

ASU alumni, professionals connect with Chandler students at Latino Leaders Week

By Annie DeGraw, ASU News
September 29, 2025

To the room of middle school students, hearing Victoria Favela's title of "prospect research analyst for the ASU Foundation" was somewhat underwhelming.

But then Favela, who graduated from Arizona State University with a bachelor's degree in business law in May, described her job in more familiar vernacular: Checking out friends' social media.

This, Favela explained, is what she does; she uses technology and teens' digital footprints to find potential ASU scholarship students.

The students perked up and their eyes grew wide.

"My job is to find students to give money to so they can go to college," Favela said.

Favela was one of eight Latino speakers with a direct ASU connection who shared their professional and personal experiences with about 100 students from Willis Jr. High at the ASU Chandler Innovation Center on Sept. 19.

The event was the culmination of the Chandler Contigo: Latino Leaders Program, a weeklong annual event that brings Latino professionals to students, sharing their journeys in an effort to inspire, mentor and demystify higher education.

With the highest population of Hispanic students in the Chandler Unified School District, Willis Jr. High was selected for a field trip to the Chandler center for this Sun Devil-dedicated day, courtesy of ASU alumni, faculty and staff.

The speakers consisted of recent and older graduates with careers spanning government, art and business.

"You can do any job you want," Favela said. "There's a space for you."

They also talked about alternative sources of tuition, mainly scholarships awarded for sports, art, music and a bevy of other categories.

Favela earned her degree thanks to a full-ride scholarship. Students gasped and mouthed, “Wow!” when hearing that a study abroad program allowed her to travel to Europe for free.

“I’m smart, but I’m not the smartest person in the room. ... You can do it,” Favela said. “The one thing they cannot take away from you is your education. That will always be yours.”

Jesus Chavez, an ASU alumnus and coordinating senior for student success and engagement in ASU’s Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering, is the first-generation son of Mexican immigrants who grew up in the East Valley. He can still point out the Chandler homes where he did landscaping as a kid to earn money.

Being someone who can help future generations succeed is one of the reasons Chavez has participated in the Latino Leaders event every year.

“My philosophy is: Be who you needed when you were coming up,” said Chavez, who earned his bachelor’s degree in Spanish literature and Italian in 2013, and his PhD in engineering education and systems design in 2023. “I know the value of being able to come into spaces where students may not get answers to the questions they have, and just help them get a better understanding of what they need to be a better student and learner.”

Eighth-grader Miles Troutman, 13, wants to be a teacher and also a real estate agent. He enjoyed hearing the different perspectives and wide-ranging advice, especially with regard to finances.

“I don’t know how to save money yet, so it was definitely important to hear it from someone closer to my age,” said Troutment, who wants to go to ASU. “I’m really excited to go to college.”

As a first-generation daughter of Mexican immigrants who speaks Spanish at home, classmate Brianna Macias, 13, liked that she could relate to the speakers.

“It meant a little more, knowing they went through what I go through,” said Macias, who wants to be a dentist. “Hearing how they were able to feel more comfortable at ASU and in their jobs was encouraging.”

Now in its fourth year, Latino Leaders Week was created to bring professionals to Chandler campuses so students could learn not only about what they do for a living but also their past and how they got to where they are now, said Adrianna Tušek Erickson, a program coordinator for the city of Chandler.

Details that seem simple — like growing up speaking Spanish at home, sharing a roof with many siblings, eating familiar dishes and discovering that their grandmothers made tamales the same way — are powerful in creating that immediate bond.

“It’s important for a young student to see themselves in a leader and it’s important for non-Hispanic students to see a Latino leader,” said Erickson, a former teacher and ASU alumnus who earned a bachelor’s degree in political science and government and a master’s degree in education.

“Speakers talk about their lives and the obstacles. It’s not all sunshine and roses. We want to show them that there are harsh truths out there but you can overcome those. If they can see it, they can

be it.”

Having the ASU Chandler Innovation Center makes it easy to introduce ASU to students.

“For some kids, a university may seem unattainable. But it’s here, in our backyard, and to be able to bring it to them is impactful,” Erickson said. “They know what it means to be a Sun Devil, and we appreciate that.”

The event was an ideal chance to plug into an existing city of Chandler program that is powerful and embraced, said Christina Ngo, executive director for social embeddedness at ASU.

“It’s a great opportunity to show that there are other really cool careers out there,” Ngo said. “And it’s a great inspiration for kids to see someone in a professional career who looks like them.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Text image(s)



Latino leaders gather to speak to students at the ASU Chandler Innovation Center. From left to right: Santiago Moratto (ASU), Eric Moreno (ASU), Marcelino Quiñonez (ASU), Esmeralda Franco Ruiz (Valle del Sol), Brenda Peralta (Valle del Sol), Victoria Favela (ASU), Jesús Chávez (ASU) and Melecio Flores (ASU). Photo courtesy city of Chandler