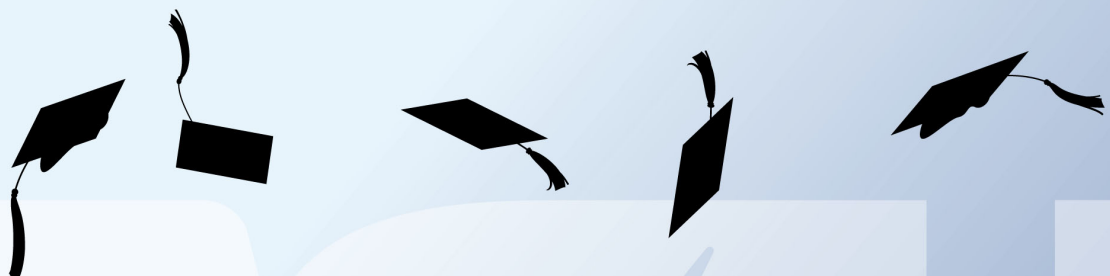


Center for Community Development and Civil Rights



Pathways to Prevention: The Latino Male Dropout Crisis

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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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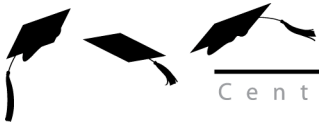
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INTRODUCTION

Every year, thousands of young people exit the educational pipeline prior to graduation. One of the most pressing and least discussed aspects of the dropout crisis in the United States today is the Latino male dropout rate. Institutional barriers within schools, such as tracking, along with cultural factors, create significant obstacles in the pathways to success for Latino males. By dropping out, these young men are greatly impacting their futures, their future families, and their community in ways that someone so young cannot readily understand. The potential economic and social costs are staggering. High school dropouts are more likely to require government assistance, go to prison, experience chronic poverty, and pass these struggles on to their children. Even more worrisome, this dropout crisis is occurring in the midst of a population surge among Latinas/os under 25.

THE DROPOUT CRISIS

To better understand the specific crisis among Latino males, their dropout rates must be situated within the context of the larger academic crisis in the Latina/o community. Latina/o communities have experienced distinct shifts in the past two decades. Increased immigration from Mexico and Central America intensifies pressure on already strained services in Latina/o communities. This pressure is acutely experienced within the field of education. Public schools have become responsible for not only educating established and historically disenfranchised Latino communities, but are also increasingly the first point of contact for a growing population of immigrants seeking to integrate into U.S. society. Public schools are not structured to accomplish these goals: soothe social and cultural alienation of long-standing communities and acculturate recent arrivals. Additionally, the educational arena has become a political flashpoint in recent years with the passage of English-only laws in California and Arizona, for instance. The stressed school system and the contemporary political climate are the context in which dropout trends demonstrate an entrenched sense of alienation and disinterest toward educational achievement among youth in the Latina/o community.

THE ACADEMIC PIPELINE AND THE LATINA/O

COMMUNITY IN THE 1990s

Responding to a charge from the U.S. Department of Education, in 1998 a panel of national experts published, *No More Excuses: The Final Report of the Hispanic Dropout Project*. The Project's findings were unsettling. Relying on the then most current data from 1994, the report showed that the educational attainment for the Latina/o community lagged well-behind the other major ethnic groups in the United States:

- Nearly one in five of the nation's Latinas/os between the ages of 19 and 24 had no diploma or GED.
- Dropout rates for both African Americans and white non-Latinas/os declined from 1972 to 1994; the dropout rate for Latinas/os remained static between 30% and 35% (see chart bottom page five).

Most worrisome was the observed lack of educational attainment among the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States; in 1994, the changing nature of the U.S. economy, and the increased demand for a highly-educated labor force was already well understood. The United States was clearly evolving into a society of well-educated, highly-trained, and well-paid professionals and a low-to-modestly paid service sector. As the report shows, an increasing portion of the Latina/o community was being excluded from emerging economic opportunities—high school dropouts do not merit serious consideration for the best paying jobs. Additionally, and with great frustration, the report's authors note that the solutions were not novel or unheard of in the decades leading up to the report's publication; rather, they simply had never been attempted in a sustained, scalable manner.



“We in the Hispanic Dropout Project developed a new appreciation for Yogi Berra’s ‘déjà vu, all over again.’ Much of what we have to report to America is **not** new. The roots of our findings run deep through the decades of extensive research gathered in many parts of the nation [. . .]. Much of the work on the education of at-risk and disadvantaged students, and dropout prevention applies; but then, so does much of the work on effective schools, school restructuring, school finance, and equity. Over the years, many of our findings have been repeated by Hispanic and non-Hispanic researchers, practitioners, and advocacy groups. What troubles us and adds to our collective impatience in submitting this report is precisely that so much of this has appeared so often in the research literature and has been urged so often by those who care about student outcomes. Yet the nation has failed to put this knowledge to work in more than a few sites.” *No More Excuses: The Final Report of the Hispanic Dropout Project (1998)*

THE ACADEMIC PIPELINE AND THE LATINA/O COMMUNITY TODAY

All along the academic pipeline, the situation of Latinas/os, whether in K-12 or post-secondary, is often tenuous and unstable. In March 2006, UCLA’s Chicano Studies Research Center reported, “The Latina/o educational pipeline does not ensure a smooth flow of students from one end of the conduit to the other, but a broken trickle of fewer and fewer students graduating from each level.” Of every one hundred Latinas and one hundred Latino male students who enter elementary school, forty-six females and forty-nine males *exit* prior to high school graduation. Of those who do complete high school, only eleven females and ten males complete college. Nearly a decade after the Hispanic Dropout Project’s 1998 report, Latinas/os still move through the academic pipeline at rates consistently lower than the other major ethnic groups in the U.S. (chart below, numbers to the right represent males, the left females).

The U.S. Educational Pipeline, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2000.

Source: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. *CSCR Research Report*. No.7, March, 2006

	Latinas/os	Native Americans	African Americans	Whites	Asian Americans
Cohort Group Starting Elementary School	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100
Graduate From High School	54/51	72/70	73/71	84/83	78/83
Graduate From College	11/10	12/11	15/13	24/28	40/48
Graduate from Graduate School	4/4	4/4	5/4	8/11	13/22
Earn Doctorates	0.3/0.4	0.4/0.6	0.3/0.5	0.6/1.4	1.4/4.4



The U.S. Latina/o Pipeline, by Subgroup and Gender, 2000.

Source: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. *CSCR Research Report*. No.7, March, 2006

	Mexican Americans	Puerto Ricans	Cubans	Dominicans	Salvadorans
Cohort Group Starting Elementary School	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100	100/100
Graduate From High School	47/44	65/62	63/63	51/51	36/36
Graduate From College	8/7	13/12	21/22	11/11	6/6
Graduate from Graduate School	2/2	4/4	9/10	4/4	2/2
Earn Doctorates	0.2/0.2	0.4/0.6	1.2/1.3	0.3/0.4	0.1/0.2

When the Latina/o population is disaggregated for subgroups (chart above, numbers to the right represent males, to the left females), the numbers become more disconcerting given the increasing population of immigrant and native-born Latinas/os across the United States.

For instance, of every one hundred Mexican/Mexican American male and female elementary students who enroll, fifty-three females and fifty-six males *exit* school prior to high school graduation. The college completion numbers are equally disheartening: eight females and seven males. The rapidity of this population's growth and the accompanying lack of achievement is cause for national concern. Clearly, Mexican and Mexican American youth are not the only subgroup experiencing academic crisis. Across the Latina/o community, youth are exiting schools without diplomas or the necessary skills to chart their own futures, and there is seemingly very little occurring at the national level making a significant impact on this trend.

Not only are advancement rates low, the students who advance into higher grades are ill-prepared for success,

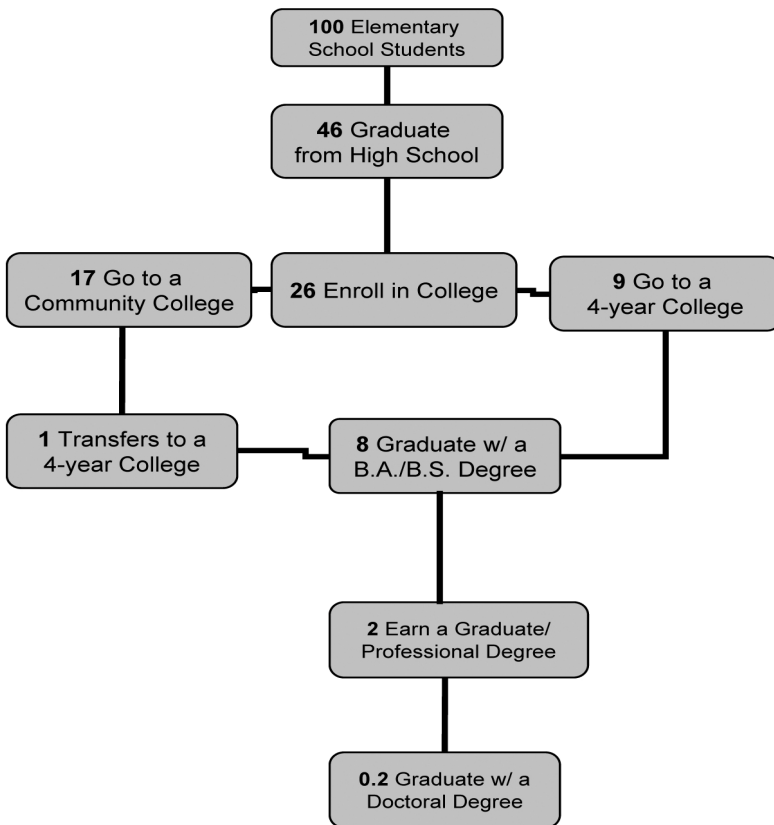
resulting in increased attrition in high school, college and graduate school. At every step of the academic pipeline, Latina/o students are being lost. One hundred enroll in elementary school, forty-six graduate high school. Twenty-six enroll in college, eight graduate with bachelor's degrees. There is a net loss of fifty-four students by the end of high school, another twenty youth who graduate high school do not enroll in college, and approximately 70% of Latinas/os who enroll in college do not graduate (chart page five, *U.S. Educational Pipeline*). Given the increasingly specialized skills necessary to thrive in the United States, these dropout numbers foreshadow an almost insurmountable hurdle to the economic and social well-being among Latinas/os for generations to come.

Finally, in 2004, just as in 1994, the dropout rate for Latinas/os *still* surpasses all other major racial and ethnic group in the United States, and as noted, this fact has not changed since 1972 (chart page five, *Completion Rates*). For the last thirty-five years the dropout crisis has become further entrenched in the Latina/o community.



U.S. Educational Pipeline, with leaks, for Mexican Americans circa 2000

Source: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. *Latino Policy & Issues Brief*, No.13, March 2006.



- Approximately 25% of Latino males 25 and over have less than a 9th grade education, compared with 7% for all males.
- Only 57% of Latino males 25 and over have a high school diploma compared with 90% of white males and 83% of all non-Hispanics.

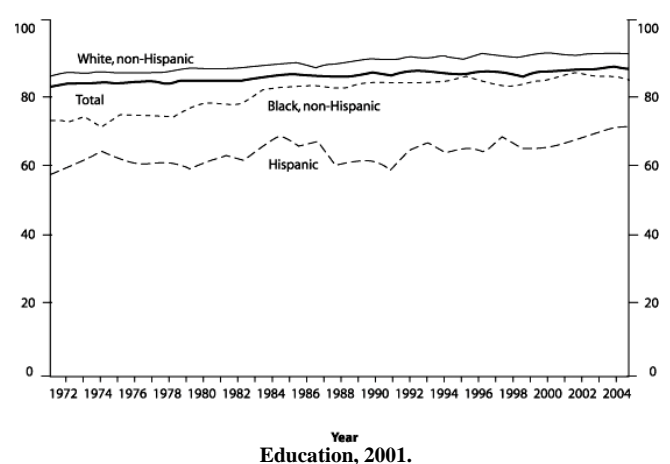
These numbers represent a devastating blow to the Latina/o community and the social fabric of the United States. The loss in future potential heralds social and economic privation with profound consequences. Under-education is becoming an entrenched aspect of the Latino male experience in the United States. In addition, the dropout rate is indicative of a schism between the needs of Latino males and the ways in which schools and teachers view and subsequently treat these young men. Schools are not meeting the needs of a significant number of Latino males, and like the cycle of under-education among Latinos, this long-standing lack of service represents an entrenched aspect of the educational culture. While this should be understood as a significant issue of *school under-performance*, more often than not, the high rate of academic under-performance is understood as a common cultural phenomenon among Latino males. The resulting prejudice being that the young man, by-and-large, is to blame.

LATINO MALES AND THE ACADEMIC PIPELINE

While the dropout numbers for the entire Latina/o community, both within secondary and post-secondary education, are a grave concern; the most acute component of this crisis is among Latino males. Consistently, Latino male achievement lags behind that of their Latina counterparts and other groups. A January 2007 study from Excelencia in Education, *Latino Males in Higher Education*, reports:

- Latino males are more likely to drop out of high school than any other male. In 2004, 29% of Latino males dropped out compared to 7% of white males and 14% of African American males.

Completion Rates of 18 to 24-years-olds not currently enrolled in high school or below, by race/ethnicity: Oct. 1972-Oct. 2001. U.S. Dept. of Education, 2001.





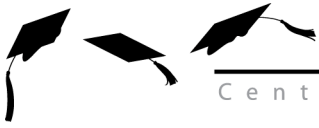
As these young men exit high school without diplomas, Latino males are not positioning themselves to address the future needs of their communities. For those young men that succeed in secondary institutions and advance to college, the success rates similarly dishearten. Again, there is a disconnect between post-secondary institutions and the Latino male community they service. In fact, Latino males appear to be losing ground in the post-secondary settings:

- Only 12% of Latino males over 25 have earned a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 30% of all males 25 and older.
- From 1976 to 2004, Latina college enrollment increased 510%, enrollment for Latino males increased 255%.
- As an overall number of Latinas/os enrolled in college, Latino male enrollment has fallen from 55% of total Latina/o enrollment to 44%. Latinas' access to higher education has consistently improved, while Latino enrollment in post-secondary education has stagnated.

The dropout rates, college completion rates, and, as a result, future economic and social opportunities have improved for young women and men from every demographic with the exception of Latino males. There are clearly problems.

“The young Latino male drop out crisis, if unabated, has the potential to condemn a large segment of the Hispanic community into a permanent underclass. This underclass will exhibit all the pathologies associated with urban decay: a culture where going to juvenile detention or incarceration is merely a rite of passage and/or a badge of honor, a preponderance of out of wedlock births, family disintegration, functional illiteracy, limited job skills, loss of pride, and loss of hope. . . . In a relatively short period of time, the traditional value system of young Hispanic males has been transformed. The shame of incarceration has turned to a misplaced pride, the prestige of educational achievement morphed into a socially demeaned status Only recently have we begun to ask the questions of causality. Consequently, we have only some hypotheses that need to be tested in the real world. We believe that at least some young Latino males drop out of school for rational economic reasons. It turns out that if college is not an option, dropping out of school at the permissible age of 16 in the 10th grade makes some sense. There are meager differences in wages for unskilled workers. A high school diploma is of no value to someone who flips hamburgers or works as a laborer in a construction site. But there is a psychic reward for helping the family budget and prestige in not having to ask our parents for handouts. But the long-term consequences are devastating. Thus it appears that interventions that establish with unshakeable certainty that college is a realistic option for at-risk Hispanic youngsters if they successfully complete the requisite college preparatory courses can make a transformational difference.”

Raul Yzaguirre, 2007



INTERVENTIONS

As noted nearly a decade ago in *No More Excuses*, there are many existing solutions to draw upon; there exists the necessary practical experience to reverse the Latino male dropout trend, improve high school and college completion rates for Latino males, and infuse hope and possibility into the broader Latina/o community and U.S. society. And in spite of all the discouraging demographic information presented, the solutions are already familiar. There is reason for hope.

The following represents a sampling of best practices that have been proven in classrooms and communities nationwide. These represent points of departure, a common vocabulary from which to begin a collective discussion. Because the Latino male dropout crisis is already highly evolved and largely systemic, there may be a need for more innovative suggestions. The Center for Community Development and Civil Rights (CDCR) is open to all such suggestions, and is not limited in its thinking to what follows.

SMALL-LEARNING COMMUNITIES (SLCs)/SCHOOL-WITHIN-A-SCHOOL

From Oakland to New York City, school districts have experimented with the SLCs/school-within-a-school model with varying degrees of success. The most successful models for vulnerable youth have been those that reject the logic of academic exclusivity in favor of drawing from high-potential, under-performing students. Additionally, successful models mirror the school's demographic make-up; they are not isolated bastions of one ethnic group or another. The teachers and administrators involved in these models are dedicated to student success and ensuring student access to knowledge and opportunity.

The greatest limitation of the SLC/school-within-a-school model has been the inability of schools and school districts to ensure universal student access to these programs. Whether this has been a question of funding, instructor/administrative resistance, or lack of information is unclear. Additionally, these models are

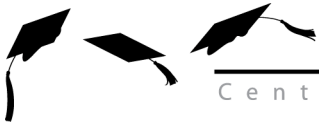
generally not gender specific, so the relative impact on exclusively Latino male retention is not well-understood.

However, given that the SLC/school-within-a-school model consistently demonstrates success both with high school retention and as a college-bridge program, the CDCR believes it is time for aggressive implementation of SLC/school-within-a-school models among those most vulnerable. Whatever obstacles exist to scalable implementation must be identified and overcome. Given the acute crisis among Latino males, the CDCR concludes that the SLC/school-within-a-school model must account for gender-specific issues; whether this is in single-sex classrooms or unisex academic settings with gender-specific support programs is a necessary debate.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT CURRICULUM

In an era of standardized testing tied to school funding and increasingly rigid state-mandated content standards, how can the unique needs of Latino males be met while teaching the necessary skill set to pass high-stakes tests? Some of the most successful programs that work with Latinas/os infuse the history and culture of the Latina/o experience, not as an addendum, but as a core component of instruction. The articulation of a history and culture that is familiar and personal to the Latina/o student has, historically, proved to anchor the student in the educational setting. Seeing themselves in the curriculum is a meaningful way to minimize academic alienation and disinterest. The CDCR believes that there is enough room, and time in the day, to address the unique cultures of all students in the public education system. Every demographic in the United States has contributed to the current social, economic, cultural, and political make-up of the country. The curriculum should reflect this inclusive American experience. Teachers and school districts should both seek out and be provided with the necessary tools and information to make all classrooms more comfortable and inclusive.

Additionally, school curriculum, from middle-school to college, should reflect the “real world” applications of what is being taught. Latino males must understand that the knowledge base acquired in school is the foundation for life-long professional and personal development. Rather than see school as an obstacle to earning both



money and respect, the curriculum should reflect that school is a meaningful investment in one's self.

These beliefs, however, require creativity and will to implement. The CDCR advocates for a relevant curriculum, a curriculum that centers the Latina/o experience and is infused with job-relevant information. This is a fundamental response to the Latino male dropout crisis. Ultimately the question remains, how can the curriculum be shifted from something that contributes to the alienation of Latino males into a hook that keeps students returning to school and invested in their personal and professional development?

ACADEMIC/PERSONAL MENTORING AND STUDENT RESILIENCE

Nearly all literature on dropout prevention acknowledges the importance of a mentoring relationship between a caring adult and youth. Arguably, it is the most important factor in student retention; it ensures students do not experience overwhelming estrangement or isolation and are exposed to academic and professional possibilities outside the youth's immediate experience. Unfortunately, the majority of students in the educational pipeline are not able to connect, or are not connected, with a mentor. This is especially true for students of color and those with less-than-perfect academic records. The lack of access must be remedied.

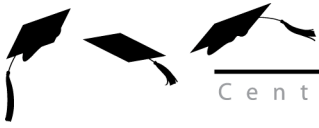
As noted, Latino males experience an incredibly high dropout rate, one that has persisted for years. However, there have been those Latino males who are exceptions to this trend. There are young men who have graduated from high school and college; young men who have overcome all of the social and cultural barriers that stymie countless others. The CDCR recognizes the need to establish formal mechanisms, both institutional and community-based, that forge relationships between those Latino males who have defied the pressure to dropout and those still in the academic pipeline. Schools possess the responsibility to reach out to community members who are successful. Community organizations and business must see schools as focal points for personal investment in future human capital. The CDCR believes successful Latino males must become commonplace in schools.

“The number of jobs offering a livable wage for individuals without high school diplomas grows fewer each year, as demonstrated by the rapid shrinkage of the industrial work force, which lost 2.3 million jobs since 1991. In 2001, the unemployment rate for dropouts 25 years and over was almost 75 percent higher than for high school graduates—7.3 percent versus 4.2 percent. Approximately, two thirds of all state prison inmates have not completed high school. The negative impact of not graduating may be more severe for some minority groups. For instance, a 2002 Census Bureau report shows that the mean earnings of young adult Latinos who finish high school are 43% higher than those who drop out. The earning gaps are much larger for graduates with some college education, even if they do not finish a degree.” [Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Crisis.](#) (2004)

Again, the solution to this problem is clear; Latino males need more mentors. The mechanisms for delivery however, are yet to be imagined. What would a mentoring program look like that addresses long-standing academic alienation? Would it be embedded in schools as a collaborative of teachers, parents, and administrators? Is a school-embedded mentoring program, because of the existing culture of alienation, an incongruity in the Latino male context? What are the specific academic and personal needs of Latino males in a mentoring setting? What cultural concerns must be central to building these bridges? How can the air of artifice be eliminated from a contrived mentoring relationship in order to assure a mutually beneficial relationship that is sustainable and effective? These questions are some of the most difficult, yet most pressing.

MANAGEABLE SCHOOL REFORM

As the demographic information presented earlier demonstrates, schools are not serving the Latino male population. Some argue that the most promising way to service this population, and other historically underserved groups, is to begin anew. The argument being it is easier to create new models than to transform



existing institutional culture and practice—the very culture and practices that contribute to the Latino male dropout crisis. The question then becomes is “beginning anew” an immediate and effective solution to this dropout crisis? Does there need to be a concerted and cooperative effort to develop a broad, novel system of charter/alternative schools to serve the Latino male population? Is this realistic? Or is the solution additional training for teachers and administrators in traditional districts and schools?

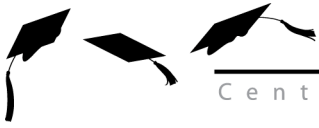
Public schools already possess a vast infrastructure and access to tremendous resources—they can provide services and resources that the majority of charter/alternative schools cannot. However, charter/alternative schools are demonstrating a culture of innovation that displays an ability to rapidly respond to historically alienated students. The CDCR emphatically believes that seamless cooperation between traditional and charter/alternative school systems is imperative. Too many Latino males exit from traditional public schools for academic, disciplinary, or economic reasons. Alternative settings are often the initial point of return for these students; however, there are often insurmountable institutional barriers for these students when, and if, they elect to transition back into traditional public schools. For those young men who elect to remain in the charter/alternative setting, these schools often lack the support services to effectively help these students. It is in the best interest of the most vulnerable students to establish clearly articulated institutional pathways so students can move back and forth freely between traditional and charter/alternative schools as needed.

An era of cooperation must begin. Traditional public schools are the backbone of the educational system in the United States. They possess the resources, political clout, and expertise to make a significant positive impact on this crisis. Charter/alternative schools are nimble innovators where new approaches and ideas can be rapidly implemented and tested. The CDCR envisions a cooperative relationship where the traditional public schools’ economy-of-scale and the charter/alternative schools’ innovative spirit find a common ground in shared programs and approaches in order to effectively assist the Latino male population.

COMMUNITY-SCHOOL SUPPORT COOPERATIVES

There are already numerous pre-existing after-school, intervention, and supplemental programs servicing Latino males. Many of these are already successful at empowering and growing mature, responsible young men; however, there is the constant pressure of a lack of services for all of those in need. The CDCR takes a broad view of support cooperatives; from athletics to faith-based, the Center recognizes that the preexisting infrastructure in the Latina/o community is both undervalued and underutilized by schools. Similarly, the CDCR wishes the community would be more aggressive in taking ownership over the public schools by taking community resources and opportunities to its schools.

How can these relationships be formalized between the numerous existing and successful community programs and local schools and school districts? The Latino male dropout crisis is too big for one organization, one school, or one district to address. The CDCR foresees a partnership of numerous local organizations and schools making a positive impact. Schools must become better at notifying community organizations regarding young men exhibiting the already well-understood precursor behaviors of dropping out. In cooperation with parents/guardians, these young men must be referred to a community organization that can provide for them, not just any organization, but one that meets the specific needs of the student. Young men with a proclivity for the arts require an arts program, athletes require athletics, and so on. Community service providers must be better at developing and marketing their expertise to the schools in their communities, so when an intervention becomes necessary, parents/guardians and schools are not at a loss for resources. The CDCR recognizes the need for stronger, formalized collaborative relationships between parents/guardians, community organizations, teachers, and the young men themselves as a step to correcting the Latino male dropout crisis.



THE CHARGE

The aforementioned best practices provide a framework for debate. We trust that these positions will not constrain, but inform and inspire further discussion. The CDCR's charge to individuals, schools, community-organizations, government, and the nation, is to rely on your expertise, and in a spirit of cooperation realize actionable solutions. Solving the Latino male dropout

crisis may seem like an insurmountable charge; however, the Center for Community Development and Civil Rights is committed and capable, and envisions a radically different future for Latino males.

We envision a program that addresses not only academic needs, but the social, economic, and policy issues that affect the ability of Latino males to persist in the academic pipeline.

*“Building bridges between the University and Community
as catalysts for transformation”*



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