Arizona’s Economic Imperative: Increasing Latino Degree Attainment

PHOENIX – Educating every student in Arizona is essential to ensuring our state’s economic prosperity, yet a growing portion of Arizona’s future workforce is falling short of essential degree attainment. This is particularly true of the fastest growing demographic in our state – the Latino population.

Arizona has an opportunity to lead the nation in closing the Latino student achievement gap and secure a future where every student, regardless of zip code, is prepared to succeed and become an active contributor to our state’s viable and growing economy.

Vince Roig, Founding Chairman of Helios Education Foundation, Dr. Michael Crow, President of Arizona State University and Paul J. Luna, President and CEO of Helios Education Foundation addressed these issues to local business and community leaders at an event on Thursday, April 30, 2015.

“If we do not address the Latino degree attainment gap in Arizona, our state risks becoming a second or third-tier economy,” said Vince Roig, Founding Chairman, Helios Education Foundation. “We are positioned for either greatness or peril. We must commit to greatness and take advantage of the unique opportunity we have to lead the nation in recognizing Latino student success as a true economic imperative.”

According to Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce, by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the economy will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school. However, only 35 percent of Latino adults in Arizona have any post high school training and a mere nine percent of Latino adults have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Latinos represent the fastest growing segment of Arizona’s population and Latino students are the largest proportion of our state’s total K-12 population. Yet Latino students trail their White peers in almost every education assessment category, including high school graduation rates. That, combined with the fact that Latinos are the largest segment of this state’s future workforce, makes the Latino education achievement gap Arizona’s top economic imperative.
“As a New American University, Arizona State is redefining itself in support of our changing student population.” said Dr. Michael Crow, President, Arizona State University. “We have set a goal to be the institution to provide opportunities for all Arizona students, and that means addressing the Latino student achievement gap. We know that our student population looks different than it did 20, 15, even 10 years ago and that it will continue to change as we head toward becoming a majority-minority state.”

It is imperative for Arizona’s future economic growth that community leaders from all sectors make Latino student success a priority in Arizona. Latinos will make up the majority of Arizona’s workforce pipeline tomorrow and far into the future. Improving Latino college success will contribute to Arizona’s ability to expand, attract and retain vital growth industries, and ultimately, to transform Arizona from a low-skill, service economy to a high-skill, knowledge-based economy. Arizona must ensure that all students not only graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and career, but also complete a postsecondary education.

“This issue is one of critical importance to Arizona,” said Paul J. Luna, President and CEO, Helios Education Foundation. “The good news is that Arizona has a great opportunity to lead the nation in recognizing Latino student success as an economic imperative and develop a blueprint for how we will close the Latino achievement and degree attainment gaps.”

**About Helios Education Foundation**

Helios Education Foundation is focused on creating opportunities for individuals to succeed in postsecondary education by advancing the academic preparedness of all students and fostering a high-expectation, college-going culture in Arizona and Florida. Through a decade of strategic partnership and investment, Helios has identified Early Grade Success, College and Career Readiness and Postsecondary Completion as the three most critical reform priorities in achieving our long term goal.

As an engaged foundation, embedded in communities across both states, the Foundation is contributing its knowledge, expertise and financial resources to better prepare students for college and career and to compete successfully in a globally-competitive economy. Since 2006, Helios has invested over $155 million in education-related programs and initiatives in Arizona and Florida. For more information about the Foundation, visit www.helios.org.

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