



Weaving a Web of Support for Students

ASSESSING ENLACE NEW MEXICO



Recognizing the need to provide financial contributors and community stakeholders with a reliable overview measuring its success in meeting its stated goals and objectives, the leadership of ENLACE New Mexico sought the results of an objective review performed by an outside independent entity. In 2007, ENLACE selected *Excelencia in Education* to conduct a program audit examining its performance based on the information and data collected to date.

Excelencia in Education, a 501(c)(3) organization based in Washington, D.C., aims to accelerate higher education success for Latino students by providing data-driven analysis of the educational status of Latino students, and by promoting education policies and institutional practices that support their academic achievement. *Excelencia* is building a network of results-oriented educators and policymakers to address the U.S. economy's need for a highly educated workforce and civic leadership.

Excelencia in Education continually identifies, assesses and catalogs effective efforts by communities, institutions and states to accelerate Latino student success in higher education. Too few communities demonstrate the willingness to take risks and make systemic changes in education on behalf of Latino students.

Excelencia's audit of ENLACE New Mexico found it to be a powerful example of a community and state collaborative willing to invest in programming to ensure Latino students, and all students, have the opportunity to attain high levels of academic achievement.

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In a state where the majority of the population is minority, how youth maneuver through the educational system plays a determining role in the economic well-being of the state. ENLACE New Mexico was created in 2001 to empower the community, students and educators to affect positive change in the public educational system, leading to increased student success, not just for Hispanics, but for all students. An acronym for **ENgaging Latino Communities for Education**, ENLACE also has meaning in Spanish — “to link or weave together.”

As part of a national initiative to increase higher education attainment for Latino students, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation provided the initial funding to support three regional ENLACE sites in New Mexico, as well as a statewide collaborative from 2001 to 2009. In 2004, ENLACE New Mexico secured support from the New Mexico Legislature in addition to other state and national funders and has now expanded to five regional sites.

ENLACE is rooted in the recognition that obstacles exist between educational institutions themselves and the public they are intended to serve. The fragmented systems of Pre K-12 and higher education tend to operate independently, in isolation, from each other and parents, students and community.

The sustaining strategy used by ENLACE is to build strength and capacity to better serve students through collaboration. Through this active and purposeful collaboration, communities can bridge the major disconnects in the educational system to bolster the academic achievement of students. Smoothing the transition process from one level of the educational pipeline to the next can increase high school retention and graduation rates and propel students toward successful completion of their postsecondary education goals.

Partnerships are the tool ENLACE uses as the vehicle for change. The ENLACE model forges partnerships between educational institutions and students, parents, educators and community leaders. Some of these partnerships include public school districts

from preschool through high school, community colleges and universities. Because of their high enrollments of Hispanic and low-income students, efforts are centered on public institutions of higher education that are designated Hispanic-Serving Institutions.¹

For ENLACE New Mexico, the critical partner to develop an effective and equitable educational system, however, is *la gente*, the individual members of the community and community-based organizations who are the primary stakeholders. ENLACE concentrates its efforts to promote parental and community involvement in schools to boost student achievement and aspirations. ENLACE works to serve as a catalyst unleashing the capabilities of the community to enact positive changes in public schools.

The ENLACE collaborative is headquartered at the University of New Mexico School of Law in Albuquerque. As ENLACE New Mexico has expanded to serve more students by adding sites, it now serves five regions² across the state:

- The central region led by the University of New Mexico
- The eastern region led by the Clovis Municipal School District
- The northeastern region led by Santa Fe Community College
- The northwestern region led by San Juan Community College
- The southern region led by the New Mexico State University



The 2007 program audit found a lack of clarity in the descriptions of goals and objectives employed at the different sites. In response, the strategic plan adopted by ENLACE New Mexico in 2008, now clearly defines ENLACE’s overarching goal. **ENLACE’s goal is to transform New Mexico’s educational systems in order to dramatically increase the academic and socio-economic success of its greatest resource — young people.** This goal is directed by a vision of an educational system that develops talent, builds leadership and transforms communities; working within an educational system comprised of schools reflective of New Mexico’s history with teachers who comprehend the state’s rich diversity is an asset.

In support of its goal, the audit identifies two primary objectives of ENLACE New Mexico:

- To bring together disparate groups for a common cause to create common ground
- To create a seamless “flat” structure from the existing hierarchy in education

ENLACE New Mexico provides a framework for including promising practices throughout the educational pipeline, with each regional site providing a diverse menu of program offerings

tailored to suit its own community’s strengths and needs. Each site serves as a virtual laboratory for adapting and testing existing and new programs. Some of the programs and strategies mirror traditional educational interventions or practices, such as mentoring, tutoring and family outreach. Others have been adapted from programs of other organizations operating in different parts of the country that have been identified by studies as “best practices.”

The ENLACE model features a variety of program components that fit generally into three integrated themes:

- **Strengthening supports for students** by linking schools, families and community members through mentoring, tutoring and leadership development to support student achievement in a rigorous college preparatory curriculum
- **Changing educational institutions** at all levels of the P-20 continuum to be more responsive to the needs of underserved students by engaging families and communities in partnerships to leverage public and private resources that offer creative ways to address education
- **Creating a seamless pathway to college** through P-20 alignment and increased rigor in curricula and standards, improved cultural literacy and teacher preparation to ensure that students make smooth transitions from one level of education to the next

Cross-referencing between sites is encouraged, with sites sharing information about the effectiveness of their own programs and activities. ENLACE participants observe what programs are working at the local level and integrate these programs into an educational movement for change in their communities.

While current programs supported by ENLACE have evolved and changed, the audit determined that implementation strategies remain focused on the overarching mission of meeting the needs of students and families to improve academic achievement and graduation rates. Although each site establishes its own priorities, programs and performance measures, they are aligned with the three operational themes of the ENLACE model.

STRENGTHENING SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

The following is an abbreviated list of some of the diverse initiatives ENLACE sites are implementing to strengthen support for students:

- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Tutoring Program
- AVID College Prep Program
- Creating Opportunities and Making Progress After School (Los C.O.M.P.A.S.)
- EXITO/Pathways to Success
- Leadership, Educational Access, Academic Support and Parent Involvement (LEAP)
- Los Compañeros Mentoring Program
- Mexican American Law Student Association (MALSA) Partnership
- Saber y Hacer Program
- Student Ambassadors (Early Intervention) Program
- Student Leadership Development
- Summer Bridge Program

As many of ENLACE's programs begin working with students at middle or high school — some even as early as pre-kindergarten — calculating the graduation rates of participants as a measure of success requires more longitudinal data than is currently available. The audit examined the measuring tools employed by the sites and the consistency of data collection and data use from program to program and site to site.

The June 2006 through January 2007 impact report provided by ENLACE indicates more than 83 percent of ENLACE graduates went on to college. Additionally, ENLACE reports that the majority of its programs have a 97 percent retention rate of students in the educational pipeline.

The increased number of participants in ENLACE programs demonstrates a strengthening in support provided for students. When ENLACE expanded its site in Northern New Mexico, the number of students served more than tripled. According to the September 2007 participant report, more than 8,500 students were active in its programs. Involvement ranged from pre-kindergarten to college, with approximately one-third of the participants enrolled in college.

CHANGING EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

ENLACE's strategy to make educational institutions more responsive to the needs of Latino students engages parents and communities in partnership to leverage public and private resources. The following is a partial list of the primary ENLACE programs undertaken to accomplish this:

- Action Research & Service Learning
- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Parent Nights
- Family and Youth Resource Centers
- Family Centers
- Leadership, Educational Access, Academic Support and Parent Involvement (LEAP)
- Parent Centers
- Parent Leadership Development

Both students and parents participate in the majority of ENLACE's programs designed to engage families and communities. The program with the greatest numbers of participants is ENLACE's Family Centers. According to the ENLACE's 2007-2008 annual report, more than 5,200 students and 9,400 family members were served by Family Centers. This represents approximately 60 percent of the total number of student participants in all ENLACE New Mexico programs. Family Centers established in three high schools in the Albuquerque Public School system proved so popular that the client base increased from 300 in their first year to 1,000 students and parents by the midpoint of the second year. The New Mexico Legislature recognized the Family Center model in its Family and Youth Resource Act, and the model is proving suitable for replication elsewhere in New Mexico.

School officials credit ENLACE for helping their districts cut dropout rates by working with parents to bring students back to school. The Family Center's concept of "knock and talks" utilizes volunteers to physically track down dropouts and attempt to convince them to re-enroll in school.

In addition to developing parents' skills as educational coaches, ENLACE strives to increase family literacy and help parents advance their own education. ENLACE's documentation indicates it is meeting its established benchmark of serving hundreds of family members each year through its advocacy in education and leadership development.



CREATING A SEAMLESS PATHWAY TO COLLEGE

ENLACE works to align the academic services provided to students by the educational system and provide a smooth transition from one level of school to the next while increasing the rigor in curricula and standards to prepare students for college. To better serve students, ENLACE focuses on cultural literacy and supporting teachers as they learn how to help students from minority or low-income families succeed. The following is a list of some of the programs ENLACE sites have implemented to create seamless pathways to college:

- Academic Curriculum for Excellence (A.C.E.)
- Champion Teachers Program
- Cultural Competency Training Workshops

- Exito! (Success for University Students)
- Hispanic Teacher Pipeline (HTP)
- Parent Civic Engagement
- Student Ambassadors Program
- Summer Bridge Program

A grant from the College Board supported ENLACE's efforts to create a road map to higher education. Tapping the combined expertise of middle and high school teachers, assistant principals and ENLACE's experience in working with families, ENLACE developed *Saber y Hacer*, a 63-part, skills-based college preparatory program for grades 6-12.

ENLACE NEW MEXICO COLLABORATIVE

The ENLACE New Mexico Collaborative focuses on leveraging resources for the entire state of New Mexico, while facilitating each regional site's capacity to meet the needs of their respective communities. The differences in programming from site to site complicate coordinated management, particularly in the area of data collection and evaluation. The Collaborative, however, recognizes the need for greater coordination of services, programs and on-going assessment of impact and is working to improve these efforts.

The Collaborative lists its priority areas as statewide strategies in policy, evaluation, communication and the development of student leadership. Students, parents, teachers and ENLACE leaders work together to identify effective strategies for supporting Latino students' education. The diverse representation characterizing ENLACE partnerships contributes to the Collaborative's well-rounded view of statewide issue,

While some of the partners are more experienced in developing policy, the ENLACE New Mexico Collaborative takes pride in integrating community voices to develop its policy recommendations. ENLACE creates an opportunity for Latino and other underserved families, many without strong English language skills or educational achievement themselves, to gain confidence in their capabilities to serve as advocates for their own children, as well to assume leadership roles promoting the betterment of children in their communities. As students sense their opinions are listened to with respect and help shape the final recommendations for changes in state policy, their commitment to support those efforts intensifies.

When ENLACE organizes its annual Legislative Day, community members, families and students converge at the New Mexico Legislature to advocate to sustain the work underway at the local community levels and for replication of the strategies identified as successful. By sharing their personal experiences with ENLACE programs, these newly empowered community activists provide convincing cases for the legislature.

Critical measures for gauging the impact of ENLACE's policy work in forwarding its goals and objectives are the statewide



replication of its programs, the inclusion of its representatives in education policymaking bodies, and the funding support allocated to it by the New Mexico State Legislature. The most significant endorsement of ENLACE's activities is the inclusion of the ENLACE Family Center model in House Bill 212 as a replicable activity for support in 2004. Additionally in 2004, House Joint Memorial Bill 35 unanimously passed by the New Mexico Legislature requested that

ENLACE New Mexico programs be represented on public education department task forces, councils and advisory groups. Following the program audit, ENLACE reported that in 2007 the New Mexico State Legislature authorized the transfer of \$1.65 million to fund the ENLACE Collaborative on a recurring basis in the general appropriations act. In 2008, the New Mexico State Legislature approved \$1.45 million for ENLACE initiatives. During the 2008 legislative session, funds were placed into the state budget for ENLACE to create and oversee a task force aimed at researching issues affecting the high student to counselor ratio. The task force will provide policy recommendations to the state legislature.

STATEWIDE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

ENLACE works to increase awareness of its programs and activities to improve student opportunity and achievement. Among ENLACE's achievements is the growth of recognition of its programs throughout the state and nationally.

- The New Mexico Legislature endorsed the Family and Youth Resource Centers as a model for replication and the state's substantial investment in ENLACE programs.
- ENLACE was recognized by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans and offered as a model to emulate for its work with parents and communities.
- ENLACE New Mexico was selected as a semi-finalist for the national Examples of Excelencia, a national initiative to systematically identify and honor programs boosting Latino students' college enrollment, performance and graduation.

EVALUATION STRATEGIES

Key to effectiveness is having program evaluation methods based on accurate design and methodology that will provide the means to gauge actual results for students. The ENLACE umbrella encompasses more than 25 programs in multiple communities, each with diverse partners. As part of their ongoing assessment of what is and what is not working, leaders of the ENLACE Collaborative determined the existing evaluation program was not producing the information they needed to respond to legislative and funding inquiries. In order to more accurately determine the outcomes of their programming efforts, they restructured the system of evaluation for the statewide Collaborative.

The first component of the revised evaluation approach created an ENLACE Evaluation Team comprised of research scientists from the University of New Mexico and New Mexico State University. The team completed the first evaluation report in 2008. Secondly, the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute was brought in to conduct a more integrated and comprehensive evaluation of ENLACE's efforts statewide. The third ongoing component of evaluation is participants' and leaders' own cluster evaluations to determine the more immediate impact of program activities for potential changes or replication.

CONCLUSION

While the goal of ENLACE is to increase the graduation rates of underrepresented students in high school and college, the strategies and impact of program efforts span the P-20 educational pathway. Because the seeds of college-going are planted early, changing conditions in elementary, middle and high school and in the community are an impact of ENLACE not easily captured in standard evaluation practices.



A critical premise of ENLACE is that partnerships can result in systemic changes as local schools, colleges and universities work together in new ways. In addition, connecting disenfranchised communities to the educational process can shift the work from a series of disconnected projects into an educational movement. ENLACE's theory of action assumes investing in multi-pronged strategies will create the student-level and systems-level impacts that define ENLACE's goals and objectives. Therefore, getting incremental results, even if they are limited improvements in a small arena, signals change is possible and provides momentum for sustaining ENLACE's work.

As ENLACE New Mexico continues to grow and evolve, participants will face continuing challenges. Establishing partnerships that will outlive fleeting external funds requires building relationships and laying down community roots to address educational disparities for the long term. In turn, these partnerships signal to students that their educational achievement matters to everyone in the community — *toda la gente*.

Primary sources of information for the program audit include grant reviews, program evaluations and public documents provided by ENLACE staff and other partners. Interviews were conducted with ENLACE staff, participating students and families. Elected officials and other policy leaders in New Mexico were also asked for their critical observations about ENLACE's work. Finally, *Excelencia* in Education staff observed ENLACE in operation during three sites visits and worked with senior staff to update program information throughout 2008.

1 Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are colleges and universities where total Hispanic enrollment constitutes at least 25 percent of total enrollment.

2 Two regions were added while the program audit was underway; therefore no performance data about these new locations was available.



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