

Participant Feedback from the Twelfth McKee Learning Lunch

Latino Post-secondary Training and Workforce Development

February 16, 2017

Convened by the McKee Chair of Excellence in Learning;
College of Health, Education, and Professional Studies;
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Introduction

During the past 15 years, the Chattanooga area has experienced a significant increase in the number of Latino families who call the region home. The resulting diversity brings many exciting changes. It also raises some essential issues for community leaders. Substantial changes in the student population in local schools compel us to evaluate our traditional models of post-secondary training and workforce development in order to ensure access and success for every member of greater Chattanooga.

What barriers at the K–12 and post-secondary levels limit student access and success? What models of good practice or partnership opportunities support access and success for students? How can representatives from local agencies and services analyze the current situation, identify challenges and obstacles, and propose possible ways in which to improve access and success for Latino students who want to pursue job training or post-secondary education? We explored those questions at the 12th McKee Learning Lunch.

Quincy Jenkins, Director of Hispanic and Latino Outreach at Dalton State College introduced the session. Then, in accordance with the process used at every McKee Learning Lunch, there were three general feedback opportunities, or Assignments 1, 2, and 3. The participants, who are listed at the end of this report, provided their insights and questions about the topic. Their responses and insights are presented below.

Assignment 1

Post-presentation Questions: Following the discussion, participants posed questions about Latino training and workforce development.

The questions are listed below.

Significance and Impact

- Why is the specific issue being addressed today a cause for concern and, therefore, discussion?
- Do Latinos feel as though they are disadvantaged in the American workforce?
- In what ways do Latinos need post-secondary training and workforce development, and why?
- What are the primary barriers for Latino families in acquiring post-secondary training?
- What better ways can we [find to] work across state lines?
- What does Latino enrollment in post-secondary school look like today and how can it evolve into the future?
- What percentage of Latinos enrolls in college? What percentage graduate?

Funding for Undocumented Students

- Are there funding resources for DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals] students?
- How can we better support undocumented Latino students' transition into higher education?
- Where do we find financial resources to support undocumented students—who are ineligible for federal aid—for post-secondary education and workforce opportunities?

Preparing and Increasing Interest

- How can we leverage Latino post-secondary opportunities to discourage high-school dropouts?
- How can we integrate more Latinos into higher education?
- How can we interest more Latinos in advanced degrees and in academic and research careers? How do we prepare Latino students more effectively for this path?
- How significant is parental involvement in a child's education within the Latino community?
- What arts programs are available to Latino students that resonate with their ethnicity and journey to America?
- What current programs and projects are successful in supporting student success in workforce development, education attainment, or both?
- How can schools prepare students to develop proficiency in other languages in a monolingual system?

University and Community Involvement

- What is the relationship between the Latino community and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC)?
- What initiatives target Latino students at UTC? In Chattanooga?
- How soon can Chattanooga put together an alternative graduation program that truly serves the needs of Latino students who have limited formal education?
- How can UTC be more engaged in Chattanooga's regional initiatives to help to increase educational achievement rates of Latino K–12 students?

Assignment 2

Discussion Question: After the presentation, participants, in groups of four, discussed three assigned questions. Questions and responses are listed below.

Question 1. What barriers at the K-12 and post-secondary levels limit student access and success?

- Language, trust barriers, engagement with teachers, parents' language (non-English speaking), parental engagement, money, limits in ELL [English-language learners] program, limited bilingual educators, resistance toward using other languages in America, students' views.
- Lack of previous formal education, lack of resources, lack of vision/ inspiration from parents, lack of quality programs, lack of skills.

- Financial concerns, receiving misinformation about resources, misunderstanding of foreign language vs. ESOL [English speakers of other languages], lack of collaboration.
- Lack of understanding of cultural differences, free education, cultural acceptance, tuition and financial support, politics, policies.

Question 2. What models of good practice or partnership opportunities support access and success for students?

- Gap between school and home (need program to close it), leaders on a system level who support immigrants (group on campus to get help campus awareness).
- LaPaz advocates in Chattanooga: Partnership, business council, bilingual regulation coaches, graduation coaches, family resource center, chamber of commerce, UTC training coach, hands-on activity with community.
- Importance of leadership, open lines of communication, department of education, stakeholders, focus groups, programs like Dalton State, ELL for UTC students.
- Campus-school readiness, model to build awareness in community with accurate information, *Chattanooga Times Free Press*.

Question 3. How can representatives from local agencies and services analyze the current situation, identify challenges and obstacles, and propose possible ways in which to improve access and success for Latino students who want to pursue job training or post-secondary education?

- Through cost-benefit analysis of programs that inspire students to get higher education.
- By following through with education.
- By raising awareness through video memoirs.

Assignment 3

Post-discussion Question: After the discussion, we asked participants to respond, in writing, to two additional questions. The questions and responses are listed below.

Question 1. What is the most important thing you learned today?

Overwhelming Interest

- Many people and organizations in Chattanooga are interested in supporting the Latino community.
- A powerful Latino movement exists in Chattanooga, and that community's impact is long lasting.
- Several groups willing to do what is needed to support Latino populations.
- The increasing number of advocates will help to provide ways to support the Latino community.

Critical Need

- Although unmet needs and resources exist, many people who care about the issue.
- This issue is bigger than UTC.
- There is a gap and barriers effecting student success, but there are solutions that we, as a community, can provide.

Education and Community Involvement

- Community partnerships exist in Chattanooga.
- Community resources are available.
- The Hamilton County Department of Education offers several ELL (English-Language Learners) programs.
- We start language-learning too late.
- The problem requires a community effort to resolve it. Stakeholders must avoid the urge to act in isolation.
- Learning and understanding the commitment that UTC has to the Latino community.
- People can make a difference. Care, passion, and commitment can and will sway public and political opinion and policy.

Question 2. What unanswered question(s) are you leaving with?

Forward Action

- How do we all work together to move Chattanooga to the forefront of “change leaderships” of this topic?
- How can we enforce the learning of other languages for K-12 students?
- What’s next?
- How do we collaborate in moving forward?
- How do we get things done?
- How can we go beyond the talking points to create tangible action steps?

Engagement

- How can we effectively engage Latinos in higher education and [how can we] interest Latinos in academic and research careers?
- What strategies do we need to reach the community at large in order to raise awareness without offending or angering the audience?

Contributions/Resources

- How inclusive are non-speaking Latino communities in this Chattanooga movement?
- How can we establish a newcomer center for Latino students with paths to graduation?
- How do we continue to connect good people, good programs, and excellent practices to ensure that progress continues?
- How does change happen in an educational system—even a country—when some people are unwilling to change?
- How does UTC currently reach out to and support Latino students in Chattanooga? How does it plan to do so in the future?
- What resources can we provide on campus?

Participants

We would like to thank the following participants for their interest in and contribution to this McKee Learning Lunch.

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