Creating College Opportunity: Families and Communities as Partners in the College-going Process

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Why partnerships matter...

• The AZ Department of Education reported the following for 2012, four-year high school graduation rates:
  – All students 76.65%
  – African American 71.4%
  – Asian American 86.68%
  – Hispanic / Latino 70.33%
  – Native American 64.88%
  – Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander 63.35%
  – Migrant 75.12%
  – Limited English Proficient 23.42%
  – White 84.11%
Why partnerships matter...

Hispanic students continue to have the highest high school dropout rates and the lowest college enrollment rates when compared to their African American and White peers (NCES, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a; 2011b).

- Asian Americans ~85%
- White 69%
- African American 65%
- Hispanic / Latino 63%

- A little over half (59-63%) of the Latina/os who graduate high school enroll in postsecondary education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).
The Foundation of my Work

Funds of Knowledge

historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being; people have life experiences that have contributed to their knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Community-Based Research

engages the community as participatory partners in project design and implementation, values community knowledge and works towards shared understanding and improved ways to address problems (Israel, Eng, Schulz, Parker, 2005; Polanyi & Cockburn, 2003).

Community Cultural Wealth

recognizes the “knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression” (Yosso & Garcia, 2007, p. 154; Yosso, 2005).
History of my Work

Funds of Knowledge and College Ideologies: Lived Experiences among Mexican-American Families

School Experiences of Latina/o Students: A Community-Based Study of Resources, Challenges, and Successes

Parents in Transition: Perspectives of Parents of Students of color, First-generation, and Low-income Students as they Experience the Transition to College
What do we know about Latina/o family engagement?

• College-going activities encouraged as early as elementary school (Auerbach, 2004; Tierney et al, 2003).

• Latina/os have a history of engaged educational practices:
  – Fighting against oppressive educational systems (Valenzuela, 1999; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996).
  – Life lessons and consejos (Lopez, 2001; Espino, 2008).
  – Setting high standards and expectations (Treviño, 2004).
  – Instilling a foundation of *respeto* (Treviño, 2004) and *educación* (Kiyama, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999).

• The transmission of sociocultural values from families and communities acts as an important means of establishing positive college ideologies.
After receiving a map of the university from a college outreach program:

*Mother:* Even if I didn’t go on the tour and stuff, they still gave us maps of the [university]. And I still made her go, we went on little field trips just me and her and we found like the music hall and we got to see a band play there and then we went to the ballet.

*JMK:* So you did this all on your own?

*Mother:* mmhhm. With the map that hey gave us. I said, “we need to go here and here.”

(daughter – age 10)
College Practices in the Home: Creating college sounds!

The University of Michigan story:

Father: My oldest one’s already talking about Michigan.

JMK: How did she find out about Michigan?

Father: Playstation and me watching college football...but it’s true, if you watch sports on the weekends, of another school, it’s like wow.

JMK: Right, they show clips of the school.

Father: When she saw Michigan – first the colors. Boom. Then I showed her, “look at the marching band.” And then, she goes, “Let’s look up Michigan.” She just saw it and was like, “I want to go to that school.”

(daughter – age 11, learned the University of Michigan fight song)
Families’ pre-existing college knowledge

JMK: How about understanding college costs? Do you feel like you understand tuition?

Mother: I went through it with my husband so I was never scared of that.

JMK: Do you feel comfortable looking for financial aid and scholarships?

Mother: Yeah. Even if they wanted a loan and pay it back when you are done…it gets paid back.

JMK: So the affordability piece?

Mother: It doesn’t scare me.

(husband was attending local community college)
Families are committed to developing college-knowledge

My daughter, why I’m signed up for this program, she’s like, “You have to go to this program. Because this program is going to pay for my college. You have to go. “ Oh gosh, I told her I wasn’t going to be able to go and it just broke her heart. She was crying and crying. So I told her, “You know what, I’ll make it. I’ll be late, tell them I’ll be there.” And I remember I walked in like half an hour late, I was so embarrassed. It was like, “I’m here. Sign me up.”
What else can we learn from families?
Social networks & Social media

First-generation college families often have important social and familial networks that provide information about college and empower students to believe that college is a reality.

My nieces, they are going to college. Casandra [niece] is in her third year now. So hopefully by the time my daughter starts showing interest, Casandra will be there to answer questions she might have and stuff.

Families are savvy when it comes to social media.

So you got some of the parents who know how to Facebook, who know how to MySpace, but they don’t know how to look for scholarships. It’d be nice to have a central website.
Important Considerations

• Do not discount the college knowledge families already have. Instead, reinforce it and build on it.

• Use social media to inform families of important deadlines, scholarship opportunities, college-based events and programs, and community partners.

• Consider designating financial support for families to attend college visits and/or orientation programs.

• Develop college-going programming starting in elementary grades and include families in ways that are culturally relevant and responsive.
Action Planning: Family Partnerships

• How do you currently engage families at your school?

• What college knowledge and/or resources are currently represented in your students’ families and how can you tap into those resources?

• What messages do families receive about being involved at your school? How might those messages be reframed to:
  – Acknowledge the engagement of families outside of school walls?
  – Request partnerships with families based on their engagement practices?
  – Collectively develop a college-going culture for students?
Why should we consider the broader community?

• Many students of color gain resources and strength from their communities, who are often collectivist in orientation - Collectivist societies value interdependence, group synchronization, emotional attachment with families or parents, societal norms over individuality, and the subordination of individual aspirations to the aspirations of the collective (Fox, Lowe, & McClellen, 2005; Triandis, Chen, & Chun, 1998).

• Community organizations often work from a collectivist orientation serving as important forms of activism and advocacy.

• Communities of color and community organizations have long fought for educational equity.
### Community / School-Based Programs

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<th>Community-based programs</th>
<th>School-based programs</th>
<th>*Community-school based programs</th>
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<tr>
<td>Programs based solely in the community that have no presence (either formally or informally) in the schools such as the local Boys and Girls Club.</td>
<td>Programs that do not have presence and/or coordination based in the community. Include programs coordinated through colleges, like Upward Bound.</td>
<td>Programs based at a community organization with significant programming within and during schools. Like Puerto Rican Youth Development &amp; Urban League.</td>
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Benefits of Partnering with Community-School Programs

- Increased confianza
- Professional, academic and personal development
- Incentives for staying in school
- Cultivation of ability and confident
- Opportunity for students to help other students
- Opportunity to interact within one’s own cultural group and expand out to meet others from different races/ethnicities
- Opportunity for students to develop their own voice and sense of agency
- Increased college-going opportunities
- Enhanced college aspirations
Caring Adults + Familial relationships + Confianza = Social and Academic support

• Caring adults described using familial terms.
• Institutional agents (i.e. caring adults) provide key support for students as they navigate in school.

I mean Ms. Gallego, she’s the Latino Youth Development teacher. She’s like – I’ve got my own counselor, but she’s like my mother. My other mother. I’m really close to her, and I can actually talk to her and say some secrets.
Caring Adults + Familial relationships + Confianza = Social and Academic support

JMK: You said you passed through [referring to school]. What brought you around?

Student: AC [program mentor] helped me to pass.

JMK: How so?

Student: He kept my mind on track for the classroom, tried to help with my work.

JMK: Do you have other people like AC who are – I don’t know what you would describe him as, but somebody you could go to?

Student: An older brother.
Caring Adults + Familial relationships + Confianza = Social and Academic support

Interviewer 1: Entonces si sacas Latino Youth Development, si sacas Family Services, y estas aquí en [la escuela] y quieres hablar con alguien...

(Then, if you take away Latino Youth Development, if you take out Family Services, and you are here in [the school] and you want to speak to someone.)

Student 1: No tienes a nadien. (You don’t have anyone.)

Interviewer 2: Si no esta [program mentor] con quien habla?

(If it’s not [program mentor] who do you talk to?)

Student 2: Nadie. (No one.)
Community and school-based programs as Safe Spaces

You don't have to be something else outside of these four walls to impress everybody else. You can be yourself. You can say what you want. You can express how you feel. And we got the whiteboard so we can express whatever we feel. We can write it on the board. We got our signs everywhere. I'm really dedicated to this group.

- Space represented both literal safe area or room and a figurative space they could turn to for advice and support.
- Spaces also described as, “peace among chaos.”
Important Considerations

• Community-school based programs and especially the mentors who work with them do not represent a replacement of school staff, instead they are a valuable, additional resource for students to turn to.

• Access to these programs can be a significant moderator regarding student experiences in schools because of the positive role of institutional agents and resources.

• Such programs build on students’ cultural and linguistic identities and histories in ways that facilitate authentic relationships with mentors and other students.

• Community-school based programs offered students college campus tours, assistance with college applications and costs, and connections to summer program opportunities.
Action Planning: Community Partnerships

• What community-school based organizations / programs are currently represented at your school?

• What community-school based organization / program would you like to establish a partnership with?

• How can you grow this partnership beyond drop-in programming?
  – Established community center at the school.
  – Community center that empowers students to be responsible for the direction of the space (i.e. themes, topics, materials, decorations, etc).
  – Examine policies (budgets, MOAs, legal counsel) to determine what steps to take to fully integrate community space into school.
Thank you

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