



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SEVENTH ANNUAL YOUNG ACHIEVERS FORUM BRINGS 1,000 SIXTH GRADERS TO UTEP

*Program continues to successfully build and foster a college-going culture across
El Paso County*

EL PASO, Texas – Today, CommUNITY en ACCIÓN—a nonprofit dedicated to advocating for the Hispanic community in El Paso—held its seventh annual Young Achievers Forum (YAF) at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). YAF is an education focused event that gives at-risk sixth-grade students and their families a taste of college for a day.

1,000 middle school students and their families attended the event, which instills in students the importance of higher education and explains to them and their families how they can make it a part of their lives. Since its inception in 2011, the forum has introduced over 6,000 students across El Paso County to the possibility of a higher education and each year its impact continues to grow in the region. Earlier this month, the program took place in Southern New Mexico where 500 students descended onto the New Mexico State University campus for the event.

“A key component of YAF is ensuring that parents are engaged in their students’ pursuit of post-secondary opportunities from an early start,” stated **Raymond Palacios**, President of Bravo Chevrolet Cadillac and founder of YAF. “Our goal is simple--expose and give students the space and platform to dream big about their future career paths and give them and their parents the tools to achieve and make their dreams a reality.”

This year, the day-long event marked its seventh consecutive year held at UTEP.

“Our partnership with the Young Achievers Forum builds on UTEP’s commitment to ensure that our region’s students have access to excellent higher education opportunities that will enable them to achieve their dreams,” said **Dr. Diana Natalicio**, President of UTEP. “The earlier we

can introduce the idea of going to college, the better prepared students will be to enroll and complete their degrees. We are always delighted to welcome the sixth graders who come to the UTEP campus excited to learn more about the University."

Dr. Natalicio welcomed students and parents to the UTEP campus highlighting the importance of a higher education and the significant impact students can have on El Paso's future. This year's keynote address was given by Dr. Luis Luna, Region 19's 2018 Secondary Teacher of the Year.

"By bringing local leaders from our community to speak directly to students about their personal experience with college and own career path, students can hopefully see a reflection of their future selves," said **Jaime Barceleau**, CEA board member. "Students can see first-hand that college is absolutely a possibility and they should envision themselves in a college campus six years from now and being a doctor, engineer or in any other profession down the road."

During the day-long event, groups of students and parents attended informational sessions covering five broad fields of study: health and medicine; science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); business and finance; liberal arts and education; and public safety. Special breakout sessions for parents and family members—facilitated in Spanish and English—helped them prepare their children for higher education, from explaining the college application process to financial aid options.

"We are overwhelmed with pride when we see how this program has served as a catalyst for students to pursue their dreams," said **Carmen Perez**, CommUNITY en ACCIÓN Member and Partner, Delgado Acosta Spencer Linebarger & Perez Law Firm. "If no one in your family or community has gone to college, you might not think of it as something you can do. Our goal is to change that mindset and show students what is possible and give them a roadmap for how to make it happen."

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About CommUNITY en ACCIÓN:

The purpose of CommUNITY en ACCIÓN is to instill Hispanic pride, unity and leadership and have a positive impact on the El Paso region by engaging in "value-driven" initiatives through a cohesive network of Hispanic community leaders.

About Young Achievers Forum:

The Young Achievers Forum is a county-wide event that gives at-risk students and their parents the college experience for a day to introduce post-secondary education to families who may not otherwise have exposure.