

Latino Leadership Link

A Democratic Caucus Update on the Hispanic Community

Senator Robert Menendez

Latinos and College Access: Ensuring Young Latinos Can Achieve the American Dream

Recently, the Senate voted on and passed two landmark pieces of legislation that will make college more affordable and more accessible to all our nation's students – the Higher Education Access Act and Higher Education Reauthorization bill. These Democratic-led proposals increase critical grant aid and strengthen key programs that help open the doors to college for Latino students. Today, Latinos constitute 18.3 percent of the traditional college aged-population, yet make up only 11 percent of total enrollment. Nonetheless, Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in the nation, and by the year 2015, Latino enrollment in college is expected to increase 73 percent, more than 3 times the rate of African-Americans and 15 times the rate of non-Latino Whites. Democrats understand that our success as a nation will depend on how educated our population is and pledge to continue to level the playing field and make education more affordable and accessible to all young people.

- **Latinos are Less Likely to Attend College:** Latinos are approximately 10 percent less likely than non-Hispanic Whites and five percent less likely than African-Americans to attend college. As a result, only 12 percent of Latinos age 25 and older had received a bachelor's degree or higher in 2005, compared to 30.5 percent of non-Latino White students. Despite these numbers, evidence shows young Latinos are eager to attend college. Nearly 98 percent of all Latino high school students say they want to go to college, and nearly 95 percent believe they will graduate from college. Democrats believe that anyone who is qualified and willing to work hard should be able to access and afford a college education. That is why Democrats are working to ensure those opportunities are available to all.
- **Latinos are More Likely to Attend Community College and Work Full Time:** Students who are the first in their family to attend college, from an ethnic minority group, or economically disadvantaged are more likely to start their education at a community college. As 60 percent of young Latinos report that neither of their parents attended college – twice the rate of non-Latinos – a majority of Latinos (55 percent) begin their higher education at community colleges. In addition, Latinos are more likely to work full time while attending college. Latino undergraduates at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), which enroll more than half of all Latinos, are more likely to work full time than their non-Latino counterparts.
- **Latinos More Likely to Qualify for Federal Financial Aid:** While a majority of Latinos attend HSIs, 65 percent of which are community colleges with lower tuition rates than other institutions, Latino students are still less able to contribute to the cost of their education than students from non-minority-serving institutions. On average, Latinos are more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to receive federal aid to pay for their undergraduate education. However, Latino undergraduates receive the lowest average financial award of any other racial or ethnic group – on average, Latinos receive a full

\$650 less than non-Latino students. Democrats have made a commitment to making higher education more affordable and accessible to Latinos by increasing the maximum Pell Grant award, reauthorizing Perkins loans and other key grant programs, and simplifying the FAFSA to make the financial aid process more accessible and less burdensome.

Ensuring all our students are prepared to be the next generation of leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs requires a serious commitment to make college affordable and accessible. By passing key legislation that will make higher education more accessible to all, Democrats have taken critical steps to make sure every Latino student who is willing to work hard has the opportunity to graduate from college and participate in the American Dream.