

College Access Para Todos: Sustaining the Latin American Coalition's Efforts to Connect Latinx Immigrant Youth to Higher Education

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Overview

In December 2015, College Access Para Todos – a youth-led initiative sponsored by the Latin American Coalition to equip Latinx immigrant students in Charlotte with the knowledge, skills, networks, and resources needed to effectively navigate the college readiness and application processes – was discontinued. Eight months later, under the leadership of a new Executive Director, regular and ongoing requests for college preparation assistance from Latinx immigrant families in the area inspired the Coalition to consider reviving the program. However, due to miscommunication among incoming and outgoing staff throughout the Executive Director's transition, the Coalition was left with a lack of clarity around why the program had been discontinued and whether it should return. Inspired by this dilemma, this project investigates the causes and consequences of the discontinuation of the College Access Para Todos program.

Scope of the Problem

- 1980 - 2016: The Charlotte metro area Latinx population grows about 1,000%
- 2001: Only 54% of U.S. Latinx students receive their high school diploma
- 2006: 1,400 undocumented students graduated from North Carolina high schools without access to in-state college tuition rates
- 2007: Only 12.7% of Latinx adults hold a baccalaureate degree, compared to 30% of White adults
- 2010 – 2014: Mecklenburg's Latinx population grows 15% - more than double White growth
- 2016: The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools system includes 33,878 Hispanic students, serving a population that is over 20% Latinx
- 2025: Latinos will comprise 25% of students attending U.S. public schools

Research Questions

How can the Latin American Coalition sustain its efforts to connect Latinx immigrant youth to solutions for college access?

- Why was the *College Access Para Todos* program discontinued?
- How did the discontinuation of the program impact different stakeholders?
- Should the program be revitalized? If so, why, and how? If not, why not?
- Should the Latin American Coalition's efforts to connect Latinx immigrant youth to solutions for college access take on a different form?

Methodology

10 Semi-Structured Interviews with Key Program Stakeholders

1. CAPT Co-Founder and Volunteer, Former CMS Student
2. CAPT Co-Founder and Volunteer, Former CMS Teacher
3. CAPT Co-Founder and Volunteer, Former CMS Student
4. Immigrant Welcome Center Manager, The Latin American Coalition
5. Executive Director, The Latin American Coalition
6. Former *College Access Para Todos* Participant
7. Parent of a Former *College Access Para Todos* Participant
8. Former CAPT Program Coordinator, The Latin American Coalition
9. Program Officer, The Leon Levine Foundation
10. Immigrant Services Program Director, Communities in Schools

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my advisers Dr. Hilton Kelly and Dr. Stacey Riemer and to CIS Director Dr. Fuji Lozada for your guidance. Thank you also to Whitney Smith, former Director of Advocacy and Civic Engagement at the Latin American Coalition, for all your assistance with this project. Finally, thank you to my interview participants and the awesome folks at the Latin American Coalition!

Goals for Program Improvement: Interpretations from Social Capital Theory

Bridging Familial and Professional Worlds

- More Frequent and More Meaningful Parent Engagement
- One-on-One, Personalized Approach with each Student and each Family
- Robust Partnerships between CMS, Colleges, Organizations Offering Scholarships, Donors, and the Latin American Coalition

Institutionalizing the Development of Student Resiliency

- Youth-led, Youth-designed, and Youth-centered Program Model
- Avoid Student Volunteer Burnout
- Emphasize Value of Seeking Financial Aid and Scholarships

Structural Barriers and Supplementing Existing Educational Inputs

- Explicit Focus on Undocumented and DACAmented Students
 - Support Measures for Safety from Deportation
 - Working with School Leaders to Provide Targeted Programming
- Support Alternatives to Traditional Colleges and Universities
 - Includes 2-Year Degrees, Certifications, and Training Programs
- Start Building a College-Going Culture in 9th Grade or Earlier

Achieving Goals for Program Improvement: Strengthening Organizational Effectiveness

Transforming Organizational Culture

- Shift Toward Philosophy of Empowerment rather than Rescue Mentality
- Maintain Reputation of Openness and Trust with Community

Financial Investment and Diversifying Sources of Funding

- If Revitalized, Make *College Access Para Todos* a "Core Program"
 - Staffing the Program and Devoting General Operational Support
 - Proactively Appreciate and Support Program Volunteers
 - Build and Grow a Diverse Base of Donors and Community Partners

Measuring and Communicating Impact

- Hire Staff and/or Equip Staff with Needed Evaluation Skills and Knowledge
- Invest in Effective Evaluation Tools and Relevant Data Tracking Technologies
- Align Program Goals with Desired Short-Term and Long-Term Outcomes
- Create Standard Operating Procedures for Regular Reporting of Progress

Conclusion and Recommendations

- The Latin American Coalition applied for a grant from the Levine Foundation for the 2015-16 fiscal year, then **withdrew their application** due to disarray resulting from a leadership transition and a lack of other large donors.
- Interviewees universally affirmed the need for a program assisting Latinx immigrant students in Charlotte with college preparation and **supported the revitalization** of the *College Access Para Todos* program.
- The decision as to whether the program should be revived depends upon (a) the extent to which **the need for college access support takes precedence** over other existing needs facing the Latinx immigrant community in Charlotte and (b) the **availability of human and fiscal resources** at the Latin American Coalition to sufficiently invest in the program's revitalization.
- To assess priorities for the community, the Latin American Coalition should either **conduct a needs assessment** using surveys, focus groups, or other feedback systems or collaborate with staff members internally to **determine community and organizational priorities** given available resources.
- If *College Access Para Todos* is revitalized, the updated program design should **incorporate insights** shared in the sections on goals for program improvement and strategies to achieve those goals.