

**Raising the Bar: How AmeriCorps Members Are Increasing Literacy  
Rates in Latino Communities**

*An Evaluation of the NCLR Latino Empowerment Through National  
Service Project*

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## Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
Tutoring	3
Parental Involvement	9
Member Development	13
Community Strengthening	19
Volunteerism	23
Conclusion	30
Success Stories	31
Performance Measures	35
Recommendations	38
References	39

## ***ABSTRACT***

Founded in 2001, the National Council of La Raza's Latino Empowerment through National Service Project (NCLR LENS Project) has been working to shrink the achievement gap between Latinos and their non-Latino counterparts through tutoring, mentoring and parental involvement. The NCLR LENS Project mission is to use service as a strategy to improve literacy rates among Latinos; engage Latinos in service to the community; and to provide parent involvement training and support for greater Latino student achievement.

Funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the 2007-2008 project is administered by twelve (12) NCLR Affiliate organizations that serve large, Hispanic populations. NCLR plays an intermediary role providing training and technical assistance to Affiliate sites and also serves in a compliance role monitoring project progress ensuring that Affiliate sites are meeting their stated objectives.

The project engages AmeriCorps members in service to the community to provide tutoring/mentoring for Latino youth; English as a Second Language (ESL) and GED instruction for adults; parental involvement training to increase student achievement; and community strengthening through volunteer recruitment and service projects. AmeriCorps members also participate in *Life After AmeriCorps* training to build life and employability skills to prepare them for post-secondary education and the workforce.

In program year 2007-08, some of the projects notable accomplishments include:

- Over 2,500 Latino students were served through the NCLR LENS tutoring component.
- More than three quarters (76%) of students receiving a minimum of 15 hours of tutoring increased literacy performance by one grade level.
- Over 3,500 community volunteers were recruited to address critical needs in communities throughout the U.S.
- Almost four hundred (380) parents received Parents as Partner (PAP) training at NCLR LENS Project Affiliate sites.

This report seeks to highlight some of the promising practices and illuminate opportunities for continuous improvement across NCLR LENS Project Affiliate sites. Furthermore, the report incorporates an extensive literature review to highlight best practices and provide greater analysis of tutoring, parental involvement and service and volunteerism as evidenced-based strategies to meet the needs of the Latino community.

## ***INTRODUCTION***

Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States, especially among families living in poverty and children under 5 years of age (Day, 1996). The number of Latino children under age 5 is expected to increase 146% between 2005 and 2050. Currently, Latino children already represent 21.4% of the early childhood population—an amount larger than all minority groups of that age combined (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). However, research on early childhood literacy indicators suggest that Latinos lag behind their peers in both receptive and expressive vocabulary skills. In 2003-04, 78% of Hispanic children two years of age demonstrated receptive vocabulary skills, compared to 89% of their white peers. Only fifty-four percent of Hispanic children demonstrated expressive vocabulary skills, compared to 71% of their white peers. (Digest of Education Statistics, 2007, NCES, 2008). Further, Hispanic children 4 to 5 years lag behind other racial and ethnic groups in language, vocabulary skills and mathematics knowledge (Preschool: First Findings from the Third Follow-up of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, 2008). The strength of our nation's schools and America's place in the global economy will be impossible to evaluate in the coming years without focusing on the educational outcomes of Latino students. One in five - approximately 10 million - public school students are Latino. The proportion of Hispanic school-aged children is expected to grow by 166 percent by 2050, quickly outpacing the 4 percent expected growth of non-Hispanic children. Yet Latinos are among the least likely to enter kindergarten ready to learn and least likely to graduate from high school. (Lazarin: *An Education Agenda for Latino Students*, 2008). Through the NCLR LENS Project Latinos, both young and adult, have

the opportunity to reverse many of the harsh realities mentioned above. NCLR developed the Latino Empowerment through National Service (LENS) Project to increase the number of Latinos involved in national service and in their local communities. The primary mission of The LENS project is to cultivate literacy skills for youth, adults and English Language Learners. The project also emphasizes parental involvement through effective skill building and parent advocacy training. Research shows the more that providers can emphasize the tremendous value that everyday language and literacy activities can play in supporting their children's development, the more likely Latino parents' strong aspirations for their children's academic success will result in more active engagement in language and literacy activities at home (Lopez, et. al 2007).

### ***Tutoring***

According to “*What Works for Latino Students*” by the year 2025, a fourth of school-age children in the United States of America and right under 25 percent of the college-aged population will be Latino. In the country’s biggest states; Texas, California, Florida, and New York, Latinos already have reached high levels. Unfortunately, even with this significant growth there remains considerable academic achievement gaps between Latino students and other racial and ethnic groups.

Addressing the educational needs of the fastest-growing population in the United States-- the Latino community-- is critical to the national interest (Santiago and Brown, 2004).

Latinos are now the most poorly educated major population group in the United States.

For example, White males average 13.3 years of schooling and black males average 12.2, while Latino males lag behind with 10.6 years of schooling. Some of this

achievement gap reflects low levels of education among many Latino immigrants but that

is by no means the entire problem. U.S.-born Hispanic males average only 12.0 years of schooling, which pales in comparison to other racial and ethnic groups (Smith, 2001). Among 3- to 5-year-olds not yet enrolled in kindergarten, White and African-American children are more likely than Latinos to recognize most letters of the alphabet, participate in storybook activities, count up to at least 20, and write or draw rather than scribble (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). In 1995, the US Department of Education reported that, compared with 73% of White and 76% of African-American first graders, only 57% of Latino first-graders had participated in a center-based early childhood program prior to kindergarten. As a group, Latino children lag behind their peers when they enter kindergarten and the gap in academic achievement appears to widen as children grow older (Buysse, V., Castro, D. C., West, T., & Skinner, M. L. 2004). Compounding the problem, many Latino parents lack the skills necessary to prepare and engage their children with the support needed to thrive academically (Toussaint-Comeau, Smith, and Comeau Jr., 2005). Many Latino parents lack formal education, language proficiency, and the basic skills needed to effectively assist their children with their school work and studies. Consequently, many Latino youth are referred to academic tutoring programs during the traditional school day, as well as, in after-school settings. In the United States today, people with more education tend to live longer and healthier lives, remain married longer and earn more money (Pew Hispanic fact sheet, 2002).

The NCLR LENS Project leverages AmeriCorps members, who provide service at schools and community-based organizations on a full-time or part time basis. Their delivery of service varies at each Affiliate site. However, the primary goal is to provide

academic and social support for Latino students seeking to improve their academic performance. Research demonstrates that trained, committed volunteer tutors can have a positive impact on student performance. (Heron, Welsch & Goddard, 2003).

To illustrate impact, at Instituto del Progreso Latino, a NCLR AmeriCorps Affiliate organization, 250 students were served through the tutoring project and every participant (100%) showed an increase in literacy levels through pre-post assessment.

NCLR is also achieving measurable progress with its English Language Learner (ELL) population. At the Latin American Youth Center in Riverdale, Maryland, AmeriCorps members provided tutoring to Latino ESL (English as a Second Language) students that were having academic difficulty. According to Eunice Humphrey, Project Director, “Many of the ESL students made improvement [due to the tutoring] in reading out loud and in their communication skills with others.” According to the Pew Hispanic Center, the fast-growing number of students designated as English language learners are among the farthest behind in reading and math, according to an analysis that is based on standardized test scores. About 51% of 8th grade ELL students trail Whites in reading and math, meaning that the scores for one out of every two will have to improve for the group to achieve parity. In the 4th grade, 35% of ELL students are behind in math and 47% are behind in reading when compared with their white counterparts (Fry, 2007).

Much of the tutoring services for youth and adults are provided at NCLR AmeriCorps Affiliate sites located within communities that serve low-income families. AmeriCorps members work with these students for 15 to 25 hours monthly. Tutoring is needs based, focusing on the individualized academic needs of the student/participant(s). For example, at the Youth Policy Institute in Los Angeles, California a partnership was

developed with the Los Angeles Infrastructure Academy to engage Latino students in the careers of engineering and science. Despite the projected high demand for engineers in many engineering fields, leaders in the engineering community have expressed concern about the supply of well-prepared engineers over the next few decades. The number of 18–24 year olds will grow by three million by 2010; and African Americans, American Indians, and Hispanics will make up almost 60% of the population increase over that time period. The consensus among leaders in the engineering community is that the necessary increase in the engineering labor supply will come about only through the development of a more diverse workforce (Noeth, Cruce, and Harmston, 2003). Conversely, one of the Youth Policy Institute goals is to recruit Latino students to work for the local Dept. of Water and Power. As part of the project, AmeriCorps members provide daily tutoring to students in the areas of math and science and assist the classroom teacher with the daily lesson plans, as per teacher instruction. Members also contribute ideas for potential and future lesson plans and promote internship opportunities through the Department of Water and Power. According to a fact sheet put out by the National Association of Manufacturers in March of 2007, manufacturers are particularly concerned about lagging graduation rates (as compared with our international counterparts) in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) especially at the Masters and PhD level. To compete in an increasingly technical global economy, a strong foundation in math and science is fundamental for all students, whether or not they pursue post-secondary education (N.A.M., 2007). Through tutoring, YPI AmeriCorps members engage students academically and provide career exploration in engineering and science through targeted internship opportunities. At YPI, 74% of the students in the project increased their



literacy levels by one grade.

### ***Tutoring Performance Assessment***

Pre- and post-tests document the services of a program, measure outcomes, and demonstrate success. Pre- and post-tests are useful not only for obtaining impact data for progress reports required by funders, but they also act as a thermostat, providing real-time feedback of program efforts, to help program directors decide whether or not to make changes in the implementation of activities throughout the program year (Pratt 2002). The majority of NCLR AmeriCorps LENS Project Affiliate sites measure student literacy performance through a pre-post assessment. Program sites use several pre-approved assessment instruments such as; the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) test, Brigance Assessment Kit, Texas Reading Progress and Readiness Instrument (TPRI), Academic Progress Indicator (API), Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and the GED Leveling Test. The ideology of pre and Post testing of students is often accepted as a reliable method to assess the extent to which an educational intervention has created an impact on student learning (Newton 1998). The selection of the appropriate approach to properly measure specific program outcomes are critical to program accountability. NCLR Affiliate project directors use pre/post assessment to measure student progress in core subject areas like reading and math. Further, the assessment tools are used to measure readiness for student promotion to the next grade level and to measure GED competencies. Most importantly, however, project directors understand the significance of how these measurement instruments play a key role in the development of sound evaluation practices. Many of the project sites use a combination of assessment instruments based on the demographics of the

student/participant(s) who attend their programs. At intake, students are given a pre-test as a baseline assessment to evaluate student/participant(s) literacy levels. The information obtained from the pre-test provides the foundation for individualized tutoring plans for each student/participant based on their needs. Upon completion of the educational intervention, projects administer a post-test as a comparative analysis to measure the impact of tutoring in core subject areas. It is important to note that the majority of NCLR AmeriCorps LENS Project Affiliates use a pre-post testing instrument. However, some NCLR AmeriCorps LENS Project sites do not administer pre-post testing. In place of assessment tests, some project sites measure program performance through report cards, whereby sites do a comparative analysis of a student/participant(s) grades pre-program intervention and post-program intervention. Report cards are also used to monitor student behavior patterns and attendance rates.

### ***Tutoring Progress***

The NCLR has been instrumental in changing the current literacy plight of many young Latinos and their families through partnerships with community based organizations, local education agencies, and charter schools. Through the development of the NCLR AmeriCorps LENS Project, the NCLR has produced a bridge between schools, parents, and children. Due to poor attendance rates, a lack of access to rigorous instruction, poor study skills, and parents with very low levels of formal education, most Latino students do not graduate or even consider the importance of a post-secondary education. NCLR LENS Project Directors have reported that the tutoring assistance provided by AmeriCorps members has improved literacy rates and contributed to the increased grade levels of many Latino students. Some of the site-specific achievements of tutoring are:

- At the Unity Council, in Oakland California, 100% of the students enrolled in the project successfully exited the tutoring program and moved on to the next grade level.
- At Information Referral Resource Assistance (IRRA), in Edinburg, Texas, all Pre-K through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students in their project had a 100% grade promotion and a 100% post-assessment grade level evaluation.
- At the Youth Policy Institute, in Los Angeles, California, 25 Latino students completed the rigorous curriculum of math and science through the partnership with the Los Angeles Infrastructure Academy.
- At Youth Development Incorporated, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, 80% of students in the program improved literacy levels by one grade.

### *Parental Involvement*

Many studies have shown that parental involvement in a child's education leads to improved educational performance (Epstein et al., 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; Sheldon, 2002, Van Voorhis, 2003). Parent involvement fosters better student classroom behavior (Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003) and promotes greater feelings of ownership and commitment to supporting the school's mission (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Parent involvement is important to the educational success of a young adolescent and yet generally declines when a child enters the middle grades (Epstein, 2005; Jackson & Andrews, 2004; Jackson & Davis, 2000; NMSA, 2003). According to the U.S. Department of Education, students whose parents are actively involved in their education have better grades, higher test scores and better prospects at long-term academic achievement. Students also attend school more regularly, complete more homework and demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors than those with less involved parents. Unfortunately, in many Latino households, parental involvement is not emphasized to the extent that it probably should be. Latino families are less likely to read books and share stories with their children than

parents from other ethnic backgrounds (Lopez et.al, 2007). Research also suggests that parent involvement in the education of young people addresses parents’ activities in the support of learning at home, in school, and in the community (Epstein, 2005).

***Six Types of Parental Involvement***

Table 1 below outlines Epstein’s framework for parent involvement (Sanders et. al, 2002). The framework identifies skill development (i.e. parenting skills) and action strategies that increase the likelihood that parents will be involved in their child’s education.

**Table 1: Six Types of Parent Involvement**

Type 1	Parenting	Activities are designed to help families understand young adolescent development, acquire developmentally appropriate parenting skills, set home conditions to support learning at each grade level, and help schools obtain information about students.
Type 2	Communicating	Activities focus on keeping parents informed through such things as notices, memos, report cards, conferences about student work, and school functions.
Type 3	Volunteering	Activities incorporate strategies to improve volunteer recruiting, training, and scheduling.
Type 4	Learning at home	Activities allow coordination of schoolwork with work at home (e.g., goal setting, interactive homework).
Type 5	Decision making	Activities are designed to solicit the voice of parents in decisions about school policies and practices.
Type 6	Collaborating with the community	Activities acknowledge and bring together all community entities (e.g., with the community businesses, religious organizations) with a vested interest in the education of young adolescents.

The framework above serves as a useful tool to illustrate NCLR’s approach to parental involvement. NCLR LENS Project promotes active engagement of Latino families in their child’s education at the elementary, middle, and high school

level. The project includes curricula, training and emphasizes partnerships with community-based organizations that focus on effective strategies for Latino family engagement and achievement. The objective of the parent involvement is to train low-income, ethnically diverse parents of Latino children to take a participatory role in assisting their kids to achieve the following:

- Be ready and prepared for school
- Understand the importance of staying in school
- Improve their academic performance in class
- Improve parent and child relationships
- Attend college or a form of higher education

According to the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, (Mapp & Henderson, 2002) students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs
- Be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits
- Attend school regularly
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school and;
- Graduate and go on to post-secondary education

At many of the NCLR LENS Project Affiliate sites, AmeriCorps members assist with organizing parent and child activities, aid teachers with the delivery of the parent involvement curriculum, support continuity between school and home, and encourage parents to become engaged in their child's education. For example, at Unity Council, in Oakland, California, AmeriCorps members train Latino parents on how to incorporate literacy activities at home and contribute to the promotion of literacy in general to many Latino families who participate in programs offered at Unity Council. At La Fe, Inc. in El Paso, Texas, AmeriCorps Members tutor students in a HomeWork Hut, an after school homework assistance initiative where members spend about forty-five minutes with a

student after school and assist with their assigned homework. AmeriCorps members must also communicate with each student's parent about their progress a specific subject.

According to Amy O'Rourke, at La Fe, Inc, "AmeriCorps members contributed to the success of the school environment and climate with respect to gaining parent trust, and getting parents informed and involved in their child's education."

Through the service of AmeriCorps members and opportunities for parent engagement, parents who participate have become more comfortable with the local school system; gain knowledge about school rules and guidelines; attend parent/teacher conferences on a consistent basis; develop good communication/rapport with teachers and provide parents with a skill set to change the culture of parent involvement in Latino communities. At Camino Nuevo Charter School in Los Angeles, parents organized and formed their own committees to address certain issues at school and started their own club called *Grupo de Padres*. Their efforts have lead to an increase in effective communication with school administration and staff. As Judee Fernandez, the NCLR LENS Project Director at Camino Nuevo, stated; "We were enthusiastically surprised that through parental involvement efforts, we contributed to and created leaders out of parents to be self-sufficient and strong enough to make change [at the charter school]. Schools that succeed in engaging families from diverse backgrounds share three key practices: They focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families and community members; they recognize, respect and address families' needs, as well as class and cultural differences and they embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared (Mapp, 2002; Chrispeels and Rivero, 2000). The NCLR LENS Project uses parent engagement to ensure student achievement through various

levels of training to parents at the pre-school, elementary, and secondary level. At the same time, the contribution of AmeriCorps members has bridged the communication gap between students, parents, teachers, and school administrators at many of the NCLR LENS Project Affiliate sites. Through the parental involvement efforts and awareness at all NCLR LENS Project affiliate sites, it is evident that when schools and community-based organizations form partnerships with families, share and designate power, engage community volunteers, and promote parental involvement, students are apt to make greater academic and social improvement.

### ***AmeriCorps Member Development***

AmeriCorps member development is a very important part of the AmeriCorps service and member experience. Member development provides all AmeriCorps members the opportunity to pursue professional and personal goals that are both service oriented and educational. Members are given opportunities to learn and apply skills during their specific service assignment, such as tutoring or construction. Even more so, members are given opportunities to develop leadership qualities to enhance soft skills, such as time management and conflict resolution. The nonprofit organizations where members serve are also capitalizing on members' newfound or improved skills. Many organizations rely on AmeriCorps members to help mobilize the volunteers necessary to expand the organization's reach within its community (AmeriCorps: Changing Lives, Changing America, Washington, DC, 2007). Together, AmeriCorps members and the volunteers they mobilize tackle some of our nation's toughest problems: Crime, illiteracy, homelessness, gang violence, and drug abuse. They teach and tutor to help students improve academically, mentor children and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, run

after-school programs, reconnect prisoners with mainstream society, care for seniors, and protect the environment. Nationally, 90 % of members report that they have gained new skills from their AmeriCorps experience, regardless of whether it was their primary or secondary goal for joining. These skills prove to be useful to members in their education and career pursuits, as 91 % of alumni report that they have used the skills gained from their AmeriCorps service. (AmeriCorps: Changing Lives, Changing America, Washington, DC, 2007.) The NCLR LENS Affiliate organizations are responsible for recruiting, selecting, and supervising AmeriCorps members to serve in their programs. They must also have a plan detailing what types of member development opportunities will be presented, or available for participating AmeriCorps members.

One of the key operating principles of the NCLR AmeriCorps LENS Project is to ensure that each AmeriCorps member develops employability and life skills that will enhance their social and economic mobility. The NCLR LENS Program emphasizes employability skill development for members to prepare them for life after AmeriCorps. In other words, member development is a strategy to prepare members for the challenges of the workforce and civic life. Member Development serves dual purposes. The first is to provide AmeriCorps members with a tool box of transferable skills that increases their ability to carry out their volunteer service. These skills can improve the member's methods of service delivery to students. For example, all of the NCLR LENS Affiliate sites provide members with an agency orientation and content specific training in the areas in which they will provide service. In 2008, trainings and workshops offered by NCLR LENS Affiliates included: multi-cultural awareness and diversity; CPR/First aid; parental engagement; tutoring strategies; Spanish/English GED and programmatic



training that focused on AmeriCorps guidelines and required grant paperwork for all members providing service. According to the National Association of Manufacturers, American workers are the most productive workers in the world. They demonstrate daily the initiative, creativity and energy that have made American companies competitive and American manufacturing a model for the rest of the world. Unfortunately, many workers are doing so with inadequate support and eroding skills. To remain competitive in the global economy, America needs to do more, both publicly and privately, to educate and train the workforce of today and tomorrow. The NCLR AmeriCorps LENS Project is providing an excellent pathway for members to gain relevant experience through workshops, service-learning opportunities and community outreach. Furthermore, service and volunteerism provides valuable career exploration opportunities, whereby young adults can gain exposure to careers, network with career professionals and develop core workforce competencies. For instance, at La Fe, Inc., an AmeriCorps member, who wanted to pursue a degree in Special Education was given the opportunity to gain experience working in a special education classroom setting. She was sent for specific training that provided early intervention techniques for special education students. She was inspired by what she had learned and then convinced her supervisors at La Fe, Inc. to let work specifically with all of the low-performing students. She was so successful in assisting these specific special education students, that as soon as her term of service was completed, she was offered employment at La Fe, Inc. as a para-professional on staff. A key element in the progression of NCLR LENS Project member development has been the implementation of the NCLR LENS Member Development Training Framework. The training framework addresses service needs at the sites, provides a guide to develop core

competencies for AmeriCorps members and offers LENS sites the flexibility to incorporate site-specific trainings within the broader framework. This flexibility also allows project sites to share promising practices within the family of the NCLR LENS Project. The training framework also develops the core workforce competencies necessary to ensure job preparedness for all NCLR LENS Project AmeriCorps members once their term of service is complete. For some members, this is an opportunity to successfully transition into employment with affiliate sites after their term of service. This unexpected outcome has become an area of potential sowing for the recruitment of skilled, organized, community oriented, individuals for the NCLR LENS Project Affiliate sites. According to Angelica Gomez, Project Director, “this helps, because it gives the prospective member(s) a viewpoint and an understanding of what is expected and that it’s a privilege to join AmeriCorps.” This formula has been successful in retaining members and giving former AmeriCorps members an opportunity for employment through Association House. AmeriCorps members also can take advantage of the Adult Learning Resource Center at Association House. The Adult Resource Learning Resource Center provides various types of professional development and training that AmeriCorps members can enroll in. For example, AmeriCorps members can take academic support trainings to further their knowledge on how to work with students on their literacy skills, or participate in trainings on how to improve their service delivery to participants. At Unity Council in Oakland California, NCLR LENS AmeriCorps members receive training on specific assignments such as parental involvement, employability skills, customer service, basic and advanced financial fitness, conflict/resolution, public speaking, and basic tax law. According to Lindsey Rojas, Project Director, “All of these

trainings assist members in various techniques. They [members] then become knowledgeable with a certain skill set, which helps with potential employability, learning how to communicate, and the importance of teamwork on the job.” To confront sensitive social issues, trainings on sexual education and rape crisis were offered this past year. “Members felt they needed knowledge on how to assist students dealing with sensitive topics that members needed to be able to handle if confronted with.” Thus, project sites are responsive to the emerging needs of members working in changing conditions.

### *AmeriCorps Member Composition*

AmeriCorps members are more highly educated than the national population. Overall, fewer than a tenth (7 percent) lack a high school diploma, a figure less than half that for the general population. Overall, members roughly divide into three groups: Slightly more than a third (37 percent) have at least some post-secondary education, including associate’s degrees, but have not obtained a bachelor’s degree. Slightly smaller percentages (31 and 32 percent, respectively) have either received a degree from a four-year or graduate institution, or have only a high school diploma or less (Serving Country and Community: A Study of Service in AmeriCorps, A Profile of AmeriCorps Members at Baseline, June 2001). AmeriCorps members are younger than the general population and more likely to be female, single, and persons of color. Not surprisingly, enrollment often occurs at transition periods in young peoples’ lives—age at enrollment spikes around 18 and then again around 22, time periods roughly corresponding to members’ presumed graduation from high school and college.

AmeriCorps demographics for 2006 show that AmeriCorps members are:

- 73% women

- 38% from typically underrepresented racial or ethnic groups: Including 18% African-American, 12% Hispanic, and 9% Multiple/other races.
- 32% are college graduates
- 23% are enrolled in college (does not include those in graduate school)

(Source: 2006 AmeriCorps Member Satisfaction Survey.)

### ***LENS Project Member Composition***

One of the main purposes of the NCLR LENS AmeriCorps Project is to engage AmeriCorps members in direct service and capacity building opportunities that address unmet community and organizational needs. In order to meet these needs, NCLR LENS Project Directors look for members that can assist in core subject areas like math, English, Spanish, and have good writing skills. They also want individuals that have excellent communication skills, are dependable, display some leadership capabilities, and have an interest in helping people. Many potential NCLR LENS Project AmeriCorps members are recruited from ethnic minority groups and come from disadvantaged circumstances. The majority of LENS Project AmeriCorps members that serve are Latino and proficient in both English and Spanish. Bilingual AmeriCorps members become powerful liaisons connecting parents and students to their schools. According to Delisa Carillo, Project Director, at the Mexican American Unity Council, “AmeriCorps members made a difference, in their delivery of service. The bilingual members became a good bridge between teacher, student, and parents.” As the research suggests, when youth from disadvantaged circumstances do volunteer, they demonstrate the same level of commitment as youth from non-disadvantaged circumstances. Thirty-six percent of youth from disadvantaged circumstances devote at least 52 hours to volunteer activities, while 39 percent spend a minimum of 12 weeks per year with an organization

*(Volunteering and Civic Engagement Among Youth From Disadvantaged Circumstances,*

March 2007). Alumni from racial and ethnic minority groups and from disadvantaged circumstances, specifically those from low-income backgrounds are much more likely to be employed in public service careers, with 44 percent of minority and 46 percent of disadvantaged alumni employed in public service careers versus only 26 percent of their comparison groups. Not only are they much more likely to have public service careers because of their service in AmeriCorps, they are also much more likely to report that it is important to them that they have a service-oriented career (*Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni*, 2008). According to Judee Fernandez, Project Director at Camino Nuevo Charter Academy, “All NCLR LENS Project AmeriCorps members leave prepared to pursue their careers and next challenges in life. They have the potential to make a difference and become agents of positive change. They [the members] learn leadership skills and are models for their community.” Members provide critical capacity-building support and provide the infrastructure through volunteer recruitment to meet the needs of their communities after the members have left the organization (*Serving Country and Community: A Longitudinal Study of Service in AmeriCorps*, 2002, updated August 2006.)

### ***Community Strengthening***

Black and Hughes define community strength as ‘the extent to which resources and processes within a community maintain and enhance both individual and collective well-being in ways consistent with the principles of equity, comprehensiveness, participation, self reliance and social responsibility (Black and Hughes, 2001).

Community strengthening is a continuous effort to foster connection, participation, contribution, and partnership between members of a community to achieve common

goals and objectives. It involves community organizations, government, business, philanthropic organizations and local neighborhood associations working together to confront, deliberate, and tackle various community issues. The basic premise of community strengthening is that valuable knowledge and ideas are readily available within communities, and the role of government is to develop mechanisms for sharing this knowledge. Community strengthening helps to mobilize community skills, expand networks, harness energy and resources and apply them in ways that achieve collaborative and positive social change (Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victorian Government, 2007). Community strengthening efforts can be done in many different ways. Most efforts involve strategic planning that focuses on some of the issues/topics listed below:

- Providing support services to families/community members that focus on well being and family stability.
- Reducing certain risk factors for families and children.
- Providing training and workshops that focus on: Independence, education, empowerment, civic engagement, and employability skills.
- Creating and developing viable partnerships between parents, children, and community organizations.

In many communities, an emphasis on partnerships between schools and other community-based nonprofit organizations, has contributed to the success of community strengthening efforts. The combining of resources creates supports that benefit and enable children to learn and succeed. In turn, the pooling of resources helps families and communities to thrive in changing environments. These partnerships bring together diverse individuals and groups, including principals, teachers, school superintendents, school board members, community-based organizations, youth development organizations, health and human service agencies, parents and other community leaders

to expand opportunities for children, families, and communities (Blank and Langford, 2000). The importance of bridging the space between home and school with the service of AmeriCorps members has contributed to stronger communities nationwide. The mission of AmeriCorps is to strengthen communities and develop leaders through direct, team-based national and community service. In partnership with nonprofits, state and municipal government, faith-based entities, and other community organizations, AmeriCorps members complete service projects throughout their year of service. These community partnerships foster greater interagency collaboration and facilitate better communication and sharing of resources to address community priority areas. Each NCLR LENS Project Affiliate must participate in a minimum of two community service projects yearly. AmeriCorps members are given a leadership role in recruiting community volunteers to assist with special events and activities. This is also an opportunity for AmeriCorps members to form a bond and team up together. This teamwork contributes to and builds an *esprit de corps* among AmeriCorps members, which is a cornerstone of the national service movement.

### ***Community Service Projects***

To increase capacity of a community is to increase its ability to do things for itself. It is more than just adding some communal services or facilities like roads, sanitation, water, access to education and health care. It means increased ability and strength. It means more skills, more confidence, and more effective organization. It cannot come about by charity or donation of resources from outside. It can be facilitated through action such as community projects, but only when all community members become involved from the

beginning, to decide upon a community action, to identify hidden resources from within the community, and by developing a sense of ownership and responsibility of communal facilities from the start to the finish (Bartle, 2007). Community service projects focus on addressing vital community needs. Community service projects will vary from community to community. Excellent examples of community service projects are: efforts to help cook, serve a meal, or distribute food at a homeless shelter or food bank; gather used clothing and donate it to a local shelter; rake leaves, shovel snow, clean gutters, or washing windows for senior citizens; deliver meals to homebound community members; and picking up groceries with or for a senior citizen. NCLR LENS Project Affiliate sites incorporate many of the examples above into their community service projects.

AmeriCorps members either organize service projects or team up with others to address the specific needs identified by each unique community. At La Fe Inc., in El Paso, Texas, AmeriCorps members partnered with the University of Texas A&M Colonias Program on a Thanksgiving food drive. In San Antonio Texas, at the Mexican American Unity Council, AmeriCorps members worked in partnership with a local church to feed 250 homeless. In Riverdale, Maryland at the Latin American Youth Center, AmeriCorps members partnered with other AmeriCorps Projects locally to create Happy Hats Day, where members created and distributed hats to children at the local children's hospital that are diagnosed with cancer. Through their service to the community, members develop critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork and collaboration and effective communication skills in the context of community asset mapping, volunteer recruitment and training and community organizing. A good illustration of this is *El Dia del Niño*, a day focused on promoting the importance of mutual exchange and understanding among



children, as well as, to initiate action, to promote the welfare of children around the world. The day was also chosen as the day to celebrate childhood. Many of the NCLR LENS Project Affiliate sites partner with community organizations and local schools to promote *El Dia del Niño*. Annually, on November 20th, AmeriCorps members provide service to children by organizing literacy games, reading to youth, staffing arts and crafts booths, and promoting the importance of children's literacy. Community service projects also contribute to the forming of cohesive service and volunteer teams. Members work together by setting up a shared vision of what can be done for the community they are serving. Members also build consensus by balancing different values and varied opinions of community members and then use this information to develop service projects. The result is members working together to implement service projects that have been planned and thought through, provide community impact, deliver a positive message, and ensure that each member has the opportunity to make a noteworthy contribution. As a final point, community strengthening brings forth a continuous effort to foster connection, garner participation, and develop partnership between members of a community. By engaging in service projects, AmeriCorps members are able to meet vital community needs and develop essential life skills that they will utilize beyond their term of service.

### ***Volunteerism***

Presently, Americans are designating more time to volunteer. Individuals are volunteering through faith based organizations, schools, social service and non-profit agencies, college campuses, and in communities throughout the United States. By examining historical volunteer trends, it is clear that Americans are turning

out in record numbers to volunteer. The growth in volunteering from 1974 to 2006 has primarily been driven by three age groups: Young adults; mid-life adults; and older adults. In particular, volunteer rates among the young adult population (16-19 years old) showed a dramatic rise between 1974 and today. While volunteer rates among young adults declined between 1974 and 1989 (20.9% and 13.4%, respectively), the percentage of young adults who volunteer almost doubled between 1989 and 2006 (from 13.4% to 26.4%, respectively (*Volunteering in America: 2007 State Trends and Rankings in Civic Life*, Washington, DC 2007)). In a recent issue brief put out by the Corporation for National and Community Service, volunteer contribution was valued at \$18.77 per hour. In 2007, 60.8 million Americans or 26.2 percent of the adult population gave 8.1 billion hours of volunteer service worth \$158 billion. In addition to the 60.8 million volunteers serving in organizations nationwide, about 5.2 million people also volunteer informally to help their communities. In 2007, the proportion of volunteers giving 100+ hours reached its highest level since 2002 when 35 percent of all volunteers gave 100+ hours. Data since 1989 show that religious organizations have consistently remained the most popular organizations for volunteers to serve through, followed closely in recent years by educational or youth service organizations (*Volunteering in America Research Highlights Research Brief*, July 2008). Volunteerism creates a sense of pride, satisfaction and accomplishment. When people volunteer, they share their talents and time to strengthen communities, improve lives, and connect to others while contributing to a good cause. The NCLR LENS Project has been strategic in the granting of its funds to Affiliate organizations that have the capacity and reputation of delivering social services through quality educational and youth programs.

### *Community Volunteer Recruitment*

The NCLR LENS Project Affiliate organizations use several different ways to harness community resources and recruit community volunteers. Volunteer recruitment is done primarily through media including, newspaper, public service announcements, internet, and television. Other efforts focus on community outreach. As mentioned earlier, each NCLR LENS Project Affiliate must participate in a minimum of two National Days of Service. AmeriCorps members are given the opportunity to take a leadership role in recruiting community volunteers to assist with special events and activities. Members develop outreach materials and take a lead role in facilitating presentations at local schools, nonprofits, neighborhood and faith-based organizations and businesses to attract interested volunteers. Interested volunteers are listed in site databases and are mobilized for service based on their area of interest. For example, at the Youth Policy Institute, AmeriCorps members man booths at different sponsored community events to recruit volunteers in advance for future events. At the Spanish American Civic Association, in Lancaster Pennsylvania, AmeriCorps members use the bilingual public radio station as a way to promote community volunteer recruitment to members of the Spanish speaking community. Word of mouth is yet another method that AmeriCorps members use to seek out community volunteers. Many members recruit friends and family to volunteer and give back some time to the community. AmeriCorps members at many of the Affiliate organizations are encouraged to bring family and friends to the service projects and community events. For instance, at Youth Development Incorporated (YDI) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, AmeriCorps members bring three volunteers with them to each service project and community event. According to Rebecca Gonzales, Project

Director at YDI, “This volunteer opportunity is a way to bring people together to do something positive and worthwhile for the community. It also presents an opportunity to seek out potential members, who might be interested in providing service and taking advantage of the AmeriCorps opportunity.” This strategy also creates a pipeline of committed volunteers that provide capacity-building support at no cost to community-based organizations.

### *Community Volunteer Composition*

The success of any volunteer effort weighs heavily on the skills and attributes of the volunteer, the alignment of these skills and attributes to the service assignment, the amount of preparation involved when placing a volunteer and the efficacy of the support staff in providing direction and ongoing support to meeting performance outcomes (Mirabal, 2006). A volunteer should have a certain set of characteristics and

abilities that can lead and inspire others. Volunteering also can be an educational opportunity on the importance of service and giving back to the community for young people. For example, at the Youth Policy Institute, a family that had children involved in the NCLR LENS project, all volunteered at the Bert Corona Parent Summit, which was a health and activities fair where AmeriCorps members coordinated activities and manned booths promoting health and wellness. The family traveled from Pacoima, California to Santa Monica Beach, California, to volunteer and assist AmeriCorps members at the health fair. So, what inspires people to volunteer? Functional Volunteer Theory attempts to link people's beliefs and their subsequent behaviors. It examines the internal motivations that have caused them to take action, to get involved (and stay involved) in external volunteer activities. (Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen, et al.,

1998.) The six main categories, or functions, identified by Clary and colleagues are:

- **Values:** to express humanitarian and prosocial values through action;
- **Career:** to explore career options and increase the likelihood that a particular career path can be pursued;
- **Understanding:** to gain greater understanding of the world, the diverse people in it, and ultimately, oneself;
- **Enhancement:** to boost self-esteem, to feel important and needed by others, and to form new friendships;
- **Protective:** to distract oneself from personal problems or to work through problems in the context of service;
- **Social:** to satisfy the expectations of friends and close others.

Although there are slight differences among specific demographic groups, these motivations are present across gender, class, race, and other lines. It is also worth noting that the highest rated functions, as indicated by volunteers across the board, are values, enhancement, and social, followed by understanding, protective, and career (Clary,

Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen, et al., 1998.) At all of the NCLR LENS Project Affiliate sites, volunteers get involved for many of these reasons. According to Delisa Carrillo, Project Director, at the Mexican American Unity Council, “they [volunteers] get involved and are interested in volunteering at activities and events that have a social, educational, or environmental impact on the community and school.” Through the recruitment efforts of NCLR LENS project directors and AmeriCorps members, community volunteers benefit and develop a greater sense of safety, gain improved health, and participate in activities and events that promote positive youth development and public awareness on particular community issues. Parents also can be an asset for community volunteer recruitment. In 1990, Lucas, Henze, and Donato studied six high schools that were successful in promoting the academic achievement of Latino students. In determining commonalities between these schools, they found that parent involvement played a key role. The more parents participate in schooling, in a

sustained way, at every level - in advocacy, decision-making and oversight roles, as fundraisers and boosters, as volunteers and para-professionals, and as home teachers – the better for student achievement (Williams & Chavkin, 1989). At some of the NCLR LENS project sites, volunteerism is a requirement for parents to participate in the project. Most are parents that have students enrolled in classes, or are students themselves in some form of parent enhancement curriculum. For example, at Camino Nuevo Charter Academy, parents must provide twenty-five service hours in order to have their child in the charter academy. At La Fe, Inc., parents are the targeted population in volunteer recruitment efforts. As Sara DeLaGarza, from La Fe, Inc., states; “Parents are mostly volunteers who assist because they want to, they are essential to the success of what we do.” A final point--but maybe the most significant in the composition of a NCLR LENS Project community volunteer-- is the ability to serve a diverse population and be able to communicate in a dual language context. Being bilingual is a skill that all NCLR LENS project directors will look for when seeking out community volunteers. Many of the students that participate in the NCLR LENS Project are native Spanish speakers, who have difficulty with English comprehension and struggle communicating with others. Having someone there who can assist with translating and conveying information in a simple, but concise manner can help many students and volunteers understand expectations, how to approach an assignment, or what to be prepared for when assigned a task at a community event or school activity.

### ***Community Volunteer Training***

Training gives volunteers the direction and skills necessary to carry out assigned tasks.

Training is typically provided by the staff in the area of the organization where the

volunteer is assigned (Retrieved from

| <http://www.gosv.state.md.us/volunteerism/bestprac/sec05.htm>). Grossman and Furano

identify three elements as crucial to the success of any volunteer program: Screening

potential volunteers to ensure appropriate entry and placement in the organization;

orientation and training to provide volunteers with the skills and outlook needed; and

management and ongoing support of volunteers by paid staff to ensure that volunteer time

is not wasted (Grossman & Furano, 2002). They conclude, "No matter how well

intentioned volunteers are, unless there is an infrastructure in place to support and direct

their efforts, they will remain ineffective at best or, worse, become disenchanted and

withdraw, potentially damaging recipients of services in the process." The adequate

training of volunteers is essential in creating a successful volunteer experience. Trained

volunteers can reduce potential risk to the NCLR LENS Project and their Affiliate sites.

Training for volunteers will vary according to the knowledge and skills needed to conduct

specific responsibilities and perform a particular set of tasks. Through the NCLR LENS

Project Affiliate sites, volunteer training is offered to community members through a

general orientation on the mission and purpose of the Affiliate site. This may include

important history, information, and the type of services the project Affiliate site offers. The

types of training may vary depending on the size and target volunteer audience. In many

cases, AmeriCorps members are trained to train community volunteers on the required

delivery of services and what is expected. Community volunteers can benefit by gaining

new experiences and incorporating service into their lives by making a difference in their

community. According to data collected from program directors, volunteer training has

made a difference in ensuring quality service delivery and has given community volunteers

valuable organizational and community context needed to implement effective service projects.

### *Conclusion*

The NCLR LENS Project has demonstrated that tutoring efforts are having a positive impact on Latino students throughout the country. Over three quarters (76%) of students participating in the program have shown gains in literacy levels. The emphasis on individualized and small group tutoring has proven to be a successful strategy in meeting the literacy needs of Latino youth. Furthermore, with over 3,500 community volunteers mobilized for service, the NCLR LENS Project provides critical capacity-building support to meeting unmet needs in Latino communities. Moreover, the project has woven in parent engagement strategies to train and educate parents on how to be advocates for student success. The training of parents (in terms of numbers) across NCLR Affiliate sites varies greatly. This can be attributed, in part, to parent engagement being a relatively new focus of the initiative. NCLR LENS Project Directors suggested more professional development and training to successfully implement a strong parental involvement piece to the LENS Project. While research suggests that parental involvement leads to better student outcomes, it is critical for the NCLR LENS Project to examine program specific parent involvement efforts and their causal link to student performance.



## *Success Stories*

### **The Power of Mentorship: A LAYC Success Story**

Geoffrey Vargas came to the Maryland Multicultural Youth Centers' AmeriCorps Tutoring Service (MMYC-ACTS) very troubled. He was failing in his classes, rarely attended school, and engaged in many risky behaviors such as drugs and gang activities. His outlook on life was very much gloomy. Geoffrey was referred to MMYC-ACTS for the in-school tutoring component. From there, Geoffrey was partnered with an AmeriCorps member, who worked with Geoffrey 3-4 times a week. He went from class to class with Geoffrey, assisting him with his class work and homework assignments. In addition to the tutoring, George took an interest in Geoffrey's life outside of school. After a few weeks, Geoffrey told George to now call him "Geff." It was at this point where George realized he was not only Geff's tutor but, he was also his mentor. Geff and George were able to divulge in many conversations about Geff's life. Through these conversations, George had a better understanding of Geff. Trust was now being given to George. George was able to take it and try to guide Geff on a more positive path. Slowly, Geff started to show improvement in school. He was no longer skipping school or classes and was able to bring most of his failing grades up to passing grades. Most importantly, his attitude towards life was changing. Geff now had plans for after high school. When asked in the beginning, he had no answer. George realized that the patience and energy that was put into Geff was definitely paying off. Even though George will not be able to be with Geff every step of the way, he hopes that he has planted the seed for another person to nurture it.

### **Instituto de Progreso Latino - A Story of Tenacity and Perseverance:**

Fernando Soto is in my ESL class at Instituto Del Progreso Latino in the location of Back of the Yards. He has been one of my students from the middle of October of 2007 to date. When he registered, he had only lived in the United States for about one year and a half. He only completed the equivalent to High School. He was a part-time employee at the time. When he was asked about the reasons why he was interested in taking ESL classes, he responded: "I want to improve my ability to express myself in English, and if possible, obtain a better job." He also mentioned that he was, and still is interested in communicating with other people (those who do not speak nor understand Spanish) because, as he said: "I need to do so just about all the time and everywhere."

During the first term of the ESL classes, which ended in the middle of December, I always noticed his eagerness to participate in the class. He was always one of the students who would show his interest in learning the subject, not only by asking questions, but also by making comments on the topics he was already familiar with, in order to make even clearer something that was being mentioned during class. This was very helpful to the rest of his classmates as well. I also noticed his willingness to help out his classmates understand the material better. I remember seeing him clarifying doubts for his classmates when they seemed to be somewhat confused while they were working on an assignment. By the end of the first term, auto-evaluations were given to all students, and he wrote: "I personally consider that this course is very useful to have a better relationship with the people who do not speak my language (Spanish), and also to have better life and work expectations in a culture that is unknown to me." In addition, he mentioned he considered that his abilities to communicate in English had improved; he

had attained some of his goals during the course, and even more importantly, that the course had helped him maintain his job. Fernando continued to be part of my group of students in the ESL class. This second term started in the middle of January of 2008, and ended in the middle of April. During this time, I was glad to know he's now working full time at a construction company. It was also very satisfactory to see his improvement in all areas of communication, such as reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. It was even better to see him continue to be a very helpful peer of the group. He kept assisting his peers in all possible ways, and I was very glad to see that. When this term was over, there was another series of auto-evaluations. This time, Soto wrote that "I believe that during this term at this course level, besides all that I learned, it's helping have more self-assuredness on the development of my daily activities with the other existent cultures on the places where I work." It was very gratifying for me as a teacher, to see such improvement in so little time, and I am glad to know that I am actually making a difference by being part of AmeriCorps.

**A Good Example of what The LENS Project is all about – a S.A.C.A. Success Story:**

One of our members, Zulma Pabon, is a great example of what this program can do for our community. At the early age of 14, Zulma became pregnant, and although she continued to attend school, she was no longer interested as she was focused on her new future as a single mom. As time progressed, she had to quit school due to her health and pregnancy related issues. After the baby was born, Zulma started working part time odd jobs due to the lack of education. She also needed extra financial help to supplement the Government Welfare Program, provided to her. For many years, she was worried about her future and her baby's future as well. She was very confused and challenged with her

situation as a young single mom. After 13 years living this life style, Zulma realized she wanted to give a better life and a great example to her now teenage son. That's when she joined the NCLR AmeriCorps program. She came to the program for the financial and educational rewards. Little did she know, that this program was going to make her a better person and better prepared for the future. As soon as she started in the program, Zulma also enrolled at McCaskey High School, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania as a High school student. On June 6, 2008, she graduated with a High School Diploma from McCaskey High School. It was a very emotional event for her and her family, especially for her son that knew how much her mother had sacrificed herself. After her High School graduation, the guidance counselor for La Academia helped Zulma to move on to better and bigger things. Zulma was accepted to the Harrisburg Community College (HACC), where she enrolled during the 2008 Summer Program. She is currently majoring as an Ultra Sound Technician using the rewards of the NCLR AmeriCorps Program. She is a wonderful example of what this program is all about. I am extremely proud of her and her accomplishments since she joined our team. Her future looks brighter and better every day.

## NCLR LENS Program Performance Measures 2007-2008

NCLR Project Directors were asked to provide quantitative data for NCLR LENS Program Performance Measures. For performance measures that were not relevant to their Affiliate site project, a response of N/A was accepted. The data compiled is for project year 2007-2008.

### Tutoring

#### **Total number of students served through tutoring:**

<b>LENS Project Affiliate Site</b>	<b># of Students</b>
Association House	688
Camino Nuevo	250
I.R.R.A.	436
Instituto del Progreso Latino	250
Latin American Youth Center	67
La Luz Social Services	38
La Fe, Inc.	101
Mexican American Unity Council	250
Spanish American Civic Association	78
Unity Council	90
Youth Development Inc.	120
Youth Policy Institute	269
<b>Total:</b>	<b>2,637</b>

#### **Percentage of students who increased literacy levels by one grade level:**

<b>LENS Project Affiliate Site</b>	<b>% Increase</b>
Association House	75
Camino Nuevo	20
I.R.R.A.	81
Instituto del Progreso Latino	100
Latin American Youth Center	Program just started
La Luz Social Services	45
La Fe, Inc.	67
Mexican American Unity Council	96
Spanish American Civic Association	100
Unity Council	100
Youth Development Inc.	80
Youth Policy Institute	74
<b>Total:</b>	<b>76</b>

**Total number of students who received General Education Diploma (GED):**

<b>LENS Project Affiliate Site</b>	<b># of Students</b>
Association House	18
Camino Nuevo	99
I.R.R.A.	7
Instituto del Progreso Latino	10
Latin American Youth Center	0
La Luz Social Services	0
La Fe, Inc.	0
Mexican American Unity Council	5
Spanish American Civic Association	5
Unity Council	N/A
Youth Development Inc.	0
Youth Policy Institute	N/A
<b>Total:</b>	<b>144</b>

**Community Strengthening**

**Total number of community service activities performed by AmeriCorps members:**

<b>LENS Project Affiliate Site</b>	<b># of Community Service Activities</b>
Association House	2
Camino Nuevo	20
I.R.R.A.	42
Instituto del Progreso Latino	4
Latin American Youth Center	2
La Luz Social Services	6
La Fe, Inc.	31
Mexican American Unity Council	17
Spanish American Civic Association	6
Unity Council	10
Youth Development Inc.	2
Youth Policy Institute	8
<b>Total:</b>	<b>150</b>

**Total number of community volunteers recruited for service activities:**

<b>LENS Project Affiliate Site</b>	<b># of Community Volunteers</b>
Association House	98
Camino Nuevo	25
I.R.R.A.	298
Instituto del Progreso Latino	175
Latin American Youth Center	50
La Luz Social Services	29

La Fe, Inc.	50
Mexican American Unity Council	2,060
Spanish American Civic Association	142
Unity Council	293
Youth Development Inc.	35
Youth Policy Institute	422
<b>Total:</b>	<b>3,674</b>

### Parental Involvement

**Total number of parents/stakeholders who participated in parent education training:**

<b>LENS Project Affiliate Site</b>	<b># of Parents</b>
Association House	103
Camino Nuevo	20
I.R.R.A.	9
Instituto del Progreso Latino	5
Latin American Youth Center	25
La Luz Social Services	10
La Fe, Inc.	43
Mexican American Unity Council	5
Spanish American Civic Association	No response
Unity Council	54
Youth Development Inc.	6
Youth Policy Institute	100
<b>Total:</b>	<b>380</b>

### *NCLR LENS Project Recommendations*

- **Connect parents with school administrators, school staff and community leaders to strengthen student outcomes.** There were some cross-site inconsistencies with the parent involvement component of the project. Performance varied based on confidence-levels administering the curriculum and by ability at each site to engage parents. Continuing to embrace a partnership between parents, schools and community leaders, as evidenced in this report, will lead to better educational outcomes for Latino youth.
- **Monitor NCLR LENS Affiliate progress towards meeting the Parental Involvement objectives and goals.** Many of the Affiliate sites expressed ways that they wanted to engage and attract parents to participate in the parental involvement component of the project. The number of parents participating in this component varied greatly across sites. Also, specific outcomes related to this objective are not clear at this point. Due diligence at the intermediary level will ensure greater compliance in meeting the parental involvement objective. Further, NCLR should consider professional development opportunities for Affiliate staff related to the parent involvement component.
- **Broaden member development activities to include workshops on intervention strategies, special needs populations and professional development.** Based on the unique needs of the project, AmeriCorps members need basic skills in case management, crisis intervention, serving special needs populations and inclusion. Broadening the scope of member development activities will expand their direct service toolbox and give them transferable skills they can apply in future employment.
- **Continue to engage AmeriCorps members in NCLR LENS Project leadership.** The NCLR LENS Project develops civic minded, Latino leaders by allowing members to assume leadership roles in their community. Moreover, the AmeriCorps Member Council promotes critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration for future Latino leadership. The Member Council has also fostered greater cross-site collaboration among members in the exchange of promising and effective service practices. Expanding on the professional development and leadership opportunities for this core group can strengthen retention rates among members and build a pipeline for future community leadership.



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