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HELIOS’ VINCE ROIG ON PARTNERSHIPS TO RAISE COLLEGE READINESS

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- Helios' Vince Roig on partnerships to raise college readiness

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To raise student achievement and increase the number of students going to college and completing their education, it helps to have [partners in the public and private sector](#) with a similar vision and innovative methods, said Vince Roig, founding chairman of [Helios Education Foundation](#).

“The reality is that no one entity can do it alone,” Roig said. “We must work together to strengthen education and ensure that all students have opportunities for postsecondary success.”



Vince Roig, Helios Education Foundation's founding chairman

Helios Education Foundation was created by Roig in 2004 through the sale of Southwest Student Services Corporation, which he led for over 20 years. Since then, Helios has invested [millions of dollars in education initiatives](#) in Arizona and Florida led by partners in the public and private sectors.

“We are grateful for our partnerships with other organizations throughout Arizona and Florida and are inspired by the commitment that we see every day from others who are as passionate about student success as we are,” said Roig, who has a master’s degree in secondary education.

Roig serves as chairman of the [College Success Arizona board](#), and has served on the boards of many organizations including [Teach for America](#), [Greater Phoenix Leadership](#), [Stand for Children Arizona](#) Advisory Committee and [Valley of the Sun United Way](#).

Recently, Roig was honored with the [Champion of College Access Award](#) by the [National College Access Network](#) for his work helping students gain access to college and complete their education and as the [Maricopa Community Colleges Foundation](#)’s [2014 Hero of Education](#).

Q: Why is it so important to close the college access and achievement gap that exists for so many low-income, first generation and minority Arizona students?

A: First and foremost, Helios believes that education transforms lives and strengthens communities. And, to that end, we believe that every student, regardless of where they come from, deserves the opportunity to succeed in postsecondary education.

The achievement gap is a reality and we must close that gap, both for individual success as well as for the economic stability of our state.

Latinos are the nation’s largest minority group and among America’s fastest growing populations. Latino children are now the majority within Arizona’s early childhood population and soon to be in its K-12 educational system. However, the high school graduation rate for Latinos is only 70 percent, compared to 84 percent for Caucasian students.

Currently, 65 percent of Latino adults have no education beyond high school. However, research also tells us that more than 60 percent of the jobs of the future will require some form of postsecondary education.

The stark reality of these statistics will affect our state’s economy. We need a skilled, knowledgeable workforce that will help attract business growth and contribute to a robust economy.

Helios believes in the potential of this population and is determined to improve the academic preparedness and college success of these students.

Prioritizing the educational success and degree attainment of all Latino students is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty, unleashing Arizona’s greatest talent potential and ensuring the state is positioned to compete and thrive in a knowledge-based global economy.

Q: How is the Helios Education Foundation’s \$2 million investment in and partnership with Maricopa Community College District – initially focusing on Estrella Mountain and Glendale community colleges for the next three years – ensuring that more Latino students in Arizona achieve a college degree?

A: One of the things that we find is that many first-generation students – and many Latino students are first-generation – need more support as they navigate the college experience.

This partnership with the Maricopa Community College District provides comprehensive student supports and resources for these students.

Financial assistance is one type of support and that’s important, but that’s not all that is needed. Students also need mentoring, academic support, academic planning and help determining the pathway toward degree completion at the

community college or transitioning into a four-year university to earn a bachelor's degree.

We are excited about this partnership and believe it will have a significant impact on the postsecondary success of Latino students.

Q: Helios Education Foundation has partnered with Yuma Union High School District on Ready Now Yuma, Chicanos Por La Causa on Abriendo Puertas, and WestEd on the Arizona Mayor's Roundtable among so many other projects. What initiatives is Helios Education Foundation working on now in Arizona?

A: Helios is celebrating our 10th anniversary this year and it has been an amazing journey.

In the past 10 years, we have invested more than \$155 million in education initiatives that have impacted more than 100,000 students and more than 16,000 educators. However, we also know that this work is just beginning and it will continue to require deep passion, commitment and partnership.

Through a decade of strategic partnerships, we have identified [three areas](#) that we believe are critical to education reform – early grade success, college and career readiness and postsecondary completion.

With respect to early grade success, we are developing partnerships that are providing resources to early childhood educators and families to help ensure children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed and read at grade level by the end of third grade.

One strategy we've employed with this work is in partnership with the University of Arizona where the university has created connections and collaboration between the early learning educators and the K-3 educators to align curriculum and ensure children are on the pathway toward grade level success.

In advancing college and career readiness, we have made the [ACT exam](#) available to all high school juniors in 14 districts throughout the state. This initiative is in its seventh year and to date more than 81,000 students have taken the exam as part of the initiative.

The goal is to increase the number of students who are taking the ACT in Arizona and, by exposing students to the exam, create an environment in which college becomes an option for those who might otherwise not pursue a postsecondary degree.

[Ready Now Yuma](#) continues to be [a strategic partnership](#) between the [Yuma Union High School District](#) and Helios to help ensure every student in that district is ready for college and career. The district has adopted an internationally recognized, high expectations curriculum called the Cambridge Curriculum. Every student, regardless of past academic performance or future plans, will be challenged and supported to succeed.

Our work in postsecondary completion is focused on helping more traditionally underserved students access, persist and attain a high- quality postsecondary certificate or degree. Our partnership with the Maricopa Community Colleges District – that we've already discussed – is an example of this work.

Another example is our partnership with College Success Arizona. College Success Arizona is building public will for college completion in Arizona and provides a unique combination of scholarships and mentoring in order to increase college graduation rates among low-income and first generation students.

The ultimate goal is to create a significant increase in the postsecondary attainment rate of students in Arizona, particularly for those who otherwise would not be able to attend or graduate.

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