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The New Futuro College Plan: Facilitating College Access

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Since 1970, researchers have produced numerous studies on education reform strategies intended to end the poor academic performance of minority children. In September 2002, the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans published a report highlighting the complex reality of raising educational achievement for Hispanics in the United States. The report explained the impact that educating the largest-growing population would have on workforce development for the country. The Commission pointed out important factors to success, such as the role of stakeholders including family, community organization, and the government, and concluded with the need for a collective solution.¹

During the last decades, many organizations have allocated funds to alleviate the Hispanic achievement gap, but the efforts have been rather isolated. Recently, it has been well-established that large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination.² During the last year New Futuro, a socially innovative educational community, has expanded the commitment of an important group of actors from different sectors to the common agenda of increasing college access for Latino students.³

Built on a free, bilingual, "high-touch, high-tech" platform, New Futuro has created a robust community of Latino students and parents, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, government agencies, and corporations to connect those that need help with those that provide it. One of the resources developed by New Futuro is a proprietary 10 Steps College Plan that provides structured information targeted to Latino students and families to help them prepare, apply and pay for college.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in 2000, among Latinos who did complete high school, less than half pursued a postsecondary education.⁴ Ten years after the aforementioned publication of the report from the Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, the reality presents a similar challenge. In 2010, 36% of Hispanics graduating from high school enrolled in universities; only 13% graduated.⁵ The main reason that young adults report for not enrolling in college is the lack of information about options for paying for college, specifically financial aid.⁵

The New Futuro College Plan was written to provide a pathway to college access in an easy-to-follow format. The steps start with researching careers and end with getting money for college. Students begin by indicating their current status on each step at the time they first encounter the College Plan. Developed to provide three levels of scaffolding per step, the goal is for students to eventually check the highest level in every step. While providing a tool for students to track

milestones to successfully continue their education after high school, the added value of the College Plan goes far beyond that by giving students the opportunity to work together with their parents and caregivers.

Today, 53% of all Hispanic adults are first-generation, foreign-born immigrants, and only about 7% of them are under the age of 18.⁵ This means that the likelihood of a K-12 Hispanic American student having a first-generation parent is very high. Foreign-born immigrants typically have more difficulty understanding the U.S. education system, which, coupled with a lack of English language skills, makes it hard for them to get actively involved in their kids' college planning efforts. Using the College Plan, parents can support their children in their pathway to college while sharing their commitment, as they can read the document in the language of their preference. For parents, this may be a unique tool to help them understand and navigate the path to a college education.

The 10 Steps in the College Plan are as follows:

1. Explore Careers
2. Build a Support Team
3. Research Colleges
4. Create a Financial Strategy
5. Take the Right Classes
6. Get the GPA You Need
7. Get Involved
8. Take the College Entrance Exams
9. Apply to College
10. Get Money for College

The three-level approach to scaffolding each step reflects low, medium, and complete success in each of the steps. The 10 steps and associated levels were pilot-tested for clarity, timing, and readability level, and were reviewed by an independent expert for content validity in terms of completeness and accuracy. Test-retest reliability analysis was conducted with a high school group of students in a large metropolitan school holding statistical significance ($N=84$, $r=.79$, $p<.05$). Still, it is premature to determine whether or not this mechanism is conducive to improving the ability of a Latino family to better navigate the path to college. Qualitative data gathered through survey responses supports the notion of the great benefit that Latino parents perceive when they explore the documents.

The College Plan represents the entry point to NewFuturo.com, a place where parents and students can continue their journey online in a

completely bilingual fashion. Data collection is taking place from now until the end of the year. A forthcoming report will explore the patterns of Latino students as they progress in their college plan and the way they interact with other resources at NewFuturo.com. Further research will also be conducted to measure the correlation between milestones achieved by students and their actual rate of success in enrolling into college.

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