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News Release:

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Educational Needs of *Students We Share* Go Unmet

Symposium examines educational experiences of students who attend school on both sides of the border. Seeks solutions to improve learning opportunities.

(Mexico City) The United States and Mexico share hundreds of thousands of students, but their educational needs too often go unmet and their potential is imperiled because of poor communication, bureaucratic challenges, language barriers and inadequate and unequal educational opportunities on both sides of the border, said educational researchers from both countries at a research symposium today in Mexico City.

More than 400,000 U.S. born school age children and their families are currently trying to find their way in Mexican schools, according to research presented at the symposium. Students who return to Mexico and fail to enroll in school are not counted in these numbers but constitute a highly vulnerable group. Another 700,000 Mexican children in the U.S., as well as millions of U.S. citizen children of Mexican parents share parallel struggles in the United States

“These students, bright, bilingual and bicultural, represent a tremendous asset for both of our countries, but too often they are caught in an educational no-man’s land where the struggles of school systems to communicate, needless bureaucratic requirements and language barriers undermine learning opportunities,” says Patricia Gandara, chair of the UC Mexico working group on education and a professor of education at UCLA. “We need to work together to understand the issues confronting students and schools and improve learning opportunities in both countries.”

“The lack of coherent policy and communication is resulting in a massive loss of human talent, a loss of the very young people who could serve as bridges between the two nations and throughout the hemisphere,” adds Max Matus, a researcher at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF) and co-coordinator of the symposium.

These findings and others were presented at “The Students We Share/Los estudiantes que compartimos,” a bi-national symposium exploring new research findings on the experiences of students who attend school on both sides of the border. The symposium is a project of the University of California-Mexico Initiative and highlights a partnership between El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF), UCLA, UC Riverside, and UC San Diego. Seven Mexican institutions of higher education in Mexico are serving as co-convenors including CIDE, CIESAS, COLMEX, Instituto Mora, PIPE, UABC, and UdeG. The Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) of the Secretary of Foreign Relations (SRE), and the U.S. Embassy are also participating.

Symposium organizers contend that not enough attention has been focused on the impact of incoherent immigration policies and almost totally uncoordinated education policies that impact large numbers of students whose lives and education are divided by a border that separates not only families but different phases of young people’s education. Researchers and policymakers gathered at the symposium to study the issues and develop public policy options for optimizing the educational and workforce development of Mexican-origin students in the United States and Mexico.

Among the findings to be presented at the Symposium*:

- Of the U.S.-born students (U.S. Citizens) who have returned to Mexico, approximately 40,000 are residing in the border area of Northern Baja California.
- More than nine-tenths of the U.S. students of Mexican origin were born in the U.S. and are citizens but many have at least one parent who is not. Forced repatriation to Mexico of parents creates a huge life crisis for their U.S. citizen English-speaking children.
- Major impediments to accessing schools in Mexico for returning students are bureaucratic procedures and documents that returnees do not have. In spite of a change in the law that stipulates returnees do not have to meet these requirements, this barrier continues to exist in some places in Mexico.
- Mexican origin children are concentrated in California, Texas and the Southwest, and large centers in New York, Florida, Illinois and a few other states. Populations are growing rapidly in the southern and midwestern states of the U.S., where there are comparatively few resources and little knowledge of how to address their needs.
- Language barriers present significant challenges. U.S. born students returning to Mexico are often held back because they can't read and write in Spanish and Mexico offers no programs to transition them. Additionally, it is estimated that no more than 5 percent of teachers nationwide in Mexico are proficient in

English and the capacity to teach English is very limited. Similarly, fewer than 5% of US teachers are certified as bilingual and many teachers lack the necessary training and skills to effectively teach children whose native language is Spanish.

- There are vast inequalities in educational offerings in both countries with children of Mexican origin being schooled in some of the most segregated and impoverished schools in the U.S. and low income and rural children in Mexico scoring a full standard deviation lower than their higher SES peers in Mexico.
- Higher education admissions requirements are varied, unsystematic, and opaque and governed by different entities at the federal and state levels. Systems are not responsive to inquiries from returning students.

“Our research makes clear that on both sides of the border, Mexican and Mexican-origin students are not attaining the level of education they need for success and mobility in our societies,” said Gary Orfield, co-director of the Civil Rights Project at UCLA who contributed to the research findings. We need to do better.”

In addition to the presentation of new research, the symposium is also gathering educational leaders and policymakers from both the United States and Mexico to share ideas and develop solutions for improving educational opportunities for the students we share.

The Students We Share/Los estudiantes que compartimos,” was made possible by a grant from the UC Mexico Initiative at the University of California as well as grants from several Mexican Universities and the Ford Foundation. Leading researchers from many universities in both countries have prepared research papers and presentations in sessions where they will face both other scholars and later panels of officials and academic leaders discussing the implications and possible solutions.

In addition to the participation of academic researchers, the symposium will be addressed by education and policy leaders from both countries: Education Advisor to President Obama, Roberto Rodriguez; President and General Counsel of MALDEF, Thomas Saenz; Provost of the University of California, Aimee Dorr; President of CONACYT (Consejo Nacional de Ciencias y Tecnologia) Enrique Cabrero Mendoza, and President Pro Tem of the California State Senate, Kevin de León.

The sessions will be recorded and streamed live on the web at:
(Day1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1QmZjwY3-o>
(Day 2.)https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1h_p2SU_jCs

*(A more detailed summary of findings is available from conference organizers or on the [UC-Mexico initiative website](#)

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