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PLUS Fellows Policy Brief

Assessing Pathway Programs for Underrepresented Minorities to Medical School

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ISSUE

In order to provide more quality care, medical schools must utilize medical school pathway programs to support K-12 and undergraduates interested in becoming doctors, yet there is a disconnect in information between those who run the programs and the populations they serve. Currently, just 6% of practicing doctors are underrepresented minorities (African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans), while they make up 31.5% of the U.S. population. Representation that reflects population demographics is linked to better quality care for patients. Exposing students to a career in medicine allows students to assess their personal interest and capabilities. Medical school pathway programs provide students with the opportunity to work directly with mentors and build relationships while learning and acquiring skills that can be applied to any industry through Linked Learning. These programs must be inventoried and assessed for quality.

“I had no idea I could be a doctor. How are you supposed to know when no one looks like you?”

-Dr. Garrick

METHODS

In order to inventory and assess pathway programs, this report relies on survey and interview data. A survey was conducted of 31 current medical students, residents, and doctors who identify as underrepresented minorities in Northern California. The survey sought to understand what programs were offered while the students were in school and what, if any, support they wished had been provided. In addition, 12 doctors and individuals who oversee pathway programs were interviewed. These interviews asked about the career trajectory of the individual and what pathway programs were successful and why. It is evident that mentor programs and support is needed starting at the high school level. These connections should then follow students throughout their undergraduate career and into medical school in order to avoid matriculation at every stage.

FINDINGS

Pathway programs are a recognized necessity by medical schools, but dispersing information about programs proves very difficult. As of 2016, the Association of American Medical Colleges requires medical schools to have a pathway program for underrepresented minorities. Even though medical school pathway programs are recognized as essential, the programs provided have trouble recruiting and reaching high school students. Of the individuals surveyed, 87% cited quality mentors as the number one support system that enabled them to succeed in the medical field, but mentors were not engaged or equipped to provide support. Furthermore,



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medical schools expressed providing medical school pathway programs, but there is a huge disconnect between being able to reach high school students and undergraduates to participate in these programs. As a result, the programs lacked participants and subsequent funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Short term:

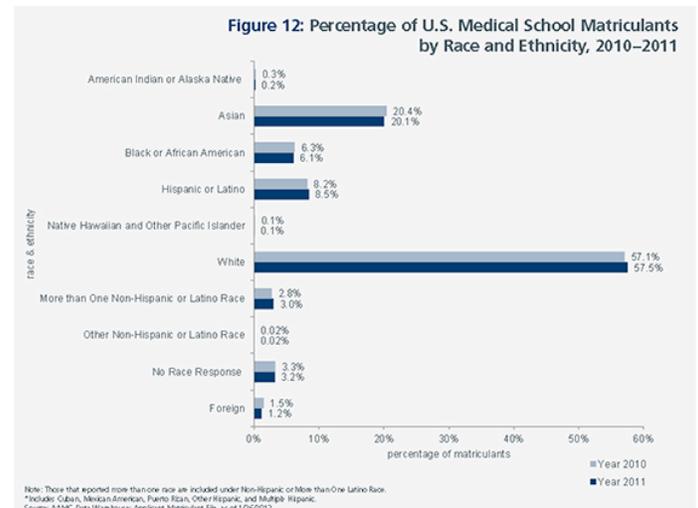
Align SCUSD linked learning and pathway programs

- Educators and doctors work together to create curriculum that provides both learning standards and opportunity without burdening either group. The curriculum can provide students with background knowledge of science, leadership skills, and cultural knowledge that will help them make the most of their onsite visits. Opportunities for interaction include fieldtrips, shadowing, science demonstrations, and participation in programs such as FACES for the Future Coalition.
- Utilize funds granted from Career Pathways Trust and implement through linked learning.

Long term:

Track alumni of health pathway programs

- By following alumni of health pathways programs, current programs will better understand how they can expand capacity and improve. The alumni also serve as advocates for the program and later mentors.
- Data on alumni's education, career route, and final occupation should be kept for reference.
- This data will also help programs seeking to apply for and justify an increase in funding.



Marrast, Lyndonna M., et al. "Minority physicians' role in the care of underserved patients: diversifying the physician workforce may be key in addressing health disparities." *JAMA internal medicine* 174, 2 (2014); 289-291

Identify staff to serve as advocate for programs

- Many medical program coordinators and staff felt they lacked institutionalized support from high schools and undergraduate campuses. They were unsure how to advertise and promote their pathway programs.
- In order to better network students and programs, each school should have an identified staff member who serves as an advocate and champion for pathway programs. The goal of this staff member should be to increase visibility of the programs.
- This point person serves as the go between and answers questions surrounding participation and identifies students who may be interested in the program. Before entering a partnership, the role of each participating party should be clearly defined.

