A Preliminary Evaluation of Mexican-sponsored Educational Programs in the United States: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Potential

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Background

The Instituto para Mexicanos en el Exterior (IME) in conjunction with the Secretaria de Escuelas Publicas (SEP), the Instituto Nacional para Educación de Adultos (INEA), and Programa Binacional para Estudiantes Migrantes (PROBEM), has endeavored to provide educational support to Mexican origin students outside of Mexico, as well as to those students returning to Mexico after having been educated for some period in the U.S. This is a relatively new effort, beginning formally with a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the U.S. Department of Education and the SEP in 1990. However, the diffusion of programs under these entities has been even more recent. For example, while teacher exchanges date to the 1980's between some Mexican and U.S. states, PROBEM came into being in 1995 and began to extend and organize the Intercambios thereafter. Today, 27 of 31 Mexican states and the federal district have PROBEM offices and participate in other binational activities.

In September of 2004 the University of California at Davis in conjunction with the California Policy Research Center at Berkeley was asked by the IME to conduct an initial evaluation of the major programs sponsored by Mexican governmental agencies to assist the education of Mexicans in the exterior. The 7 programs we were asked to investigate include:

1. El Intercambio de maestros
2. El documento de transferencia
3. La donación de libros de texto gratuito
4. Los programas de educación para adultos: alfabetización, primaria, secundaria
5. Bachillerato abierto y a distancia
6. Plazas comunitarias
7. Los programas en colaboración con instituciones educativas norteamericanas que hospedan el portal de CONEVyT.

This report outlines the findings of our initial investigation, which covered 3 months of investigation. The report begins with a consideration of the context in which the 7 programs are being introduced—a context in which Mexican origin students are in urgent need of educational assistance, and in which the U.S. currently has inadequate human and educational resources to meet their needs. This is followed by a discussion of our investigative methods, a description of the programs as they have been explained to us, and a discussion of our findings. We then provide general observations about the initiatives, their strengths, weaknesses, and most importantly, their potential. We end with a set of recommendations (1) for strengthening the programs through ongoing evaluation that will aid in their more effective dissemination, (2) for collaborative research, and finally (3) we propose several avenues of continued cooperation that we believe can greatly enhance the education of Mexican students in the United States.

The Context of Education for Mexican students in the United States

Most recent data from the U.S. Census indicate that there are about 27 million persons of Mexican descent living in the United States (Passel, 2004). Of these, about 10.6 million are born in Mexico and have migrated northward. Approximately ten percent of these, or one million, are youth who were born in Mexico and attend U.S. schools (Este País, 2002). Untold numbers of Mexican students who have experienced some of their education in U.S. schools return to Mexico to continue their studies,

sometimes moving back and forth across the border. Recent data reported by SEP indicate that 21,398 students returned to Mexico from the U.S. in 2002-03 to continue their studies in Mexican schools. However, we have no reliable numbers on how many of these students make two or more moves across the border. We do know anecdotally that most Mexican states are receiving U.S. educated, Mexican born students, and that they lack the infrastructure to deal with this challenge well (Zuñiga, 2004). We also know that Mexican-origin students in the U.S. confront significant barriers to academic achievement, including inadequate assessment of their skills and abilities, impoverished schools and weak curriculum, insufficient materials, absence of linguistic support, and communities that lack the resources to assist the academic achievement of these youth (Gándara & Bial, 2001). Ironically, the handicaps these students face in the U.S. are not unlike those confronted in Mexico in many instances. The situation is aggravated by the known educational risks that accompany student mobility. Students who move from school to school are much more likely to drop out of school altogether than those who remain in the same school (Rumberger, 2003). Part of the reason for this is the social isolation that often ensues from such moves, but the situation is also seriously aggravated by lack of consistency in their educational program. The Documento de Transferencia, which we will discuss later in this report, was designed to reduce that inconsistency to some extent.

Given all of the barriers that confront them, it is not surprising to find that students of Mexican origin achieve at much lower levels than most other groups of

students in the United States. From the time they enter kindergarten, Latino[1] students score significantly lower on tests of academic skills than their White and Asian peers. For example, Table 1 shows the early literacy skills of a national sample of students from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of the U.S. Department of Education. It is notable that Latino students are more likely than all other ethnic groups to fall into the lowest quartile of reading skill, even from the first day of kindergarten. Some of the difference in scores with other groups is due to language differences, and these children's weak command of English, but these gaps do not diminish significantly over time as they acquire more English.

Table 1
Percent of Kindergartners in Lowest and Highest Quartile of Reading Skills, by Ethnicity, Fall 1998

Group	Percent Lowest Quartile/ Reading	Percent Highest Quartile/Reading	Percent Lowest Quartile/Math	Percent Highest Quartile/Math
Black	34	15	39	10
Latino	42	15	40	14
Asian	13	39	13	38
White	18	30	18	32

Source: America's Kindergartners, U.S. Dept of Education, NCES, 2000

At least one-third of those Latinos[i] who begin school in the U.S. drop out of school before earning a diploma (Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002), and in California 45% of Latinos enrolled in the 9th grade drop out before high school graduation (Rothstein, 2002). Recent national data show that while 41% of European American students have

[1] Where we use the term "Latino" we mean to indicate persons from all Spanish speaking backgrounds, however in California, where most Latinos reside, the great majority are of Mexican origin. However, most national data are reported for all persons of Spanish speaking origin combined.

gained proficiency in reading in the 4th grade, only 15% of Latino children have achieved this level of academic competence. The typical Latino 12th grader scores at the same level in math and reading as the average 9th grade European American student. In other words, Latino students, who are largely Mexican origin, function a full 3 years behind native European-American students by the end of high school (NCES, 2002).

As Latino, or Mexican origin, students travel through the academic pipeline, they continue to fall behind students from other ethnic groups. For example, while more than 30% of Asian students and approximately 16% of European American students qualify to attend the University of California, only 6.5% of Latino students do (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2004), and Latino students who attend college are more likely than all other groups to attend 2 year colleges where the likelihood of continuing on to obtain a college degree (licenciatura) is extremely low (Gándara & Chavez, 2003). This is evidenced by the fact that in California 43% of all Asian Americans and 33% of all European Americans in the workforce have at least a bachelor's degree, while only 8% of Latino workers are equally well educated. As a result, Latino workers who comprise 28% of the labor force take home only 19% of the earned wages (López, Ramirez & Rochin, 2001).

Parental income, and especially parental education, are significantly correlated with student achievement for all students. It is therefore not surprising that Latino students would fare so poorly in school. Data from the College Board –the organization that administers the SAT college admission test[2]—provides an indication of why this is

[2] This test is administered to about 2 million annually in the U.S. but is most widely used by colleges and universities in the western and eastern United States, thus the sampling

so. Table 2 shows the educational and economic backgrounds of Mexican origin students, compared to others, who apply to selective, 4 year universities. These are the highest academic performers nationally.

Table 2
Parent Education and Income by Ethnicity
College-bound Students, 1999

Group	% Parents w/ less than H.S. Diploma	% Parents w/ some college	% Parents w/ income <20K	% Parents w/ income >100K
Black (114,912)	5	45	27	3
Mexican American (41,028)	27	30	27	4
Puerto Rican (13,635)	9	47	26	5
Native-American (10,159)	4	53	15	9
Asian (94,066	11	59	21	10
White (704,462)	1	66	5	16

Source: The College Board, 1999 SAT administration data

Even these students of Mexican origin who have high grades and high aspirations, are much more likely than all other students to have parents without a high school diploma, and much less likely than all others to have a parent with *any* college education. Given that these are the highest performing students in the educational system, one can only speculate on the percentages of lower performing Mexican origin students whose parents have not completed high school.

Even more disadvantaged than Mexican origin students generally, are those who do not have a good command of English and who are consequently classified as English Learners. About half of all Mexican origin students in California are English Learners. We have recently collected extensive data on these students in an attempt to demonstrate the degree to which they experience inadequate and inequitable education in the state.

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does not include large numbers of Latinos from the central and southern portions of the U.S.

There are two reasons why it is important to consider California data. First, the state of California is home to 40% of all English Learners in the country, and 41% of all Mexican origin persons live in California. It is the state with the largest number of both Mexican origin students and English learner students in the nation. Second, California has collected some of the most extensive data on English Learners of any state in the country.

Data from a variety of sources reveal that the academic achievement of English learners who, as we have indicated, are largely Mexican origin students, lags significantly behind the achievement of English background students. We examined the achievement of English learners using a number of different measures and data sets –including data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) of the U.S. Department of Education, the American Institutes for Research Implementation of Proposition 227 Study (Parrish, et al., 2001; 2002) and California Department of Education published data.[3] While we present analyses of existing data on student achievement for English learners, we do so fully acknowledging the serious limitations of test scores based on exams administered in English to students who do not speak English well, or at all.

Stanford 9 Achievement Scores

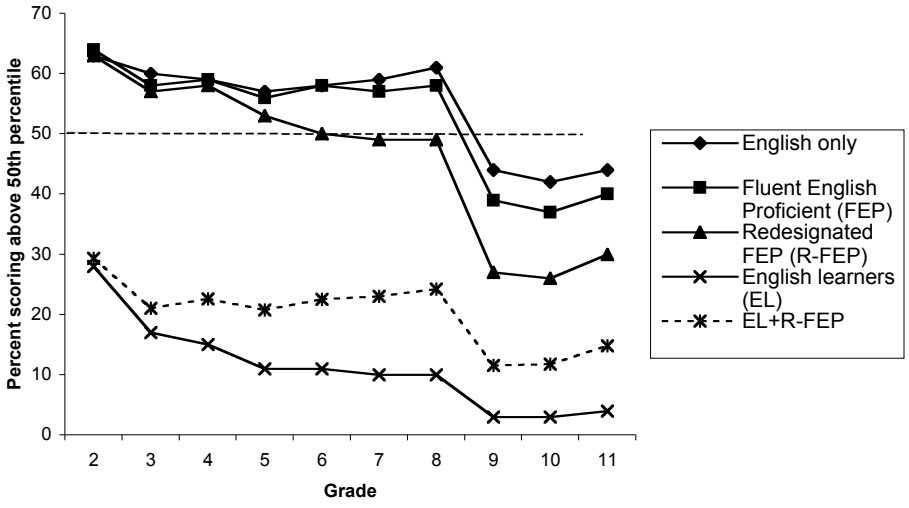
In spite of the fact that we disagree with the state's decision to use a norm-referenced, standardized achievement test in English only for students who do not speak enough English to understand it, we provide an analysis of the test scores as they are routinely used to describe the academic achievement of English Learner students.

As expected, English learners who, by definition, are not yet proficient in English, have low reading scores across all grade levels (See Figure 1). Language minority

[3] California population totals can be found at http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest

students who enter school already proficient in English (Fluent English Proficient or FEP) start out comparable to native English speakers, but by third grade they fall behind and never catch up. Students who enter the schools as English learners and who are subsequently reclassified as proficient (R-FEP), also start out comparable, but by 5th grade they fall below native English speakers, and by 7th grade they fall even further behind these students. Such results challenge the belief that if English learners simply demonstrated "proficiency" in English –as defined by early scores on the SAT 9 test—the achievement gap would disappear.

Figure 1
2001 California SAT9 Reading Test Scores by Grade Level and Language Background



SOUCRE: California State Department of Education, *California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program*. Retrieved February 7, 2002 from the World Wide Web: http: http://star.cde.ca.gov/star2001/default.htm

About one-third of English learners in California are found in grades 7 – 12 and these students are often shortchanged by their schools because of lack of appropriate coursework offerings or materials to support courses for English learners. In secondary schools, English learners are often assigned to multiple periods of ESL (English as a Second Language) or ELD (English Language Development) classes while other students are taking a full complement of academic courses. Commonly, when not enough courses are available in either SDAIE (Specially Designed Instruction in English) or other formats, students are given shortened day schedules, resulting in significantly less time devoted to academic instruction (Olsen, 1997).

We selected a random sample of transcripts of secondary English learners from two different northern California districts. In district #1, we compared a random sample of English learners with a random sample of English speaking students. For English only students (20) with GPAs from 1.6 to 4.1, 58% of their courses were college preparatory. For the English learners (8), with GPAs from 1.3 to 3.3 (this was the upper bound of the GPA range for English learners), 21% of their courses were college preparatory. The following are samples of English learner programs for the sophomore and senior years:

District #1

Saúl (2 years in U.S., attended 9th grade in Mexico where he was in a college preparatory curriculum and took advanced mathematics courses) 2nd year of high school (2001):

Period 1: No class
Period 2: Language Development 1
Period 3: Language Development 2
Period 4: Native Spanish1
Period 5: U.S. History (in Spanish)
Period 6: Math A (general, low level)
Period 7: Weightlifting

(two courses meet college preparatory requirements: Spanish and U.S. History. No science is provided. This program will not result in a high school diploma within 4 years)

José Luis (1 year in the U.S. Uneven academic history prior to immigration) Second year of high school (2001):

Period 1: No class
Period 2: Language Development 1
Period 3: Language Development 1
Period 4: General Math (in English)
Period 5: Native Spanish 1
Period 6: Drawing 1
Period 7: No class

(One class prepares student for college requirements: Spanish. No science or social science offered. Student failed English-only math because he could not understand the teacher. This program will not result in diploma within 4 years)

District #2

Marcos (Long term EL student, enrolled in California schools prior to entering high school). Second year of high school (2000):

Period 1: English 10 SDAIE
Period 2: World History SDAIE
Period 3: Pre Algebra A SDAIE
Period 4: Court Sports
Period 5: Integrated Science 2 SDAIE
Period 6: English Language Development

(Only two courses could be used to meet college preparatory requirements: World History and Integrated Science as an elective, not as a science course. Student never took a college preparatory science, math or English course through the junior year of high school.)

Marisela (Long term EL student, enrolled in California schools prior to entering high school) Senior year (2002):

Period 1: Power English
Period 2: Weight training
Period 3: English Language Development
Period 4: Business Math
Period 5: Consumer Foods
Period 6: Floral Design

(None of the student's courses meets college preparatory criteria. The student took no laboratory science or math beyond algebra 1 which she failed and received no credit. Not likely to complete high school diploma within 4 years)

These are students who have been attending California schools with caring administrators and school personnel, but the schools did not have the resources –human or otherwise—to provide an appropriate program of study for these students. They were selected randomly from among a pool of students like them for illustrative purposes, but they represent typical scenarios in many of California's, and the nation's high schools. It is worth noting, in addition, that more than 82,000 English learners in California receive *no special instruction whatsoever*. They are in mainstream classes-- sink or swim.

California attempts to strengthen the teaching skills of its teachers by providing professional development workshops and courses for its teachers in areas of special need. In the year 1999-2000, teachers reported an average of 31 hours of such instruction. However, in spite of the fact that more than 80% of all teachers in the state have at least one student in their class who does not speak English, only about 2 of those hours were dedicated to helping teachers improve their skills in working with EL students (Gándara & Rumberger, 2003). California does not look too different from the rest of the nation in this regard: a recent national study found that over a five year period, teachers of English learners have received an average of only 4 hours of professional development dealing with English learner issues (Development Associates, 2003).

In a recent survey we conducted of 5300 teachers of English Learners in California (Gándara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2004), the single biggest challenge that teachers of primary grade English learners cited was the inability to communicate with the parents and communities from which the students came. Teachers felt that they were unable to

create partnerships with families to help the students. At the secondary level, the biggest concern of teachers was their inability to encourage and motivate their students, as they saw their desire to study flag and they lacked the ability to communicate effectively with them.

In summary, Mexican origin students –especially those for whom English is not their native language—achieve at much lower levels than all other students, and the schools are ill-equipped to educate them. As a result, most have teachers who do not speak their language and have few, if any, skills to teach them. While the state provides some training to help enhance teachers' pedagogical skills, it provides very little to help teachers meet the challenges that these students face. Moreover, teachers express frustration that they cannot communicate with the students or their parents, and they do not know how to help students who lose their motivation to learn. It is in this context that we have embarked on a study of the impact of Mexican educational initiatives toward Mexican students living abroad –principally in the U.S.

Methods of Investigation

Immediately upon returning from Mexico in September 2004, the study director, Dra. Patricia Gándara, contracted with two advanced doctoral students, both of Mexican origin and fully bilingual, to assist in the data gathering for this project. These research assistants are Enrique Sepúlveda, a former teacher and Vice-Principal in schools serving Mexican origin students, and Jisel Vega, a former bilingual teacher. Both research assistants therefore are intimately familiar with the education of Mexican origin students in the U.S.

The first task of the research assistants was to gather all information possible on each of the programs, to read and assimilate the information and to draw up descriptions of the programs and potential sources of information about their functioning. They searched web-sites, contacted IME staff, and key officials associated with the programs. They were delayed in some of this data gathering as many officials did not receive notice of the evaluation until November and were therefore reluctant to share information with us until they felt they were authorized to do so.

After we felt we had sufficient knowledge of the programs and the appropriate contacts, we developed a set of questions and interview protocols to be used in collecting information on each of the programs. The research assistants then began making phone calls and email contacts to key informants. The primary questions to which we sought answers were:

- How does one find out about this program? Receive training or information about its functioning?
- How does this program function in your context?
- What are the strengths of implementation?
- What are the weaknesses of implementation?
- What can be done to improve the functioning of the program?

The research assistants conducted email and phone conversations with more than 25 informants –program directors and staff; they met with consular staff in Sacramento, visited a plaza comunitaria in Woodland, California to interview the staff and participants about the program. The whole research team met regularly to review what we were learning and to refine the questions that we needed to ask about each of the programs.

Jisel Vega and Patricia Gándara visited the San Diego County Schools plaza comunitaria and conducted a day-long interview with Enrique González and his associate Harry Bloom. Dra. Gándara, with Dir. Andrés Jiménez, also met in December with the Consul General in Sacramento, Lic. Alejandra Bolonia and with the staff member charged with educational programs, Margarita Amezcua, to discuss the study and to learn about the Consulado's role in promoting the programs.

Patricia Gándara met with a number of representatives of Secretarias de Educación from several Mexican states including Tabasco, Michoacán, Nuevo León, Guanajuato, with officials of the SEP in Distrito Federal, and with a number of Mexican and U.S. academics and policymakers doing research on Mexican students in the exterior at the Universidad de Monterrey and the Instituto de Tecnología de Monterrey in December 2004. All of these individuals were able to provide important perspectives on the circumstances of Mexican origin students in the U.S. and those returning to Mexico. Representatives of the Secretarias de Educación also presented statistics on their programs, as well as their views of the functioning of the binational programs. Later in December, Patricia Gándara also interviewed the Director of PROBEM for Jalisco. This interview yielded important insights into the history of the Intercambios de maestros and the challenges that the programs have faced in disseminating the documentos de transferencia.

All of these site visits, interviews, email and telephone conversations, and reviews of existing data and documents form the basis of our data gathering and the observations and conclusions that we share in the following pages. Additional meetings with key individuals in foundations and other private and governmental agencies also inform our

conclusions and recommendations with respect to the potential for further research and collaboration that could strengthen the programs for Mexicanos en el Exterior.

Preliminary Evaluation of Programs

We believe it is important to remind the reader at this point that the entire evaluation effort described here consisted of 3 months in which we were charged with learning about 7 programs and that many representatives of the programs were not willing to talk with us until more than half-way through the evaluation period. Hence, we cannot claim to have intimate knowledge of the full range of programs that exist, or to know any of these programs in great depth. We do, however, believe that we have been able to make important observations about factors that both promote and inhibit the implementation of strong, effective program models.

Intercambio de Maestros

The Intercambio de Maestros is a bi-national program that permits qualified teachers from México to teach in U.S. public schools for between 4 and 6 weeks, generally in the summer. Most arrangements are made through Migrant Education or other similar educational programs. Participating teachers come prepared with lessons and materials that are requested of them prior to their arrival. The Intercambios are generally organized through the PROBEM offices in the different states and expenses are shared between sending and receiving states and programs to provide teachers with room, board, and a small stipend. Mexican teachers are anxious to improve their English while in the U.S. and learn more about the U.S. educational system. The U.S. programs are anxious to have help in understanding the sending communities from which the students

come, and to learn more about typical lessons in the sending schools. An important part of the Intercambio experience is sharing of culture.

How many States participate in the Intercambio de Maestros?

Documentation we have received from IME suggests that 16 U.S. states participated in the Intercambios in 2004 (Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Michigan, Nebraska, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin). California, Texas, Oregon, and Florida have the highest number of teachers, averaging between 20 and 50 teachers participating in the Intercambio program. Most other states have only a handful.

Type of educational settings and programs:

Because the primary connection point with U.S. educational entities is through Migrant Education, the great majority of the Intercambios occur in Migrant Education summer school programs, or other summer programs hosted by local community based agencies. Year round schools is listed as an option for the summer Intercambio, however we were unable to confirm any instance in which teachers were working in year round schools. Programs in which the summer students are typically enrolled include ESL programs, Even Start, federally funded programs, parent involvement programs, and 4-H (agricultural education) programs.

Dissemination of Information

Mexican Consulates in the U.S. disseminate information about this program through radio and television public service announcements and informational meetings within the community. However most contacts have been established between U.S.

educational agencies such as Migrant Education and Mexican governmental agencies. Sometimes these connections are facilitated by the Consulates but not always.

Preliminary Observations

The Intercambios appear to be organized mostly through Migrant Education offices and involve Mexican teachers in short stays in which they work outside the regular public school classrooms and during the summer months. Mexican teachers like the opportunity to improve their English while in the U.S. and to learn something of the U.S. schooling system. However, their actual contact with the school system is relatively limited, as is their contact with urban schools where the majority of Mexican origin students attend. The program has limited impact on helping U.S. teachers to better serve Mexican origin students because there is little contact with teachers who teach in the regular school program and they do not actually interact with the school district or regular school personnel. Their impact appears to be more on the students with whom they interact in the summer school program.

Through interviews we have gleaned that standards for selecting teachers for Intercambios are not uniform, or not uniformly employed, across Mexican states. Thus some teachers have been more successful in the program than others, and some states have a reputation for sending stronger teachers, which results in better relationships with U.S. receiving states.

We note that while there is great potential for Intercambios to enhance the education of Mexican origin students in the U.S., the program has a relatively weak impact because of its small size, short duration of stay of the teachers, and most importantly, because they do not interact with the regular schools. Most of the emphasis

is on cultural diffusion, with little emphasis on academic preparation of students. We do not discount the importance of culture in the developing identity of Mexican origin students, but their educational needs extend far beyond this. We also note that greater standardization of criteria for acceptance to the program would probably improve the quality of the experience for all involved.

A number of questions remain about the programs for which we have not had time to pursue the answers: Which Mexican states are sending teachers to the Intercambios? What are their selection practices? Is there an interest among potential candidates in a longer term, academic year, and position in a U.S. school? In addition to visa restrictions, are there other impediments to expanding the lengths of stay?

Documento de Transferencia

The Documento de Transferencia is a record of a student's schooling history in Mexico and in the U.S. that is supposed to accompany every migrating student. Students must apply for the Documento from the sending school in Mexico or through the Mexican Consulate in the U.S. before leaving the country. The document is to be handed on to the receiving school in the U.S. or Mexico, and ideally should provide detailed information about the student's grade level, subject matter covered, and grades earned. However, preliminary investigation reveals that few schools in the U.S. are aware of these and relatively few students immigrating from Mexico have them. For example, data collected by the SEP for the years 2002-03 show that only 1,099 students going to the U.S. presented a Documento de Transferencia. An informal survey of bilingual school psychologists in northern California found that none had ever seen such a document

although it is their responsibility to work with these students and families in addressing any learning difficulties the students may have.

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Preliminary Observations

The concept of the Documento de Transferencia appears to be a very good one, and would be extremely helpful to school personnel in the U.S. in placing immigrating Mexican students into more appropriate classes, however there are evidently many impediments or disincentives to securing the document. Most informants suggest that parents frequently leave Mexico without giving notice to the schools, so there is no opportunity to secure the Documento, and the documents are often held in offices distant from classroom. Teachers cannot always gain access to them at the moment that parents appear requesting them. One suggestion has been that schools that send large numbers of emigrants to the U.S., should ensure that all teachers have copies of the document in their desks. Additionally, although many states have been conducting informational campaigns to help parents become aware of the existence of the Documento, these campaigns have evidently not communicated the importance of using the Documento de Transferencia and/or are not reaching the target audience. On the U.S. side of the border, the Documento de Transferencia must be certified (apostillado) at the consulate, which adds another layer of bureaucracy, impeding parents from requesting and using it.

Donación de Libros Gratuitos

The distribution of free textbooks in the U.S. is provided through the consulates throughout the U.S. The consulates have discretion over to whom they provide the books

and this varies somewhat from site to site. Some Consulates noted that they only gave the texts to schools and community organizations where they could receive broad use; others would provide them to individuals or families if they received a letter of request. The texts are generally distributed once or twice a year when they are sent from Mexico and are given out until they are all consumed. INEA reports that 52,714 books were sent to the Consulates for distribution in the U.S. in 2004. However, Consulates were unable to tell us how they were used.

Preliminary Observations

It is important to find out who uses the texts and how people become familiar with their availability. They are a potentially powerful resource for students who are not ready to take English only courses in the schools, especially in secondary schools where few materials are available for students who are fluent English speakers.

Plazas Comunitarias and Programas para Adultos --Alfabetización, Primaria, and Secundaria

The Plaza Comunitaria is a site that is designed to support individuals of Mexican origin residing in the U.S. who are over the age of 15 in completing their education via an INEA-CONEVyT portal. Plazas offer any one or more of the following curricular offerings: Alfabetización, Educación Primaria and secundaria; Bachillerato/Preparatoria; GED; Inglés como Segunda Lengua/ESL, Computación, and cultural programming. The curriculum at each Plaza site varies; however most offer Primaria, Secundaria, and Alfabetización.

A Plaza Comunitaria is sponsored by an organization that has office/classroom space with access to computer labs, video and Internet services. The sites sponsoring the Plaza can be anyone of the following:

- Social organization or community center
- Correctional facility or state prison
- School or school district
- Community college or university
- Corporation or worksite

How many Plazas exist in the U.S.?

In November 2004, INEA reported that there were 116 Plazas in 26 U.S. states. However, data collected from IME indicate that are 96 Plazas in 21 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Among these, however, not all have an ACTIVE status. According to IME, only 45 Plazas are active, 1 is temporarily closed, 2 are not functioning, and 48 have unknown status. Our survey of programs indicated that Plazas generally serve small numbers of students, often fewer than 10, and that there is difficulty holding student in the program after they have enrolled. The discrepancy in the INEA and IME data are significant and it is important to reconcile these numbers to get a better picture of how many programs actually exist, how many have been started but have ceased to exist, and how many are in the process of starting up.

Dissemination of Information

Information about Plazas is typically disseminated through television and radio public service announcements. These announcements are done by the Mexican Consulates, schools, and community organizations. Sponsors utilize word of mouth strategies as well as flyers to get the word out about the availability of services. It is very difficult to know from talking with local staff how effective these strategies are. In the northern California sites, it appeared that participants in the Plazas were the same

individuals who had participated with the community organizations prior to establishing a Plaza, so they were not extending their reach into the wider community. More in-depth study is required to determine the effectiveness of the dissemination strategies and how they might be improved.

How does a Plaza Comunitaria get funded?

The Mexican government does not provide any monies for start up and maintenance of the Plazas, but it does in some cases send experts to help get the Plaza running. In California, Proyecto California, provides considerable technical support to its members, but not all Plazas choose to become members of the Proyecto California network. The Mexican government does provide on-line curriculum and if needed technical support through their Consulates. Community organizations such as MAAP (Mexican American Alcoholism Project) in the Sacramento, California region, provide staffing, funding, and all of the costs involved in maintaining a Plaza. Plazas may provide paid and/or volunteer staff through the community organization, depending on their own funding situation. Social services programs within schools, such as, Healthy Start/Even Start programs and Migrant Education that serve the larger school community, sponsor some Plazas.

Preliminary Observations

A recent evaluation study completed by Cecilia Rios Aguilar of the University of Rochester (2004) found that of 23 students enrolled in the SEA (Educación secundaria para adultos) only 11 took the end of course exam, and only 10 passed. Rios Aguilar found that the primary reasons that students dropped out were that (1) the hours of operation of Plaza were inflexible; and (2) the program went too fast, requiring students

to devote too much time to study; and (3) the students received relatively little feedback on their progress. A problem that was mentioned repeatedly by interviewees was that facilitators (asesores) in the Plazas were either paid very low wages or were volunteers, and so there is a very high turnover rate of staff. Additionally, Rios Aguilar also found that only one of the facilitators in the program she studied in Missouri had teaching certification, so facilitators were not trained in how to teach students. Their role was narrow: make sure the materials were available. Most informants note that the materials are good and that texts are of high quality, however some informants noted that there was difficulty in matching texts to the program modules. This may be because the facilitators lack teaching experience and do not have sufficient familiarity with the curriculum. This is an important question to pursue.

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While the Plaza concept could fit easily into schools and school districts, there is very little knowledge of them by school personnel. Word of mouth appears to be the primary way in which people find out about the Plazas. Dissemination efforts do not appear to have been very successful. Data on the plazas are unreliable and the numbers of individuals being served across the plazas is not tracked. We attempted to do telephone surveys of the Plazas to gather numbers of participants but had great difficulty contacting directors or getting accurate responses in the short time that we had available for the study. There are difficulties in maintaining qualified staff to work in the plazas as most are not able to provide a salary due to lack of funding. Additionally, there is difficulty in holding students in the programs because of their rapid pace, generally inflexible hours, and inconsistency of staff available to provide assistance.

Bachillerato Abierto y a Distancia

The Bachillerato a Distancia is offered to students who have completed secundaria. They can take the modules at their own pace, take a series of exams, and complete the bachiller in a distance education setting, such as in a Plaza Comunitaria. Developed for use within Mexico, the curriculum has been made available via the INEA-CONEVyT portal in the United States, as well as in other countries. The San Diego County Schools have server capacity and infrastructure to beam this curriculum throughout the U.S. Only a handful of students in the U.S., however, have taken advantage of this program. The reason for the low interest in the program appears to be because it is not aligned with the high school diploma or the GED, and that students in the U.S. prefer to take the GED as it offers a certification that is acknowledged in the U.S. We were told that Brunswick District in North Carolina had attempted to align the Bachiller curriculum with the high school diploma in that state, but after many attempts to contact the program, we were not successful. We remain very interested in finding out more about this program.

Preliminary Observations

In our estimation the Bachillerato a Distancia could have a very large impact on Mexican students in the U.S. if we could achieve broad accreditation of the course modules so that secondary students could take high school equivalent and college preparatory courses –mathematics, sciences, social sciences---using the Mexican bachillerato a distancia curriculum while also studying English intensively in U.S. high schools. If students were able to receive credit both in Mexico and the U.S., this would provide a strong incentive to take the courses, and could have an impact on the drop out rate among Spanish speaking students who see little point in staying in high school taking

courses that lead neither to a high school diploma nor to postsecondary preparation. We are anxious to mount a demonstration of such a model with foundation funding. We also note that this would provide a more viable option for Mexican (and other Spanish speaking) students in the U.S. than the GED, which seems to be the currently most attractive option. This is unfortunate because the GED does NOT confer the same benefits as a high school diploma and can foreclose certain opportunities. It does not, for example, provide an avenue for a student to pursue a college degree.

Los Programas en Colaboración con Instituciones Educativas Norteamericanas que Hospedan el Portal de CONEVyT

There are 3 sites that house servers for the CONEVyT websites: California, North Carolina, and Oregon. We had the opportunity to visit the San Diego Proyecto California site, which is truly impressive. It is housed in a technologically sophisticated new building with classroom space for large numbers of students. Enrique González and Richard Thome, who direct the site, contend that they can support transmission to Plazas all over the country, with digitalized curriculum for Primaria, Secundaria, and Bachillerato programs, in addition to INEA developed curriculum for parent support on topics such as nutrition and child rearing. They certainly are capable of meeting the needs of all California sites. The San Diego site, with modern, new equipment and technologically savvy staff, is a model for CONEVyT collaboration, and a model Plaza site. Because the site was just inaugurated a few months ago, and no students were present, we were unable to see it in actual operation. It would be good to follow the progress of the San Diego site carefully. Richard Thome and Enrique González have an excellent Proyecto California website that introduces the concept behind the Plazas and

the availability of online services. We are not aware, however, that very many key people in the state of California know about these resources or how to link to the website.

Summary Observations

We are struck by the low visibility of these Mexican educational initiatives in the U.S. schools. Knowledge of these programs appears to be haphazard and mostly word of mouth. For example, although the website indicates that the California Secretary of Education had attended the inauguration of the San Diego County CONEVyT portal and Plaza site (Proyecto California), individuals within the California Superintendent of Instruction's office claimed to know nothing of the project. When the Deputy Superintendent of Instruction for California Schools (Dr. Geno Flores) was introduced to the extensive resources available through the various projects supported by the SEP, SRE, IME, INEA, PROBEM, and CONEVytT, he was astounded and noted that it would be a grave mistake not to make these available to all Spanish speaking students who could benefit from them. However, with primary communications about the programs being directed through the Mexican Consulates, the diffusion of information is weak. We often made a dozen or more attempts to ascertain who was in charge of education matters within the Consulates in different parts of the U.S. with little luck. And, even knowing the persons in charge did not necessarily increase our chances of making contact with them. Some offices are only open for a couple hours a day, and telephone messages are not returned. As ex-Secretary of Education Jose Angel Pescador noted (2004), the Mexican Consulates do not have a record of paying attention to issues of education, and so they have not developed the focus, the infrastructure, and the personal contacts to adequately promote these programs.

There are a number of barriers that have operated to prevent greater penetration of Mexican initiatives into U.S. schools in addition to the limited effectiveness of the Consulates. Our evaluation of the current situation suggests that the time has come for the Mexican and the U.S. Departments of State to redefine the meaning of "migrant student" so that the term has a shared meaning on both sides of the border. The U.S. should acknowledge that most Mexican immigrant students need specialized educational services whether they live in urban or rural areas, and that migrant education could better serve the needs of students if it broadened its scope.

There is also a lack of accurate information as well as perception about the value of some educational programs within the U.S. There is a need to clarify what programs are, and how they can benefit students. For example, we observed that many students were reluctant to take advantage of the Bachillerato Abierto a Distancia curriculum because they did not see a value in having a certification that held little value in a U.S. context. They preferred to get a high school diploma that would have currency in the U.S. We also observed that these students were often given advice to pursue the GED route to certification. However, this is a very limiting option for students as the GED does not prepare them for admission to college, and many employers do not acknowledge it as completion of high school competencies. The GED is NOT equivalent to a high school diploma, which is a much more marketable certification. Yet, some programs treated the two as though they were equivalent and channeled students who might have otherwise completed the high school diploma into GED programs.

Inadequate funding of programs is a serious problem that hampers their effectiveness. Most of these programs are dependent upon either voluntary incorporation

into existing educational agencies, or external –and often temporary—funds such as small, short-term grants to maintain them. When the funds dry up, so does the program. This is one reason for the relative success of prison-based programs: steady funding streams and captive clients. So the two biggest problems –loss of funds and dropping out of students—are reduced dramatically by institutional circumstances. However, one would hope that it would not require imprisonment for students to take full advantage of these programs. Programs need to be embedded into institutions with reliable funding streams, such as in the public schools. Additionally, several major foundations can be tapped to provide the initial base of support to "grow" these programs and help them to find an appropriate home within existing publicly funded entities.

Several of the programs could contribute significantly to addressing fundamental problems faced by the U.S. schools and the Mexican students in them. **Intercambio de Maestros** could be used to greater advantage in several ways. (1) By connecting the programs directly with the school districts in which teachers serve, rather than through offices of Migrant Education, by extending their stay into the school year, or by placing them in year round schools (an option that is mentioned in documents, but that we have not seen utilized), and by placing more emphasis on academic instruction, visiting Mexican teachers could have a much larger impact on the education of students in the U.S. In the current circumstance, they are affecting very few students, they have relatively little contact with the regular classroom teachers or school systems, and their lessons are limited mostly to cultural programming. (2) Project models such as Alianza, which was funded by the Kellogg Foundation and ran through 2002, have developed strategies for preparing Mexican educated teachers both in the U.S. (legal residents) and

in Mexico (visiting teachers) for certification to teach in U.S. schools. Department of Education officials in a number of Mexican states have told us that there is a surplus of well-trained, Mexican teachers (who hold licenciaturas) and have a command of English, who would be available for multi-year exchanges if it were possible to arrange for them to get extended visas. We have been told that there are hundreds of such teachers in Mexico—a statement that we have not been able to verify. However, with a longer commitment to teach during the regular school years, such Intercambios could have much greater impact. (3) An Intercambio of Teacher Trainers (Formadores de Formadores) could have a very large impact on the education of Mexican (and other Spanish speaking) students in U.S. schools. If such teacher trainers could work alongside U.S. professors in colleges and universities that train teachers, they could infuse the U.S. curriculum with culturally and pedagogically appropriate practices. They could help to train more teachers with skills and sensitivity to working with parents as partners in the education of their children, a need that we have found to be very great among English Learner students. U.S. teacher training professor could also help Mexican Formadores de formadores to integrate particularly effective practices into their curriculum as well, and could help to prepare teachers to prepare their migrating students for the experience they will have in the U.S. At several levels of the concept of the Intercambio de Maestros could be expanded to provide much greater benefit for more students. We also understand that greater uniformity of criteria for selection of these teachers, with strict adherence to high standards for both Mexican and U.S. teachers would be necessary, but these are issues that can be addressed in a pilot program train more teacher trainers, thereby having a larger impact on more students than the current model of individual teachers doing short

summer exchanges. Teacher training modules developed in Mexico to train Mexican teachers in communicating with parents and fostering community involvement could be powerful additions to U.S. teacher training and professional development programs.

The **Documento de Transferencia** is an important tool to help Mexican students to have a more consistent educational experience, both in the U.S. and in Mexico. Yet it is not well understood or widely used. It appears to us that it would be more widely used if all teachers had immediate access to them, and if the school principal (director) could certify their accuracy at all levels of the curriculum from kindergarten through high school, without necessity of going to the Consulate for certification. All schools with Mexican origin students should have the Documento immediately available, and school personnel should be trained in using them. Better standards need to be developed and explained so that grades have similar meanings across schools and countries, or designed so that they give information about competencies, rather than grades. Additionally, if Mexican schools could provide more information about assessment of students using standardized tests that are given in Mexico (and U.S. providing this information as well), this would help in placement of students. Finally, knowledge of the Documento needs to be disseminated through professional development at school districts, and in teacher preparation programs in colleges on both sides of the border.

It is difficult to know what impact the **Donación de Textos Gratuitos** is having without a study of how they are used and by whom. This is a potentially rich resource for Spanish speaking students and teachers in the U.S., but little is actually known about their use.

Plazas Comunitarias are currently most often hosted by community organizations or prisons. In the case of the community organizations, the funding to support the Plaza is often tenuous. Additionally, because the community organizations generally have very limited funds, they do not have expansive networks for diffusing information about the programs. They rely on word of mouth, which is not very effective. The Plaza Comunitaria concept, with programming for parents as well as older students, fits well into the needs of schools that serve immigrant students. Most teachers work hard, but feel incompetent to encourage parent involvement, and our own research (Gándara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2005) shows that meaningful contact with parents and engagement with their children's learning is the single biggest challenge that teachers of these students face. Virtually every high school, and many elementary and middle schools, in the state of California could host a Plaza Comunitaria for use by parents and family members, and for use by parents WITH their children in the after school hours. Models of such programs now exist. UC LINKS is a program sponsored by the University of California that brings students to after school sites where they can learn to use computers and interact with university students who guide them through a variety of educational activities. Anecdotally, we know that a very large percentage of the students in this program are of Mexican origin, because of the neighborhoods in which the programs are established. Parents are also encouraged to participate with their children in computer learning activities. University of California students are given course credit for working with younger students in these sites and this provides a steady supply of talented, low cost, or cost free, assistants for the programs. The Plaza Comunitaria concept could be easily incorporated into the UC Links sites, providing primaria and

secundaria courses for parents, and other course modules for students. The UC Links website (www.uclinks.org) describes the program in the following way:

Now, as in the beginning, college students work in small groups with children so that they learn together through informal activities exploring a variety of educational software, Internet-based resources, and other educational materials. University students are generally enrolled in a special research course where they learn to help guide the children through a variety of learning activities designed to promote literacy, math, science, and computer skills, as well as collaborative behavior on a local and international scale.

Over the years the size and diversity of UC Links has expanded. What began in a single town in the United States became a network that included other U.S. locations and Russia. The success of these efforts led to the spread of the activity to encompass all campuses of the University of California and many countries around the world. Adoption of the general model of university-community collaboration by colleagues in the European Union led to the development of yet further, and more diverse forms of activities both in universities and their local sites.

In 2004 the dynamics of growth and change have led to the creation of International UC Links, which builds upon the ideas of prior generations. As we start this new phase of development, we can characterize the broad set of features to the varied partners in this voluntary association of educational innovators.

Each site in the UC Links network is adapted to serve the special concerns, interests and needs of local children and their families. The community's role in the collaboration is to define themes and appropriate for their children. The university's role is to help design and implement activities that achieve these goals through sustained collaborations that connect faculty and students' community service activities with undergraduate education and faculty research. As a whole, UC Links represents: a network of school, community, and university people with broad expertise in designing innovative, development-enhancing programs using a growing pool of technology-based software, Internet learning materials and other educational resources for children of different age and grade levels.

We find it astounding that this program, initiated in San Diego, California at the University of California at San Diego, now has partner sites in Russia, but none with Mexico and none hosting a CONEVyT portal, or using Mexican curriculum available through INEA or SEA. These settings are ideal for Plazas Comunitarias, but the appropriate contacts have not been made.

ENLACE is another technology-based program sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation and partnered with the University of California at Santa Barbara, that brings Latino students and their parents together in joint academic projects. The goal is to strengthen education for both the students and their parents. ENLACE describes itself at its website (www.research.ucsb.edu/ccs/enlace/project_design.html) in the following way:

The ENLACE y Avance partnership will test its model in full over the K through 14 pipeline through the specific emphases of its three regional clusters. Each cluster has arrived at its unique emphasis through:

* *An initial assessment of community needs*
* *A thorough inventory of existing programs and services*
* *Collaborative relationships, fostered within the clusters themselves, from which programmatic connections-leading to program expansions and enhancements-have sprung*

The Santa Barbara Cluster will pair advocacy teams with families of ENLACE scholars and will use home visits to help families select from a "menu" of services those, which best meet, their needs. The Santa Barbara Cluster also will address issues of literacy, particularly at the elementary level, where students must build a solid foundation in reading, writing, and mathematics in order to pursue eventual college and career goals. The Ventura Cluster will focus on family development and will assist families, primarily those from rural, farm worker communities, in successfully negotiating critical transitions in their children's personal, social, and academic development. The Oxnard Cluster will use its distanced learning technology to broadcast college-preparation programs in Spanish and English to Latino communities, not only in its region, but also nationally through HACU's network of Hispanic-serving institutions.

There is also a network of Preschool Education sites throughout the state of California that are supported with Proposition 10 funds. These are fund collected from tobacco taxes that are earmarked for preschool education. Probably the majority of students served in these programs come from Spanish speaking homes, yet no connection has been made with the Plazas or with the CONEVyT to incorporate the Mexican curriculum geared towards parents into these programs. The INEA curricula would be invaluable resources in these sites as well, as modules on nutrition, parenting, etc. in

Spanish are very appropriate for incorporation into these well-funded sites. There are many potential marriages between programs within California –and no doubt within the U.S.—that have not been capitalized upon because of lack of infrastructure to realize these unions.

We consider the **Bachillerato Abierto y a Distancia** as one of the programs with the greatest potential to assist Mexican students. Accreditation of the secondary school coursework could be an important supplement to the very weak curriculum that most Spanish speaking secondary students in the U.S. receive. We believe that this could have a significant impact on the drop out rate for Spanish speaking students. All that is required is to establish a structure for accrediting team within school districts (and involving university personnel) that would determine which course modules within the Bachillerato curriculum could be approved for high school diploma and college preparatory course credit. With such agreements in place, Spanish speaking students could take the Bachillerato coursework while they simultaneously studied intensive English courses at the high school, and could receive credit for BOTH the Bachillerato and the high school diploma. This would be a great incentive for students to remain in school and would prepare them for successful postsecondary study and employment in both Mexico and the United States. And this should not be difficult to do. We have already enlisted the key individuals in the state of California –including the Office of the state Superintendent of Instruction (SPI) – to develop a demonstration program of how this can be accomplished.

Our preliminary observations lead us to believe that there is enormous potential for U.S./Mexican collaboration around programs that are already developed, but

underutilized and that these programs also form a basis for innovative adaptations that can serve even larger numbers of students, parents, and teachers.

Recommendations and Proposed Activities

- **Evaluation of Programs**

  Several programs deserve and require more in-depth evaluation in order to determine how effective they currently are, and how they might be more cost effective. Included among these are:

  1. The Documento de Transferencia: The Documento is a potentially powerful tool that relatively few people take advantage of. Which parents are most likely to use it? How do schools and teachers use it? How helpful is to them? How do people find out about it? What are the impediments to wider use? How can it incorporate more consistent, usable information? How can it be incorporated in standard procedures for schools in both the U.S. and in Mexico so that both parents and teachers have greater accessibility to it? To ascertain this information would require visits to a number of school and districts, interviews with school personnel and parents, and contact with officials both in Mexico and the U.S. We estimate that a careful evaluation study that yielded this information could be conducted for $50,000.
  2. Donación de textos gratuitos: The textos are rich educational resource, but no one knows exactly who uses them, or how, or how many students actually have contact with the books once they are delivered into the hands of a school or program. In order to make cost effective use of the books for the largest number of students, a study should be conducted to answer these questions. A

case study investigation, looking at the use of the texts that are distributed by a sample of Consulates around the country could be conducted, based on a few site visits and interview, plus extensive telephone and email interviews, for about $40,000.

3. Plazas Comunitarias: How do people find out about the possibility of establishing a Plaza? How do they get technical assistance to start it and maintain it? How do they fund them? What are the major problems in sustaining them, attracting clients, attracting volunteers? How many students begin in different programs (primaria, secundaria, bachillerato, other) in different sites? What kinds of structural issues that impede or enhance their functioning, such as hours of operation, ease of transportation, location of sites, and how are these challenges addressed in successful programs? What are potential sources of revenue to sustain them? An evaluation that yielded this information, using a case study approach could be conducted for about $60,000. [This study would require the most travel to sites.]

- **Research**

  A number of studies need to be commissioned to determine basic information that will allow us to better serve students through these binational educational initiatives. These studies necessarily should be conducted by binational teams of researchers as well to utilize data sets and census data from both Mexico and the U.S. Some of these studies might be made available, at least in preliminary form, for the upcoming conference in Morelia. Such studies include:

1. What do we know about Mexico's production of highly trained teachers, and those who also have competency in English? How many are there? How many would be available for short or longer term assignments in the U.S.? Is it true that Mexico has an over-production of highly qualified teachers? Why are they not being absorbed into the Mexican education system? How many qualified Mexican origin teachers are living in the U.S. but not teaching, who could be brought into the teacher force? What are the problems of acquiring visas for Mexican resident teachers and how can these problems be addressed?
2. How many Mexican students return from the United States to Mexico annually to resume their schooling? Which Mexican states have the most and fewest returnees? How do Mexican schools assist them in adapting? What are exemplary practices in this area? How do the Mexican schools deal with the issue of limited Spanish competency? Are there things to be learned by both Mexico and the U.S. with respect to how this situation is addressed in the two countries?
3. What is the profile of Mexican students migrating to the United States in the 21st century? Is it true that recent migrant students arrive in the U.S. with a higher level of previous schooling than in prior decades? What is the age and educational distribution of Mexican migrant students? What are the patterns of returning to Mexico for short periods or long-term residence? What percentage of migrant students are likely to return to school in Mexico? How does this profile vary by Mexican sending state?

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4. What kinds of large scale testing and assessment are currently being conducted in Mexico that could be used to help place students in U.S. schools, and vice versa? How available are test data on Mexican students? Is there variation by states in Mexico with respect to large scale achievement testing? Are any tests aligned with U.S. tests?

- **Collaborative Activities**

  This preliminary evaluation study has pointed up several areas in which immediate collaboration between IME, the SRE, and other educational agencies in Mexico and the University of California could yield potentially rich outcomes for Mexican students in both the U.S. and those returning to Mexico. Among those initiatives that we believe should be undertaken are:

  1. A pilot demonstration project to establish the feasibility of a dual accreditation program that would provide BOTH bachillerato and high school diploma credit based on courses that could be taken via the Bachillerato Abierto y a Distancia. We have already identified both funding and educational partners for this initiative and invite the IME to partner with us in this activity.
  2. Seeking funding for a Professors of Teacher Preparation or Formadores de Formadores Exchange or Intercambio that would bring the most skilled professionals who are preparing teachers on both sides of the border to work together to develop better training methods, materials, and curricula to aid in the instruction of Spanish speaking students. We have had some

preliminary discussions with funders who might support such a project. We invite IME to participate with us in this activity.

3. Partnership in seeking ways to link existing programs, such as UC Links, Proposition 10 Preschool centers, and other public programs, with the Mexican educational programs we have reviewed within this document. This would require some resources to support personnel to dedicate time to these activities.
4. Participation of a Mexican representative at a Hewlett Foundation sponsored conference on meeting the academic needs of secondary English Learners in May 2005 to seek foundation support for activities such as the bachillerato/high school diploma initiative.
5. Active involvement in pursuing strategies for addressing the issues and opportunities we have noted through the Morelia conference in March 2005.

[i] Most data on persons of Hispanic origin, or Latinos, do not break out the numbers by sub-group, i.e, Mexican origin, Puerto Rican, Cuban American, or other. Where data speak directly to Mexican origin students, we note that. Otherwise, our best proxy, and especially in California where 80% of Latino students are of Mexican origin, is data for "Latino" students.

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