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## YOUNG ACHIEVERS FORUM CONVENED 1,000 6TH GRADERS AT UTEP IN EFFORT TO EXPOSE THEM TO HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

*Fifth annual event builds on the programs legacy of serving approximately 5,000 students and their families to date*

EL PASO, Texas – Today, CommUNITY en ACCIÓN—a nonprofit dedicated to advocating for the Hispanic community in the El Paso region—held its fifth annual Young Achievers Forum (YAF), a county-wide event that gives at-risk students and their parents a taste of college for a day.

Approximately 1,000 middle school students and 200 parents attended the event which was held at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and highlighted the importance of higher education as well as explained to the students and their families how they can make it a part of their lives. Since its inception, the forum has already introduced over 5,000 students to the possibility of a higher education.

“We want to inspire students to recognize and achieve their inner greatness,” stated Raymond Palacios, President of Bravo Chevrolet Cadillac and founder of YAF. “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.”

Students and parents were welcomed by Aliana Apodaca, President of CommUNITY en ACCIÓN who was later joined by a group of civic and business leaders to talk about how their personal experiences with post-secondary education have created opportunities for growth and prosperity in their individual lives.

“This event can be a game-changer for many at-risk students in the El Paso area,” said Jaime Barceleau, Executive Director of the Paso del Norte Children’s Development Center and co-organizer of the event. “Most of the students who attend YAF have never even stepped onto a college campus before. YAF invites them to picture themselves there, and to think about what path they might want to follow in college and beyond.”

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 health fitness. Special breakout sessions for parents—facilitated in Spanish and English—helped them prepare their children for higher education and explained financial aid options.

“Coming from a family where college has opened so many career opportunities for my brother and sister, I wanted my son to also know that college could be a reality for him,” said Vivian Favela, one of the many parents that participated in YAF. “It’s one thing for me to stress how important it is, and it’s another for him to experience a program like YAF with his classmates and then leave excited and come to me letting me know he wants to make college a part of his life. Now we are both able to effectively plan for how to make it happen.”

Building on its tradition of being a community-driven effort, more than 100 UTEP undergraduates volunteered for this year’s event, serving not just as guides but as role models for sixth graders from area school districts. YAF attendees came from every school district in Region 19.

“Experts predict that more and more jobs in our country and our region are going to require a college degree,” said Socorro Rodriguez, MA Ed., Head Start Director, Region 19. “Through events like YAF, we can get students thinking about college as an option early, and get parents on board too.”

In addition to the great show of college volunteers, the Young Achievers Forum also recruited business leaders from across the region to help lead some of the breakout sessions and talk to the parents during the event.

“Our partnership with the Young Achievers Forum strengthens our efforts to create a college-going culture throughout El Paso County and surrounding communities,” mentioned UTEP President Dr. Diana Natalicio. “The earlier all students in this region understand the many opportunities that are within their reach through higher education, the better prepared they will be to invest in their bright futures. Nothing brings more joy to us at UTEP than seeing all the talented young El Pasoans on our campus for YAF—they are our future students.”

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**About CommUNITY en ACCIÓN:** CommUNITY en ACCIÓN is a non-profit organization dedicated to advocating for and implementing “value-driven” initiatives that help El Paso’s Hispanic community prosper and connects them with leadership opportunities.

**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. Approximately 1,000 students and their families participate in this event every year with the help of hundreds of volunteers—ranging from college students to local business and civic leaders.

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