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MCC reaches out to first-generation minority applicants

By Diana Whittle

Last year, the U.S. Census Bureau confirmed that kids nearing school age are part of a majority-minority population segment.

According to the government's statistics, in 2014 there were more than 20 million children under 5 years old living in the U.S.; 50.2 percent of them were minorities.

Parents, who identify their child as white with Hispanic origin are the largest minority, making up 22 percent of the total 19.9 million children under age 5, followed by African-American children, who make up 15 percent.

In the Valley, enrollment in the Maricopa Community College system is not quite at the minority-majority level, but the percentages are not far behind, says Deanna Villanueva-Saucedo, director of public outreach for the community college district.

She is currently working in the East Valley, with Mesa Community College, on initiatives to attract more Hispanic students to seek higher education.

At MCC, the enrollment of Hispanic students is currently at 23 percent, and officials anticipate the number will exceed 25 percent soon, perhaps even during this school year.

This growth would trigger some positives for MCC, including becoming a "Hispanic-Serving Institution," which is an official designation by the federal government and would allow the college to be eligible for additional federal funding to serve minority students.

Receiving the HIS designation demonstrates that, as an institution of higher education, MCC has an enrollment of undergraduate, full-time-equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic at the end of the award year," said Villanueva-Saucedo, who was in Washington, D.C. to attend a conference by the non profit "Excelencia in Education."

Additionally, she said:

"Excelencia in Education accelerates Latino students' success in higher education by providing data-driven analysis of the educational status of Latinos, and by promoting education policies and institutional practices that support their academic achievement."

The organization, founded in 2004, has become a resource on the status of Latino educational achievement, and a major change agent for influencing policy at all levels, while also being a widely recognized advocate for expanding evidence-based practices to accelerate Latino student success in higher education.

"Excelencia is also building a network of results-oriented educators and policymakers to address the U.S. economy's need for a highly educated workforce and for civic leadership, particularly in the Hispanic community," said Villanueva-Saucedo.

Locally, her concerns are to pave the way for

Hispanic

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Hispanic families to aspire to higher education and to provide the support at MCC, and other community colleges, for them to understand the process, which may come naturally to other ethnic groups.

"If you have no family members or other role models who have sought out higher education, just the application process can be daunting. We want to support Hispanic families so they have a greater opportunity to succeed and to graduate."

With no other roadmap to guide them, many Hispanics may come to the community college with no supportive networks and little preparation, which can lead them to drop out, researchers say.

"My goal is to help MCC staff to develop the internal processes to help retain students and for them to continue to reach their educational goals," said Villanueva-Saucedo.

"Many of the students enrolled in community college intend to transfer to obtain a four-year degree, so we

need to support them in graduating to the next level."

Villanueva-Saucedo's office is located in Tempe and, while she's worked nearly 11 years to establish relationships at all the community colleges, she has a special fondness for Mesa because it's her hometown. She also is a liaison with the Mesa Unified School District.

"I was born and raised in Mesa, graduated from Seton Catholic High School, and then obtained both my bachelor's and master's degrees at ASU."

She says that that the Mesa schools provide the perfect pipeline for Hispanic students to continue their education at MCC.

"Their enrollment is already a minority-majority," said Villanueva-Saucedo, "because their statistics report 54 percent of students identify themselves as a minority and of that total, 42.4 percent are Hispanic."

In the Tempe Elementary school district—the trend is similar. Of 12,000 students enrolled, 53 percent are classified as Hispanic, reports Christine Trujillo, director of strategic partnership and innovation.

Among 15 U.S. 'Afterschool Ambassadors' Tempe Kid Zone's Jeremy King named

A key shaper of Tempe's Kid Zone enrichment program has been selected to serve as a 2016-17 Afterschool Ambassador, one of 15 leaders from across the U.S. chosen for the honor by Washington, D.C.-based Afterschool Alliance.

The announcement of Jeremy King's appointment to the prestigious group came from Jodi Grant, the national group's executive director.

King and the other designees will continue directing or supporting their local afterschool program while also serving a one-year Afterschool Ambassador term, which involves organizing public events, communicating with elected officials and policy makers, and in other ways growing support for afterschool programs.

"We are thrilled that Jeremy will serve this year," said Grant.

"He is a dedicated champion for quality afterschool and summer learning programs. I know he will mobilize business, community and faith leaders, lawmakers, educators, parents and others to increase resources for afterschool programs, which keep students safe, inspire them to learn and help working families."

Said King:
"I am delighted to support the Afterschool Alliance's work to increase resources for afterschool programs, here

and around the country.

"In my 20 years working in this field, I've witnessed firsthand the many ways that afterschool programs give students opportunities to explore their interests and discover their passions, while giving parents the peace of mind that comes with knowing their children are safe and supervised, with engaging, educational activities, during the afternoons.

"I look forward to raising awareness and support for the out-of-school-time opportunities all students need."

The Kid Zone Before and After School Enrichment Program serves 3,000 youth annually at 17 elementary school sites in the Tempe and Kyrene school districts.

The program complements classroom curriculum through hands-on, experiential learning in a safe and fun environment.

Topics include science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs, nutrition education, community gardening, homework help, sports and fine arts.

Each Ambassador will organize a major event for Lights On Afterschool, the Afterschool Alliance's annual rally for afterschool, to be held this year on Oct. 20.

Last year, 1 million people participated in some 8,000 Lights On Afterschool events across the United States and at U.S. military bases worldwide.



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