

## Unleashing the Potential of Young Latinos

This century, we have borne witness to some of the most significant scientific discoveries and technological innovations the world has ever known. Generations have moved through the industrial age into the space age, followed by the information age; and now we enter the human age at a time dominated by the individual.

As we enter this new era, the single most important determinant will be the ability to optimize and unleash the human potential, in a world increasingly reliant on high technology and how it is used. The training of STEM professionals will play a critical role in our ability to compete on a global playing field and meet the demands of the future.

In his 2009 State of the Union speech, President Obama stated: "Our success as a nation depends on strengthening America's role as the world's engine of discovery and innovation." With that in mind, the President set an aggressive goal in 2009: "to move U.S. students from the middle of the top of the pack in math and science achievements over the next decade." In his State of the Union, the President called for a new effort to prepare 100,000 STEM teachers with strong teaching skills and deep content knowledge. "We must out-innovate, out-educate, and out-build the rest of the world."

The Latino community will play an integral role in our ability to compete, out-perform, and expand our reach into the STEM fields. And this is supported by a major demographical shift in the U.S. According to the 2010 U.S. census, nearly 55 million Hispanics reside in the U.S. and its territories. Eventually, Latinos will account for 60% of the Nation's population and will no-doubt drive the overall growth of the labor force. According to Simon Rosenberg, president and founder of New Democrat Network, "The data affirms that one of the great stories of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is the changing majority of America from a majority white country to a majority minority country."

Recent reports indicate that American students are lagging in many of the STEM majors when compared to other countries. These same studies indicate that Latino students continue to under-perform on science and mathematics proficiency tests. As the fastest growing minority group, the competitiveness of the U.S. in these fields will be compromised and constrained by the Latino population if the current course is not corrected and changed.

Corporations are partnering with government agencies, academic partners, and professional associations to build creative, innovative programs to grow awareness and generate interest in the STEM fields in an effort to interest traditionally under-represented groups. It is imperative that these corporations move

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from STEM as a marketing tool to STEM as a development and education opportunity. Technology corporations have a vested interest in the success of these programs, as it will lead to a strong supply of skilled workers in the future.

Many of the Fortune 100 companies have robust STEM initiatives and investments underway. In fact, Intel has spent over \$1 billion on education projects and others such as ExxonMobil, Dell, Lockheed Martin and Microsoft continue to support science and technology education. Companies such as Google have created online global science fairs to help encourage and lure future scientists, engineers, and programmers to these fields. Others, such as Cisco, are leveraging their internal Employee Resource Groups (ERG's) in partnership with key executives and professional affiliations to create communities of learning that extend beyond colleges into K-12 schools and incorporate mentoring practices, career development workshops, internships, and various leadership programs. For the past two years, Cisco has run a Career Fair for 300 at-risk high school juniors, presenting them with a day of education about technology, mock interview practice with employees and hosting roundtable discussions.

As leaders of our community, we need to continue to find creative ways to build alliances and accelerate the work that is underway. Given the advancements in our collaborative technologies, we need to expand our reach and intensify our communities of learning that extend into the K-12 and college students. Working together, we will build a robust pipeline of future STEM Latino professionals that will ensure our country's future as a technology leader and create access and opportunity to the Latino community.

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