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Policy Letter: Campus Diversity Board

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Dear Campus Diversity Board,

Today's rural and minority youth face many challenges. The challenge I am writing to you about today relates to education, the foundation of our society. As we all know, education and knowledge are two powerful tools that help individuals succeed in life. Education is a life long journey, a never-ending journey. For many, a high school education suffices the need for education, but it is important to realize that having a college education is an excellent step to financial and professional success. Many of these youth come from minority groups and a low socioeconomic status (SES) family, which influences the type of education these youth tend to receive.

According to survey research from the Pew Hispanic Center, 88% of Hispanics feel that a college degree is important for getting ahead, but only about 48% of Hispanics say they plan to obtain a bachelor's degree or more. Why does this gap exist? There are plenty of reasons that can be attributed to this gap, and when focusing on the Hispanic culture, here are a few:

- Parents not playing an active role in helping their children
- Different cultural backgrounds of students and their teachers
- Limited English skills
- Students are not working as hard as other students
- Students need to help support their family and education take less priority
- Cannot afford to go to school
- Grades were not high enough
- Students say they don't need more education for the career they want

These are all valid reasons, but instead of focusing on these negative aspects, we need to learn how to embrace them and find a way to rectify them. Learning never ends, there is always more to learn. As we attempt to confront these challenges, we will address three key questions in an effort for education to become a priority and a necessity for minority and rural youth.

1. What resources can we provide to parent to educate them on the importance of an education and be supportive of their children?
2. What practices must be put in place to help foster the importance of an education at an early age?
3. What can higher education institutions do to help support their minority student populations?

The importance of higher education should be emphasized at an early age, but unfortunately, that is not always the case. Parents of minority youth have less experience with education, which leaves their children at a disadvantage. More resources emphasizing the importance of college need to be made available to low-income family of these minority youth. If the families had the

information, they too could prove to be great allies and help ensure that our youth is receiving the education they deserve.

Students should start planning for college in grade school. Locally, a San Diegan founded Turn Around Schools, a consulting agency that provides schools with methods and resources to help introduce students to colleges and universities. The agency has set up a network of 30-affiliated schools through the country as part of their No Excuses University. This is a great example of how youth can learn about college readiness and the importance of a higher education. No Excuses University believes that “every student deserves the opportunity to be educated in a way that prepares him or her for college” (Damen, 2009).

Other programs focusing on high school students include the Posse Program. The Posse Foundation has established a partnership program with top universities and college around the country. The goal of the program is to recruit top high school students and places cohorts of students at their partner intuitions. The purpose of the cohort is to provide the students with a support unit within the institution, which helps promote individual and collective success. More grade schools, high schools and universities need to establish partnership program in an effort to provide minority youth with additional opportunities.

The transition from high school to college can be difficult. For youth who pursue a college education, programs such as the First Year Experience (FYE) are crucial to the success of the student. Faculty, administrator and other college personnel can also shape a students’ college experience. Additionally, student support programs and services can also be beneficial and critical to a student’s college experience and their retention. Support for student services programs must continue to be a priority for institutions of higher learning.

In conclusion, I would like to ask the Diversity Board for its support in establishing resources and partnerships to provide parents and families with the needed information about the importance of a college education. I also ask that additional resource be allocated to student services to provide support systems for these minority youth.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sergio E. Rodriguez

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