



**Minneapolis, MN
Community Visit Report
October 18, 2011**

On Tuesday, October 18th, 2011, The Chicano Latino Affairs Council held a community forum at Las Mojarras Restaurant. The purpose was to capture the voice of the Latino community on education and economic development. We were honored by the participation of representatives of the city, community colleges, universities, nonprofit organizations, community members, and other groups. We had great support from local leaders, good promotion of the event, and a productive and engaging session.

Meeting Agenda:

- I. Introductions and Networking
- II. Review of CLAC's mission and goals
- III. Forum objectives
- IV. Education : Achievement Gap
- V. Economic Development
- VI. General discussion
- VII. Video – Latino Artists: A Community Vision
- VIII. Civic Engagement
- IX. Adjournment

Presenters:

Hector Garcia, *Executive Director, CLAC*

Host:

Eloisa Echavez, *Executive Director, La Oportunidad*
Daniel Bonilla, *Program Director, Latino Economic Development Center*

Participants:

1. Lester Collin, Council on Black Minnesotans
2. Michael Jones, Minnesota Parent Child Advocacy
3. Matt Kazinka, Latino Economic Development Center
4. Eduardo Nelson, Minnesota Home Ownership Center
5. Krystell Escobar, Farmer's Insurance
6. David O'Fallon, Minnesota Humanities Center
7. Marlene Rojas, Minnesota Immigrant Freedom Network
8. Dan Solomon, Office of Senator Al Franken

9. Aileen Brown, Twin Cities Daily Planet
10. Bruce Pomerantz, Department of Education
11. Laura Torres, Summit Academy OIC
12. Sibrena, Cleaning contracting
13. Kimberly Spates, Council on Black Minnesotans
14. David Martinez, Wells Fargo
15. Maxie Rockymore, Department of Human Services

Minutes:

The meeting took place at the dining hall of Las Mojarras restaurant.

CLAC's Executive Director Hector presented meeting agenda, introduced, and thanked hosts. He presented an overview of CLAC's mission and goals. He also invited Eloisa Echavez to discuss her work at La Oportunidad and Matt Kazinka to briefly present on the Latino Economic Development Center.

Hector made a presentation of statistics on the Latino education achievement gap. She pointed out that Minnesota's high-school graduation disparity between Latino and European American students is one of the worst in the U.S., but the MN Latino graduation rate is near the national Latino median rate. The situation in Minneapolis and the surrounding area is the lower as in the rest of the state; this area has a 61% high school graduation rate in four years for Latinos.

Hector presented data and comments on economic development in Minnesota and the need for an educated workforce in the state. He referred to a published study from Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce "Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018." This study indicates that Minnesota will be the second state in terms of the need for a well-educated workforce, meaning that some higher education will be required by 70% of the jobs.

Community Participation:

- What can we do about social mobility for the poor? Strongly encourage working on focusing educational outcomes for mobility and families that move around often.
- ED: That's very common, especially for families with agricultural workers. We are interested in solutions for this issue.
- One of my takeaway points is that people don't realize how high the stakes are. This is the fastest growing population in the state and this nation is dramatically underperforming educationally. They aren't "in the pipeline" to become the next generation's leaders. We should all be much more concerned about this. The achievement gap is often viewed through today's viewpoints and not ten years down the road and the problems that come about there. There is no room to just tweak the system and see if it performs two percentage points better. What if

we collaborated 50 programs throughout the state that are really reaching kids and have them show us what is really working and create policy from the bottom-up?

- This data and this message must be presented to the community and it must come in terms that we can understand. The Latino community doesn't really even know. They're too busy working, working, and working. The community needs to know what is going on and brings these issues to them.
- It's both sides. We need to be really compelling to those in power, but also, there is a very strong message that needs to be communicated to the stakeholders. It's the roofers and the laborers whose children are suffering. They are far more engaged in paying insurance and getting by than in their children's education and grades.
- There is a statistic that says 84% of Latino parents are satisfied with their child's education, which has to mean they are unaware of what is truly going on with their child. It might be they are unaware, they don't care, etc. Poverty is directly related to educational performances for schools. Any school with a 50% poverty rate, nationwide, the performance rate just plummets. There are many distractions: drugs, domestic violence, hunger, etc. The Twin Cities public schools are doing a good job; I think schools are starting to realize that they need to step up. St. Paul Public School Foundation has invited the private industry to invest and make themselves aware of these issues. Everyone is trying to find that silver bullet. This needs to be a systemic and collaborative effort. One example that works is at Henry Sibley High School, how can they do so well when other schools are a mess? The U of M has a multicultural fraternity that has an 85% graduation rate from the U of M, when the overall graduation rate is 40-50%. How do we duplicate these successes?
- Just wondering that with the cost of colleges here, why bother for some students?
- There are so many kinds of attitudes and poverty that hinder students for aiming for higher education. Maybe people are waiting for the Department of Education to do something different, but what if we collaborate and let the revolution start from the bottom upward? There is a parallel in the justice system where they collected information to change policing and punishments. It's not going to happen from legislation coming down, although you do need good policy. It takes a look at real data to find where the successes are, you can build there. The justice system has done that and worked on their data-driven best practices. Fundamental point: there are programs that are working right now, even for kids from distressed families.
- If you look at those programs and put them in urban settings, that's where the problems begin. Where do you draw the line in making the decision about who it is you're going to target? When do you say: "This is all that I can do"? Independent school districts have the freedom to achieve their very definite goals, but you need all kids moving in the same direction. How do you level the playing field for a child the minute they walk into a classroom? If we don't all move, that graduation number is not going to change. We have to be realistic; some kids just aren't going to graduate. How do you figure out multiple pathways toward success?
- ED: A lot of money has been invested in our communities. The power brokers are asking why they should give even more money to these efforts. The issue is the mindset we have when we

approach this. We have to talk about what is not working. How do we change the mindset and make it functional?

- A lot of people are hearing through referendums that taxpayers are demanding that we figure out a different way. To have an honest conversation with superintendents and others is difficult. Those who are in power and adults who have children need to get involved in the system and understand how it works. We'll continue to limp along until there is no one here that can work because they aren't qualified. You have to lobby the community and the government.
- There was a study that school districts are looking at mobility more often to compare to performance but also for budget reasons. They lose money if enrollment goes down. If you're going to study mobility, you should be contacting school districts and speaking with their intake office to see why parents move their children from school to school. It shouldn't be, "Why are we losing kids?" The districts are making it seem like they are more interested in the money than in the progress of the students. They don't share feedback between the districts either. Ultimately, the conversation will change in how they evaluate themselves.
- I see the lack of involvement on the parental side. I'm guessing that is a strong factor on a child's performance. On the way here, I was listening to NPR and a caller was frustrated with the Latino community in their area because of the limited number of resources for schools. When you talk about programs and agencies and so on, that's not a conversation to be having right now with this climate. We need to be saying: how do we move from this community from the bottom? How can we, in the private sector, motivate Latinos to see the benefits of something like car insurance but not engage them about their child's education? The parents aren't neglectful, but their focus on work is so dominant. There's nothing out there to excite parents.
- In some places they do reach families and the children. Every successful school has engaged families, no matter what the income level is. Schools can't fix everything by themselves—we need to say this out loud and often. What strength can we build on for now?
- ED: A big barrier is talking about the accountability of the Latino community. We don't have the luxury of being quiet about it anymore. We need to approach it from both ends, with things like best practices but also doing things to make the community more responsible. Part of the problem is the system, but part of it is our problem. I often tell people in government that the only way to solve any of this is through partnership. If the people in leadership view us as a liability that needs to be funded, they'll do it, but they won't like it and we will resent it as well. We can't afford not to talk about this.
- I appreciate this conversation so far. Senator Franken is working on protections for foster children, who often bounce from school to school and he is also working to preserve Pell Grant funding. Early childhood education needs additional resources. Schools are struggling with how to deal with accountability, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but it's how to do it right. The current testing models need to move to growth models.

Next Action Steps:

- Plan a follow up meeting with more community leaders
- Define a strategy to integrate and better help immigrant communities

- Define a strategy to promote Latinos and Latino culture in Hennepin County and present these videos. Mail DVD to those that requested it.
- Participants would like to help determine and analyze how to reduce the education achievement gap. When a strategy is developed to reduce education achievement gap, they would like us to include this area and city and help them with their issues in education.

Meeting adjourned at 7:05 pm