

THE STATE OF LATINOS IN THE INTERMOUNTAIN WEST

Building the Infrastructure
of Opportunity
for Latinos





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III. Strategies for Building the Infrastructure of Opportunity for Latinos in the Intermountain West

A. Executive Summary of Strategies

A limited infrastructure of opportunity for Latinos, as well as others, has short-term and long-term fiscal and economic costs for states and their economies. For example, barely half of those who start four-year colleges, and only a third of those enrolled in community college students, graduate. The American Institutes for Research estimates the cost of those dropouts, measured in lost earnings and federal and state taxes, at \$4.5 billion.³³

The consequences of illiteracy, such as poor school performance, low high school and college attendance and graduation rates, result in low-paying jobs and economic insecurity for individuals and families. Low literacy levels cost the U.S. roughly \$225 billion or more each year in non-productivity in the workforce, crime, and loss of tax revenue due to unemployment.³⁴ Reports find that low literacy levels directly cost the healthcare industry over \$70 million every year.³⁵ The link between low literacy levels and crime are striking. Two-thirds of students who cannot read proficiently by the end of the fourth grade are likely to end up in jail or on welfare.³⁶ Over 70 percent of America's inmates cannot read above a fourth-grade level.

Strengthening and expanding opportunities to pursue education, access capital, and secure well-paying jobs for Latinos can have positive short-term and long-term fiscal impacts for communities and economies in states in the Intermountain West region.

For example, the Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that graduating 90 percent more of the Latino students in each of the Intermountain West states would have the following benefits as shown in Table 9.³⁷

Table 9. Economic Impact of Graduating 90 percent More Latino Students

| State | Increase in Wages | Increase in Annual Spending |
|------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| Arizona | \$37 million | \$29 million |
| California | \$389 million | \$313 million |
| Colorado | \$25 million | \$20 million |
| Nevada | \$20 million | \$16 million |
| New Mexico | \$19 million | \$15 million |
| Texas | \$245 million | \$200 million |
| Utah | \$6.9 million | \$5.3 million |

This final section presents policy guidance for how decision makers, legislators, service providers, and community organizations might build and strengthen the infrastructure of opportunity for Latinos in the areas of education, workforce development, and asset development.

Many of the recommendations presented have been identified as best practices based on successful implementation in other states. Several of the recommendations are geared toward the experience of Nevada. This is because, in large part, across the whole range of indicators, Latinos in Nevada face a more limited infrastructure of opportunity than Latinos in other Intermountain West states. However,

many of the recommendations are also relevant to the policy landscape in other states in the Intermountain West region.

The recommendations are summarized below:

1. Expanding Early Childhood Education

- a. Prioritize and support the expansion of high-quality, assessed pre-kindergarten programs throughout each state.
- b. Establish a dedicated funding stream to finance early childhood education programming (both pre-K and kindergarten).
- c. In the absence of state funding, local school boards may need to explore other options for resourcing early childhood education programs.
- d. Continue to raise awareness among Latino families about the importance of early childhood education and strengthen parental engagement efforts.
- e. Recruit and train more bilingual early childhood educators.

2. Improving Literacy

- a. Support policies to improve early literacy in grades K-3.
- b. Standardize early literacy expectations across each state.
- c. Retool professional development.
- d. Refocus on literacy at higher grade levels.

3. Improving STEM Education

- a. Prioritize science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), and computer science programming in elementary and middle schools with high percentages of Latino students.

4. Improving High School Graduation Rates

- a. Launch and/or expand the Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) program in public high schools.
- b. Initiate and/or expand the JAG program in middle schools, focusing on schools with high percentages of Latinos and English Language Learners.
- c. Raise awareness about the JAG program and adopt early identification of potential participants.
- d. Increase the number of bilingual college/career counselors in middle schools and high schools.

5. Improving Career Readiness

- a. Encourage high schools to offer the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) as an assessment of college and career readiness.
- b. Encourage the Nevada Department of Education to adopt the NCRC as the state's college and career readiness assessment tool.
- c. Support Nevada's JAG program to offer the NCRC as part of its programming.

6. Reducing Disproportionality in Discipline

- a. School districts should locate mental health professionals and social workers in high schools with high Latino and English Language Learner populations.
- b. Monitor recent efforts in Colorado and Nevada to reduce the disproportionately in expulsions and suspensions by race/ethnicity.

7. Increasing the Affordability of Higher Education

- a. In Nevada, support proposed legislation to create a state-supported need-based grant program to provide financial aid to low-income students seeking to attend community college.
- b. Explore ways to leverage student income.
- c. Enable undocumented immigrants to receive resident tuition at state public institutions.

8. Improving Retention and Graduation in Higher Education

- a. Expand counseling and advising staff and increase the number of bilingual counselors.
- b. Create incentives to enable students to attend college full-time, at least for the first year.
- c. Provide wrap-around services to support student success.
- d. Explore evidence-based methods for assessing student skill level.

9. Introducing Innovation to Remediation

- a. Explore new ways of offering remedial courses.
- b. Introduce culturally relevant literature in remedial and gateway English and writing classes.
- c. Increase professional development funds for adjunct lecturers.

10. Improving Workforce Development Service Delivery

- a. Place bilingual counselors at workforce development centers (including One-Stop job centers).
- b. Include representation from Latino businesses and service providers on workforce investment boards and industry councils.

11. Improving Job Training

- a. Offer an integrated bilingual curriculum.
- b. Offer industry-specific English as a Second Language/English Language Acquisition training.
- c. Increase the number of bilingual language certificate programs offered by colleges.
- d. Increase science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) training and awareness in the Latino community.
- e. Promote the use of bilingual health care workers.

12. Improving Access to Capital

- a. Build and strengthen microenterprise development institutions and Community Development Financial Institutions in Nevada.
- b. Adequately regulate payday and other consumer loan products that can strip low-income families' wealth.
- c. Invest more in State Housing Fund Trusts and support the development of affordable housing.
- d. Raise awareness about existing financial instruments, federal programs, and business services among Latinos and accelerate outreach efforts to Latino entrepreneurs and businesses.
- e. Offer bilingual services at microcredit enterprises and small business development centers.

13. Social Justice Issues

- a. Support community groups that address labor and employment rights of undocumented workers.
- b. Encourage judicial reform and strengthen programs to reduce the recidivism rate.

B. Building the Infrastructure of Opportunity: K-12 Education System

1. Expanding Early Childhood Education Programs

As indicated previously, roughly 68 percent of Latino 3- and 4-year olds in the Intermountain West states are not enrolled in preschool; in Arizona and Nevada the rate is higher, a whopping 77 percent. Any effort to increase early childhood programming would directly improve the infrastructure of opportunity for Latinos since so many Latino children are not currently enrolled in pre-K.

Studies have long documented the benefits of pre-K and kindergarten programs.³⁸ However, states have been slow to prioritize funding and direct the required resources to expanding government funded early childhood programming. Only 11 states in the U.S. require school districts to offer full-day kindergarten programs, none of which are in the Intermountain West.³⁹

The Great Recession certainly tested each state's ability to continue funding pre-K programs and full-day kindergarten programs. In Arizona, for example, Proposition 302, which was eventually defeated, threatened to repeal First Things First, the early childhood program, and put the revenues (\$324 million) into the state's cash-strapped general fund.⁴⁰ Arizona's kindergarten programs did not fare as well during the Great Recession. In 2010, Arizona eliminated all state funding for full-day kindergarten.⁴¹ In Colorado, efforts to fully fund full-day kindergarten have been stalled since 2008 due to limited funds.⁴²

Recently, some states have increased state resources for early childhood education and kindergarten. For early childhood education, the Nevada Legislature provided \$50 million over the 2013-2015 biennium to improve services for English Learners, which included providing preschool programs and full-day kindergarten in 20 schools. Utah also recently launched its Utah High Quality Preschool Program, which will deliver a high impact and targeted curriculum to increase school readiness and academic performance among 3 and 4 year olds. It is expected that the initial \$1 million investment in this program will enable 450 to 600 children to attend pre-school in 2014-2015 school year.⁴³ In California, school districts are now required to offer a year of transitional kindergarten to students who turn five-years-old between September 2 and December 2.⁴⁴

For kindergarten, the Nevada Legislature provided \$32 million for the 2013-2015 biennium to expand full-day kindergarten, which reflects a 66 percent increase over the previous biennium. In 2012, Utah created an enhanced kindergarten program targeted to at-risk students which focuses on building age-appropriate literacy and numeracy skills using an evidence-based early intervention model.⁴⁵ This program received \$7.5 million in 2013-14.⁴⁶

- Prioritize and support the expansion of high-quality, assessed pre-kindergarten programs throughout each state: Policymakers need to strengthen data collection efforts and performance metrics in order to evaluate and identify high quality early childhood education programming and pre-K centers. School districts need to support and fund the national certification of early childhood educators.
- Establish a dedicated funding stream to finance early childhood education programming (both pre-K and kindergarten): Some states, including Georgia and North Carolina, have established lotteries to fund all or part of universal, statewide pre-K programming in their state. While this funding instrument has not completely insulated these states from volatility in revenues or unanticipated growth in demand for services, education experts stress the importance of dedicating funds to early childhood programming.⁴⁷

- In the absence of state funding, local school boards may need to explore other options for resourcing early childhood education programs: In addition to sponsoring initiatives to raise local taxes to fund universal pre-K, some communities have used or are exploring the use of social impact bonds to fund early childhood education. Utah is the first state that has used social impact bonds to finance pre-K programs.
- Continue to raise awareness among Latino families about the importance of early childhood education and strengthen parental engagement efforts: According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), Latino families are “least likely of any group to send children to public preschool education programs due in part to parental education, language barriers, low socio-economic status, and lack of program access.”⁴⁸ Many community groups, which focus on parental engagement of Latino families, are often under-funded and under-resourced. Private foundations and corporate foundations may want to consider opportunities for funding parental engagement and awareness about early childhood education programs.
- Expand use of technology (iPads, etc.) to parents of ELL students to increase possibilities for more parent-teacher interaction: Many parents indicate that limited transportation capacity, limited language ability, and time limitations due to shift work or holding multiple jobs prevents them from meeting with teachers and attending trainings. Technology assistance could address many of the barriers and facilitate greater parental engagement.
- Recruit and train more bilingual early childhood educators: Trained, bilingual early childhood educators could help reduce barriers to Latino parental engagement, and help improve the early education success of young Latino children in the classroom.

2. Improving Literacy

Literacy levels among Latinos across the Intermountain West states were consistently and considerably lower than whites in all states, and even African-Americans in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Improving literacy requires commitment at all levels, including teachers, principals, administrators, school boards, and the state. Legislators and school districts should examine the following strategies to improve outcomes for Latino struggling readers.⁴⁹

- Support policies to improve early literacy in grades K-3: These policies include requiring universal assessments to identify students needing intervention, parent involvement, intervention programs for students, evaluation of the effectiveness of the interventions, and literacy training for teachers.
- Standardize early literacy expectations across each state: Decision makers should consider legislation to create a state policy on early literacy to standardize and formalize expectations across each state. Key components should include universal assessments to identify students needing intervention, parent involvement, intervention programs for students, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the interventions. It is important that any legislation provide school districts with options so that they can tailor programs to student needs.
- Retool professional development: To ensure that instruction and interventions are being implemented effectively, sustained, job-embedded professional development on literacy must be available to teachers. In addition, professional development resources are needed to train teachers in ELL literacy. Teachers in ELL settings should possess a Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) endorsement on their teaching certificate. Professional development resources should be directed to

provide and/or expand coaching, including peer coaching, as well as trainings. Additional public investment will likely be needed to ensure that teachers receive high quality professional development.

- Refocus on literacy at higher grade levels: While early literacy is a critical to the success of Latino students, there also needs to be a strong focus on literacy needs in middle school and high school, particularly for ELLs.

3. Improving STEM Education

- Prioritize science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), and computer science programming in elementary and middle schools with high percentages of Latino students: Throughout the Intermountain West, there is a huge achievement gap between Latinos and whites in math and science. This achievement gap threatens the long term economic security of Latinos given that a growing number of jobs will require STEM skills. Minorities continue to be underrepresented in STEM careers. Educators and policymakers need to prioritize funding, curriculum development, and after-school programming in elementary and middle schools with high percentages of Latinos.

4. Improving High School Graduation Rates

Throughout the Intermountain West, high school graduation rates among Latinos and English Language Leaders are low. As noted earlier, this has significant fiscal impacts on the states and their economies. Many states are experimenting with programs and interventions that could raise high school graduation rates.

One of the national programs that has demonstrated tremendous success with increasing graduation rates among its participants is the Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) Program, which is a national state-based 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to preventing dropouts among at-risk students. Since 1980, JAG has helped nearly 950,000 young people to stay in school through graduation (or completion of a GED), pursue a postsecondary education and/or secure quality employment that leads to career advancement opportunities.⁵⁰

The JAG model consists of a comprehensive set of services that applies a holistic approach to help at-risk students graduate. Among the components are classroom instruction, competency-based curriculums, adult mentoring, advisement and support, summer employment training, student-led leadership development, job and postsecondary education placement services, 12-month follow-up services, and an accountability system. The curriculum equips students with a minimum of 37 employability competencies and intensive career exploration and developmental opportunities. As part of the placement services, students are paired with specialists who identify entry-level job opportunities for graduates and assist them in exploring opportunities for post-secondary education.

JAG is recognized as a cost effective program. Nationally, cost-savings is approximately \$260,000 per student, while the direct costs of the program are approximately \$1,470 per student and can be recovered in just 14 months of full-time employment. Nationally, JAG has a graduation rate of 93 percent. In the Intermountain West region, only Arizona, California, Nevada, and New Mexico have the JAG program.

JAG Nevada: A Highly Effective Dropout Prevention Strategy

Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) is a highly effective dropout prevention and work-readiness model that has consistently shown positive outcomes as demonstrated by an average 91 percent graduation rate in 33 states over the last twenty years. Remarkably, JAG achieves very positive outcomes with youth who have been identified as having multiple barriers to high school graduation and future job/training placement. As the newest state affiliate, JAG Nevada (Jobs for Nevada's Graduates Inc.) is a Nevada based nonprofit organization that is affiliated with JAG National. JAG Nevada is implementing the JAG model program in eight Nevada counties and 21 schools and promises to deliver similar results to those demonstrated nationally.

The JAG Multi-Year Program is implemented over the span of 36 months. Students are recruited in the 10th grade to attend JAG instructional classes during the 11th and 12th grade and they receive support services for one year following graduation. Specialists deliver counseling, employability skills development, career association, job development, and job placement services that will result in either a quality job leading to a career after graduation or enrollment in a postsecondary education and training program. The JAG National In-School Curriculum consists of 87 competency-based modules. The Multi-Year Program services also include a capstone 12-month follow-up period during which Specialists are actively involved in intensive one-on-one employer marketing and job development activities to identify entry-level job opportunities for students after graduation or GED completion. Specialists assist graduates in the exploration of postsecondary educational opportunities and show them how to navigate the financial aid process to pursue these opportunities. Non-graduates receive additional assistance in graduating from high school or completing requirements for a GED certificate before the close of the 12-month follow-up period. Specialists track the labor market and schooling/training activities of these JAG participants on a monthly basis.

As with JAG National, initial indications of JAG Nevada's success during its pilot phase are very promising. On average, JAG Nevada students enter the program with 7.95 identified barriers to success. These barriers range from academic measures such as not passing state proficiency (67 percent), low academic performance (67.73%), and excessive absenteeism (41 percent) to economic and social measures such as economic disadvantage (45 percent) and a lack of marketable occupational skills in demand in the local labor market (86 percent). According to the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) First Look Report 2010-11, 2011-12, Nevada's Graduation rate was 62 percent lower than all states and territories except for the District of Columbia. Early indications from JAG Nevada show much promise. Outcomes include a 73 percent employment placement for non-college going participants, which exceeds the 22 year national average of 56 percent. Nevada's need for highly effective strategies that yield measurable results to combat the dropout crisis is essential for Nevada's future economic prosperity and quality of life.

- Launch and/or expand the JAG program in public high schools: Nevada implemented the JAG program in 2013, after Nevada's Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation (DETR) directed \$750,000 to implement the JAG program in five high schools in Clark County, two in Washoe County, and one in Lyon County.⁵¹ Nevada aims to have the JAG program in 21 schools statewide by

the 2014-2015 school year and is likely to meet this goal after receiving unanimous approval from the Clark County School Board for expansion of the program in its schools.⁵²

Because many Latino (and African-American) students are often at-risk students, expansion of the JAG program could help Latino students. In Nevada, approximately 44 percent of the JAG program participants are Latino, and have parents with lower educational attainment rates, higher participation in programs that point to economic disadvantage (free and reduced lunch programs), have lower grade point averages and face significantly higher barriers to success when compared to students overall. With the second lowest graduation rate for Latinos, Colorado may want to explore launching a pilot of the JAG program in its public schools.

- Initiate and/or expand the JAG program in middle schools, focusing on schools with high percentages of Latinos and English Language Learners: The mission of JAG's Middle School Program is to help 6th to 8th graders to transition more successfully from middle to high school. Participants are provided with an array of services, including counseling, skills development, career association, and experiential learning experiences that will improve their academic performance, school behavior, attendance, confidence, participation and self-esteem.⁵³ Given the low high school graduation rates of Latinos and English Language Learners in the Intermountain West, the JAG Middle School Program could provide early intervention and support needed to successfully graduate these students. To date, of the participating JAG states in the Intermountain West region, only Arizona has implemented the JAG Middle School Program.
- Raise awareness about the JAG program and adopt early identification of potential participants: Policymakers should educate counselors, community organizations, and educational institutions about the JAG program opportunity and identify at-risk Latino students in the first two years of high school as potential program participants.
- Increase the number of bilingual college/career counselors in middle schools and high schools: Huge caseloads, poor training, and budget constraints have made quality college and career counseling a scarce commodity in public middle and high schools. Nationwide, a public school counselor now has an average caseload of 471 students.⁵⁴ The average caseload is rising. During the Great Recession, school districts laid off counselors and have not yet filled those positions. For example, in California, prior to the economic downturn, a counselor had a caseload of 810 students; today, the caseload is 1,016 today. For college counselors, the ratio in California is 500, compared to 239 nationally. This is unfortunate since for many students, particularly first generation students, high school counselors are their primary source of information about financial aid and college. Many of the states in the Intermountain West were hit hard by the Great Recession and reduced their staff sizes. Policymakers should now prioritize hiring for middle school counselors and high school college and career readiness counselors.

5. Improving Career Readiness

High schools need to strengthen the preparation students receive to join the workforce upon graduation. Given the fact that many Latinos may not enter two- or four-year colleges upon graduating, it is even more important that high schools promote and prepare Latino students for careers. In addition, All4Ed indicates that "very few high school graduates enter college with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed. As a result, they frequently must take remedial courses, costing them time and money that could be better used in pursuit of a degree."⁵⁵

- Encourage high schools to offer the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) as an assessment of college and career readiness: The National Career Readiness Certificate is an industry-recognized, evidence-based credential that certifies essential 21st Century skills needed for workplace success. This credential is used across all sectors of the economy and verifies reading skills, problem solving, critical thinking and work-related mathematical reasoning. Six states, including Arkansas, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Wyoming have adopted the NCRC as the state's high school exit exam. Some states are offering students the option of taking the NCRC in high school. For example, as part of the South Dakota WINS program, the NCRC was made available to as many as 4,000 students during 2013-2014 and will be made available to 8,000 in the 2014-2015 school year.⁵⁶
- Encourage the Nevada Department of Education to adopt the NCRC as its college and career readiness assessment: During the 2013 Legislative session in Nevada, legislators passed A.B. 288 (Chapter 506, Statutes of Nevada), which will result in, among other things, the addition of required end-of-course exams, and the adoption of assessments to measure students' college and career readiness. The Nevada Department of Education is currently reviewing various assessment instruments. Policymakers in the Intermountain West states should consider offering the NCRC in high schools with high Latino and ELL populations.
- Support Nevada's JAG program to offer the NCRC as part of its programming: Jobs for American Graduates (JAG) has a proven track record in preparing its high school graduates for the workplace. For example, over 60 percent of Latino JAG non-college enrolled graduates were employed full-time versus only 42 percent of their comparison group.⁵⁷ Nevada's JAG program is standing up a pilot project in White Pine County whereby high school students participating in JAG will have the opportunity to earn the NCRC. If the pilot is successful, other states in the Intermountain West should consider allowing the state JAG to provide its participants the opportunity to take the NCRC.

6. Reducing Disproportionality in Discipline

In the Intermountain West, Colorado and Utah have the highest disproportionality rates for student discipline for Latinos. In Texas, where Latinos comprise the majority of students in public schools, a longitudinal study by the Council of State Governments, in partnership with the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University, found that "nearly six in 10 public school students were suspended or expelled at least once between seventh and 12th grade."⁵⁸ This has implications for academic performance and graduation rates. For instance, school discipline has a 29 percent increase in high school dropout rates.⁵⁹ Below are possible policy measures for consideration.

- School districts should locate mental health professionals and social workers in high schools with high Latino and English Language Learner populations: A number of studies have demonstrated that locating mental health professionals on school campuses can lower disciplinary rates. This includes trauma counselors, substance abuse counselors, and social workers offering related mental health services (e.g. anger management, etc.). As an example, in Florida's Broward County, Superintendent Robert Runcie recently implemented alternative disciplinary approaches for the student body that is 29 percent Latino and 40 percent African-American, including student referrals to social workers and substance-abuse counselors, as well as other measures. Already "suspensions are down 66 percent, expulsions by 55 percent, and arrests by about 45 percent" in Broward County Public Schools.⁶⁰
- Monitor recent efforts in Colorado and Nevada to reduce the disproportionately in expulsions and suspensions by race/ethnicity: Community organizations and civil rights advocates should encourage

school administrators and elected officials to make data collection transparent and should advocate for early and frequent reviews.

C. Building the Infrastructure of Opportunity: Higher Education

1. Increasing the Affordability of Higher Education

A second critical component of the infrastructure of opportunity is higher education. Access to an affordable, quality education and institutional pathways of success are critical to building the infrastructure of opportunity for Latinos in the Intermountain West region.

The cost of higher education is rising, making it increasingly unaffordable for many low-income families, and even middle-class families to attend. Funding cuts following the economic downturn have led to large tuition increases. According to Demos, “nationally, average tuition at 4-year public universities increased by 20 percent in the four years since 2008 after rising 14 percent in the four years prior.”⁶¹ During 2008-12, average tuition increased by approximately 66 percent in Arizona and California.⁶² In Nevada, college tuition rates were raised 8 percent in 2011. In June 2014, the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents voted to increase tuition four percent annually for the next four years.

In the Intermountain West region, all but one state – Nevada – has a state funded or supported need-based financial aid program. Nevada is also ranked last in the nation in terms of college affordability with respect to median family income for students attending two year institutions. This suggests that there are extraordinary barriers for low-income students, many of whom are Latino and African-Americans to attend an institution of higher education.

- In Nevada, support proposed legislation to create a state-supported need-based grant program to provide financial aid to low-income students seeking to attend community college: In June 2014, Nevada’s Legislative Committee to Conduct an Interim Study Concerning Community Colleges recommended legislation to create a “state financial aid program for low-income community college students” with \$5 million in annual funding.⁶³ Eligible applicants must “demonstrate that they are prepared for the rigors of college-level coursework” and must be enrolled full-time.⁶⁴
- Explore ways to leverage student income: In 2012, University of Arizona, Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University, in partnership with the non-profit Live the Solution, launched AZ Earn to Learn, an innovative need-based financial aid program. Using an Individual Development Account (IDA) model, AZ Earn to Learn allows college students to save and pay for tuition and other approved education-related expenses. With a match rate of 1:8, the program matches \$500 of a student’s earned income with a mix of federal funding (from the Department of Health and Human Services/Assets for Independence) and university funding, totaling \$4,000.⁶⁵ Now funded with \$3.47 million in grants, AZ Earn to Learn is expected to be able to serve 1,565 students across Arizona in 2014.⁶⁶ This program, which emphasizes financial literacy, could benefit Latinos, many of whom “lack financial literacy.”⁶⁷ Policymakers in states in the Intermountain West should review the program and explore the feasibility of launching a similar program in their state.
- Enable undocumented immigrants to receive resident tuition at state public institutions: Arizona is the only state in the Intermountain West that does not extend resident tuition to any undocumented immigrants.⁶⁸ Other states in the region provide resident tuition to certain undocumented immigrants. For example, in 2013, Colorado approved legislation to provide resident tuition to undocumented immigrants who attended high school in Colorado for at least three years and graduated from high

school in Colorado.⁶⁹ In Nevada, undocumented immigrants who graduated from Nevada high schools are eligible for resident tuition but certain immigrants who did not attend high school in Nevada are not eligible for resident tuition.⁷⁰

2. Improving Retention and Graduation in Higher Education

Nationally, barely half of the students who start four-year colleges, and only a third of those enrolled in community college students, graduate. Numerous studies have documented the factors that are associated with failure to graduate or complete academic programs within a reasonable period. Among these are: a lack of finances, the lack of basic reading and mathematical skills, lack of mentors, changing career goals, difficulties in transitioning, and personal circumstances.⁷¹

Institutions of higher education and community organizations have developed programs to assist students to successfully complete their academic programs. Some have achieved more successful outcomes than others. The inset box highlights two programs which have demonstrated significant success helping students stay in school, achieve success, and graduate: Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) and Promise Pathways.

Drawing on some of the most successful programs for retaining and graduating students, policymakers should:

- Expand counseling and advising staff and increase the number of bilingual counselors: Most community colleges are understaffed in the areas of counselors and academic advisers. For example, Nevada's largest community college, the College of Southern Nevada has more than 43,000 students, almost a quarter of which are Latino and almost 40 percent of which require remediation.⁷² The National Academic Advising Association recommends one advisor/counselor for every 375 students in public two-year schools. Currently, at CSN, there is one counselor for every 1,356 students.⁷³ Enlisting counselors to help students "make informed choices about their education is a critical strategy to help increase student success."⁷⁴ Despite the growing use of technology to outreach to students and provide soft skills services (e.g. webinars on good study habits), many students "will still need the face-to-face interactions provided by advisors and counselors."⁷⁵
- Create incentives to enable students to attend college full-time, at least for the first year: On average, part-time students are less likely to graduate than full-time students. At the College of Southern Nevada, 33 percent of part-time students withdrew within their first year of college. Policymakers should explore ways to eliminate barriers that prevent students from attending full-time, such as providing enhanced financial aid and implementing block scheduling. Policymakers should also explore the feasibility of requiring all students that receive state-based financial aid to enroll full-time during the first year.
- Provide wrap-around services to support student success: The needs of Latino students may vary across the Intermountain West. Policymakers may want to survey Latino students on their campuses, identify the challenges faced by students, and then explore ways to address and mitigate those challenges. Possible challenges include a lack of transportation, the cost of textbooks and supplies, and the lack of affordable childcare.
- Explore evidence-based methods for assessing student skill level: A growing body of research suggests that standardized test and placement exam scores may not be the most accurate predictor of long-term student success. Instead, recent studies have found that "using high school transcript

information instead of test scores was predicted to lower severe placement errors by 10 to 15 percent. Using the best of either placement test scores or high school transcript information was predicted to lower the remediation rate by 8 to 11 percentage points while reducing placement errors and increasing college-level success rates.”⁷⁶ In light of new research, policymakers and educators should review the existing method of placing students and explore the feasibility of considering and piloting new methods.

Accelerated Study in Associate Programs

The City University of New York (CUNY) is improving retention and graduation through a new program that tries to remove many of the factors associated with academic failure. In 2008, CUNY rolled out the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) to confront the high dropout rate at its community colleges. Early results are quite promising: 56 percent of the first two cohorts (totaling more than 1,500 students) graduated, compared with 23 percent of the comparable group that did not participate in the program. The majority of ASAP graduates, more than half of who are Latino and African-American, are now pursuing a bachelor’s degree. While ASAP costs, on average, \$3,900 per student each year, its estimated lifetime benefits — from increased tax revenues as well as savings in crime, welfare and health costs — are approximately \$205,514 per associate degree graduate.

Arguably, the program’s success owes to the fact that it is addressing the primary reasons why students dropout. ASAP covers tuition that is not paid for by federal and state grants, pays for public transit, and gives students free use of textbooks (amounting to another \$900 in savings). Students are required to enroll full-time the first year. Students are also required to take a non-credit ASAP seminar that discusses academic planning, goal setting, and study techniques. Recognizing that many of its students work or have family demands, students take their classes in a consolidated course schedule (morning, afternoon or evening) and can access free tutoring services. Intensive counseling and advising is provided in the form of biweekly seminars and one-on-one advising (with a counselor who only has a caseload of 80 students). CUNY is now planning to triple the size of ASAP to 4,000 students by fall 2014, and is exploring possible expansion to its other schools.

Promise Pathways

At Long Beach City College (LBCC), Promise Pathways is improving retention and successful completion of courses. The program design was informed by evidence based analysis, which indicated that the “standardized assessment was a poor predictor of college performance” and that, instead high school grades were the “most powerful predictor of student success in college.” Building on this research, LBCC created a more accurate, evidence-based multiple measures placement system that placed students closer to their true level of ability.

The new method of placement helped triple the rate of successful completion of math and English in the student’s first year, which are critical early educational milestones that predict long-term success and graduation. Other Promise Pathways program components include: a requirement that students enroll full-time during the first semester, the creation of an academic success plan, and an emphasis on foundational or core skills (English, reading, and math). This innovative method of placement allowed LBCC to significantly improve student placement and achievement.

3. Introducing Innovation to Remediation

Many Latinos enter college ill-prepared for college-level courses. Consequently, many of them have to take remedial English and math classes. Nationally, more than fifty percent of students entering two-year colleges and nearly 20 percent of those entering four-year universities are placed in remedial classes. In New Mexico, 50 percent of the state's Latino high school graduates were required to take remedial classes upon entering New Mexico colleges⁷⁷; in Nevada, this rate was 37 percent.⁷⁸ In Colorado, 78 percent of Latinos entering community college required remediation, but only 40 percent of Latinos entering four year institutions needed remediation.⁷⁹ In 2011, at the College of Southern Nevada, Nevada's biggest community college, almost 19 percent of incoming students require remediation, compared to 56 percent at Nevada State College and 62 percent at Truckee Meadows Community College.⁸⁰ Nationally, 40 percent of remedial students never complete their remedial courses and less than ten percent graduate from community colleges within three years, and slightly more than one-third complete a bachelor's degree in six years.⁸¹

Recently, more schools have begun to introduce innovative ways to offer student remediation courses. Some of the innovative programming is described below.

Research shows that students may fear being stigmatized by their remedial or underprepared status.⁸² As such, Cerritos College in California is providing students who need remediation in English and math with a low-risk environment and free courses. Cerritos College now offers a non-degree track for students, which "allows entering students to measure their progress with tests before and after they take the [free] supplemental courses."⁸³ Additionally, Cerritos uses adaptive software that enables students to review and drill down on the areas where they need help. So "rather than forcing students that fail the placement test to take the entire class," they can direct time and resources to the areas that require greater review.⁸⁴

In Florida, community colleges are empowering students. First, high school graduates are no longer required to take placement exams and may opt to enroll directly in credit-earning classes. College advisers can recommend that students take particular remedial paths based on other academic indicators, like students' high school grade point average or SAT scores. But, ultimately, students can make their own decision about remediation. Older, adult students are still required to take the placement tests. But if they demonstrate that they need remediation, the colleges will now be required to offer them a choice between several developmental education options, including "co-requisite" courses in which remedial students get additional help or do additional work in traditional, credit-earning courses alongside non-remedial students.⁸⁵

At Nevada State College (NSC), the state's only 4-year public college, professors are exploring creative ways to help students successfully complete remedial education courses. Specifically, NSC has modularized its remedial math course, breaking a single course into two courses, each of which is two modules long.⁸⁶ This structure provides students with more checkpoints and allows them to receive credit for their work along the way. Students can pass up to three modules in a semester, which allows them to complete their remedial coursework more quickly. In addition, NSC has created a coordinator position for remedial math classes who has both teaching and advising experience. As such, the coordinator is able to direct students through the first part of their academic careers more effectively. Although in its early stages, early results suggest the program is having an impact: students who take the modularized math course do 13 percent better in their college level math courses compared to other students. Approximately 80 percent of students who completed the modularized math program passed their college

level math class, compared to 67 percent who took college level math courses without taking the modularized math remediation.

Recommendations for introducing innovation to remedial education, which is a critical chokepoint for many Latinos seeking higher education, are offered below.

- Explore new ways of offering remedial courses: Colleges across the nation are exploring new, creative ways of delivering remedial courses. Among these are new ways of assessing students' skill levels, new course structures, and new advising systems.
- Introduce culturally relevant literature in remedial and gateway English and writing classes: A number of programs, such as the nationally recognized Puente program, or Nevada State College's Nepantla bridge program, incorporate culturally relevant books and articles into their programming.
- Increase professional development funds for adjunct lecturers: Many of those who teach remedial math and English courses are part-time or adjunct lecturers. As such, they are not eligible for professional development funds. Yet, professional development funds could help adjunct professors learn new pedagogies or teaching styles to engage more effectively with students in remedial courses. Institutions of higher education should explore ways to allocate professional development resources to support part-time faculty teachers or provide targeted training on site.

D. Building the Infrastructure of Opportunity: Workforce Development

The unemployment rate among Latinos in the Intermountain West is high. In 2012, the average unemployment rate for Latinos in the Intermountain West region was almost 12 percent; for Latino youth, the average unemployment rate was 31 percent.

Due to the high unemployment rate, states and cities are exploring ways to improve job training, and workforce development opportunities for Latinos. Below are several recommendations that could strengthen job training programs and efforts to put Latinos in the Intermountain West back to work.

1. Improving Workforce Development Service Delivery

- Place bilingual counselors at workforce development centers (including One-Stop job centers): Given the high unemployment rate of Latinos in the Intermountain West, workforce development centers (and One-Stop job centers) should strive to have bilingual counselors in place to work with job seekers.
- Include representation from Latino businesses and service providers on workforce investment boards and industry councils: This could improve knowledge and awareness of some of the challenges faced by Latinos in the workforce, and could strengthen partnerships between the Latino community, community colleges, and industry.

2. Improving Job Training

- Offer an integrated bilingual curriculum: Workforce development specialists and community colleges in the Intermountain West region should explore developing integrated bilingual curriculum for various industries. For example, in Texas, the Texas Workforce Commission funded the development of programs that utilize an integrated (English literacy and vocational training) bilingual program model. In this model, students build conceptual understanding in their native language (e.g. how to

build or program a computer) while concurrently developing the English literacy skills necessary to perform job-related tasks and pass certification tests.^{87,88} A review of workforce development programs indicates that to date, Texas is the only state in the Intermountain West that has implemented this model.

- Offer industry-specific English as a Second Language/English Language Acquisition training: Short of developing and providing an integrated bilingual curriculum, workforce development specialists should provide relevant, tailored English language training that complements career or industry training. For example, if service and placement providers are offering training on solar panel installation, they should provide an English course that would incorporate the language of that industry. These classes should be offered on site. As an example of an innovative industry-community college partnership, Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC), an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution located in Western Nevada, provides customized training to its industry partners, which includes workplace literacy and workplace English as a second language.⁸⁹
- Increase the number of bilingual language certificate programs offered by colleges: Despite the growing Latino population and the need to provide bilingual services in the areas of health care, criminal justice, and education, there are very few industry-specific bilingual certificate programs offered by colleges in the Intermountain West. Some colleges, such as Colorado's Community College of Aurora, offer a Translation and Interpretation Certificate; others offer a Spanish/English translation certificate. Nevada's Truckee Meadows Community College offers two additional certificates: Spanish/English Medical Interpreting and Spanish/English Court Interpreting.⁹⁰ Community colleges in the Intermountain West should explore expanding the number of bilingual certificate programs, particularly in high growth areas such as business services, education services and counseling/ social work. Graduates armed with a Certificate in Business Services, for instance, could then fill jobs as technical assistance experts or outreach coordinators for microenterprise development organizations or SBA offices located throughout the Intermountain West region.
- Increase science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) training and awareness in the Latino community: By 2018, around 60 percent of the jobs in the Intermountain West region will require postsecondary training. Many of these jobs will require STEM skills. According to Brookings Institute, in Nevada, there is a \$33,500 wage premium for STEM jobs versus non-STEM jobs. As was discussed previously, Latinos in the Intermountain West tend to be concentrated in low-wage jobs in construction, agriculture, retail, and food service. Training and educating Latinos in STEM careers could improve earnings and strengthen job security. Workforce development specialists should offer STEM training and raise awareness in the Latino community about STEM jobs. One new innovative STEM training program is taking place at Workforce Connections, Southern Nevada's Workforce Investment Board. Workforce Connections is rolling out a STEM career pathways program, which provides free, hands-on, interactive workshops in the areas of 3-D printing, green energy, electricity, electronics, and robotics. Participants are free to enroll in as many workshops as they like. Once they decide on a career path in one of these areas, they enroll in two higher level modules. After completing the STEM modules, they continue down the traditional career pathways (e.g. pre-vocational services, eligible training provider list (ETPL) services, and certification).
- Promote the use of bilingual health care workers: Many communities have used health care workers to treat patients with diabetes, high blood pressure, etc. Following recent studies that document the

cost savings of using health care workers, a growing number of communities are reconsidering the potential ways to use community health care workers.⁹¹ Workforce development specialists and community colleges should explore the feasibility of offering a bilingual community health care worker/social worker certificate. In addition to building a pipeline to meet growing industry demand, bilingual community health care workers can also help address health care concerns of undocumented immigrants, who often lack healthcare coverage. Bilingual community healthcare workers could be deployed at community healthcare centers and public hospitals to manage the healthcare needs of undocumented immigrants.

E. Building the Infrastructure of Opportunity: Access to Capital

Following the Great Recession, the net worth of households fell. In 2009, the median net worth of white households was \$113,149, representing a 16 percent decrease from 2005 levels; \$5,677 for African-Americans, representing a 53 percent decline; and \$6,325 for Latinos, representing a 66 percent decline.⁹² Asset development, wealth and economic security are linked to better educational outcomes. A number of recommendations to build wealth among Latinos in the Intermountain West region are presented below.

- Build and strengthen microenterprise development institutions and Community Development Financial Institutions in Nevada: Nevada has a relatively low number of microenterprise development institutions and community development financial institutions, even when compared to states that have similarly sized populations. Policymakers, community groups, and businesses should identify policies that can support and strengthen these institutions and their activities in the state.
- Adequately regulate payday and other consumer loan products that can strip low-income families' wealth: With the exception of Arizona, the average annual interest on payday loans is 430 percent, ranging from 214 percent in Colorado to 564 percent in New Mexico. Payday lenders in Arizona are now capped at 36 percent. Policymakers should consider legislation that adequately regulates payday and car title loans. Taking steps to regulate payday lenders is critical in Nevada, particularly given the relatively low number of microenterprise development institutions and Community Development Financial Institutions that exist in Nevada, compared to other states in the Intermountain West region.
- Invest more in State Housing Fund Trusts and support the development of affordable housing: Most states in the Intermountain West region have state housing fund trusts, which support affordable, low-income housing. The exceptions are Colorado, which does not have a state housing trust fund, and California, which currently does not dedicate state resources to the fund. Policymakers should also explore opportunities for increasing the asset size of State Housing Fund Trusts and building low-income housing in Latino neighborhoods close to transit centers and community colleges with high enrollment rates among Latinos.
- Raise awareness about existing financial instruments, federal programs, and business services among Latinos and accelerate outreach efforts to Latino entrepreneurs and businesses: Many Latinos lack financial literacy and awareness about federal government-funded programs (including grants and loans) designed to help businesses expand. Financial institutions and community groups should accelerate efforts to raise awareness among Latinos about financial instruments (e.g., micro-loans, state matching 529 programs, individual development accounts (IDAs), etc.).

- State Small Business Administration (SBA) offices should have dedicated, bilingual specialists on staff who provide outreach to the Latino community, inform them of relevant programs (e.g. the Small Business Innovation Research/Small Business Technology Transfer (SBIR/SBTT) programs, which provide research funding to small businesses for feasibility testing, prototype development, and collaborative research with non-profit research institutions), and help navigate Latino entrepreneurs and businesses through the process.⁹³ Workforce development providers should provide bilingual financial literacy training on site.
- Offer bilingual services at microcredit enterprises and small business development centers: Many community development financial institutions and small business development centers in the Intermountain West region often lack bilingual counselors and technical assistance experts. These organizations should provide bilingual counselors, offer bilingual services and training, and increase outreach to the Latino community.

F. Social Justice Issues

- Support community groups that address labor and employment rights of undocumented workers: This is especially critical in states such as Nevada and California which have relatively higher rates of undocumented immigrants as a share of the labor force.
- Encourage judicial reform and strengthen programs to reduce the recidivism rate: Arizona and California have the highest incarceration rates within the Intermountain West; Colorado, Arizona, and Utah have the highest ratios of incarceration rates for Latinos to whites. Policymakers should participate in Justice Reinvestment Initiatives and work to strengthen community and government programs to reduce recidivism.

G. Conclusion

It is the belief of the Guinn Center that the long term economic growth trajectory of Nevada and its Intermountain West neighbors depends on the strength of the infrastructure of opportunity available to every one of its citizens, not just Latinos. A robust infrastructure of opportunity will strengthen the economic resiliency of entire communities. In this report, we chose to focus on one demographic group that is a significant (and growing) share of the population in most of the Intermountain West States. State governments should establish a system or method of evaluation that holds decision makers accountable for progress. As such, the Guinn Center offers the following concluding recommendations:

- For each state, the Office of the Governor should designate, in coordination with local government, an (existing) intergovernmental committee, agency or group of individuals (e.g., task force) whose purpose or mission it is to monitor progress on the key components of the infrastructure of opportunity and report progress on each factor annually to the legislature and the Office of the Governor. This designated agency or group of individuals should produce a report every year assessing progress on an agreed upon set of factors.
- The Office of the Governor should request that the respective government stakeholders create specific targets for improvement on the different components of the infrastructure of opportunity and designate individuals within respective government agencies to monitor progress on these goals.