



MHEC 7th Annual Policy Summit
Ready or Not Here They Come
Ensuring the College Success of All Students

Summary of Closing Presentation: Replenishing Opportunity in America

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Act. This was the central message José Cruz, of The Education Trust, delivered to his audience at the closing address of the 7th annual MHEC policy summit, *Ready or Not, Here They Come: Ensuring the Success of All College Students*. In a presentation titled, “Replenishing Opportunity in America,” Cruz identified what he called the “sobering” and “dangerous” opportunity deficit facing American youth and reminded his audience of the persistent, alarming achievement gaps experienced by underrepresented minorities and underserved low-income students in both K-12 and higher education. Although Cruz acknowledged rates of college attendance and attainment have improved over the last thirty years, he also revealed statistics which indicate that intergenerational gains remain alarmingly low and that, perhaps more sobering, “our world standing is weaker for younger workers.”

If the cumulative strides made in broadening access and improving educational attainment are to be preserved into the 21st century, if we are to continue to close these achievement and success gaps, if higher education is to ready itself for the success of all students, and if ultimately democracy and equity are to be advanced, Cruz advised policymakers, researchers, educators, and practitioners alike to position themselves as leaders, advocates, and activists for equitable educational opportunities for all students. For these advocates and activists, Cruz recommended a multi-part action strategy that included the following:

- Reforming underfunded K-12 institutions in ways that un-cluster low-income students, set and maintain high performance standards, and demand high-quality instructors;
- Preserving need-based financial aid and rethinking inequitable financial aid policies that disadvantage underrepresented minorities and low-income students;
- Identifying, validating, and swiftly replicating successful K-12 schools, school districts, and post-secondary institutions; and
- Cultivating leaders and followers willing to participate in a collective movement that advances the success of all youth at all educational levels.

Cruz cited examples of several successful and activism-oriented institutions, including Michigan elementary schools Baylor-Woodson and North Godwin; the Richmond City, Virginia, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, school districts; San Diego State University; Towson University; and a variety of what he called gap-closing “top gainers” throughout the Midwest.

Cruz's holistic approach to both educational reform and educational activism inspired participants to ask numerous questions. Some of the inquiries included the effects of unionization in educational institutions, the ways financial aid policy might better serve students, the ways in which per-student expenditures advantage and disadvantage certain student populations, and the different ways these challenges can be presented to a variety of stakeholders, administrators, practitioners, educators, politicians, citizens. Additionally Cruz left the participants with the question of how we might most effectively enjoin these stakeholders to be active, informed members of this movement.

Dr. Cruz provided a variety of additional tools and resources, offered online by The Education Trust at <http://www.edtrust.org>.