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## In Latino education, challenges remain formidable

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One-hundred and twenty-five years ago next month, President Grover Cleveland presided over the dedication of what would become one of New York's most iconic images: the Statue of Liberty. Lady Liberty has stood tall in New York Harbor for more than a century since, a symbol of the freedom and opportunity sought by so many immigrants to the New World.

While some were surely disappointed that the streets were not paved with gold, many found what they were looking for: the chance to climb the economic and social ladders through hard work, rather than luck of birth. And as people began flocking to our shores in droves, there was no longer just one kind of American; there were Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Irish Americans, and Italian Americans, all sharing the fruits of this great country.

Today, the United States is poised to become a majority-minority nation by 2050, with Hispanic Americans leading the way. In fact, Latino youth now represent the largest minority group in our K-12 schools and they are the fastest growing segment of students. However, they also represent the largest group of students dropping out of high school and, according to a new study released by the College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, only 19 percent of Latino students graduate from college.

To put that in perspective, the national average is around 41 percent. Making matters worse, the report also found that 45 percent of Latino students who make it to college will require some remediation. These students are rapidly falling behind. Our challenge — as educators, as parents, as Americans — is to summon the will to give them the support they need to achieve their full potential.

To support this mission, the Advocacy & Policy center has developed the College Completion Agenda. The Agenda and a companion State Policy Guide combine comprehensive research from nationally recognized sources with best-practice policy examples to formulate 10 key recommendations. Among them are implementing the best research-based dropout prevention programs; providing voluntary, universally available pre-school, and keeping college affordable — all measures that would have a significant impact on raising Latino college completion rates.

Several states have already taken action to address the growing education gap between Hispanic students and their peers, including Florida.

For example, the 2+2 Program provides a statewide course numbering system that makes it easier for students to transfer among community colleges and four-year institutions. In Florida, students who complete an associate degree at a community college can enroll in

and earn a bachelor's degree at a state university. This policy initiative has allowed Florida to achieve above-average graduation rates at colleges and universities.

Additionally, the Florida Partnership is a national model designed to increase rigor in Florida's public schools. Developed in 1999 as a collaboration between the state and the College Board, the Partnership provides training and support for Florida's teachers as they undertake the all-important task of preparing students for the transition from middle to high school, and then from high school to college. Over the past eleven years, Florida has tripled the number of Hispanic students considering post-secondary options and has seen a remarkable increase in the number of Hispanic students taking rigorous coursework, specifically Advanced Placement exams.

The state of Florida has been out in front of this critical issue for years, and today continues its efforts by striving toward a goal set by President Obama at the outset of his term: America once again leading the world in college completion.

At the College Board and at Miami Dade College, that is the single-minded mission — ensuring that every student has the opportunity to prepare for, enroll in and graduate from college. The latest research from the Advocacy & Policy Center reveals that we still have much work to do.

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