

## Challenges towards Achieving Higher Education for Latinos in Utah

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### Abstract

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Different studies have shown that the Latino population consistently does not pursue higher education to the same degree as members of other racial groups. In Utah, the Latino population represents 17% of the student population and continues to increase. As an important minority in the state, this paper will analyze different problems that Hispanic's students face such as economic barrier, lack of documentation, social barrier, and language. This research has shown that graduation gap between White and Hispanics has decrease from 24% in 2010 to 10% in 2014. Community asset mapping revealed top programs in the community that have helped youth to overcome economic, social, and language barriers challenges for the Latino community.

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**Keywords:** Hispanic education, Education GAP, Community asset, Language barrier.

### 1. Introduction

The Latino population in the U.S has increased significantly during the last decades, but many of these people are not able to realize all their human rights in their new nation. The Latino population in 2000 was 35,305,818 and it has increased by 45% in the last 10 years. The Latino population in the U.S. for 2010 was 50,477,594, which is slightly greater than the population of the entire country of Colombia at 47,551,000. However, the Latinos still represent a minority group in a country with 308,745,538 people (The Hispanic Population, 2011). Many members of this group struggle to fully participate in this country, and one reason is that they do not participate in higher education to the extent that they need to in order to be empowered to as a race and a people in the United States.

The Latino population consistently does not pursue higher education to the same degree as members of other racial groups. An example is given by Andres Oppenheimer in an interview with a high executive of learn that the Microsoft elite research team has 800 people and from these only 1% were Latinos. In another interview with John Gage research leader for the Sum Microsystems company has 8,000 people but only 15 of them are Latinos meaning only 0.2 percent (Oppenheimer, 2010). This numbers show the sad reality that, Latinos possess the highest high school dropout rates and the lowest college attendance rates of all racial and ethnic groups (Suarez-Orozco&Suarez-Orozco, 2009). Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, Hispanic for 2014-2015 is 77.8% (ED Data Express, 2017). In Utah, only 16% of Latino adults possess an associate degree or higher, compared to 40% of all adults (National Center for Education Statistics). This study will examine the economic, familial, and language barriers that prevent Latino youth in Utah from pursuing higher education. The author will additionally assess the value of several community organizations that are attempting to combat these barriers, create a community assets map, and offer recommendations based on a human development perspective of education.

### Utah Education Statistics

Table 1 shows the percentage of students from different racial groups in Utah. Hispanics represent the largest minority group at 17% of the student population in the state.

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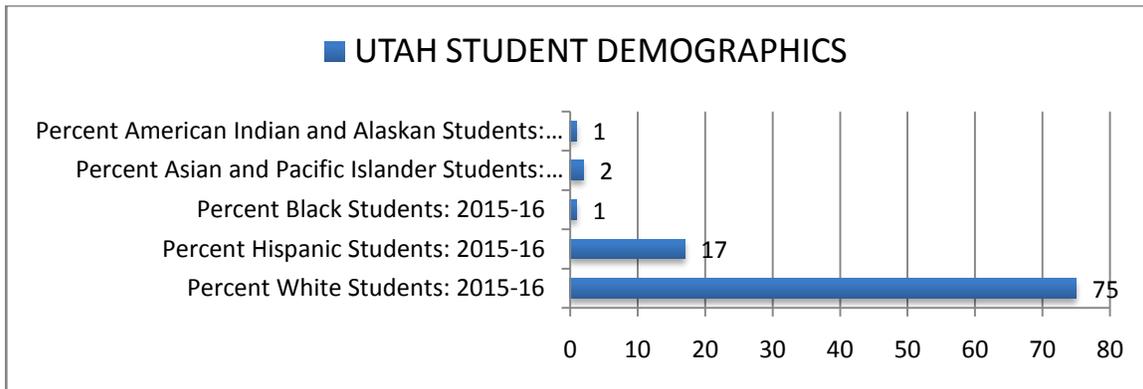
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Table 1

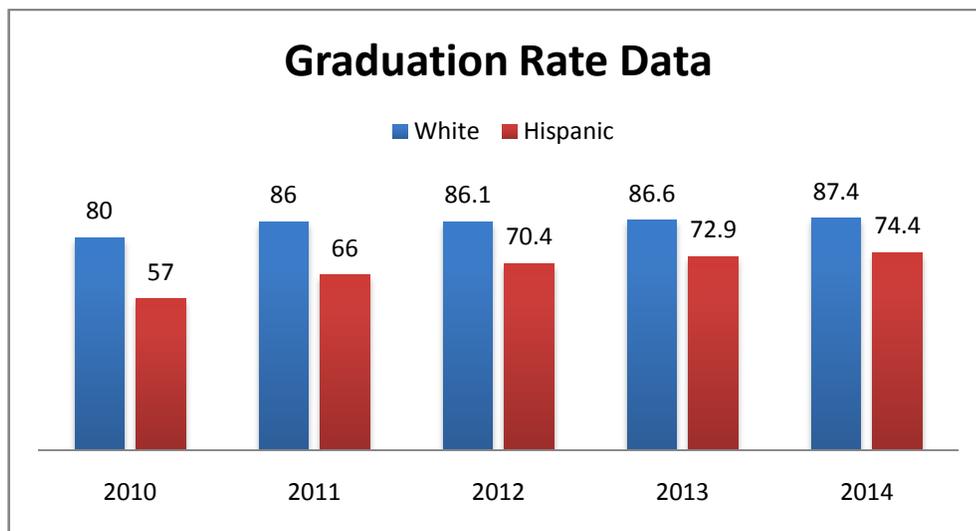


Source: Department of Education (ED Data Express, 2017).

Analís Carattini-Ruiz, who is a Latina representative on Utah’s Coalition of Minorities Advisory Committee and an alternative language services coordinator in the Canyons District, attributes this issue to the dearth of Latino educators and role models in the state. She also believes that there is a lot of room for improvement in “reflection on other cultures and infusing that into our everyday teaching so our kids can identify with what we’re talking about, can identify with people in their community” (Schencker, 2012).

There are also considerable disparities between the graduation rates of Latinos and Whites in institutions of higher learning, and there is also a notable gap between the ethnicities in terms of degree completion. Table 2 shows the percentage of students who graduated in a school year the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate. It shows how the graduation rate has improved and the gaps have come closer and closer each year.

Table 2 Percentage of students who graduated in a school year the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate



Source: Department of Education (ED Data Express, 2017).

## 2. Economic Barriers

As Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (2009) state, 30% of all Latino children are growing up in poverty, and 9.5 million children, constituting 61% of all Latino children, live in low-income households. Such poverty determines the kind of schools these children are able to attend as well as the opportunities for higher education they possess.

### 2.1 Lack of Documentation

Our informants identified economic reasons as a primary barrier to pursuing higher education citing lack of documentation as a significant instigator of these monetary pressures.

Close to 1 million Latino, school-aged children in the United States do not possess documentation, which prevents them from accessing higher education both legally and financially significantly increasing the direct costs of pursuing post-secondary education (Fix & Passal, 2003). Without documentation, students do not qualify for government funded financial aid, including grants and loans, and thus must finance their own schooling or seek out private scholarships, which are few in existence (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Though some states, including Utah, allow undocumented immigrants to pay in state tuition at public institutions, no national policy, such as the DREAM act, has passed allowing all undocumented individuals the same privilege (National Immigration Law Center, 2012; Salsbury, 2003). Even if these undocumented students excel in their primary and secondary schooling, the cost of college education is entirely unfeasible if they do not qualify for federal aid and public scholarships (Salsbury, 2003).

Several of the mothers we interviewed expressed concern over their children's undocumented status in regard to available monetary assistance. They are aware of the benefits of scholarships and financial aid, but understand that many of their children do not qualify for these educational appropriations due this lack of documentation. Marcela stated, "For me, one of the greatest obstacles is the cost of school. Since my son doesn't have papers, he can't receive any financial aid such as scholarships from the government. This brings great pressure on the family for the cost of education. My son goes to UVU, but it costs us a lot to send him there." Though this family is able to afford their son's schooling without financial aid, many are not. Indeed, the lack of documentation prevents many from receiving the monetary assistance they so need to continue their educations. The mothers of documented children we spoke to encourage their sons and daughters to excel in their schooling in order to ensure scholarship options to offset the financial burden post-secondary education presents.

## 2.2 Direct/Opportunity Costs

Latinos are disproportionately found amongst the lowest socioeconomic groups of the United States and as often cannot afford the direct costs, including tuition and books, associated with higher education institutions (Sólorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). Though most of the Latino youth we interviewed reported strong desires to attend college, they feared they would not be able to afford the associated costs. For Steven, a Latino Junior attending Timpanogas High School, money seems to be a primary obstacle for him proceeding to college. He currently works close to 20 hours a week to help subsidize his parents' bills and is accordingly unable to save much money for himself or for his future schooling. When asked what he thinks the primary obstacle preventing him from reaching college, he replied, "money" without hesitation. Steven also reported that he was failing a number of his classes due to his heavy workload. For him, the opportunity cost of excelling in school is food on the table and a roof over his head. Certainly such an economic barrier does not promote rights in education. Though he possesses documentation and access to public school, his rights in education are in no way being satisfied due to economic restraints.

## 3. Familial and Social Barrier

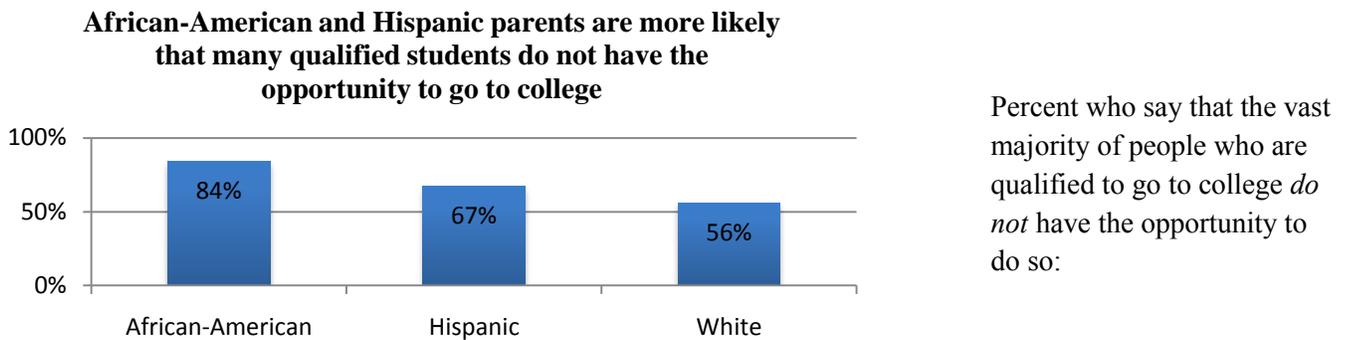
In "Life after High School: Young People Talk about Their Hopes and Prospects," Public Agenda reported that 59% of young Hispanics were raised in a home where their parents strongly expected them to go to college. (Public Agenda 2005) Our findings in Utah County were similar. When asked if her mom talks about her going to college, Maricela, a 14-year-old 9th grader at Provo high school said, "Yeah, because she wants me to have a good job-not like her: cleaning. Maricela's mother dropped out of high school in Mexico during her junior year. Maricela said her mother says her report card is good when she gets Fs and some Bs and Cs, but that she needs to do better. (personal communication, 2017)

The Public Agenda also reported that although most Hispanic students see the value of pursuing higher education, many of them are still missing out on going to college: "For the vast majority of youngsters, it seems we have been successful in inspiring a goal. Whether we also provide the real-life, down-to-earth assistance, mentoring and guidance they need to work toward it is another matter" (Public Agenda 2005). The report asserts that while the inspiration of the goal to attend college exists among Hispanic parents and students, practical steps to achieve the goal are lacking.

This assertion is in accordance with our findings. All of the students we interviewed agreed that their parents wanted them to go to college. Yet, as previously mentioned, only 16 percent of Latino adults in Utah possess a college degree, compared to 40% of all adults (National Center for Education Statistics). So where is the disconnect? There are several possible answers.

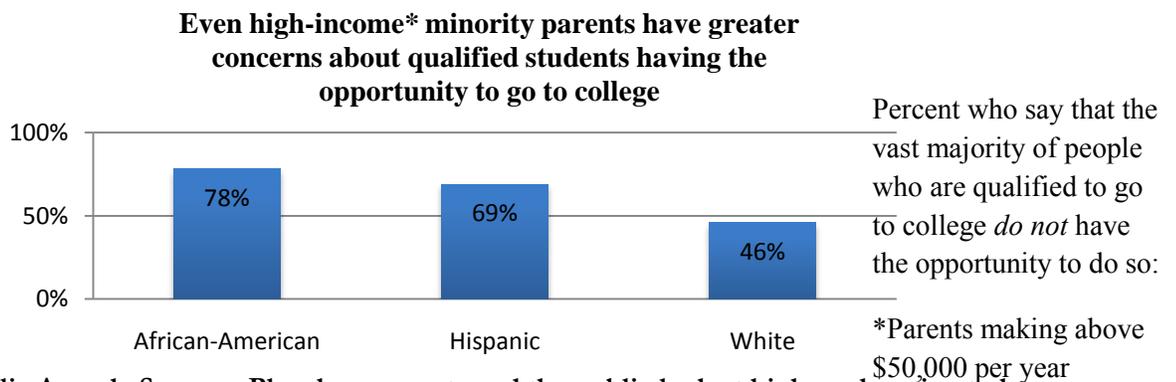
One answer may be included in what the Public Agenda report called “down-to-earth assistance” or the dedicated involvement of parents. In a 2007 report, Public Agenda found that Hispanic parents are more likely to believe that qualified students will be unable to get a college education--even at high income. (Public Agenda 2007) In other words, although many Hispanic parents are encouraging their middle- and high-school aged children to pursue higher education, they are roughly twice as less likely to actually *believe* their children will have the opportunity to go to college--even if they are qualified. They want their children to go to college, but are less certain about the reality of it. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the discrepancy between what white and Hispanic parents believe.

Figure 1



Source: Public Agenda Squeeze Play: how parents and the public look at higher education today.

Figure 2



Source: Public Agenda Squeeze Play: how parents and the public look at higher education today.

Similarly, while parents in Utah county *want* their children to pursue higher education and encourage them to do so, they are lacking in involvement in the This can be shown in the following examples gathered from students and mothers of students in the Provo School District. When asked if is easy to be involved in her son’s education, Maria explained that it is very difficult. She encourages him to do well in school but says he is distant. He does, however, express interest in pursuing higher education when his university-attending sister involves him. Even with his increased interest in college, Maria says she doesn’t believe he will go to college: “I know that he won’t go really far because in the first place, he doesn’t really like school and he’s not very studious. I have always had low expectations so if he achieves something, even if it’s a technical degree, that’s ok because it’s better than nothing.” (personal communication, 2017). Parents in Utah County largely view laziness and incompetence as one of the obstacles to their children going to college. This is apparent in Carmen’s comment regarding her daughter:

“I tell my daughter that if she doesn’t study she will turn out like me washing dishes, is that what she wants? She always says, ‘No!’ ‘Then study.’ She tries to improve her grades but she is lazy. It’s not that she doesn’t like school, just that she is lazy but it takes a lot of work.”

A practical step that could also be missing in families is parent involvement in homework. Brothers Steven (16-year-old junior at Timpview High school and Oscar (15-year-old sophomore at Timpview High School) tell of their parents’ involvement. “Go do your homework! I never see you pull out a book!” Oscar imitates his parents.

Steven agrees and imitates them as well, “Exactly--’You need to take out a book!’” One study suggests that parental involvement best influences student outcomes, especially in homework, should be focused on *quality* of involvement rather than *level*. A rights in education approach would argue that a nagging reminder or asides about reading a book are less effective in achieving the *end* of gaining an education. This type of parenting views education as a *means* rather than an end in itself. (Buzukashvily et. al, 2011) Buzukashvilyet. al suggest that an authoritative parenting style combined with high warmth and support promoted the orientation to learn and understand--education as an intrinsic value. Alternatively, an authoritative parenting style which is permissive combined with low demands or low warmth, work toward performance goals--avoiding demonstrating incompetence or viewing education as instrumental to economic values. (Buzukashvily et. al, 2011) One reason for an absence of quality involvement among Hispanic parents in Utah County may be that many of them are working parents, as discussed in the previous section.

As discussed previously in this paper, another major source of the disconnect between parents’ *aspiration* for their children to attend college and the actual numbers is financial. Public Agenda (2005) reported that “money is a strong contributor” to less Hispanic young adults seeking a college degree despite their positive aspirations. Less than half of Hispanic students believe that qualified students who want to go to college will find a way to pay for it. (Public Agenda 2005)

#### 4. Language Barrier

Language is a huge factor in fundamental development of an individual, and for a foreign language to be introduced into one’s life changes the dynamic of learning. There are two types of families in our community, in regards to immigration. There are the first generation families, and the second (or more) generation families. First generation families have recently moved to the United States, and they are the first in their family to live here and speak the language, etc. Second generation families were born in the United States and have a more advanced knowledge of English and comprehension of the language. In the case of first generation families, it is harder for children to receive parental advisement and help on projects or homework, because these assignments are primarily in English, and the parents may not have a solid enough base to assist their children. In addition to this, the children themselves often have a harder time learning English because they don’t have as much practice with the language outside of school. Apprehension of the language is also impeded if the children do not have a developed first language to compare the new language to; this meaning that if the child’s level of Spanish is not up to par, their English will take longer to reach average levels. In the case of families moving to the United States with children above primary ages, the difficulty in learning English fluently increases substantially, due to the fact that the primary age of children is the critical learning stage where language can be picked up with relative ease. Past this point, the likelihood of an individual reaching native level ability in language is greatly diminished.

The significance of this, in regards to education and the pursuit of higher learning, is that without an understanding of English, the children will suffer in the classroom. Their attention will be impaired and their excitement about learning will be hampered because the children will not entirely understand what is being taught in the classroom. Grades will go down and progress will be slow compared to children who speak English natively. This negatively impacts the aspirations of children in later years because they will not feel capable of reaching more ambitious educational goals. In second generation families, this is not as much of an issue because the children generally grow up learning both Spanish and English, and parents have more capability to assist in their children’s academic success.

Many schools offer programs to encourage the development of the English language in foreign children. These programs, such as ESL (English as a Second Language), or more politically correct, ELD (English Language Development) or ELL (English Language Learning), generally take the place of another class and meet together each day for 30-50 minutes to practice and learn English. Lectures, writing, speaking, reading, and listening are incorporated into the lesson plans, and progress is evaluated by a pre- and post- test. Students may move to different levels of the program based on their abilities, rather than age. This is especially helpful for children who develop at a faster or slower pace than the average (personal communication, 2017). Classes are also offered in the evenings for older immigrants who wish to better their English. (Dixon Middle School; more research needed). While these programs may be extremely helpful for language development, they are not enough. Language needs to be integrated into all aspects of life and practiced often for it to become native. English must be available in the home and community. In a predominantly English speaking state, such as Utah, the community offers plenty of opportunity to listen, read, speak, and write in English. In the home, however, practice may sometimes become more limited.

Reading English books encourages language ability, though unfortunately, reading has been culturally dying. Radio and TV offer an alternative for immersion in the language, though they lack written English. Because of this, students may feel competent in their English abilities, yet this is only spoken English, not written English, so school work is still challenging and grammar is not up to the level it should be.

## **5. Finding Solutions through Community Asset Mapping**

It is evident that the Latino youth of Utah face significant challenges, particularly in terms of the opportunities that they have to pursue higher education. However, focusing on these challenges will not make life any easier for these youth. The key is to seek solutions from the resources that already abound in the community. As Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) said, "Each community boasts a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. A thorough map of those assets would begin with an inventory of the gifts, skills and capacities of the community's residents." Asset-based community development, which is a process used to map community assets, involves identifying the resources that are available in the community, identifying the relevant community members that can help to solve the problem and their interests, and the establishment of productive relationships between community members (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). A good community asset map should encourage the participation of residents, associations, businesses, and institutions such as libraries and schools in creating strategies and implementing initiatives (Pinkett, 200). It is the author's intent in this section to present the assets that are currently available to Latino youth in Utah.

### **5.1 Economical Assets**

#### *The AAA Fair Credit Foundation*

Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) are an opportunity for investors to increase their savings and build their assets. The program places 3 dollars into a participant's saving account for each dollar that the participant invests. Prior to enrollment, applicants to the program enroll in free classes about basic financial management, which are offered in both English and Spanish. They can then meet with a case manager to review their financial situation and set goals and plans for the future. They receive training specific to their assets, and then those applicants accepted into the program are able to make withdrawals from their IDA savings account to purchase homes, enroll in education programs, start businesses, or buy technology.

Participants must be residents of Utah, at least 18 years old, have a work income, and a net worth of less than \$10,000. They also must be able to provide a social security number. Those in the program must commit to make regular savings deposits each month, save from 12-36 months, complete training programs for financial literacy and selected asset goals, support other participants in the program through peer meetings, maintain close contact with their program coordinator, correct their credit issues, and abide by all the rules of the program.

#### **The Somos Foundation**

The SOMOS Foundation is the 501 (c)(3) non-profit arm of the Utah Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The mission of the foundation is to provide resources to Hispanic students and adults who have demonstrated a strong commitment to education, community and have the potential to contribute to the economic development of the Latino community of Utah. The Somos foundation donated \$3,000 in its first year in 2004, and was able to donate \$1,000,000 by 2010.(Somos Foundation).

The requirements for students to obtain the scholarship are to submit a complete application and supporting documents. They must be in good academic standing and making satisfactory progress toward their program objective, such as a degree, diploma, or certificate. Applicants must be currently enrolled in high school, a university, or vocational school in the state of Utah, or have been recently admitted to an institution in Utah. Students must have demonstrated leadership in school, the community, and/or other service organizations that promote, enhance or strengthen diversity. The application requires two letters of recommendation, and the applicant must be living in Utah and of Hispanic/Latino descent (Somos Foundation). One scholarship recipient, Heidi Chamorro,said, "During a time when I felt a lot of doors were closing, SOMOS provided a window of opportunity".(Somos Foundation)While these foundations are contributing to the opportunities available to Latino youth, they are severely limited in their capacities to help students achieve. The AAA Fair Credit Foundation has such rigid requirements that many young people are excluded from participating in the program. The SOMOS Foundation is currently too small to have a significant impact on the community. With more funding available to a broader range of students, these foundations could make a greater contribution to the target population.

## 5.2 Social Assets

### BYU - SOAR

Summer of Academic Refinement (SOAR) is a program that prepares youth minorities for college and helps them to understand the possibilities and expectations of Brigham Young University. This five-day preparation is available to high school juniors who are either U.S. Citizens or Permanent Residents from Utah, Hawaii, Texas and Arizona, have a GPA of at least 3.2, and come from multicultural backgrounds.

The program provides ACT preparation, admissions and college success information, and an introduction to Multicultural Student Services. Students will also take the ACT as a part of the program. SOAR students are assigned a BYU student-counselor who serves as their mentor through the program. The cost for SOAR is \$350, which includes housing, food, activities, and materials, and need-based scholarships of \$300 are available. Estela Marquez an advisor mention that 73% of the student were part of the program and applied were admitted to BYU.

Participants are exposed to the BYU community by spending time on campus and engaging in activities that are common to BYU students, such as devotionals, hiking the Y, visiting Temple Square, a service project, and a dance. They are also able to attend presentations about BYU Admissions and Financial Aid and choosing a major.

### Independence High School

Assist at-risk students with during-school and after-school programs.

### Provo Youth Mentoring

Spend one hour each week mentoring at-risk student from Provo elementary schools.

### Centro Hispano

Centro Hispano is a community center dedicated to serving Provo's Latino population. It provides a community education program that consists of classes meant to enhance the skills and personal development of their participants. These classes are free and available to anyone who desires to attend. Classes offered through the program include English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Spanish literacy for native Spanish speakers, GED preparation in Spanish, computer instruction, and sewing classes for adults.

Additionally, Centro Hispano has pioneered a program called ¡Adelante! for teenagers between the ages of 14-18. This program is designed to help Latino youth to prepare for a great future. This preparation includes health classes that educates students about preventing unwanted pregnancies and HIV, as well as classes that teach important life skills such as budgeting, career planning, public speaking, and college preparation. Students have the opportunity to practice the skills that they are learning in the classroom setting and are encouraged to share these skills with their family members, friends, and other members of the community.

## 5.3 Language Assets

### BYU – TOPS

The main focus of Tutor Outreach to Provo Schools (TOPS) is to provide volunteers to schools of the Provo School District who can tutor the students. The tutors assist teachers in many ways and can focus on individual students when the teacher would not have time to do so. The overall outcome is an increase in the quality of education provided to the students. There are over 300 volunteers involved this semester and it is expected to increase next semester. The schools are very appreciative of the volunteers and the TOPS program, and they rely on this support.

Hal Nielson, the supervisor of TOPS, shared his experience. "I am helping a third grade student with reading, because he struggles a bit more than the other students. Since the beginning of the semester he has made a lot of progress; his teacher has even acknowledged it. This will make a big difference in the long run for him when he gets caught up to speed with his classmates."(personal communication, 2017)

Lisa Wall, a former volunteer, said the following of her experience. "I loved my experience with TOPS. I had the opportunity to go to Provost Elementary School once a week to tutor students who were struggling in math during class and then help kids with their homework in the after-school program. The majority of these children came from low-income families, and they were significantly behind in school. Each kid had their own story. On my first day as a volunteer, a friendly Latina girl told me that her dad had been shot and killed by the police.

She clung to me from that day on, always wanting to hold my hand or sit next to me. It was a great feeling to be able to serve as a positive influence in these children's lives. Many of them didn't have anyone at home that could help them with their homework, and I loved watching them light up as they came to understand concepts that they just needed to have explained to them one more time, individually." (personal communication, 2017)

#### BYU – Conexiones

Conexiones works with Hispanic families in the community. The main goal of the Conexiones program is to improve English-reading. BYU students visit people in their own homes and help them by reading with them and assisting them with their homework. This program is open to children, youth, and adults who wish to participate.

#### Centro Hispano

The purpose of the General Educational Development (GED) Testing Program is to provide an opportunity for adults to obtain the equivalent of their high school diploma. By making it possible for qualified individuals to earn their high school credential, the GED allows individuals to pursue high education, obtain jobs or job promotions, and achieve personal goals. This course is for any adult seeking to earn their high school credentials in the United States.

### 6. Conclusion

We have found three basic obstacles that impede Latino youth in Utah from pursuing higher education, which are economic, social, and language barriers. Community asset mapping revealed the aforementioned programs in the community that can help youth to overcome these challenges. However, the author feels that more than money, these youth need to find motivation to pursue higher education. If they are inspired to achieve, they will find ways to reach their dreams, even if that means working multiple jobs to put themselves through school. If they have a goal they want to reach, they will work for it even if they have to do it alone, without the support of their families.

Therefore, the author proposes the creation of a program in which students will have the opportunity to shadow professionals in various careers during the summer before their Senior year. This program will be mandatory for graduation for all students in Utah. Students will be able to choose four careers that interest them, and spend 2-week rotations shadowing members of the community who work in these professions. This will require the cooperation of the community in order to find professionals who are willing to participate in the program and serve as mentors for the next generation.

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