

# NSRF's Partnership with La Raza: Towards a Coaching Platform for Early College High Schools

Pedro "Pete" Bermudez, Florida

Founded in 1968, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) is the largest national constituency-based Hispanic organization in the United States and the leading advocate in Washington, DC for the Hispanic community. "La Raza" is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt organization established to reduce poverty and discrimination and improve life opportunities for Hispanic Americans.

Four major functions provide essential focus to the organization's work: capacity-building assistance; applied research, policy analysis and advocacy; public information efforts; and special and international projects. These functions complement NCLR's work in five key strategic priorities – assets/investments, civil rights, education, employment and economic status, and health.

NCLR is headquartered in Washington, DC and serves all Hispanic subgroups in all regions of the country. NCLR has field offices in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, Phoenix, Sacramento, San Antonio, and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Through its community-based efforts, NCLR reaches more than four million Hispanics through a formal network of affiliates – more than 300 Hispanic community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia – and a broader network of more than 35,000 groups and individuals nationwide. In 2004, NCLR expanded its regional outreach with the opening of a New York City office. NCLR now has eight field offices throughout the country.

Three years ago, the NSRF was invited to partner with NCLR to provide support for its Early College High School Demonstration Project – an initiative to develop and strengthen blended institutions involving Latino-serving community-based organizations, institutions of higher education, and public schools with the goal of graduating students with the equivalent of two years of college credit. For me, the connection between the work of helping build small high schools to serve some of the poorest and underserved Latino communities around the nation and the NSRF's mission of fostering "educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities" was irresistible and I embraced both the opportunities and challenges of the work without reservation.

During the past three years, Maria Elena (continued on page 19)

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## NSRF's Partnership with La Raza...

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Rico, NSRF National Facilitator from Los Angeles, and I have been coordinating professional development support for NCLR Early College High Schools in Los Angeles, CA, Tucson, AZ, Washington, DC, Houston, TX, and Lancaster, PA. Maria Elena and I, along with key NCLR staff members, have also codesigned and cofacilitated a series of multiday cohort meetings. These meetings bring together school teams and their respective college and community partners three times a year to support each other's learning and assess their progress towards becoming successful schools for the students they serve. NCLR Early College Cohort meetings usually revolve around an in-depth site visit hosted by a member school and framed by a question selected by the school community. Other NSRF National Facilitators who have contributed to this project include Connie Chene, New Mexico, and Simone Waite and Belkis Cabrera, Florida. The cohort is working on developing its own internal capacity and currently has an additional nine individuals who are trained NSRF Coaches.

Currently, the cohort consists of twelve schools and plans are underway to provide specialized training, leadership development, organizational and instructional coaching, and assessment and accountability standards based on needs assessments performed at site visits. To date, in nine states



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*Making a difference for Hispanic Americans*

and the District of Columbia, six small schools of exemplary practice are operating and six more are emerging.

The NSRF and NCLR are currently working on the adoption of a coaching platform that will provide a more comprehensive approach to support the vital work that Early College High Schools do for Latino students throughout the nation. The major design elements of this platform include:

- Building consensus and support at the school and organizational levels for the design and implementation of learning communities in all NCLR Early College High Schools;
- Identifying and training a cadre of coaches who will facilitate the work of learning communities in all NCLR Early College High Schools;
- Providing regular follow up activities to support and deepen the work of learning community coaches and their group members;
- Documenting the learning, growth, and overall impact of the work of learning communities on professional practice and student achievement in NCLR Early College High Schools; and
- Developing facilitative leadership capacity in all NCLR Early College High Schools.

At a recent site visit to one of the schools I serve, the principal shared a letter from a senior who had recently graduated. In the letter, the student expressed his gratitude for the education he had received and expressed his desire and commitment to continue his studies in college. The sad part of this was that he was writing the letter from a jail cell as a result of "his past having caught up with him." Moments later, a mother came in with her daughter who had just arrived from Mexico and spoke no English. With eyes full of hope, she told the principal that she had heard from her neighbors that "this school would take good care of her child and prepare her for college." I couldn't tell whether the mother or her daughter had a green card...but I know that at this school, it wouldn't matter. ■

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