

Unequal Guidance: Why 65% of Latino Students Do Not Go To College

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Summary

We interviewed several young Latinos in East Boston who want to go to college but are not attending a four year college or university. They reported being ignored by guidance counselors or allowed to fall through the cracks when applying for college. Staff at local high schools failed to support these Latino students and their families in the college preparation process. This happened to both documented and undocumented students alike. To address this problem, Students United for a Better Education (SUBE), the youth component of Neighbors United for a Better East Boston, are developing a program to provide peer support to high school students in East Boston who want to continue their education. This poster will describe four of the stories of young people who were diverted from the path to college by high school guidance counselors and how SUBE will work to meet their needs. They are presented here anonymously to protect their identity.

Data



Linda, 19 years old

Linda is of Puerto Rican heritage and was born and raised in Massachusetts. She went to her guidance counselor at East Boston High School to get help with completing her college applications. Her counselor failed to tell her that she needed to complete the FAFSA. She was accepted to UMass Boston but because of the missing FAFSA, she was not awarded any financial aid. She is currently going to school at Bunker Hill Community College and works part time in food service. She wants to be a teacher but she struggles to stay in school.

Sara, 20 years old

Sara was brought to the US as a child from El Salvador and attended the Boston Public Schools since middle school. She isn't very confident in her English speaking skills but she managed to graduate from East Boston High School. At the beginning of her senior year, she decided that she wanted to continue her education after high school. She didn't know what she wanted to do so she went to her guidance counselor to talk through her options. The guidance counselor told her that she has no options because she is undocumented. She was told, "Enjoy your senior year because this is it for you." She is currently living with her parents and working part time.



Louis, 18 years old

Louis is a permanent US resident (i.e. green card holder) from El Salvador. He came to the US as a child and graduated from East Boston High School. He began to apply for colleges at the start of his senior year. He felt that he had to be very persistent in order to get any help from the guidance counselors. In the middle of the college application season, his father died. Understandably, he was very upset and became a bit depressed. When he failed to return to the guidance office to complete his applications, no one bothered to follow up with him. No one called him to ask him what happened. Currently, he works two jobs and helps support his family. He wants to study graphic design but he believes that he cannot afford to go to school.

Mitt, 18 years old

Mitt came to the US from Venezuela as an infant. He attended a Boston area private religiously affiliated high school. He knew he wanted to go to college since middle school. His high school provided support to all of its students to prepare them to apply for college starting in their freshman year. He wrote his first draft for his college essay as a graded assignment in his junior year English class. His school guidance counselor sat down with him for an hour to tailor the recommendation letter to his situation. He was never told that his legal status as an undocumented youth was an insurmountable barrier to going to college. He has currently been accepted to 15 colleges in the Northeast, all of which provided some financial aid.



Findings

These stories illustrate two key findings from all of our interviews:

- Guidance counselors at EBHS and other public schools serving EB youth are not providing adequate assistance to Latino youth with pursuing a college or other post secondary education and training options.
- The lack of assistance to Latino youth is not only experienced by undocumented students. Students who are US citizens or permanent legal residents are also being ignored or allowed to fall through the cracks.

East Boston High School has several programs to support students who want to pursue college or training after high school. However, with the exception of ROTC, the EBHS staff and guidance office are not proactive in making these programs available to Latino students. We are particularly troubled that they do not follow up on students who express an interest in college and seek their help. Ideally, the guidance office will institute behavioral and attitudinal changes and train their staff.

East Boston High College Access Programs	Mitt's HS College Access Programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) • The Education Resources Institute (TERI) College Access Services • Gear Up • Action Center for Educational Services and Scholarship (ACCESS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resume building starting in freshmen year • College essay graded assignment in junior English class • A network of relationships with college admission offices

Solutions

Students United for a Better Education (SUBE) was established in January of 2012 to create a youth based program in order to fulfill this gap. This program has three components:

- **Consciousness raising to help motivate East Boston Latino students to seek a college education.**
- **Peer led workshops to help students develop resumes, strengthen interview skills, assist with completing college applications, and help with writing college essays.**
- **Peer support groups based on civil status and other interests where young Latinos in East Boston discuss and explore post secondary education and training options**