



FIRST PROCEEDINGS REPORT

TEXAS LATINO FAMILY ECONOMIC BLUEPRINT



Latino Policy Symposium

Path to Power & Prosperity

OCTOBER 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The inaugural Latino Policy Symposium: Path to Power, was a convening to work on policy issues, ideas, and strategies directed at improving the economic mobility of Latino families. We thank the 68 Symposium participants and discussants who engaged in passionate and constructive exchange to produce this document. A special thanks to the researchers who presented policy discussion papers, the capacity-building panelist, and panel facilitators for helping guide the policy discussions.

The Symposium was held on the Downtown Campus of the University of Texas at San Antonio. Our hosts were the College of Public Policy and its Policy Studies Center. We extend our appreciation to Dean Rogelio Saenz, and Center Director, Roger Enriquez, and their support staff and student volunteers.

Our gratitude is extended to the Symposium sponsors for their financial and in-kind support. In particular, we appreciate your trust in our purpose for encouraging public policies that support families.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Public policies matter. Laws and policies relating to taxes, education, health care, criminal justice, banking, housing and neighborhood development, environment, civic rights, etc. are a direct result of policy-making that may have positive or negative consequences. It is expected that they be fair and equitable to all. In particular, they should be responsive to human capital investment that builds social and economic opportunities and prosperity for its citizens.

On May 4-5, 2017, 68 academics, practitioners and advocates from across the state met for the inaugural “Latino Policy Symposium: Path to Power” to begin development of a **Texas Latino Family Blueprint**. The Symposium’s **strategic long-term goal is to establish equitable public policies that contribute to economic mobility opportunities that strengthen Latino families**. Strong families are families with financially stable home environments, increased education, secure employment, greater child development support opportunities, improved health, and more civically engaged citizens.

The Symposium agenda’s primary outcome was the Texas Latino Family Blueprint describing:

- The state of Latino family economic mobility condition.
- Issues and policy priorities for human capital investments in education, labor and employment, housing, and health and human services.
- Latino capacity to influence state and local policies responsive to their concerns and investment priorities.

Public policies, when designed as human capital investments, demonstrate economic win-wins for families, their children’s future, and the state’s prosperity. Unfortunately, Texas has a sordid history of racial inequities and limited human capital investment policy-making. For many Texans, and Latinos disproportionately, it has meant generational perpetuation of low-income and poor families with limited economic mobility opportunities.

Today, Latinos represent 38.7% (11.7 million) of the Texas population. Latino families represent 64% of Texas family growth between 2000 and 2013, and have significantly less asset resources (e.g., education, income and employment benefits, healthcare access, home ownership, and other assets) than non-Latino Whites. **As a result, 1 of 2 or 2.3 million Latino children are at-risk of becoming another generation of low-income and poverty families.**

This policy Blueprint is a **genesis plan** driven by a **‘family strengthening and children’s futures’** vision for Latino and allied advocates. The aim of this Blueprint is to contribute to reflecting on the work ideas, strategies and collaborations that guides our commitment and efforts to continually improve the *bienestar*¹ (well-being) of Latino families. The Blueprint is a call to continually:

1. Review the status of Latino families.
2. Build capacity to influence public policies that increase family economic mobility.
3. Address underlying structural political and policy barriers for real transformative change.
4. Build local and statewide collaborations and capacity that increases organizing, policy development and communications capabilities which support family-strengthening policies.



¹ *Bienestar* is defined as a perceived quality of life status among individuals, families and communities affected by social, environmental, and systemic factors – a concept of holistic wellness.

There is strong evidence that supports the proposition that society can accrue significant benefits and economic returns from the following accomplishments:

- Producing four-year college graduates who earn about \$50,000 more annually than high school graduates only, who experience better health, who are more civically engaged, and who significantly contribute to the State’s workforce productivity, tax base, wages, and economic vitality.
- Making investments that contribute to maintaining health and wellbeing that results in lower healthcare spending overall, an increased opportunity for financial stability, reduced productivity losses to employers, and decreased reliance on social welfare or safety-net programs.
- Providing access to affordable housing that results in increased family stability and independence, and creates a platform for social and economic advancement.
- Creating job-driven training programs that increase work skills, wages and financial mobility; respond to industry and business worker needs and economic growth; and also create less reliance on social welfare or safety-net programs.

It is beyond question that the issues for and complexities of change are numerous in education, employment and labor, affordable housing, and health and human services. It is understood that advocates struggle to prioritize and achieve progressive state-level policy changes in each of these areas. Invariably, they have to overcome three major challenges: lack of political power, dwindling financial and human resources, and an entrenched policy culture hostile to human capital investments. The state’s apparent desire to implement policies trending toward more centralized control to obstruct progressive local-level policies further thwarts these challenges.

In Texas politics, racialized policy making is the shared perspective across these challenges; **“everything is about race—it’s veiled as public policy, but it encourages people to believe that their tax dollars are going to support lazy black and brown people.”** (Garnet Coleman, Houston Representative, New Yorker, July 2017) These political views are further demonstrated

by the skewed redistricting, voter suppression, and anti-immigrant policies. Most Latino advocates and their allies know the preceding to be the policy environment in which they are pursuing progressive policy change. More often, however, they must also defend against the bombardment of regressive, unequal, racialized and marginalizing policies.

The idea for a Texas Latino Policy Blueprint is not new, and the Symposium incorporated other Latino focused policy source documents in its discussions. Foremost, this Blueprint is:

- Driven by a desire to strengthen families and enhance the future of children.
- Explicit about the policy-making culture that must change for policy transformation to occur, and lead to breaking the generational chain of poverty and low-income families.
- Unequivocal about the capacity that is required to significantly change and improve Texas policy making.

This Texas Latino Policy Blueprint is a work in progress intended to provide an economic mobility **path** that strengthen families. It is a path we hope will be embraced and supported statewide through collaborative activities and actions.

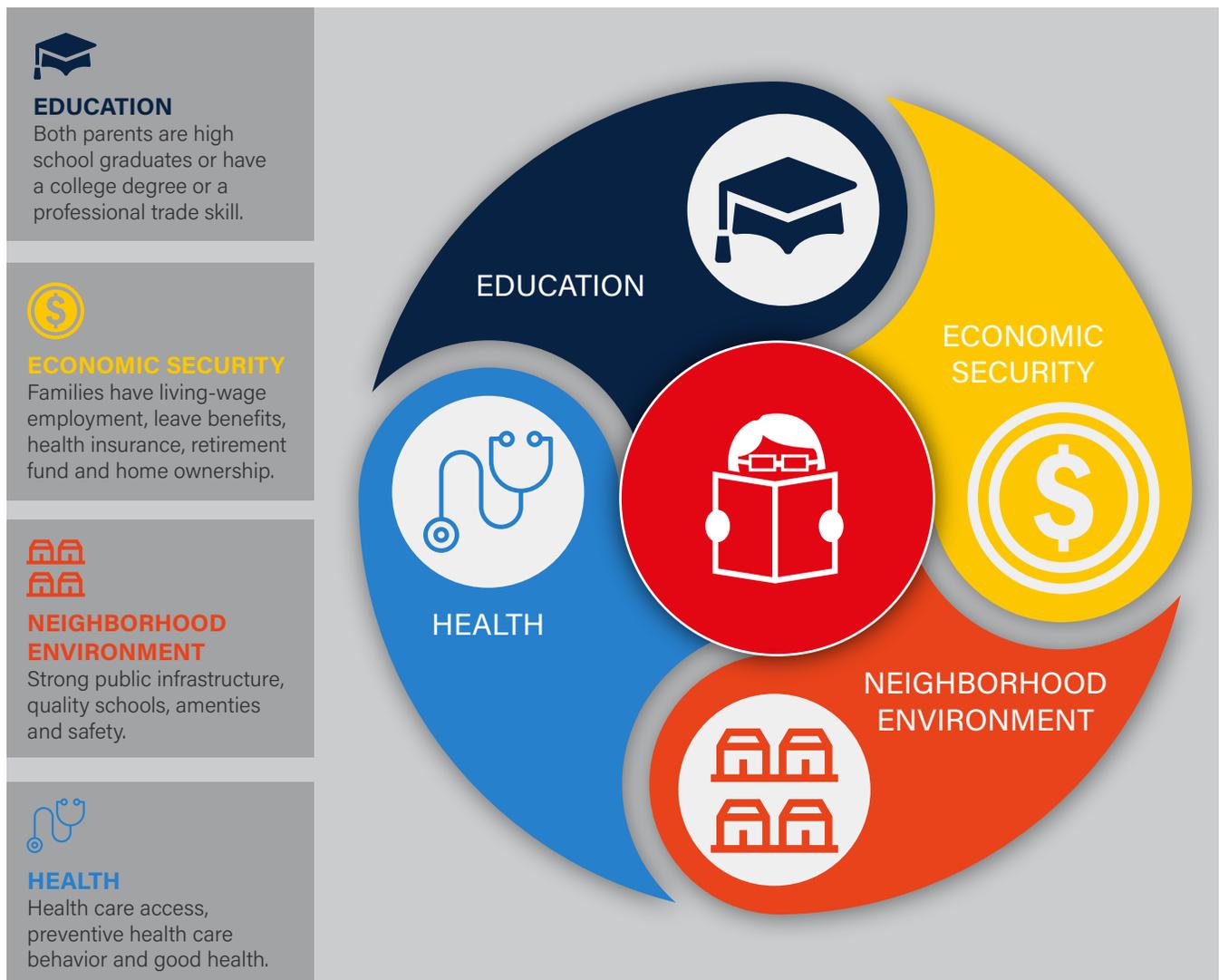


II. SYMPOSIUM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Latino Policy Symposium: Path to Power was designed to be “a gathering at which ideas are freely exchanged.” The idea was to **target economic mobility issues among Latino families, and their implications for childrens’ developmental well-being and future opportunities for middle-class economic success.** The Symposium was premised on the argument that there exists an inter-generational cycle of Latino poverty and low-income status, of which, state policy making was a significant contributor in its cause and continuation.

It is well-documented and accepted that children in financially stable families with resource assets experience increased development opportunities at each life stage, particularly from infancy to adolescence. The opposite is true for children growing up in poverty and low-income families, e.g., they are at much higher risks of less education, low-paying occupations, poor health, teen pregnancy, incarceration, etc.

The Symposium’s design was structured to discuss human capital issues and public policy solutions in four strong family-influence areas – education, labor/employment, housing, and health and human services.



The **Symposium goal** to strengthen the economic mobility of Latino families incorporated four process objectives, and a corresponding agenda implementation structure.

Objectives

1. **Review** the Texas political environment and public policy impact on Latino families.
2. **Identify** the underlying policy culture and structure that permeates and influences most policy outcomes.
3. **Assess** the strengths and weaknesses of Latino influence on policy-making and regulatory rule-making.
4. **Create** a strategic working document that supports capacity-building developments in Latino policy influence.

Structure

Symposium Participants:

- **Identify** through formal and informal networks advocates with involvement in Latino *bienestar* concerns specific to education, labor/employment, housing and health and human services. Approximately 300 individuals were contacted to determine their interest to participate.
- **Invite** a maximum of 100 individuals from across the state with the participation requirement that they attend the complete Symposium, and accept assignment to one of four concurrent round-table discussion panels; 106 were invited and 68 attended.
- **Ensure** statewide, and balanced advocate participation from non-profit service-providing and policy organizations, grass-root coalition groups, and academic representation.

Agenda:

- **Setting-the-Table** plenary presentations that permeated all human capital issues: Status of Latino Economic Mobility, State Budget as Policy, and Latino Political Power and Influence.
- **Four Break-Out Panels** (education, labor/employment, housing, and health and human services); each guided by a facilitator, a discussion issue paper, and reactants for interactive discussions.

All panels were recorded, and a scribe assigned to each for summary note-taking.

- **One discussion paper** assigned to each panel intended as a catalyst for discussion of a) impact on Latinos, b) political and policy environment, and c) policy relevant recommendations.
- **Sixteen to 20 discussants are part of each panel** where members react to their respective discussion paper and one another share perspectives, ideas, and actions that can be translated into legislative priorities and a capacity-building strategy directed at increasing policy influence.
- **Capacity-Building** plenary panel discussion to underscore the need to increase organizing (local and statewide), policy development, and Communications Messaging capabilities to achieve more policy influence and outcomes.
- **Plenary** session for each break-out panel to present their identified issues, policy recommendations, and capacity-building strategies.

In summary, the Symposium was designed as the **genesis for a Latino Family Policy Blueprint** to engage and build local and state advocate support, and collaborative actions.

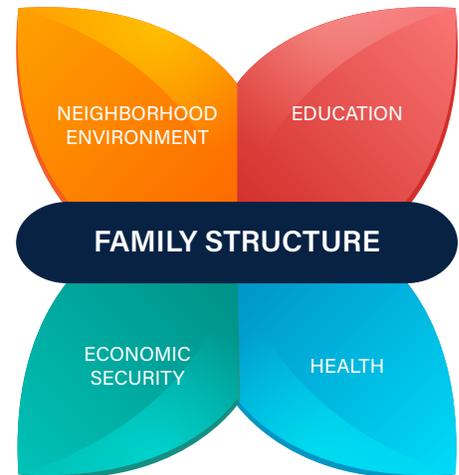


III. FAMILY BIENESTAR (WELL-BEING) POLICY PRIORITIES

A. Family Human Capital Investment Policies

Participants in the inaugural Texas Latino Policy Symposium (TXLPS) outlined major education, labor/employment, affordable housing, and health and human services issues which impact family economic mobility. The exchange of perspectives on identified issue along with their causes and solutions were accompanied by the Symposium’s research discussion papers and reports, and over 500 combined person-years of the discussants front-line Latino activism, service delivery, and policy experience.

The supporting data from the presented discussion papers and policy reports underscored the four (4) interrelated indicators or determinants of a strong family – they include family structure, education, economic, health, and neighborhood environment. Each affect the family sustainability by enabling or challenging parental capacity to provide a thriving child development support environment.



Empirical data overwhelmingly indicate that Latinos fare worse nationally relative to their race/ethnic peers compared to Whites and Blacks in Texas. Inequalities are evident across an expansive range of indicators. The discussants identified a wide range of issues across the following human capital investment indicators.

HUMAN CAPITAL ISSUE INDICATORS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preschool Enrollment ▪ High Stakes Testing ▪ English Second-Long Term Language Programs ▪ Ethnic Studies ▪ Parent-School Involvement ▪ High School And College Graduation Rates ▪ Adult Education and Training ▪ Community College/University Transition ▪ Higher Education Admissions ▪ Technical Trades ▪ Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Degrees ▪ Bilingual/Bicultural Educators ▪ College Financial Aid ▪ Job Training-Apprentice Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Job-Related Benefits ▪ Child Care ▪ Wage and Income Gaps ▪ Poverty and Low-Income ▪ Living Wage ▪ Affordable and Innovative Housing: Ownership and Rentership ▪ Neighborhood Gentrification ▪ Neighborhood and Family Stability/Safety ▪ Financial Lending Programs: Home and Small Business ▪ Small Business Development ▪ Asset-Building Education/ Opportunities ▪ Health Insurance Coverage ▪ Health Care Access and Health Status

The discussants made clear that the issues span decades, and many continue having negative impacts on Latino families. Latino families represent 64% of Texas family growth between 2000 and 2013, and have significantly less asset resources (e.g., education, income and employment benefits, healthcare access, home ownership, retirement and IRA savings, etc.) than non-Latino Whites. As a result, one of two Latino families are low-income or in poverty, and one of two or 2.3 million Latino children are at-risk of becoming another generation of low-income and poverty families.

The following Education, Labor/Employment, Neighborhood Housing Development, and Health and Human Services policy priorities are summations from the respective Symposium panel discussions. They are the policy responses to address the multitude of issues which continue to marginalize Latino families and jeopardize the futures of their children.

B. Education

POLICY ISSUE CLUSTERS	POLICY PRIORITIES
Equalized Public School Education Funding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding based on updated cost of education index and formula weights for special programs across elementary and secondary schools. 2. Equitable funding between property-rich and property-poor districts. 3. Fund statewide full-day Pre-K education for ages three and four. 4. Fund bilingual and dual-language programs. 5. Funding that addresses low-income underserved students. 6. Funding that supports public education with elected board oversight and that is not diverted to expand charter schools and private-corporate interests.
Quality Schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Best practices and culturally relevant curriculum inclusion of ethnic studies. 2. Class-size (22) and curricula that prepare all students for college. 3. Curricula is available that assist students' entry into the workforce upon graduation. 4. Incorporation of 'opportunity to learn' metrics. 5. Alignment between high school graduation and college admissions requirement. 6. Supportive and not-punitive support systems that eliminate dropout risk. 7. Wraparound support services for students experiencing social and health needs. 8. Innovative language and culturally relevant parental engagement opportunities. 9. Innovative adult education programming and collaborations.
Teacher Quality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Equity in teacher quality within and across districts. 2. Teacher preparation programs must prepare educators to serve the diverse student population. 3. Targeted increases of Latino bilingual-bicultural teachers. 4. Teachers and administrators serving emergent bilingual students should be required to undergo ongoing professional development. 5. All teachers must be certified and demonstrate academic and social competency to teach students. 6. Early Care and Education (ECE) certification standard must be in place and enforced. 7. Hiring incentives and compensation.
Accountability in Student Achievement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Testing in core academic subjects, and use of sample versus statewide testing. 2. Standardized testing is focused on diagnostic purposes to trigger student support. 3. Equity in availability of high school endorsements and dual-credit options. 4. Collection of disaggregated data and assessment that enables school accountability for student achievement. 5. Multiple measures for high-stakes decisions in grade promotions and graduation. 6. Students are not disproportionately separated from learning due to suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary removals to alternative education programs.

POLICY ISSUE CLUSTERS	POLICY PRIORITIES
<p>Higher Education Funding</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fully fund Texas higher education formula including special items pursuant to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and expand Tier-1 universities. 2. Increase funding that serves majority students of color and low-income students, and further enables strengthening: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Academic diversity in faculty and students. b. Community to senior-college transition and retention-support systems. c. Equity in community college trade school access. d. Community college access to adult learning and career pathway training support. e. Community college education and training collaborations with business, nonprofits, and other public sectors. 3. The continuation of higher education admissions under the Texas Top Ten Percent Plan (TTTPP). 4. In-state tuition for all Texas residents including undocumented immigrants. 5. The Texas grant program must increase and be based on student financial need.

C. Labor/Employment

POLICY ISSUE CLUSTERS	POLICY PRIORITIES
<p>Job Training and Work Preparation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public education must prepare all students for college, but also support job entry-level preparation in occupational trade skills. 2. Increase and ensure equity in higher education Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs. 3. Adult learning and job training must be available in public secondary schools and community colleges. 4. Increase opportunities for job-training collaborative partnerships among educational institutions, public agencies, and for-profit and non-profit organizations. 5. Incorporate and increase mentorship and apprenticeship opportunities in job-training collaborative partnerships. 6. Increase funding support to scale-up model job-training programs with demonstrated results in full-employment, living wages and economic mobility opportunities, and meet industry and employer needs. 7. Increase funding, equity and coordination between the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in career pathway, training and job acquisition. 8. Incorporate money management and asset-building education in adult education and job-training programs. 9. Safety-net program eligibility must support and not discourage adult education and job-training opportunities.

POLICY ISSUE CLUSTERS	POLICY PRIORITIES
<p>Worker Protections</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Safety must be strengthened and maintained in occupations and related industry sectors determined lacking in or requiring increased safety regulations. 2. Immigrants must be protected from employment-related abuses inclusive of safety, wage discrimination and theft, and retaliatory conduct from employers. 3. Workers must be protected in their right to determine unionization. 4. Right to Work Laws must not create barriers or prohibit resolution of worker grievances or unionization. 5. Workers Compensation must be equitable and fair in employee protections, and not diminish safety, access to care for work-related injury, or loss in wages.
<p>Work Attachment and Security</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Equitable and balanced approaches in policies that protect workers and lend support to both small and big businesses in providing employment security demonstrated by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Living wage – equal pay/equal work – full benefits work hours b. Fair job scheduling - health and life insurance – retirement benefits c. Workplace safety and workers compensation d. Annual, sick and emergency leave e. Portable benefits f. Child care
<p>Job Creation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State and local government job-creation initiatives must be transparent and involve educational institutions, public agencies, for-profit and non-profit organizations, and advocate coalitions. 2. Equitable and balanced approaches in policies to increase middle and high-paying jobs, and increase training and wages for poor and low-income employees. 3. Increase support for small businesses (new entrepreneurship) and existing ones through innovative subsidy, grant, and loan-demonstration initiatives. 4. Job-creation initiatives must include accountability measures for Return on Investment (ROI). 5. Equity and balance in ensuring employment security criteria (e.g., living wage, benefits, safety, etc.) in all public-support job-creation initiatives.

D. Affordable Housing Development

POLICY ISSUE CLUSTERS	POLICY PRIORITIES
<p>Land Use</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create more open and inclusive communities inclusive of mixed-income housing. 2. Tax vacant land or donate it to non-profit affordable housing developers. 3. Consider affordable housing when public facilities are redeveloped. 4. Ensure that a share of new development is affordable. 5. Combine work on housing affordability with proactive code enforcement to ensure available low-income housing on the private market is safe and healthy. 6. Equitable and diverse strategies relating to colonia, urban and rural neighborhood development of affordable housing; prevent gentrification. 7. State and local governmental and private investments must include low and moderate income families neighborhood and housing access and quality. 8. Provide for inclusionary housing policies in which local land-use policies are linked to jurisdictional approvals for construction of market-rate housing to the creation of affordable homes for low and moderate-income families.
<p>Rentals</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preserve existing affordable rental units. 2. Incentivize and remove barriers to the production of moderately priced rental housing via land-use and regulatory mechanisms. 3. Rental assistance demonstrations targeting low-income households. 4. Employ creative financing and ownership structures to preserve affordable rental housing in both the public and private sector. 5. Preserve both privately owned and subsidized rentals by specifically targeting portions of tax-credit allocations and federal funds for preservation projects. 6. Equity and compliance implementation of funding through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC).
<p>Home Ownership</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase availability of housing that is both affordable and of good quality to reduce the need for low-income families to choose between the two. 2. Provide direct and indirect financial assistance to create access to ownership for moderate income first-time homebuyers. 3. Incentivize and remove barriers to the production of moderately-priced rental housing via land-use and regulatory mechanisms. 4. Innovative affordable home construction strategies inclusive of mobile home option strategies. 5. Harness growth to expand financial resources for affordable housing. 6. Equitable and compliance implementation of funding through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC). 7. Equitable and compliance implementation of funding through New Market Tax Credits (NMTC) to ensure revitalization of low-income communities that suffer from a lack of investment.

POLICY ISSUE CLUSTERS	POLICY PRIORITIES
<p>Equal Access</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Equitable and monitoring of compliance in public housing inclusive of Section 8 vouchers and rental assistance programs targeting harm caused by systemic housing discrimination, past and present. 2. Prevent the prevalence of all forms of neighborhood gentrification. 3. Require involvement of housing practitioners and advocates to insure low and moderate-income families can afford to live in neighborhoods. 4. Provide home ownership and budget education support. 5. Vigorously enforce fair housing laws, including regular and rigorous testing. 6. Protect longtime residents who wish to stay in their neighborhoods. 7. Provide lower-income households with greater access to opportunities in low-poverty neighborhoods.

E. Health And Human Services

POLICY ISSUE CLUSTERS	POLICY PRIORITIES
<p>Family Income & Asset Growth</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State and local programs must provide coordinated health and human services from a 'family unity' and 'economic mobility' approach to strengthen families. 2. Promote, expand and fully implement the Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) program. 3. Ensure a non-regressive tax system which otherwise negatively impacts poor and low-income families. 4. Ensure support for state and local living wage increase efforts. 5. Provide child-care subsidies in adult job-training education programming. 6. Ensure state and local gender-free equal pay for equal work policies. Ensure the elimination and prevention of predatory lending. 7. Expand affordable housing subsidy opportunities for low and moderate-income families. 8. Ensure equity in access to quality Pre-K and public school education inclusion of accepting environment and structures that support language and cultural diversity.
<p>Child & Family Development</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Equity and compliance in state oversight of the nutrition-based Women, Infant and Children (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), inclusive of responsive bilingual bicultural approaches to service delivery. 2. Ensure family-based integrative programs inclusive of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Foster care b. Child-care support alternatives – grandparent or other relative c. Family violence prevention 3. Equity and supportive behavior change approaches in the juvenile justice system. 4. Ensure comprehensive child-support enforcement. 5. Support marriage promotion and parenting education. 6. Fairness in opportunity for documented and undocumented immigrants to gain access to state and local health and human services programs.

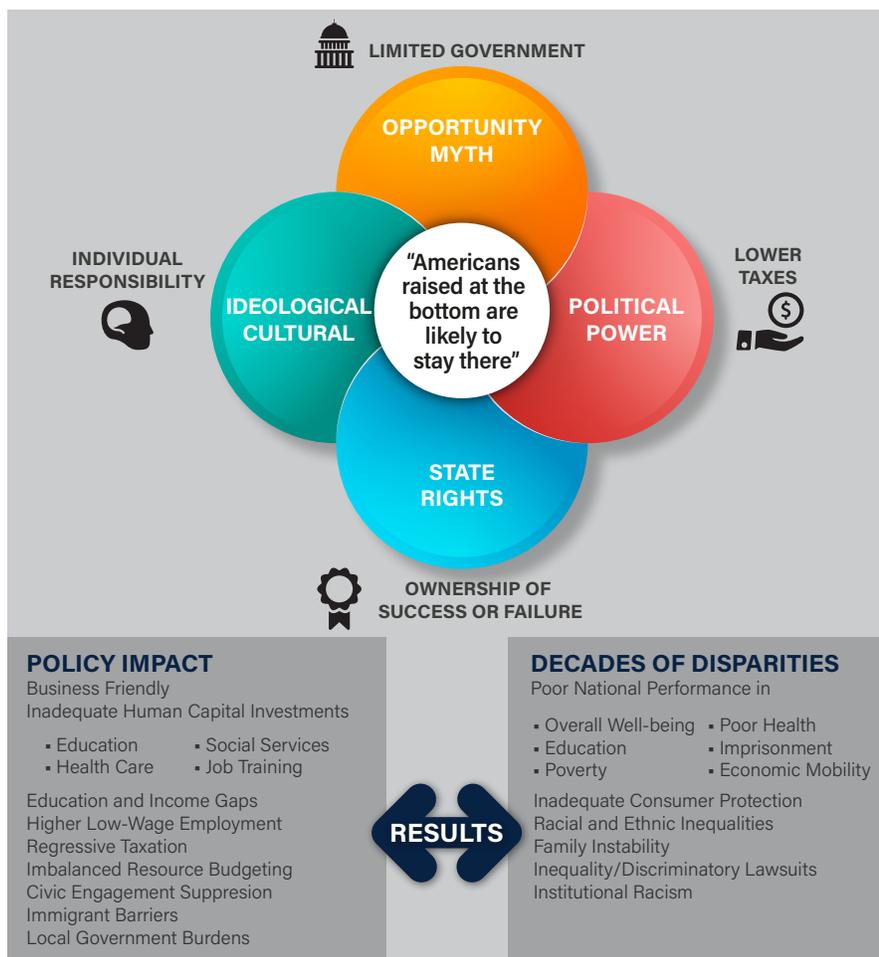
POLICY ISSUE CLUSTERS	POLICY PRIORITIES
<p>Healthcare</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Healthcare equity in availability and access to both physical and mental health-related care beginning with health insurance coverage regardless of family income. 2. Parity in service coverage regardless of health status inclusive of general illnesses, chronic disease, mental health illness, or any disability. 3. Expand Medicaid coverage to uninsured adults. 4. Ensure regulatory compliance and fully utilize available federal funding; and where allowed provide additional state funding to leverage increased federal funding for safety-net programs. Programs demanding targeted attention are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Women's health b. Community health center c. Teen pregnancy d. Substance-abuse prevention. 5. Ensure supportive and non-punitive eligibility and ease of access to federally mandate state healthcare programs, inclusive of responsive bilingual and bicultural approaches. 6. Ensure health professions training that meets the state's population growth and demand for health professionals across community needs. 7. Increase the representation of Latinos in health professions training and practice.
<p>Healthy Behaviors</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure development and implementation of school-based prevention oriented approaches that promote healthy behaviors, and prevention of health illness. These must include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Health curricula inclusive of physical education b. Nutrition-based education opportunities c. Counseling and wrap-around service support for at-risk families 2. Supportive and not punitive discipline support systems, and elimination of school-to-prison pipeline risks. 3. State and local pregnancy prevention support targeting teens and young adults. 4. State and local substance abuse prevention support targeting teens and adults. 5. Alcohol and tobacco tax, and provide adequate enforcement of age-related sale prohibitions.

IV. LATINO POLICY INFLUENCE AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

A. Texas Policy Making

The Symposium discussants' identification of economic mobility issues and policy recommendations were grounded in the realities of Texas policy-making. They engaged in candid discussions surrounding the Latino community's infrastructure capacity to change the state's **'minimalist'** public policy-making culture. A culture that intentionally minimizes human capital investments under auspices of fiscal conservatism. The discussions concluded that the underlying **'structural'** political and policy problems in this approach disproportionately produces inequitable impacts on Latino families. They further concluded that there are more weaknesses than strengths in the community's capacity to significantly influence change and mitigate the harmful effects of bad policy.

National report cards, research reports, lawsuits, and media investigative reporting have documented the harmful impacts from the state's policy-making approach across human capital investment policies. **The often-promoted 'Texas Way to Policy Making' is entrenched in ideological values, political power and state-rights perspectives masked by messaging related to individual responsibility, lower taxes, limited government, and ownership of individual success or failure.** Simple messaging that attempts to conceal the "structural" problems by "blaming the victim" or hiding behind an antiquated tax code leads to the same result: a limited budget to meet our states' growing needs.



Without transformative change to the State's minimalist policymaking approach, Latinos will experience another generation of unequal opportunity to economic mobility. Latinos and their allies must transform Texas policy-making to an approach focused on principles of inclusion and equity.

B. Mapping the Political and Policy Challenges

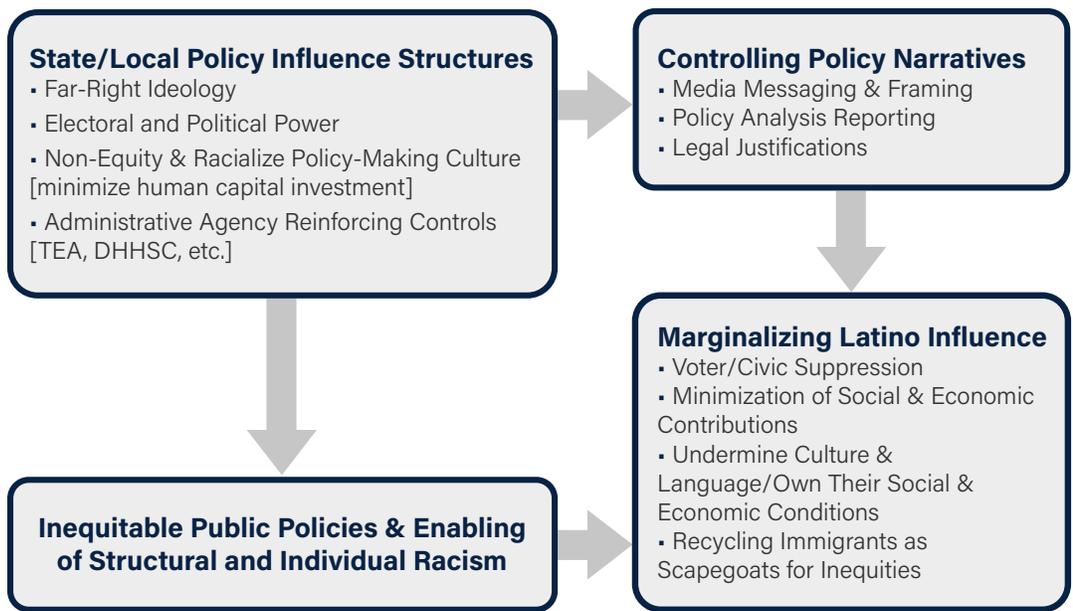
Political power and its underlying values and support structures were **identified by the Symposium’s four issue panels** as the influencing policy drivers that perpetuate generations of low-income families. Texas’ political and policy environment disproportionately continues to have negative policy impacts on the economic mobility of Latino families.

The Symposium discussants recognized, from the policy research presentations and their experience, the state’s policy-making status-quo **mirrors** Texas’ Policy-Making Way illustrated above. It is evident that multiple layers of ideological, political, race/ethnic, and bureaucratic barriers must be overcome for meaningful policy changes to occur. Fundamentally, there is a **direct relational line from each of these barriers directly to unfair and racially motivated far-right policies and laws that offer little solutions to inequalities or simply legitimize them.**

“The current political environment is particularly ugly toward Latinos, and seemly insurmountable for the structure we want to build and the things we want to accomplish.”

Furthermore, it is clear that political power brokers and policy-makers effectively use their resources (power and money) to maintain policy control by negatively framing and **messaging the issues, and providing skewed policy analysis** and shaky **legal justifications**. Together, they combine to produce unfair and inequitable policies that marginalize Latino opportunities to influence policy-making. The image of a seemingly powerless Latino community is further fostered by passing and enforcing voter suppression laws, utilizing a blame-the-victim and negative stereotyping, narrative and using immigrants as convenient scapegoats.

TEXAS STATUS-QUO: IDEOLOGY, POLITICS, AND POLICY



The discussants also highlighted the similarities of Texas’ history of inequitable and racialized policies, to the current-day political environment of policy exclusion and suppression contributing to maintaining generations of families in poverty and low-income conditions.

The human capital investment policy priorities identified in Section III are targeted to change the status-quo in Texas policy-making, and the barriers it creates to the economic mobility of Latino families - i.e., specifically, across the key middle-class economic measures of:

- Employment Occupations
- Living Wage
- Employment Benefits
- Education Attainment
- Housing Access/Value
- Neighborhood Infrastructure
- Asset/Wealth Building
- Healthcare Insurance & Access
- Health Status
- Family Stability

“We have to more effectively communicate the connections between electoral power and policy decisions; and the economic conditions our families continually experience.”

Certainly, **all** Texas families encounter challenges and most start each day with efforts to lead productive lives. These efforts include working hard toward maintaining a protective and supportive child-development environment that will be the foundation of a secure future for their children. Nonetheless, the reality is that the starting gate is not the same for all families even when they embrace and adhere to expected standards of personal and parental responsibilities.

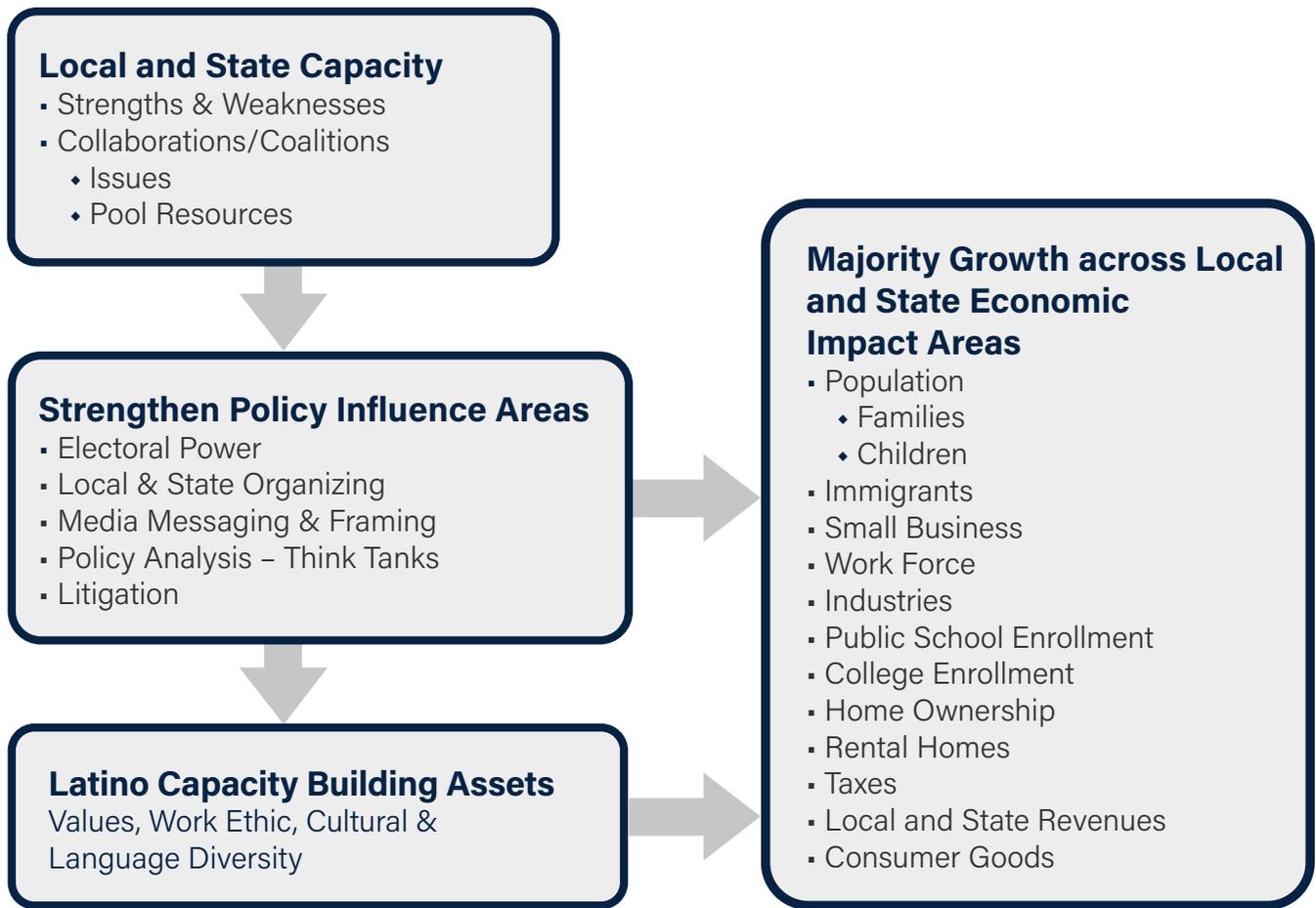
Researchers have noted that income alone does not result in family economic security. Throughout life, real middle-class economic security (i.e., $\geq 300\%$ of federal poverty level) is linked to both income and asset ownership. Poverty thresholds are recognized for not being adequate other than a family's minimum economic survival measure. Indeed, a family's ability to build sufficient income for a comfortable middle-class living has become increasingly more difficult. Nationally, Texas is among the top-ten states with the highest income inequalities.

C. Policy Influence Capacity

The need to augment the **Latino capacity to build and exercise sufficient power to influence policy-making** generated passionate discussion among all the Symposium panels. Three over-arching action strategies were identified:

- Address the singular and often disjointed approaches and actions to influence policy. This problem is more evident in state-level advocacy, but no less important at the local level where capacity to influence policy decisions (city/county government, quasi-governmental and school district boards) vary widely across cities and towns.
- Sustained increased focus on long-term strategic capacity-building through collaborations which strengthen electoral power, local and state organizing, policy analysis support, media framing and messaging, and litigation strength.
- Organize and use our human capital assets more effectively to influence policy actions; significant assets include our values, culture and language, and majority position among numerous (education, labor growth, business, taxes, consumer goods, etc.) indicators important to the state's economic future.

BUILDING POWER TO INFLUENCE POLICY-MAKING



The following **discussant comments** underscore the needs, challenges, and actions required to increase Latino policy influence:

1. Strengthen year-round voter education and turnout, increase low-propensity voters to high-propensity voters, and build and transfer current funding support to models better-suited for our communities.
2. Build advocate leadership that includes accountability to Latino issues across publicly elected positions, non-profit organizations, and grass-roots civic engagement.
3. Be more resolute in resolving issues that put us at odds with each other's issues because we are predominately encountering the same political, policy and budgetary barriers.
4. Decrease our reliance on consumption-based taxes that makes our tax system quite regressive, with low- and moderate-income families paying a disproportionate share of their income to support education, health care, roads and highways, public safety, and other public services.
5. Strengthen local grass-roots organizing, replicate effective efforts in other communities, connect local issues to state-level policies, and include online organizing tools to help increase collaboration and civic engagement.
6. View needed policies from short, middle, and long-term perspectives; and prioritize them accordingly relative to maximizing family economic mobility opportunities.

7. Find ways to move from a reactive to proactive policy mode by adopting more long-term change agenda while still connecting immediate policy actions that can cut into underlying issues.
8. Map the underlying structural policy barriers and the political power behind Texas' detrimental politics affecting our communities to better target our limited resources.
9. Redirect accountability for the existing problems from individual and family behaviors as opposed to how political ideology, policies or programs are structured - often simply worsening and perpetuating family conditions.
10. Develop a political strategic plan that goes hand-in-hand with a strategic plan that identifies the major cross-cutting issues and action steps that are needed to accomplish it.
11. Develop Latino think-tanks that can conduct policy research through issues-oriented partnerships (non-profits, grass-roots, universities, business, etc.), which contribute to strengthening policy advocacy.
12. Strengthen Latino organizational and advocacy capability to translate policy issues to more understandable language and messaging that facilitates more community involvement and support. Expand existing successful models.
13. Expand and strengthen our networks and supporters across multiple groups and interest sectors; but, in engaging others, we must also be well-prepared with our facts and policy expectations.
14. Build stronger communications capabilities that include traditional and social media, and policy-issue messaging that connects to those most impacted, as well as, other target audiences.

In summary, the Symposium discussants identified the underlying political and policy barriers to Latino family economic mobility. In addition, the discussants concluded that, as a community, Latinos do not currently have an adequate infrastructure capacity to effectively influence the state's 'minimalist' public policy-making culture. Finally, the discussants recognized that a 'blueprint' for change must incorporate a long-term strategy to increase the Latino community's political power and policy influence.

“We’ve been dancing around the issue of power. We should be grabbing power and not wait for power to be given to us. We must be more aggressive and grab the opportunity for defining our policy agendas and intellectual space.”



V. CONCLUSION

The Latino Policy Symposium: Path to Power agenda was designed to involve a statewide representative group of Latino advocates to develop the first Texas Latino Family Blueprint. The agenda was structured to target discussions regarding:

- The state of Latino family economic mobility.
- Issues and policy priorities for human capital investments in education, labor and employment, housing, and health and human services.
- Latino capacity to influence state and local policies responsive to their concerns and investment priorities.

The opportunities for Latino children to achieve educational and career success, higher incomes, good health, and wealth accumulation was the Symposium's catalyst. Like most Texas families, future opportunities and a better life for their children is a driving Latino goal. Parents have expectations that their children will enter adulthood with human and social capital assets to achieve a comfortable economic middle-class life.

Today's economic environment has increased the challenges for families to build strong foundations for their children's future. Wages have been stagnating for nearly two decades, the gap between the rich and poor has widened, and trending toward low rates of upward mobility is apparent. As emphasized by the Symposium discussants, the challenges for Texas Latino families have persisted for well beyond two decades.

The Symposium discussants acknowledged the strong work ethic and resiliency of Latino families, civil rights progress in eliminating overt racial policy barriers, and increasing access to education that has resulted in economic and health improvements. However, as demonstrated above, major challenges persist. Latino advocates and their allies continue to be civically involved by helping to improve their schools and neighborhoods and by urging for equitable policies across the human capital investment issues discussed here.

This first Latino Family Policy Blueprint, while important, must have the 'power and resources' to substantively change the state's policy-making culture to be more inclusive and equitable. The Blueprint incorporates capacity building actions that target electoral power, local and state organizing, policy analysis/development, and communication strategies that reflect our values and policy priorities. It is intended to be long-term and malleable to annual progress assessments, revisions, and strong collective support and actions – it is a genesis document.

The Symposium discussants are resolute that the integrated ideas germinated in this initial symposium will support current advocacy efforts, sprout new roots, and result in the burgeoning of desired policies at the state and local levels to positively impact Latino families.



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