionality

ACT has supported *Excelencia in Education* since its earliest years as a two-person startup by its co-founders, President Sarita Brown and CEO Deborah Santiago. At the time, they had “a seed of an idea” to address the national need to accelerate Latino student success in higher education. Today, *Excelencia* is a trusted advisor on Latino students in higher education—a reputation well-earned through its research, advocacy for institutional and policy change, and its role as a national leader and convener of higher education institutions that serve Latino students well.

“Serving Latino students in higher education is not just about their enrollment, it’s about retention and completion,” Santiago said. “This requires a level of intentionality to know who you’re serving—and who you need to serve. That kind of learning requires a basic knowledge of who is in your classroom, their strengths, their networks of support, and the opportunities to add value to their educational experience. It requires faculty and staff that represent and look more like students, transferring students from certificate and associate degree programs to bachelor’s degree programs, supporting students with financial aid before graduating them, and helping them in the workforce.”

*Excelencia* speaks with authority on these issues. The organization’s two decades of research and data analysis span policy, student success, Latino college completion rates, education pathways, institutional practices, the workforce, financial aid, and the impact of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs).

## Validation for Years of Hard Work

In recognition of its accomplishments, philanthropists MacKenzie Scott and Dan Jewett donated

**\$10 Million**

to *Excelencia* in June 2021.

## Elevating Evidence-Based Programs

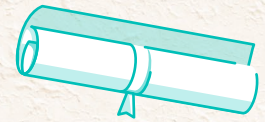
A signature *Excelencia* resource is its Growing What Works Database, a compilation of more than 200 active programs vetted and recognized through the Examples of *Excelencia* initiative. The database showcases higher education programs with demonstrated outcomes for Latino students, such as dual credit early college and mentoring, internship, and career access programs. “We have an entire database of what works for Latino students in higher education. There are no excuses for inaction,” Santiago said.

*Excelencia* has an ambitious goal: For the U.S. to regain the top ranking in the world for college degree attainment, Latino students will need to earn 6.2 million degrees by 2030.<sup>8</sup> Meeting that goal requires closing the equity gap in education; accelerating—not just increasing—the number of degrees conferred to Latino students; and scaling up programs and services that work for Latino and other students.

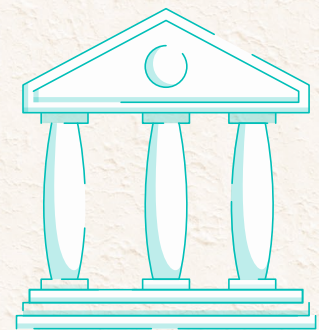
As part of this commitment, *Excelencia* created the Seal of *Excelencia*, a national certification for higher education institutions that go beyond enrollment to intentionally serve Latino students. This prestigious certification recognizes trendsetting institutions that are transforming the Latino student experience and confronting structural barriers and longstanding inequities, which enhances their capacity to serve all students. Earning the Seal of *Excelencia* is a rigorous process that requires accurate data showing positive momentum for Latino students, evidence-based programs of practice, and demonstrated leadership strategies that clearly articulate institutional focus on advancing Latino student success.

As of 2020, 14 institutions from across the country have earned the Seal of *Excelencia*, which is now in its third year—and many more aspire to achieve this recognition. Each fall, *Excelencia* announces a new cohort of Seal-certified institutions.

*Excelencia* is also working with more than 125 leading college and university presidents and chancellors who have accepted the challenge of holding themselves accountable to intentionally serve Latino students. These leaders constitute a network of common cause, Presidents for Latino Student Success (P4LSS).



**6.2 Million Degrees  
by 2030**



**14 Institutions  
have earned the  
Seal of *Excelencia***

Data prove the institutions in *Excelencia's* network are transforming higher education. P4LSS institutions represent 4 percent of all U.S. colleges and universities yet enroll 24 percent of all Latino students. More importantly, they graduate 35 percent of all Latino graduates nationwide.

### **Excelencia's Network of Higher Education Institutions Deliver for Latino Students**

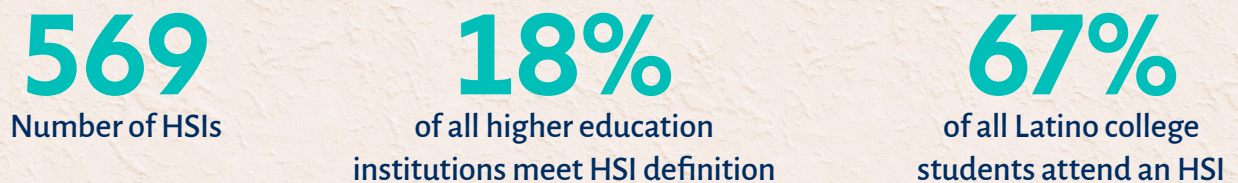


“Higher education leaders with skills and vision are fundamental to our country’s strong recovery,” Brown said. “Those prepared to engage and intentionally serve Latino students, while serving all their students, are leading the way. That is why they join Presidents for Latino Student Success.”

### **Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), 2019-20**

“HSIs represent less than 20 percent of higher education institutions, but they enroll over 65 percent of all Latino undergraduates in this country. Not all HSIs have changed their efforts and strategies to intentionally serve Latinos. They’re there because of demography and geography and not intentionality of impact.”

—Deborah Santiago



Source: *Excelencia in Education*

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.

### **Recovering from COVID-19 Setbacks**

Recent gains in Latino student enrollment, retention, achievement, and completion of postsecondary programs took a hit during the pandemic. Latino students were disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and by the economic effects it had on jobs, income, and families, which forced many students to pause or withdraw from their educational programs.

“Latino students were disproportionately affected in the pandemic, since we are the most economically vulnerable,” Santiago said. “There was less enrollment and less persistence. But looking at the bigger picture, in one year, we saw five years of growth lost in terms of enrollment and representation and that is big.”



*Excelencia* is responding by looking at innovative ways to help students get back on track, including public policy initiatives to make college more affordable, create linkages from certificate and associate degree programs to bachelor's degree programs, and award college credit for experiential learning in internships, jobs, or community-based programs.

## Collaboration in Action

ACT has collaborated with *Excelencia* for more than a decade in support of Examples of *Excelencia*, the only national data-driven initiative to recognize programs at the associate, baccalaureate, and graduate levels as well as community-based organizations with evidence of effectiveness in accelerating Latino student success. Examples of *Excelencia* is the organization's foundational strategy to identify programs with proven, evidence-based practices at the forefront of implementing strategies advancing equity for Latino students.

Since its inception more than 15 years ago, more than 1,500 programs have been submitted for consideration and more than 350 have been highlighted by *Excelencia*. Also recognized by *Excelencia* are Programs to Watch—innovative, up-and-coming programs that have already made some positive impact on the success of their Latino students.

ACT also has collaborated with *Excelencia* on the growth of its Growing What Works Database, which makes the Examples of *Excelencia* freely and publicly available.

“*Excelencia* is ensuring America's future and engaging institutions whose leaders are ready to transform higher education by intentionally serving Latino students,” Brown said. “We are proud to be partners and appreciate the investment ACT has made these many years in support of Examples of *Excelencia*. Working together, we are making a positive impact to prepare the young and fast-growing Latino population to be the future workforce and civic leadership our country needs.”



▶ **Sarita Brown**  
co-founder and President,  
*Excelencia in Education*

# Building K–12 Latino Leadership Capacity

## Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS): 2011 ▶ Present

“Our partnership with ACT has opened our eyes to equity and excellence and how to deal with these issues within structures that are already in place, and new structures you want to put in place.”

—Ana Ortiz, board member and past president, ALAS



### Professional Learning and Advancement

Serving the educational needs of all students, including Latino students, requires effective leadership. ALAS has become the national leader in building capacity, promoting best practices, and transforming K–12 districts that serve large populations of Latino students. Ultimately, ALAS strives to improve the educational accomplishments of Latino youth nationwide. Latino leaders in district and school leadership positions serve as advocates and role models who champion that goal.

ALAS’s signature program, the Superintendents Leadership Academy (SLA), identifies, recruits, develops, and advances talented administrators in districts where at least 20 percent of students are Latino. Now in its tenth year, this intensive, year-long program is highly competitive, with under twenty candidates selected every year. Designed as a cohort model, the program builds practical knowledge, skills, relationships, and enduring networks of peer support and mentoring from nationally prominent, successful superintendents.

“A major goal of the program is to prepare cabinet-level administrators for the superintendency,” said Carmella Franco, co-director of the SLA. Participants are exposed to a taste of the real world and are better equipped to serve as role models for Latino staff and, most importantly, students. Equity is the key underlying foundation, and is intricately woven throughout the curriculum, she said. Ongoing support and encouragement are hallmarks of the SLA experience. “It is critical that newly appointed superintendents not only *obtain* and *maintain*, but that they also *retain* their positions in order to carry out the moral imperative of ensuring the success of Latino students,” she said.



▶ **Carmella Franco**  
Co-director of the SLA, ALAS

“Our charge is really to make sure we’re developing leaders who support Latino students,” said Francisco Durán, an alumnus of the inaugural SLA cohort who is now president of the ALAS Board of Directors, superintendent of the Arlington County (Va.) Public Schools, member of the Virginia State Board of Education, and former chief equity officer of the Fairfax County (Va.) Public Schools. “Professional learning is one of our key pillars.”

Many, but not all, SLA participants are Latino or Latina themselves. For those who are not, the professional learning helps them understand the cultural assets and issues in the large Latino communities they serve. “To build capacity to serve Latino youth, we focus on the assets that our Latino students bring to our communities and how we build on that,” Durán said. “We shouldn’t always bring a deficit mindset and focus on achievement gaps when we look at data. We should consider opportunity gaps.”

“District and school leaders have introduced many innovative programs to improve on the academic achievement of Latino students without much success,” said Dr. Hector Montenegro, co-director of the SLA, ALAS. “In order to ensure greater academic success for Latino students, two critical areas need to be prioritized and addressed. The first is to include culturally responsive teaching—honoring and including the history, language, culture, and identity of the Latino community in the instructional framework and school culture. The second area is placing a greater emphasis on social and emotional learning—the ability to show compassion and empathy; establish and maintain positive relationships among diverse groups; and increase the capacity to make responsible decisions, especially in the way that adults receive, treat, and prepare Latino students for a successful academic future. This can only be done in a collaborative, cooperative, and inclusive learning environment.”



▶ **Dr. Hector Montenegro**  
Co-director of the SLA, ALAS

ALAS also supports aspiring and novice principals with a National Principal Leadership Academy, a collaboration with the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). A new Women Superintendents Policy Leadership Academy supports novice leaders in policymaking and advocacy on behalf of Latino students.

## National and State Advocacy

“Breaking down the barriers for all students is really about helping people understand that equity is not just for those students who are struggling or students of color. It’s not about race. It’s about meeting the needs of each individual student by name and by need.”

—Francisco Durán, president of the ALAS Board of Directors; superintendent, Arlington County (Va.) Public Schools; member of the Virginia State Board of Education; former chief equity officer, Fairfax County (Va.) Public Schools



ALAS is a dedicated advocate for Latino students at the state and national levels. A prime example: ALAS actively represented Latino students and educators as federal lawmakers crafted the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) of 2015—the sixth reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965.

Almost a decade ago, ALAS moved its headquarters to Washington, D.C. to be better connected to decision makers at the national level. For several years, ALAS has held legislative assemblies for members in the nation’s capital to brief them on its legislative platform for Latino students and communities and then visit their U.S. Senate and Congressional representatives on Capitol Hill.

More recently, the association has convened regular summits to discuss national issues. In 2021, to address educational inequities during the COVID-19 pandemic, ALAS and NASBE sponsored a virtual summit that drew 1,200 attendees. This was the first public event to host U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona.

State ALAS affiliates take on similar convening and advocacy responsibilities around state policies and practices, while an ALAS-hosted Small School District Symposium elevates their voices. ALAS also has more than 6,000 district members in 23 states, along with 7,000 individual members who are “Partners in Action and Advocacy.”

# Collaboration in Action

“ACT is our largest sponsor. We couldn’t have done everything we have done without them.”

—Ana Ortiz, board member and past president, ALAS

As a longtime executive sponsor of ALAS, ACT has supported the SLA program through participating in candidate interviews, attending and presenting to the ALAS Board, and providing resources. ACT works in tandem with ALAS leaders on the shared interest of improving Latino student outcomes.

“Obviously the financial support has been very important,” Durán said. “But we’re very intentional also about aligning with organizations and individuals who share core values with us. The work that ACT has done on equity has been really aligned with us. So, it’s been a win–win for us overall.”

“As a member of the first cohort of the Superintendent Leadership Academy myself, I remember that ACT was there for my interview when I applied,” Durán added. “They asked me questions and were really interested in my personal growth as a leader many years ago. ACT being there, being present, was so powerful. I thought, ‘Wow, this is an organization that’s really dedicated to leadership and success.’ I was very impressed.”



## Leadership Profile: Gloria Trejo



“I wouldn’t be where I am today if it were not for ALAS and my SLA cohort. It changed my life.”

—Gloria Trejo, assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, West Chicago Elementary District 33

Gloria Trejo was a school principal for 13 years, loving her job and “comfortable” in her position. “But comfortable is not always good,” she said. “I felt like I needed more of a challenge, not only for myself, but to be better skilled and equipped to challenge my teachers, so they could challenge the students.”

Attending several ALAS conferences and hearing words of encouragement from national leaders and fellow district and school administrators jolted her into action. “Many of them had very similar backgrounds as me, many first-generation, and I thought, ‘Wow, I can do this.’” She applied to the ALAS Superintendents Leadership Academy and to Aurora University’s educational doctoral program, both of which accepted her. With the support of her superintendent, she pursued both leadership and professional development programs at the same time.

After every cohort session, Trejo met with her superintendent, brimming with ideas to better support students in her district—more than 90 percent of whom are Latino. For example, she initiated the start of the Latinos In Action leadership program, a year-long class for middle and high school students that empowers Latino youth to lead and strengthen their communities through college and career readiness. She also promotes mentoring programs, after-school clubs, and other activities to support student engagement and agency.

The SLA prepared her well for career advancement. “The basis of the program was to prepare us for the superintendent position, from how to interview with recruiting companies to creating 30-, 60-, and 90-day entry plans to preparing yourself for the news media,” Trejo said. Equity was a “huge part” of the academy program. “There’s a huge misconception everywhere of what equality and equity are—and it’s really important for everybody to understand. I know that students don’t all need the same thing. We need to give them what they need. That’s our job as leaders.”

The SLA also energized Trejo’s career. She was selected as the ALAS Administrator of the Year in 2017 and as Elementary Principal of the Year by the Illinois Principal Association in 2018. The National Association of Elementary School Principals selected her as a National Distinguished Principal in 2018. In the fall of 2021, she added Ed.D. to her accomplishments.

Now an assistant superintendent with her sights set on the superintendency one day, Trejo continues to rely on the support system of educational leaders she met in her ALAS cohort. “Even as adults, we need mentors,” she said.

## Univision: 2016 ▶ Present

“We’ve done two things. We have tried to break down into small pieces things that feel big. And we have also tried to identify success stories and human narratives—kids telling their own stories so others can see that there are resources and there is a path to college.”

—Olivia Liendo, senior manager, Podcast Content and Operations, Univision Communications Inc.



### Breaking Down Barriers

Imagine you’re a Latino middle or high school student with a passion for science or math or music, a yearning to be a website designer or an architect or a teacher, a goal to be the first in your family to go to college. Or imagine you’re a parent who wants everything in the world for this child of yours, but who has only an inkling of how to make it happen.

Univision doesn’t have to imagine students and parents like these. As the leading Spanish-language media and content company in the U.S., Univision knows them as its core audience.

“As we look at the history of Univision and our mission, we’ve always wanted to make sure that we provide resources and information to our Hispanic audience so that they can succeed,” said Claudia Bojorquez, former director of strategic partnerships, Corporate Social Responsibility, Univision. “We always think about early childhood education and college readiness as the tough points within the Hispanic audience and where they need the most help.”

Univision has the bandwidth and the status as a trusted source of information to reach this audience *en masse*. For years, the company has teamed up with ACT, higher education institutions, and community organizations to host *Ferias de Educación* (education fairs) around the country. The fairs, which are part of Univision’s *Regresa a Clases* (back-to-school) campaign, are among the largest such gatherings in the nation and are free for parents, students, and educators.

Latino families flock to these events, which have been held in Austin, Chicago, Fresno, Los Angeles, Miami, Oakland, Phoenix, San Antonio, and other major cities across the country. “Los Angeles, for example, has a massive fair,” said Liendo, senior manager, Podcast Content and Operations, Univision. “On the first day of one fair there, about 10,000 families showed up on the first morning. What’s really interesting about this fair is that people feel that they are in a secure space because they trust us as a brand and they are interacting with someone in real life. They ask questions. They interact. There’s always a huge line of parents at the end asking questions.”

The fairs appeal to all ages. Workshops, activities, and question-and-answer sessions in English and Spanish give parents resources and tools to help their children achieve their education and career goals, prepare for college early, navigate higher education systems, apply for financial aid and scholarships, and more. Exhibits explain education pathways, beginning with pre-kindergarten and continuing through postgraduate education. “Reading gardens” provide age-appropriate book readings and free learning materials and books, a way to support early childhood education. Univision talent, and sometimes, appearances by major sports and entertainment figures draw crowds as well.

## Amplifying Stories that Resonate

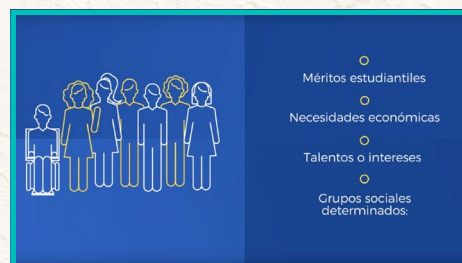
While the COVID-19 pandemic forced a pause in Univision’s in-person events, it has resulted in remarkable virtual engagement with parents and students. Univision adapted and experimented with livestream events, webinars, focus groups, social media interactions, and digital tools. The livestreams answer the same kinds of questions parents regularly ask in person. Now, a single livestream event can attract almost a quarter of a million views.

A successful collaboration between ACT and Univision led to the development of video vignettes. In addressing the top-of-mind concerns for parents, students, and educators, this format has been responsive to their needs. The vignettes tackle hot topics head-on—with powerful messages of support. “We released one vignette on why it’s still important to go to college, even with all the struggle after COVID,” Liendo said. “We sent it out because the numbers among Hispanics are dropping on college applications and filling out FAFSA forms and other indicators of steps toward college. In this vignette, the anchor says, ‘Studies have shown that in times of crisis, people who hold a postsecondary degree have more stability. It is worth it. We know it’s challenging. We’re there for you. So please, persevere.’” This video was a “super hit,” garnering 50,000 views in just the first round of sharing on social media and more than a quarter of a million to date.

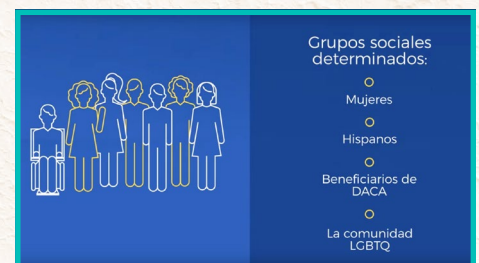


### Scholarships

- From states
- Universities
- Private or for-profit organizations
- Employers



- Student merits
- Financial needs
- Talents or interests
- Specific social groups



### Specific social groups

- Women
- Hispanics
- DACA beneficiaries
- LGBTQ community



### Standardized tests



### Some universities have chosen to make the test optional



### These tests are important to:

- Show who you are as a student
- Receive scholarship opportunities
- Be recruited by institutions



## Collaboration in Action

The collaboration between ACT and Univision is mutually beneficial. Univision works closely with ACT on both its in-person and virtual engagement with Latino students, parents, and communities. “We understand that we are not the experts in this subject,” Bojorquez said. “The people at ACT are the subject [matter] experts. We rely on their information and resources to provide this information to our audience. Partnering with ACT to help us create and facilitate these workshops is a huge help. Very few people can actually conduct these workshops. We wouldn’t be able to do this without them.”

“A partnership like this works better when you have current data and resources that can educate us on the content we create and the strategy,” Liendo added. “ACT is a great partner in that sense because we never do anything—we never write a line or draft anything—without looking at the current state of what’s going on with Hispanics and education and their college readiness and struggles.”

ACT works with Univision to break down complex content, such as filling out the FAFSA form, into what Liendo calls “snackable pieces.” “This can be overwhelming for parents,” she said. “You don’t have to do everything at once.”

Univision also encouraged ACT to make more resources for students and parents available in Spanish—a wise recommendation upon which ACT has acted.

In 2019, ACT and Univision also collaborated on a research report that explored Hispanic students’ perceptions on the transition to college. The findings and recommendations in this report inform both ACT’s and Univision’s messages and support for Latino students, families, and communities.

The pandemic required a pivot from in person events to a virtual engagement setting with the Latino community. Spanish language Facebook Live segments were created to provide practical college information and resources to students and their parents. Univision Facebook Live collaborations with ACT reached an audience of over 1.2 million.



Virtual engagement through Facebook Live streaming featured Natalia Bravo and Dr. Nancy Lewin: A College Degree is Worth the Effort.

# Moving Forward with a Sense of Urgency

It's been an honor to be part of ACT's strong history in supporting the Latino community. My lived experiences make this work very personal for me. As a Latina leader who has spent a career in education, including as executive director at ALAS, I know all the dimensions of what needs to happen. As a child, I was a migrant field worker who loved learning. I knew what I wanted and where I wanted to go—and my mother encouraged me and my siblings along the way. That is true for many of the Latino students we serve. I have seen all aspects of this work, and I know the incredible effect education can have on our young people.

My own experiences as a successful Latina student, as a school district leader, as an advocate, and now at ACT help me see the ways in which this movement must continue to grow. We must stay engaged in this work, with these incredible organizations—and many others—because it's critical not only to the success of Latino students, but to ACT, to our communities, our economy, and our country.

As the population of the U.S. shifts and our demographics change, education must also change to serve every student so that they can reach their full potential. It's why developing leaders who understand Latino learners create pathways to the future for our students. It's why ensuring that colleges and universities “grow what works” in service to the Latino population means more students getting to and through college with degrees. And, it's why providing resources, information, and tools to Latino families and communities means that they are empowered to make decisions ensuring their students' success.

We've come a long way. But we have a long way to go before we can declare victory. ACT knows that we must engage with collaborators. Investing in strong programs and initiatives means we can do more and better together. This is personal for me. But even if it's not personal—yet—for you, I encourage you to dig in. Learn more. Start with the organizations we've spotlighted here. Then look further, broader, deeper. Join us in this ever-growing, life-changing work. Together, we can transform lives.



**Dr. Nancy Lewin**  
Senior Director  
ACT's Center for Equity in Learning

# Learn More

Here are select publications and resources about the Latino population in education. Click to download our documents or visit these websites to learn more.

## ACT

### School-Based Interventions: Targeting Social and Emotional Skills to Increase the College Readiness of Hispanic Students from Underserved Backgrounds

Melissa A. Albert, Jason D. Way, Joann Moore, Kate E. Walton, Alex Casillas, and Norma Ortiz McCormick

Learnors from underserved backgrounds tend to show lower levels of college readiness (ACT, 2016a; ACT, 2018). In part to address these disparities, we investigated growth in social and emotional (SE) skills in a cohort of largely Hispanic, high-poverty students who participated in GEAR UP. GEAR UP is a discretionary federal grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in college. This study suggests that GEAR UP has a positive effect on students' SE skills and thus on their overall college readiness. It also shows that lower-performing students displayed the greatest improvement in SE skills by the end of the study, closing the gap with higher-performing students. However, we did find that interventions take time to produce change. This is important to note in the current educational reform climate in which interventions are often attempted and abandoned within an academic year or less.

ACT defines learners from underserved backgrounds as those whose parents did not attend college, whose family income is less than \$30,000 per year, or whose race/ethnicity is African American, Hispanic, Native American, or Pacific Islander (ACT, 2016). These learners tend to show lower levels of college readiness overall (ACT, 2016a), and students who most need the most of the aforementioned criteria demonstrate progressively lower college and career readiness rates (ACT, 2018). For example, first generation college students (FGCS) experience lower than average college graduation rates (Smith, 2006; Mauer-Ollivier et al., 2016), and these graduation rates decrease even further when FGCS are also from a racial or ethnic minority group.

FGCS tend to score lower than their more advantaged peers on standardized tests and in school (ACT, 2016a; Chen & Carroll, 2005; NAEP, 2016), as well as have lower self-efficacy, perceive greater obstacles to college entry, and have a more negative outlook on their chances of going to college (Cruce et al., 2005; Gibbons & Borders, 2010). These difficulties stem from lack of academic preparation and achievement, underdeveloped SE skills, and low parental involvement (Zuo et al., 2018). Hispanic college students are the racial/ethnic group most likely to be FGCS (Baltimian & Peng,



### The Interplay Between Race/Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, and Social and Emotional Skills

Yi-Lung Kuo, Alex Casillas, Kate E. Walton, Jason D. Way, and Joann L. Moore

ACT Research Report 2020-2



### The Relationship Between Social and Emotional Learning Skills and Resource Use for First-Year Outcomes of Hispanic First Generation College Students

Christian A. Latino, Gabriela Stegmann, Justine Radunzel, PhD, Jason D. Way, PhD, Edgar Sanchez, PhD, and Alex Casillas, PhD

This study found that Hispanic FGCS typically performed worse on first-year academic outcomes than Hispanic non-FGCS, including lower first-year GPAs and being less likely to be on-track than Hispanic non-FGCS. However, the FGCS differences disappeared after controlling for other salient factors.

Previous research has shown that high school GPA (HS GPA) and ACT Composite score are predictive of first-year outcomes, such as first-year college GPA and retention, even among racial/ethnic groups such as Hispanic students. In the present study, we accounted for these variables and sought to examine whether other student characteristics, such as social and emotional learning (SEL) skills and resource use, help to predict which Hispanic students struggle in college. Of particular interest were Hispanic first-generation college students (FGCS), the racial/ethnic group with the greatest proportion of future FGCS. FGCS were defined as students whose parents had not completed a bachelor's degree or higher, consistent with the Higher Education Act definition.

The first set of characteristics of interest, SEL skills, include qualities such as emotional control, academic self-discipline, college commitment, and social engagement. ACT Engage™ is an assessment that measures SEL skills, has been shown to predict college GPA and retention, even after controlling for motivation, demographic characteristics, and prior academic achievement.

The second characteristic, on-campus resource use, has been theorized to increase the likelihood that a student remains in college. To test this, Radunzel et al. (2020) investigated the association of various types of resource use (i.e., academic, social, career-related, and advising) with first-year GPA and retention. Results indicated that the utilization of all resource types was positively associated with first-year GPA and retention.

#### Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to examine how student FGCS status, demographic characteristics, prior academic achievement, SEL skills (ACT Engage scale scores [see Appendix A for scale]), and resource use predict the following outcomes among first-year Hispanic college students:

1. first-year college GPA
  2. first-to-second year retention
8. GPA at the start of the first year. (i.e., having earned at least 26 credit hours by the end of the first year, including college credits they may have earned in high school)

## School-Based Interventions

## The Interplay Between Race/Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, and Social and Emotional Skills

## The Relationship Between Social and Emotional Learning Skills

### Accelerated Learning and Financial Aid Associated with Positive Academic Outcomes for Hispanic First Generation College Students

Christian A. Latino, PhD candidate, Victoria Ornelas, PhD candidate, James Radunzel, PhD, Jason D. Way, PhD, Edgar Sanchez, PhD, and Alex Casillas, PhD

#### Introduction

First generation college students (FGCS) of all racial/ethnic backgrounds graduate from college at lower rates than their non-first generation peers.<sup>1</sup> However, FGCS who are also Black or Hispanic graduate at even lower rates than FGCS who are White or Asian/Pacific Islander.<sup>2</sup> Out of all racial/ethnic groups, students of Hispanic background are proportionally the most prevalent among FGCS, but are severely underrepresented given their prominence in the postsecondary system. Prior research has demonstrated the positive association of accelerated learning<sup>3</sup> and financial aid with degree attainment rates,<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, accelerated learning and

financial aid have been linked to improved academic outcomes (e.g., GPA, persistence, and degree attainment) for FGCS<sup>5</sup> and Hispanic students.<sup>6</sup> But to our knowledge, no studies have been conducted on Hispanic FGCS, in particular.

To address this gap, the current study focused on comparing several college outcomes between Hispanic FGCS and Hispanic non-FGCS. These outcomes included first-year GPA, first-to-second year retention, and making progress toward a degree by earning at least 26 credit hours during their first year of college (labeled as being on-track).<sup>7</sup> Data were available for the incoming 2012 first-year class from one postsecondary institution.

Christian Latino is completing his PhD at the University of Iowa while working as a research assistant at ACT. His research interests include college and first-generation college students.

Gabriela Stegmann is pursuing her PhD in Quantitative Psychology at Arizona State University. Her research interests include data science, methodology, and machine learning, as well as developing methods to identify divergent developmental processes using machine learning techniques.

Justine Radunzel is a predoctoral research assistant in Educational and Applied Research specializing in postsecondary outcomes research and equity initiatives for the ACT team.

Jason Way is a research psychologist in the Center for Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning. His research interests include behavioral and educational interventions, including their relevance to racial/ethnic and work outcomes.

Edgar Sanchez is a senior research scientist in the Statistical and Applied Research Department at ACT, where he provides methodological and statistical consultation on assessment, persistence, and graduation.

Alex Casillas is a senior research scientist in the Student Success Research Department at ACT, where he provides methodological and statistical consultation on assessment, persistence, and graduation.



### Enrollment Management Databases

Explore ACT data in three new databases designed to inform higher education recruitment, enrollment, and success strategies. User Guides for each of the three databases are linked below.

#### Enrollment Management Database

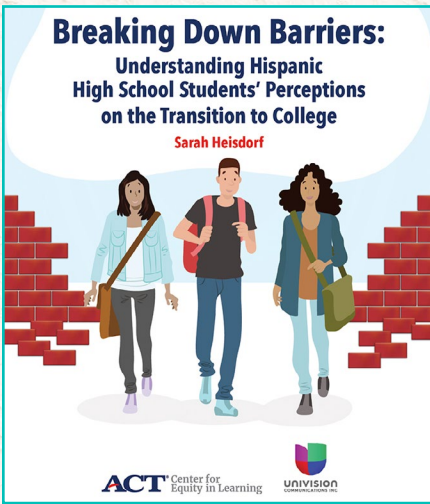
The Enrollment Management Database includes data on multiple, recent ACT-tested high school graduating classes matched to college enrollment and second-year retention data obtained from the National Student Clearinghouse. It enables users to follow a graduating class from high school through the first two years of college.

The database currently includes information on the 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 ACT-tested high school graduating classes and is structured into five topical areas: student background, college preferences, score sending behavior, enrollment, and retention and transfer behavior.

This database allows users to filter data from recent high school graduating classes to explore different college outcomes, including enrollment following high school; in-state versus out-of-state college enrollment; type of institution, and more; and student characteristics, such as race/ethnicity and family income.

## Accelerated Learning and Financial Aid

## Enrollment Management Databases

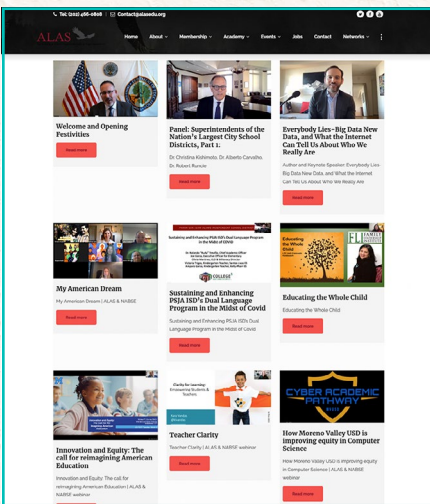


## ACT and Univision

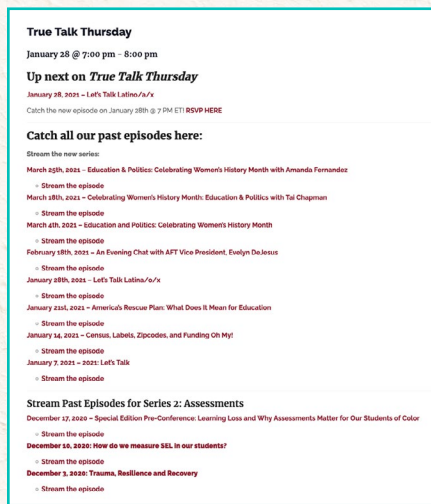
Breaking Down Barriers: Understanding Hispanic High School Students' Perceptions on the Transition to College

Eliminando obstáculos: Entendiendo como los estudiantes hispanos de secundaria perciben su transición a la universidad (Spanish)

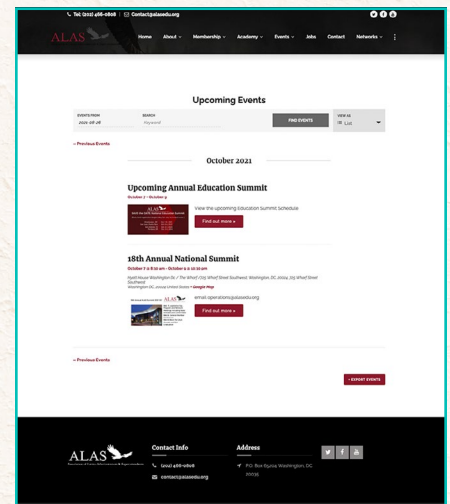
## Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS)



Webfests

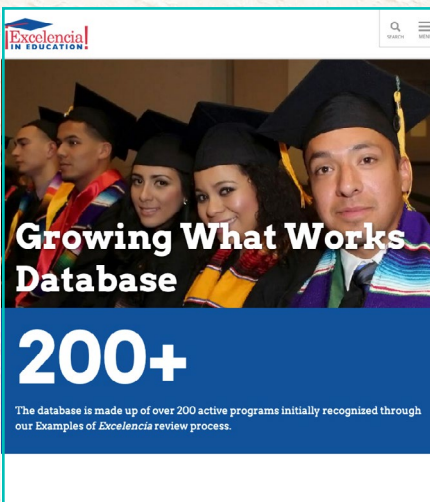


True Talk Thursday podcasts

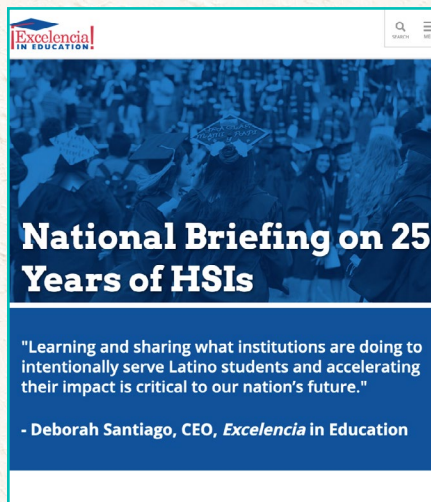


Annual Education Summits

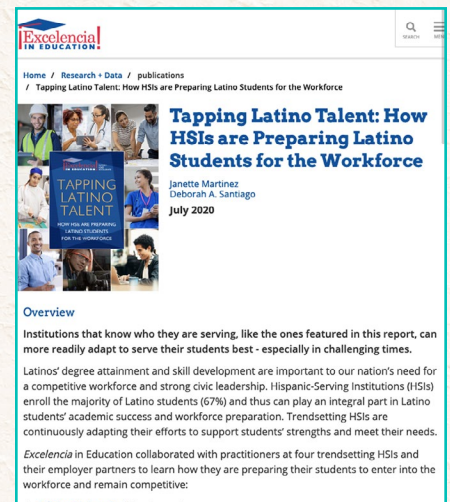
## Excelencia in Education



Growing What Works Database



National Briefing on 25 Years of HSIs



Tapping Latino Talent

# Notes

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## About ACT's Center for Equity in Learning

ACT's Center for Equity in Learning focuses on closing gaps in equity, opportunity, and achievement for underserved populations and working learners. Through purposeful investments, employee engagement, and thoughtful advocacy efforts, the Center supports innovative partnerships, actionable research, initiatives, campaigns, and programs to further ACT's mission of helping people achieve education and workplace success.

For more information, visit [equityinlearning.act.org](https://equityinlearning.act.org)  
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