



Miami Dade College President, Eduardo Padron, focus to increase graduation rates and narrow the achievement gap for underrepresented students. (Credit Miami Dade College)

Earlier this year the White House held a College Opportunity Day of Action where participants, including college presidents and education leaders, were asked to promote college completion, create K-16 partnerships around college readiness, invest in high school counselors and increase college graduates in STEM fields.

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A follow-up event, billed as the Summit on College Opportunity, was staged last week where organizations announced more than 600 new actions to help more students prepare for and graduate from college.

One person involved representing the Latino community was Miami Dade College President Eduardo Padron, who also serves as the chairman of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics.

"I think it was extremely important," Padron told VOXXI. "I really feel the future of this nation is inextricably linked to how well we educate the Spanish population. Opening the doors of higher education institutions to the Hispanic community and making sure those students complete their education is not anything other than imperative."

"At Miami-Dade, we have a long-standing record of having understood that and being at the forefront of the nation, but there are still plenty of institutions not providing equal opportunity and access to students of color."

The goal of the institutions involved in the summit was to produce 36,465 additional graduates by 2020. As for Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), the message was simple – to improve student persistence, increase graduation rates and narrow the achievement gap for underrepresented students. The summit included many goals.

Here are a few of note:

- Increase the overall 6-year graduation rate.
- Increase the 4-year transfer graduation rate.
- Reduce by at least half the current achievement gap between underrepresented and non-underrepresented students on the campus.

Considering Latino college students are often on a different track, currently viewed as unconventional in certain circles, the importance of targeting the six-year graduation rate is refreshing.

"I think acknowledgement is extremely important because life happens to some people more than others," Padron said. "And the fact of the matter is, most Latino students can't afford to go to school fulltime. They have to work and go to school. They have to support families."

“They come from low-income backgrounds, are first-generation college students and are very vulnerable to having to drop out due to economical circumstances. The main impediment for staying in school is lack of resources. So, understanding that I think is the first step. The other is how do institutions change the way we go about teaching, and change the way we support the students. That’s going to make all the difference.”

To the latter point, Padron said it’s time colleges develop a conscious to accommodate students who didn’t have the good fortune of attending a high-performing high school. Often those students lag behind their peers and are at risk for not finishing their college education.

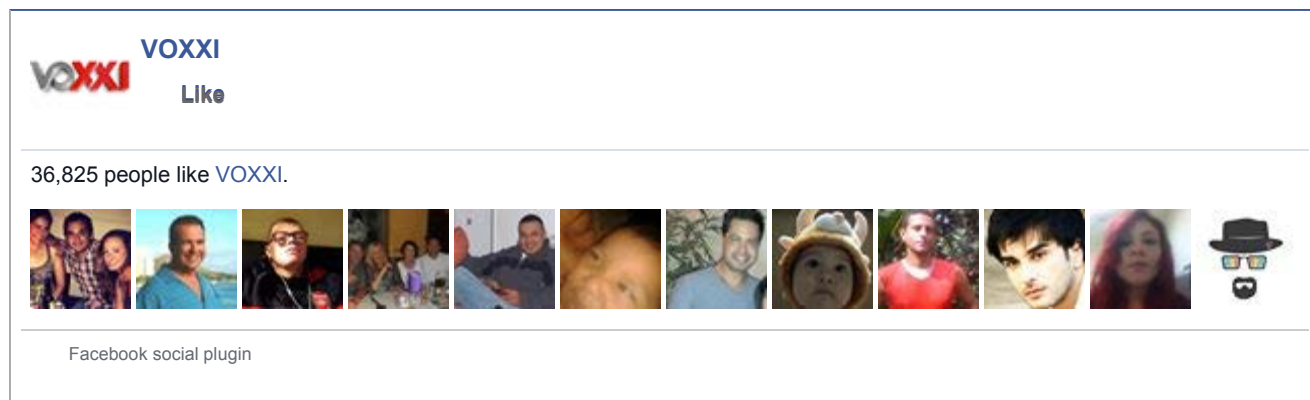
“Institutions need to be more student-centered and understand we’re here for the students to develop the strategies, pathways and programs to help students,” Padron said. “One is teaching the class when the students need them, not when the teachers want to.”

SEE ALSO: Music students can catch big break with scholarship competition

Overall, Padron said the biggest takeaway from the summit was the dialogue from all involved parties that this current initiative goes beyond higher education.

“This summit was really about the future of the United States of America,” Padron said. “We know that future depends very much on our ability to educate the masses and give them the skills they need to succeed in the new economy.”

He added, “Now, these institutions are beginning to understand that more than ever they play a very significant role in the future of the country. It’s no longer a luxury for someone to go to a university. It’s more like a duty to make sure every citizen wants to get an education at that level is able to get it.”



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