

# What we bring with us: Investing in Latinx students means investing in families

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## CONTEXT AND IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Since 2000, national college enrollment rates of Latinx students—many from low-income, first-generation backgrounds—have increased 12%; a similar increase (11%) is reflected in the University of California system. While such growth better reflects the state’s demographic patterns and drastically shifts the demographic landscape of higher education, many underlying structures of institutions still do not reflect the cultural values, and thus enrollment and matriculation expectations, of these students. Robust literature documents the prioritization of familial connections for Latinx students and the extensive ways these students contribute and support family while balancing school demands. Low-income, first-generation Latinx students also draw on these strong familial commitments and motivations (e.g., giving back to community) as a source of strength for navigating and persisting through college. When universities do not recognize these important familial values, students must decide between helping family or doing well in school—which complicates their capacity to perform academically. Thus, to serve low-income, first-generation Latinx students—and to facilitate their pathways to and through college—means to invest in their families. Such investment is essential for meeting state-wide goals of graduating diverse future leaders and building a diverse workforce.

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## WAYS OF INVESTING: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS GROUNDED IN RESEARCH

Supported by practical and empirical evidence, a range of approaches—from small interventions to larger policy changes – illustrate how to invest in the educational pathways of low-income, first-generation Latinx students and their families.

1. Integrate the importance of family and community via university messaging (e.g., welcome letters, program websites) or course assignments.
2. Provide substantive funding for institutional programs and initiatives. Some examples include funding for college knowledge days in community neighborhoods, parent panels focused on supporting students, college navigation courses for parents, or fully-funded family visit days/events or family conferences. Such efforts provide critical resources for unveiling the hidden rules of the higher-education game in culturally-relevant ways.
3. Address the affordability of college and offer paid professional opportunities through more robust federal funding initiatives. Such support reduces tension in forcing students to choose between paid work that supports their families and unpaid opportunities (e.g., research, internships) that support their academic and professional development.
4. Provide more basic needs support (e.g., housing, food) directly through federal policy funding to counter the effects of poverty for students and their families. This support recognizes students' concerns about the well-being, safety, and livelihoods of family members as they attend college.