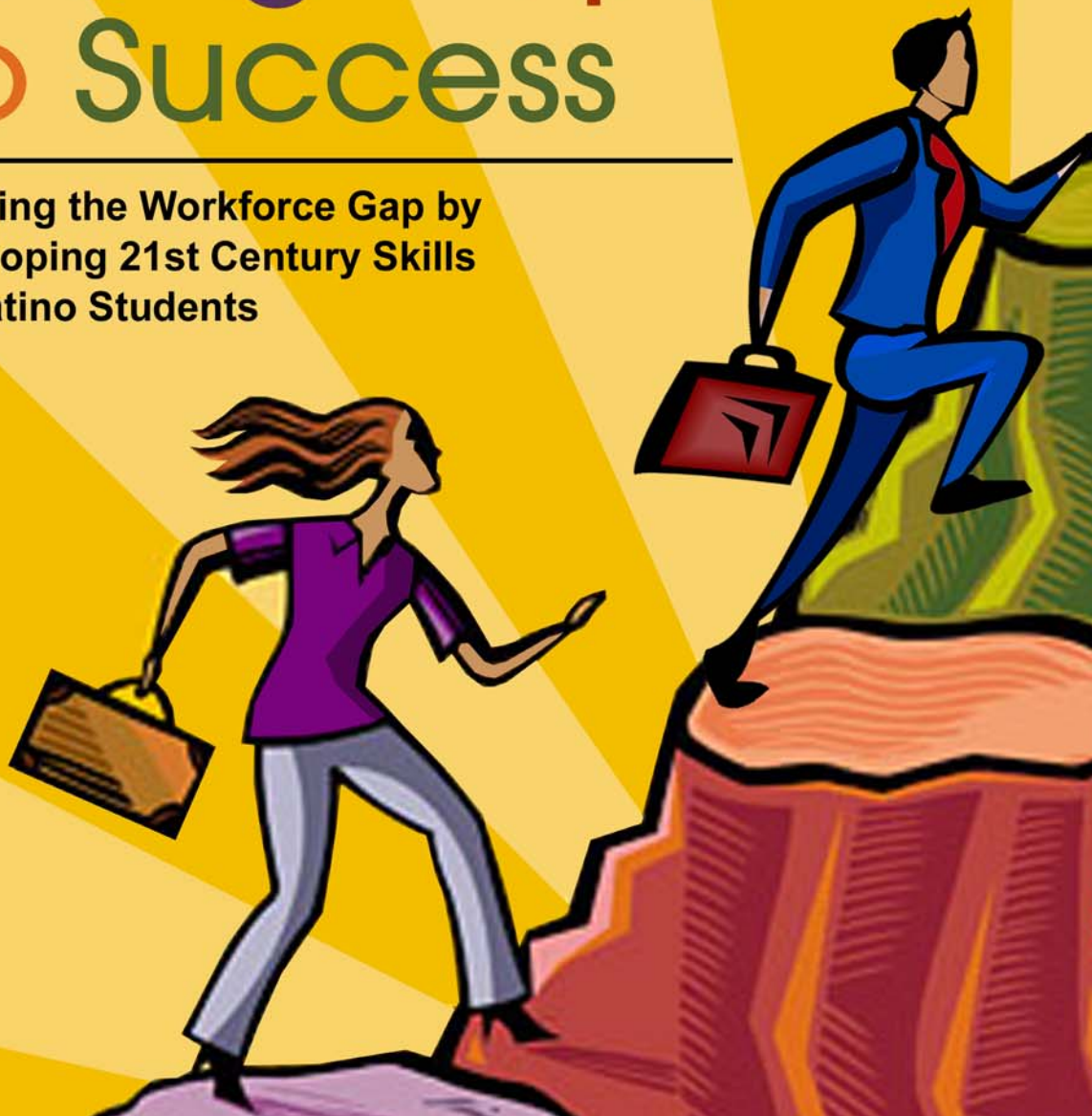


NCLR Escalera Program: Taking Steps to Success

Bridging the Workforce Gap by
Developing 21st Century Skills
for Latino Students



Sponsored by

NCLR
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA



PEPSICO
FOUNDATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

National Council of La Raza	4
Acknowledgements	5
Executive Summary	6
Introduction	9
Methodology	11
SECTION I. NCLR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE	12
NCLR Workforce Development Overview	12
Phase I. Background of NCLR Escalera Program: Taking Steps to Success	13
Pilot Site and Affiliate Selection	14
NCLR Escalera Model	14
Phase II. Expansion and Replication of the NCLR Escalera Program: Taking Steps to Success	17
Evaluation Planning	19
Table 1. NCLR Escalera Program Logic Model	19
Systems and Tools	21
SECTION II: ESCALERA PROGRAM KEY FINDINGS, PROMISING PRACTICES, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	24
Summary	24
AltaMed Escalera Program	25
AltaMed Escalera Alumni Janil Alvarez: In Her Own Words	36
Instituto del Progreso Latino (IPL) Escalera Program	37
IPL Student Success Story, Adriana Martinez, IPL Escalera Alumni	45
PROMESA: EHCCI Escalera Program	46
PROMESA Escalera Student Profile: Barbie Rodriguez	52

TABLE OF CONTENTS

(cont.)

SECTION III. NCLR ESCALERA PROGRAM IMPACT DATA	53
Overview	53
Tables	53
Table 2. Total Students Served by Site and Cohort Group	53
Table 3. Total Number of NCLR Escalera Program Participants and Completion Rates	53
Table 4. Average Student GPA by Site (2007 Cohort)	54
Table 5. Comparison of NCLR Escalera Program High School Graduation Rates Against National Averages	54
Table 6. College Enrollment and Graduation Rates	54
SECTION IV. NEED FOR FURTHER STUDY	55
BIBLIOGRAPHY	56
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	57

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) – the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States – works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations (CBOs), NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. To achieve its mission, NCLR conducts applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy, providing a Latino perspective in five key areas – assets/investments, civil rights/immigration, education, employment and economic status, and health. In addition, it provides capacity-building assistance to its Affiliates who work at the state and local level to advance opportunities for individuals and families.

Founded in 1968, NCLR is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt organization headquartered in Washington, DC. NCLR serves all Hispanic subgroups in all regions of the country and has operations in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, Sacramento, San Antonio, and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) would like to thank the PepsiCo Foundation, PepsiCo, Inc., and all of its subsidiaries for their guidance, support, and continued investment in the NCLR Escalera Program. NCLR would also like to acknowledge the following NCLR Affiliate partners and their staff for their valued contributions to this study and for their unwavering commitment to positively impacting the lives and future economic opportunities of Latino youth.



AltaMed Health Services Corporation (Los Angeles, CA)

Carlos Venegas, Escalera Program Director, AltaMed
Miguel Ortiz, Escalera Program Staff, AltaMed
Andrea Ustarez, Escalera Program Staff, AltaMed
Elbia Carillo, Senior Case Manager, AltaMed
Jorge Uranga, Director, Educational Participation in Communities (EPIC) program, California State University, Los Angeles
Lupe Paramo, Principal, Garfield High School



Instituto del Progreso Latino (IPL) (Chicago, IL)

Juan Salgado, Executive Director/IPL
Miguel Cambrey, Youth Development Director/IPL
Gabriela Arismendi, Program Coordinator/IPL
Alex Martinez, Youth Coach/IPL
Christine Diaz, Principal/Rudy Lozano School



PROMESA: East Harlem Council for Community Improvement, Inc. (EHCCI) (New York, NY)

Carol Santiago, Associate Director/EHCCI
Nilsa Orama, Program Coordinator/EHCCI
Ada Rodriguez, Youth Coach/EHCCI
Gladys Padro-Soler, Vice President of Social Services/Promesa Systems, Inc.
Raul Rodriguez, Executive Director/EHCCI



PepsiCo Inc

Los Angeles, CA

Richard Montañez, Manager, Urban Community Development North America, Frito-Lay

Chicago, IL

Irma Díaz, Senior Coordinator, U.S. Sales Foods/Snacks, PepsiCo - QTG
Gustavo Aguilar, Key Account Manager, PepsiCo - QTG
Manny Costales, Account Development Manager, Frito-Lay

New York, New York

Enrico Florio, Sr. Category Manager, PepsiCo Inc
David Hernandez, NY Metro Market Director, Frito-Lay

Also, NCLR would like to acknowledge the Escalera students and alumni that provided critical feedback and valuable suggestions for improving the program to best meet the needs of students. Your time, dedication and investment in this program are greatly appreciated.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than one-third (34.3%), or around 14 million, of Hispanics in the United States are under the age of 18.¹ These young people represent a significant portion of America's future workforce, yet the Hispanic high school dropout rate is significant (46.8%). Only 53% of Hispanic youth in the United States graduate from high school.² Without effective interventions that provide them with higher education or training, youth – like their parents – are more likely to end up working in low-skill, low-wage jobs with few benefits and few opportunities to move ahead. Actions must be taken to identify and eliminate barriers that young Hispanics face in entering and advancing in the workforce. Therefore, investments in Latino education and workforce efforts – precisely of the nature that the NCLR Escalera Program provides – are essential.

In 2001, NCLR began exploring how it might adapt its adult-oriented partnership strategy to improving the educational attainment, employment options, and economic mobility of vulnerable Hispanic youth. At the same time, NCLR wanted to increase the capacity of its Affiliate organizations to provide effective workforce development services to community youth.

The NCLR Escalera Program was developed in partnership with the PepsiCo Foundation and PepsiCo, Inc. As a national intermediary organization, NCLR was uniquely positioned to develop a youth education, leadership, and career development model that met the specific needs of Latino youth. Working in partnership with Latino-serving community-based Affiliates, NCLR was able to design, test, and replicate the model.

Data included in this report were collected over a 14-month period, from April 2006 to June 2007. The lead evaluator used several qualitative methods to collect data, including in-person interviews, phone interviews, focus groups, and observation. Further data were collected through administrative data review, conference calls, Escalera Advisory Group (EAG) meetings, and the NCLR Escalera Affiliate Client Tracking System (ACTS).

continued on next page

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Table 1.1: Population by Sex, Age, Hispanic Origin, and Race: 2004." Available at http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hispanic/ASEC2004/2004CPS_tab1.1a.pdf. Accessed on February 6, 2007.

² Orfield, Gary, Daniel Losen, Johanna Wald, and Christopher B. Swanson, *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. Contributors: Advocates for Children of New York, Civil Society Institute, 2004, p. 4.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(Continued)

Based on data collected during the 14-month formative evaluation, the following themes emerged as key contributing factors to the success of the NCLR Escalera Program:

- **An holistic approach to achieving positive educational and career outcomes.** Students' success or failure is a complex issue. The growing body of research suggests that involving the family, specifically parents in a child's education, leads to better educational outcomes. Each of the three NCLR Escalera Program sites employs a "wrap-around" social service strategy that identifies and addresses the comprehensive needs of Escalera students and their families. Each program site focuses on providing a support network for students and their families to increase the likelihood of success in educational and career settings.
- **Case management as a core program function to address socioeconomic barriers to success.** Before students can begin to think about being successful in school and careers, we must ensure that their basic survival needs are met. Using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a basic framework, we understand that basic sustenance and survival needs must be met before we can reach the ultimate goal of fulfillment.³ Through case management, the NCLR Escalera Program targets these basic needs and provides mitigation strategies to best address the socioeconomic barriers to success their students face.
- **Positive peer influence in achieving school success.** Much research has focused on how negative peer influence contributes to the dropout problem in low-income communities. What was discovered in this study was how positive peer influence can counteract this effect. Several of the testimonials provided by students point to the supportive relationships of their peers as contributing factors to achieving academic success. In a recent study of students of Mexican descent, researchers found that students lack knowledge of what it takes to get into college, feel alienated at school, and have teachers that do not understand their social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.⁴ Supportive peer relationships can assist students with the educational challenges they face in systems that often do not support them. Furthermore, positive peer influence can lead to higher expectations for low-income, Latino students to increase future economic mobility. The NCLR Escalera Program has provided an environment that provides increased peer-to-peer engagement among participating students. The program also empowers students to develop activities that are student-driven and student-led.
- **Access to broader educational and career networks.** Several Escalera Program strategies, such as the mock interviews with PepsiCo and other corporate representatives, career presentations, internships, job fairs, and

continued on next page

³ Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a famous psychological theory published by American psychologist Abraham Maslow through his ground-breaking work, *A Theory of Human Motivation* (1943).

⁴ Gandara, P., Gibson, M., and Koyama, J. *School Connections: U.S. Mexican Youth, Peers, and School Achievement*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2004.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(Continued)

career pathways for Latino students. Limited access to social and institutional networks that promote economic mobility has been an ever present challenge for Latinos living in poverty. Escalera addresses this issue by providing exposure early and often to educational institutions, the business community and career professionals that are invested in the holistic development of Latino students.

- **A strong focus on developing 21st-century applied skills for academic and career success.** The NCLR Escalera Program is very deliberate in helping students develop applied skills, such as critical thinking, teamwork, technology applications, leadership, and presentation skills. Escalera students are able to make critical connections from the classroom to career applications through the various program components and integrated applied skills curriculum.

Based on these strategies and interventions, the NCLR Escalera Program has achieved tremendous success in graduating its students from high school and enrolling them in post-secondary education. Since the program's inception, 98% of all participants have graduated from high school, and 96% of those who completed the program have been accepted to college.

While this study has illuminated several successful strategies to address the Hispanic dropout rate and the need to develop a highly-skilled workforce, further research is needed. Further studies must analyze the correlation of contributing factors to confirm what leads to dropout prevention and post-secondary and workforce success. Also, it is extremely important to understand the longer-term implications of participation in the NCLR Escalera Program, such as post-secondary preparedness, post-secondary retention, post-secondary graduation rates of Escalera alumni, workforce preparedness, and economic mobility implications for Escalera graduates.



INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Census, 42.7 million Hispanics lived in the United States as of July 1, 2005.⁵ Almost 20 million (~ 19.8 million) Latinos are a part of the U.S. labor force, having the highest participation rates in the U.S. workforce at 68%; this rate is expected to rise steadily over the next decade.⁶ Three-quarters (75.8%) of Latino men and half (51.5%) of Latinas over the age of 16 are employed.⁷

Lower wages of Latinos, to a large extent, can be attributed to employment in low-skill, low-wage, dead-end jobs due to socioeconomic and familial barriers. Some of these barriers include low-English proficiency, disproportionate school attendance, low representation in post-secondary institutions, and familial responsibilities. Latinos tend to be employed in the construction, food preparation, and hospitality industries mainly due to ease of entry for individuals with limited education. Some of the common occupations are home health aide (\$388 per week income), food preparation worker (\$321 per week income), and construction worker (\$502 per week income).⁸ The construction, food preparation, and hospitality industries do not require high levels of education or English language skills for entry-level jobs. Thus, finding employment in these industries is less challenging, regardless of the fact that employees are paid the lowest wages with virtually no benefits.

Without targeted education and leadership interventions, Latino youth face a future of low-skill, low-wage jobs with few benefits. To correct this situation, it is imperative that strategies be developed and executed which identify and eliminate the barriers that young Hispanics face entering and advancing in the workforce. The major employment barrier, for both native-born and immigrant Latino youth, is a low level of educational attainment. The lack of language, literacy (math, reading, writing), and technology skills significantly limits both educational and employment opportunities. Latinos are significantly less likely than African Americans or Whites to have a high school diploma, and fewer have a college degree. Recent data from a 2004 study by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, show that nationally 53%⁹ of Hispanics graduate from high school. Further, the National Center for Education Statistics found that in 2005 only 38% of Latino youth in the U.S. went on to college and roughly 11% graduate from college.¹⁰

Another barrier for Latino youth is their dependence on social networks (friends and relatives) to make employment contacts. In some instances this can be a positive resource for Latino workers; however, by relying on people connected to familiar but low-mobility occupations and industries, young Latinos are likely to continue job segregation in low-wage labor markets.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, "Facts for Features, Hispanic Heritage Month 2006: September 15-October 15." Available at http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/007173.html. Accessed on February 6, 2007.

⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Chart 4.2: Selected Labor Force Characteristics of Hispanics or Latinos." Available at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/labor2005/chart4-2.pdf>. Also see "Chart 4.4: Blacks Are Less Likely to Participate in the Labor Force than Whites and Asians." Available at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/labor2005/chart4-4.pdf>. Accessed on February 6, 2007.

⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 4: Employment Status of the Hispanic or Latino Population by Age and Sex." Available at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat4.pdf>. Accessed on February 6, 2007.

⁸ Household Data Annual Averages. "Table 39: Median weekly earnings of full time wage and salary workers by detailed occupation and sex.

⁹ Orfield, Gary, Daniel Losen, Johanna Wald, and Christopher B. Swanson, *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. Contributors: Advocates for Children of New York, Civil Society Institute, 2004, p. 4.

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. "Current Population Survey Reports, School Enrollment – Social and Economic Characteristics of Students," 1984-2004.

Finally, a critical factor in helping youth succeed is building the capacity of youth employment and development programs to perform more effectively. Programs serving Latino youth require access to best practices, tools, and systems that can help them make their operations more effective as well as meet the requirements of federal legislation. These barriers to economic mobility affect not only Hispanic youth, but the U.S. economy as a whole. The economy is growing, changing, and increasing the demand for an educated, technologically literate workforce. A number of major industries have expressed concern about continuing shortages of skilled workers that affect the prosperity, even viability of their business. According to a recent workforce readiness report card, high school graduates are woefully ill-prepared to enter the workforce.¹¹ The results of the study indicate that far too many youth are unprepared to achieve success in the workplace. At the high school level, more than half of the new workforce entrants are considered “deficiently prepared” in some of the most essential skill areas – oral and written communication, professionalism/work ethic, and critical thinking skills.¹²

The projected population growth of Latinos means these young people represent the nation’s future workers and taxpayers and will play a significant role in driving the U.S. economy in the years to come.

¹¹ Corporate Voices for Working Families, *Executive Summary: Are They Really Ready To Work? Employers’ Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce*, October 2006

¹² In the report, basic skills are fundamental skills such as, reading, writing, and math. “Applied skills” are referenced as skills that are commonly associated with workplace applications, including critical thinking, leadership, information technology application, and teamwork.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation design chosen for the NCLR Escalera Program was formative evaluation or process evaluation. Formative evaluation is a structured way to provide key stakeholders, such as program managers and funding agencies, with critical feedback to refine and adjust components of the program while the program is in operation. Formative evaluation can also provide a regular feedback loop for program managers to address challenging situations before they reach crisis proportion.

Formative evaluation is particularly relevant to the NCLR Escalera Program since one of the primary goals of the program is to replicate the model in other national markets. This evaluation methodology is a continuous improvement model used for identifying promising practices that can be replicated, identifying and addressing program challenges that need to be mitigated, and providing for ongoing data collection and analysis.

The evaluation model chosen for the NCLR Escalera Program was the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) model for continuous improvement. The Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle is a four-step model for carrying out change. Each phase of the cycle requires participation and investment from all stakeholders to ensure that each process leads to the achievement of desired outcomes for program participants. The model applied particularly well to Escalera since the program was striving for alignment of program goals, processes, and intended outcomes moving toward national replication.

Data included in this report were collected over a 14-month period (April 2006-June 2007). The lead evaluator used several qualitative methods to collect data, including in-person interviews, phone interviews, focus groups, and observation. Further data were collected through administrative data review, conference calls, EAG meetings, and the NCLR Affiliate Client Tracking System.



SECTION I.

NCLR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Program Mission and Objectives, Key Components and NCLR's Plan for Evaluation

The NCLR Workforce Development (WFD) programs provide targeted capacity-building assistance to support and strengthen workforce development programming at the community-based level. The vision of WFD is to ensure the Latino community's ability to develop, contribute to, and have a share of the nation's economic opportunities. In addition, workforce development and economic self-sufficiency are key to achieving NCLR's mission of improving opportunities for Hispanic Americans. The following mission statement is the foundation of NCLR's workforce development activities:

NCLR will increase the economic mobility and raise the standard of living for Latino working families through skills development and quality employment to contribute to, and benefit equally from the nation's future prosperity.

NCLR's strategy for accomplishing this includes creating partnerships between NCLR community-based Affiliates, private sector companies, key workforce development intermediaries, and public workforce systems that successfully prepare Latino youth for meaningful employment and achievement of economic mobility.



PHASE I (2001-2005): Background of the NCLR Escalera Program: Taking Steps To Success

DESIGN AND DEMONSTRATION

In 2001, NCLR proposed to develop and implement an Hispanic Youth Workforce Development Initiative that would promote upward mobility for Hispanic youth. This would have an impact on the diversity of the nation's workforce by enhancing the skills of Hispanic youth to respond to the workforce demands of corporate America, and preparing the youth to successfully compete in the 21st century. NCLR had recently completed a Strategic Plan for Workforce Development with the help of PepsiCo, Inc. and other members of the NCLR Corporate Board of Advisors; they played an integral role in the inception of this plan. The principal goals outlined in this plan were the development of signature workforce development models for Hispanic community-based organizations and the formation of strategic partnerships with corporations. NCLR's goal was to design a replicable program model that would help Latino high school students graduate from high school, prepare for college, and explore well-paying careers.

With support from the PepsiCo Foundation and PepsiCo, Inc., NCLR created, implemented, and funded an employment and college readiness pilot program, the NCLR Escalera Program: Taking Steps to Success. The purpose of the project was to design and test a program model to promote economic mobility for Latino youth by increasing educational attainment, career planning, and access to professional career paths while eliminating barriers to basic and advanced education and employment. The program would incorporate best practices in youth employment and development to provide academic support, work readiness, leadership development, and career exploration and planning for Latino high school students at risk of not graduating.

NCLR convened a Planning Committee composed of Affiliate representatives, the National Youth Employment Coalition, NCLR leadership, and senior leadership from PepsiCo and its Frito-Lay division. The purpose of the Escalera design phase was to bring together the resources and expertise of NCLR, its local Affiliates, local facilities of PepsiCo divisions, and secondary and post-secondary educational institutions to serve as an intervention and support system to help vulnerable Latino youth graduate from high school and create an informed plan for their future.

The pilot project consisted of the following three components:

- Program and curriculum design and identification of select markets with capacity and resources
- Demonstration of program planning to implement and evaluate the model in East Los Angeles and Chicago
- Documentation and technical assistance to additional sites in adapting the model and curriculum to the needs of the local community

Support from the PepsiCo Foundation allowed NCLR to increase the effectiveness of its network of community-based Affiliates that provide services to Latino youth. NCLR drew from effective practices within its network and used these to strengthen the youth employment and development capacity of local Escalera Program partners and improve its ability to impact the lives of Latino youth. The combination of proven youth programs combined with the provision of linguistically and culturally sensitive programs allowed NCLR Affiliates to be more effective intermediaries for Latino youth

PILOT SITE AND AFFILIATE SELECTION

This program established pilot partnerships in Los Angeles, California and Chicago, Illinois. These partnerships included NCLR and a local Affiliate who would directly provide services and implement the program, a PepsiCo division (Frito-Lay, Pepsi America, Tropicana, Quaker Oats) a local high school, and a post-secondary institution. Together, these partners supported an 18-month after-school/summer program for high school juniors which incorporated best practices for youth programs and combined academic support through extensive tutoring; case management; career awareness/exploration; computer literacy; college exploration and preparation; internships with local businesses; job readiness training; and opportunities for leadership, positive growth, and personal development.

The two sites were selected and funded by NCLR based on the presence of an Affiliate with strong youth programming and workforce development capacity, the potential for sustainability, and local PepsiCo or subsidiary participation. Both sites were selected through an NCLR Request for Proposals process directed to Affiliates in select markets.

- **Los Angeles** – PepsiCo, Frito-Lay, and NCLR jointly selected Los Angeles to be the first pilot site, with the Frito-Lay Rancho Cucamonga facility as the corporate partner in the project. NCLR selected the **Multicultural Area Health Education Center (MAHEC)**; the program is currently operated by **AltaMed Health Services Corporation** in East Los Angeles to be the initial pilot site. In addition to meeting the program criteria, MAHEC had five years of experience administering a successful college preparation program and close ties to local secondary and post-secondary education institutions.
- **Chicago** – PepsiCo and NCLR jointly selected Chicago to be the site for the second Escalera pilot program. NCLR selected **Instituto del Progreso Latino (IPL)** for this site due to its extensive experience and capacity in workforce development, an existing relationship with Pepsi in Chicago, and its operation of the Latino Preparatory Academy, an alternative high school for 50 Chicago youth.

NCLR ESCALERA PROGRAM MODEL

The NCLR Escalera Program: Taking Steps to Success is a national after-school model that promotes economic mobility for Latino youth by increasing educational attainment, career planning, and access to information about well-paying careers.

The Spanish term “escalera” means “ladder” in English, and the NCLR Escalera Program: Taking Steps to Success links the rungs of educational attainment to economic mobility. The program brings together national resources from NCLR, the PepsiCo Foundation, and PepsiCo, Inc. and aligns them with the resources of local NCLR Affiliates, facilities, and employee resource groups of PepsiCo divisions and/or other local employers and secondary- and post-secondary educational institutions. Each of these units comes together to help vulnerable Latino youth graduate from high school and make informed plans for their future.

The Escalera Program offers a flexible framework that NCLR Affiliates can adapt to their specific community and to the specific needs of the young program participants.

PROGRAM MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

The mission of the NCLR Escalera Program is to help vulnerable Latino youth graduate from high school, prepare for college, and make informed plans for their career by meeting the following objectives:

- Engage Hispanic youth and support their positive growth and development.
- Help youth access various entry points to economic mobility. These may be through post-secondary education, particularly colleges in the PepsiCo Latino Core School Partnership; vocational schools or community colleges; or frontline positions at PepsiCo divisions, and other growing and dynamic employers.
- Incorporate effective practices to increase the effectiveness of youth employment/development operations in Hispanic community-based workforce development networks.
- Provide programmatic links between NCLR Affiliates and local schools and school systems.
- Provide programmatic links between NCLR Affiliates and PepsiCo divisions or other local employers.

TARGET YOUTH

The program is aimed at youth who, because of academic, financial, or familial reasons, may be at risk of not graduating but have demonstrated high potential for success. The program targets high school students who are in the second semester of their junior year.

PARTNERS

A critical and unique characteristic of the NCLR Escalera Program is that it is a partnership of a national Hispanic nonprofit organization, Hispanic-serving community-based organizations, a national corporation, and a school/school system.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA

NCLR takes the lead in the national coordination of the Escalera Program, outlining a plan to take the Escalera model to scale based on information from existing sites. Responsibilities include: providing technical expertise to shape and refine Escalera; revising and disseminating NCLR materials to share best practices, and coordinate peer technical assistance opportunities; developing a coherent strategy that links Escalera to NCLR workforce development, education, and youth components; developing tools to conduct impact/measurement analysis; serving as a resource to develop plans for sustainability and local funding strategies; and serving as the link between local Affiliates and the PepsiCo team.

NCLR AFFILIATE

The NCLR Affiliate takes the lead operational role in implementing and coordinating the Escalera Program as a subcontractor of NCLR. It is responsible for hiring and supervising staff. In addition, the Affiliate's responsibilities include: getting the school district involved; developing a recruitment program; designing and implementing curricular activities; assisting with the student assessment activities; coordinating post-program support; and maintaining a data collection and analysis system to document effectiveness and enhance offerings.

SCHOOL/SCHOOL DISTRICT

The school or school district takes the lead in linking this program with the education system. Responsibilities include: assigning a primary contact for the program; involving guidance counselors and other staff in program marketing and recruitment efforts; sharing appropriate academic information about students with program staff; assisting in setting criteria for selection; and providing access to meeting space and other school resources, i.e., Career Center or computer lab, as needed.

CORPORATE PARTNER: PEPSICO, INC.

The corporate partner takes the lead in ensuring that knowledge and competencies developed through the program lead to an understanding of the corporate work environment and requirements and that the program provides the youth with an accurate understanding of the operations and career opportunities of a national corporation.

STRUCTURE

This model is designed for an after-school program that operates four days a week for one and a half to two hours a day during the school year and ten hours a week during the summer (including six-week work experience internships). The model consists of five segments, and it is designed to provide a framework for organizing the program and meeting curriculum guidelines. The specific activities will depend on local resources and the strengths, needs, and interests of the Escalera students. Generally, the model segments address the following:

- **Recruitment and Selection** – conducted during the latter part of the first semester of the junior year.
- **Junior In-School** – the second semester of the junior year. The junior in-school segment focuses on assessing skills and interests, creating individual development plans, improving academic skills, initial career exploration, and gaining computer literacy. Motivation, team-building, and basic workplace skills are also addressed and students gain access to community-based supportive services through referrals and workshops.
- **Summer Segment** – a six-week segment between the junior and senior year. The summer segment concentrates on three areas: work experience opportunities (internships, job shadowing); college exploration; and a team research project on PepsiCo.
- **Senior In-School** – the two semesters of the senior year. During the two-semester senior in-school segment of the program, the students continue to receive mentoring and academic tutoring support and have access to support services provided by community agencies and organizations. In the first semester of their senior year, the students participate in activities that focus on college or technical training options and admissions and securing financial aid.
- **Post-Graduation Support** – follow-up activities to provide support to the Escalera students.

In addition, the program enrolls a new “class” of juniors in the second semester of the school year, with the two groups of participants overlapping. During this semester, senior participants serve as peer tutors to the younger participants and plan and conduct a community service project and/or participate in leadership development activities. Program graduates receive post-program support and access to an alumni program.

PHASE II (2005-2007): EXPANSION AND REPLICATION OF THE NCLR ESCALERA PROGRAM: TAKING STEPS TO SUCCESS

In 2005, with continued support from the PepsiCo Foundation, NCLR expanded the NCLR Escalera Program: Taking Steps to Success, to impact more Latino youth and to position the program for scalability and long-term sustainability. Phase II of the partnership represents an ongoing effort by NCLR and the PepsiCo Foundation to create a sustainable, community-based model that will have measurable impact for Latino youth and communities nationwide. Phase II builds upon previous efforts that include the creation and testing of the Escalera Program model and focuses on the following key components:

- Expanding the two existing sites to reach more students
- Strengthening the program by incorporating new tools and systems that enhance the ability of local sites to effectively meet the needs of youth participants
- Replicating the program in three new markets over two years
- Forming a National Escalera Advisory Group to guide and support program expansion and implementation efforts
- Establishing an alumni base that will track and engage graduates of the Escalera Program
- Updating and refining the *NCLR Escalera Program Replication Manual*
- Conducting a comprehensive program evaluation
- Formalizing a peer exchange and support strategy in which current Affiliate partners provide training to new sites and interested workforce investment areas
- To maximize resources and opportunities, aligning Escalera Program activities and outcomes with other related components within NCLR including Affiliate Member Services (AMS), Education, and Líderes.

To date, the NCLR Escalera Program has served 127 students and is currently serving 142 students. Ninety-eight percent of enrolled students have completed the Escalera Program; 96% of those seniors have been accepted into post-secondary institutions.

As NCLR expands and replicates the Escalera Program it selects potential markets based primarily on four factors:

- Strong youth programming and workforce development capacity
- Demonstrated partnerships that will support Escalera participants' growth and development
- Demonstrated need for the Escalera Program in the community
- Partnerships that demonstrate the ability to design and execute a long-term sustainability strategy

In May 2006, the NCLR Workforce Development (WFD) Program solicited proposals from eligible Affiliates in the New York and Washington, DC areas to implement the NCLR Escalera Program.

- **PROMESA: East Harlem Council for Community Improvement, Inc. (EHCCI)** located in New York, New York was selected as the third Escalera site. PROMESA/EHCCI began implementing the Escalera Program with its first cohort of 15 students in March 2007 and will serve 45 students over the two-year grant cycle.

In May 2007, the NCLR WFD Program solicited proposals from eligible NCLR Affiliates in the Kansas City, Dallas, Austin, and Houston areas to implement the NCLR Escalera Program.

- **American YouthWorks (AYW)** located in Austin, Texas was selected by NCLR to implement the Escalera Program. AYW will launch its first cohort of 20 students in March 2008 and will serve 55 students over the two-year grant cycle.
- **Guadalupe Centers, Inc. (GCI)** located in Kansas City, Missouri was selected by NCLR to implement the Escalera Program. GCI will launch its first cohort of 20 students in March 2008 and will serve a total of 55 students over the two-year grant cycle.

By March 2008, the NCLR Escalera Program: Taking Steps to Success will be operating in five cities across the country (LA, Chicago, NYC, Austin, and Kansas City) and serving 258 students.

In an effort to continue program refinement, strengthen key program components, streamline replication, highlight program best practices, and identify opportunities for improvement, NCLR coordinated an independent formative and summative evaluation of the Escalera Program. Nterlink Consulting, LLC. completed the NCLR Escalera Program evaluation in June 2007. Based on the evaluation findings, NCLR seeks to continue strengthening the Escalera Program and execute a strategy to develop a national after-school model that can be sustained through various funding streams, meet 21st century workforce needs, and achieve maximum impact.

EVALUATION PLANNING

In April 2006, NCLR convened a 2-day evaluation planning workshop with its Affiliate organizations. Through facilitative process, the overarching goal of the 2-day workshop was to build consensus among the pilot programs around some common goals, objectives and outcomes. Furthermore, NCLR was striving to maximize efforts at the local and national-level through intensive planning and evaluation. Prior to the April convening, the two pilot sites were operating mostly in silos, with each program having a unique focus and direction. The principal goal of the convening was to identify the points of intersection the programs could agree on to get to consensus. The ancillary goal was to begin to foster a shared vision by constructing an interactive, engaged network.

The evaluation planning workshop was aimed at fostering alignment of shared goals and objectives while also serving as a learning space for peer-to-peer exchange. Each of the Affiliate partners brought unique experiences and context to the session, which allowed for rich dialogue and at times, heated debate about the vision of the program. At the conclusion of the session, the group produced a draft version of the NCLR Escalera Program Logic Model to be used for program planning and evaluation purposes. After several revisions, the final document was in place to guide the program.

Table 1. NCLR Escalera Program Logic Model

EDUCATION/SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Goal #1: To Engage and Empower Students to Make Knowledgeable Decisions in their Academic Careers and Become Life-Long Learners.

Input(s)	Activities	Output	Intermediate Outcome	End Outcome
Tutors	Tutoring and Academic Support	# of students participating in program	Escalera students will demonstrate progress towards making knowledgeable decisions in their academic careers.	Escalera students will be academically and socially prepared to meet their educational goals.
Community Volunteers	Case Management	% of students enrolled in post-secondary education		
Teachers	Post-Secondary advisement and enrollment	# of students completing 1st year of college/post secondary institution		
Escalera Staff	Training and TA	# of students returning for 2nd year of college/post secondary institution		
Community-Based Orgs.		% of high school graduates		
Networks		# of students accepted into post-secondary institutions		
Training and TA providers				

CAREER PATHWAYS/EXPLORATION

Goal #2: Students will develop skills and viable experience necessary to obtain career opportunities that will enhance their economic mobility.

Input(s)	Activities	Output	Intermediate Outcome	End Outcome
Escalera Staff	Job Skills Training	# of job skills training hours	Escalera students will successfully complete a Career Exploration internship	Escalera students will be better prepared for workforce opportunities that enhance their economic mobility
Training/TA providers	Internships	# of students participating in internships		
Private Businesses	Career Exploration and Sector Mapping	# of activities scheduled to expand students' employment networks		
Community-based orgs	Applied Career Experience			
Post-Secondary Institutions	Network Development			

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Goal #3: To Enhance Student Leadership Skills through Community Action and Engagement.

Input(s)	Activities	Output	Intermediate Outcome	End Outcome
Escalera Staff	Communication Skill Development	# of hours volunteering in community per week (average)	Escalera students will demonstrate efficacy in designing and organizing a service activity	Escalera students will demonstrate leadership through community action and civic engagement
CBOs	Social Justice Awareness Building	# of leadership training hours		
Training/TA providers	Community Organizing	# of students serving on student councils and/or boards		
Community Residents	Community Service/Service Learning	# of community organizing activities		
Private Sector	Advocacy	# of students involved in extracurricular activities		
	Community Engagement/ Reengagement	# of students volunteering in community		
	Visioning			

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Goal #4: To develop personal skills that enable students to be change agents in family, community and professional life.

Input(s)	Activities	Output	Intermediate Outcome	End Outcome
Mentors	Training and TA	# of hours personal development training	Escalera students will begin to exhibit increased self-esteem	Escalera students will acquire life skills to increase their likelihood of success in family, community and professional life
Escalera Staff	Workshops	# of hours of social justice/diversity training		
CBOs	Mentoring	% of students demonstrating positive self-esteem		
Parents	Advisement	# of hours of communication skills training		
Teachers		% of parents engaged in Escalera activities		
School Administrators				
Case Managers				
Tutors				

SYSTEMS AND TOOLS

As part of the planning phase, NCLR worked closely with PepsiCo and its Affiliate partners to create infrastructure support to build the capacity for data collection/management and quality assurance, and to provide advisory support to assist with the strategic direction of the initiative. The following systems and supports were developed and implemented during fiscal year 2006-07:

AFFILIATE CLIENT TRACKING SYSTEM

In response to Affiliate data collection needs NCLR created ACTS (Affiliate Client Tracking System) to effectively manage program data. The database provides comprehensive data collection, data management, and analysis tools used for program management and evaluation. Further, the system was strategically aligned with the program logic model to ensure that the appropriate data are collected and regularly analyzed. The system is also designed to capture descriptive statistics that will allow the program to learn more about the socioeconomic backgrounds and intensive support needs of each student. The collection of this data allows the program to mobilize wrap-around support services for students and families in need. Thus, a web of support is created so students can have a better chance of academic success.

The data collected from the program sites suggest an overall satisfaction with ACTS. Some of the words used to describe the database include: "intuitive," "user-friendly," "self-explanatory." The one major criticism of the system is that it is geared more toward workforce outcomes, as opposed to educational outcomes. An IPL staff member added: "I think the system needs to extend a bit further to capture more data related to the educational experience." In response to initial concerns, NCLR worked closely with Affiliates to customize the reporting tool to capture a broader range of data, including more educational outcomes.

Overall, however, ACTS is widely regarded as a value-add to the program and increases the capacity of program sites to collect key data to understand student demographics and measure program impact.

PEER EXCHANGE SESSION

The Peer Exchange Session is a two-day, interactive summit that leverages expertise of veteran Escalera sites in a face-to-face exchange with emerging sites. Instituted in late 2006, the session allows emerging sites to learn hands-on about replicating the program in their community through the sharing of resources, roundtable discussions on important program topics, and visiting an Escalera site in operation. Through this process, emerging programs develop strong support networks with program staff in the field, which enables them to access technical assistance from their peers as needed. Further, emerging programs can access Affiliate resources, such as training manuals, intake and assessment tools, and other nonproprietary resources.

As a continuous improvement strategy, veteran sites also benefit from participation in the session by exchanging promising practices, innovative program strategies, curriculum, and emerging trends from their region. Data collected from the site interviews suggest that the Peer Exchange is a mutually beneficial practice that creates spaces for ongoing dialogue about the program's vision and focus. "What we learned during the Peer Exchange is that each Escalera site has a distinct local flavor," added Carlos Venegas, Associate Director, AltaMed. The sharing of ideas was a wonderful experience." Nilsa Orama, Program Coordinator, PROMESA/EHCCI added: "Seeing a program in action was extremely helpful. Seeing the investment in the relationships between staff and students helped to solidify our commitment to this program and reassured us that we can have a similar impact in our community."

One suggestion for improving the Peer Exchange was to allow more time for free-flow exchange. Several respondents pointed to the need for increased time for "organic" exchange to occur. This could be addressed through topical discussions that are Affiliate-led or simply by allowing more time in the schedule for "open discussion."

NCLR ESCALERA PROGRAM REPLICATION MANUAL

The Replication Manual is a fluid document that incorporates strategies, lessons learned, program policies and infrastructure needs to effectively replicate the program. Much of the information, suggestions, materials, and insights were highlighted from baseline information collected from the two pilot sites over a two-year period. During the 14-month evaluation period, much of the manual's content was revised incorporating data collected during Phase I. The Replication Manual is a comprehensive resource tool that includes program templates from the two pilot sites, student intake and assessment tools, sample memorandums of agreement, and a step-by-step process guideline that articulates in detail how to implement the program.

PROMESA: EHCCI was the first site to use the Replication Manual during the early implementation phase of its program. "The Replication Manual was very helpful in assisting our site with launching the program," said Carol Santiago, Program Director. "However, seeing program calendars, program cycles, and resources developed by the sites themselves during the Peer Exchange session in Chicago was even more helpful. If we can find a way to incorporate this information into the manual, it would be nice."

Further review of the document and revisions is still in process to get the Replication Manual closer to a finished product. However, as a fluid document, the manual will be continually updated to incorporate recommendations from the Affiliate programs as Escalera continues to grow and evolve during the replication phase.

ESCALERA ADVISORY GROUP

NCLR has established EAG to provide guidance to the replication and expansion processes outlined in the proposal, as well as to offer overall support to strengthen key program elements. The EAG expertise will facilitate NCLR’s proposed work to take this program to scale, as well as its need to broaden and diversify sources of funding to support program expansion to new sites. The EAG currently includes NCLR workforce development, education, youth development, and Affiliate Member Services staff; representatives from each Affiliate partner in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York; the PepsiCo Foundation; and PepsiCo, Inc.

In alignment with existing members, NCLR will expand the EAG membership to include other corporations committed to the development and long-term success of Latino youth, foundations or other private funders that can support the goals of the Escalera Program, and other education, youth workforce development, and leadership intermediaries.

To provide more specific local support to the Escalera sites, NCLR proposes to establish and convene a Local Escalera Advisory Group at each Escalera site. The Local EAG will include education, corporate, and community partners, as well as at least one member from the National EAG. The Local EAG will guide local efforts, expand the base of partners and supporters, and identify funding opportunities to help sustain and expand the program. The local EAG will ensure that the program is achieving the desired impact for all key stakeholders, and primarily, on the communities in which the program is being implemented.



SECTION II.

ESCALERA PROGRAM KEY FINDINGS, PROMISING PRACTICES, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

SUMMARY

This section of the report provides detailed program analysis of each individual NCLR Escalera Program site participating in the field study. Operating in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, the NCLR Escalera Program is at various stages of maturity and has unique features in each market. This report is not intended to provide confirming results regarding factors that correlate most with Latino student failure or success; it is intended to elicit a broad stakeholder perspective to help explain themes that contribute to the retention and promotion success of the NCLR Escalera Program, its students, and its alumni.

The purpose of this section is to highlight promising practices from the Escalera network of programs to draw from the lessons learned from the pilot sites; provide critical feedback for continuous improvement; and take key findings from this section to inform decision-making moving forward.



AltaMed's 35 years of dedicated care to the community is marked by a deep commitment to the family. The organization believes that "the tree of life" accurately symbolizes this commitment reflecting its values of health, wellness, and community.

Since its inception, AltaMed has consistently provided health care and human services to the underserved, multiethnic communities of Los Angeles County. It is their mission to serve and respond to the needs of these culturally diverse families by providing exceptional health programs. Supporting this mission, AltaMed has garnered a national reputation for innovation in the delivery of care.

BACKGROUND

The AltaMed Escalera Program (formerly operated by MAHEC) was founded in early 2002. The initial vision was to create a pathway for nontraditional students to complete their high school education and prepare for post-secondary education. The program has always targeted students considered "average academic achievers," meaning that most students in the program are not the typical high-grade point average students who are already on a path toward post-secondary success. Moreover, many of the students who have participated in the program are first-generation, high school graduates, creating a new academic expectation in students' families. "It's our job to prepare these students for college and careers," said an Escalera staff person. "We want to change the mentality of students to let them know that college is an attainable goal." The paradigm shift from low-academic expectations to a higher-academic standard is a guiding principle of the AltaMed Escalera Program. Reshaping the mindset of Latino students, specifically as it applies to academic achievement, is a cornerstone of the program.

The evolution of AltaMed as an NCLR Escalera Program site began first by designing a model that was comprehensive enough to meet the needs of low-achieving students. The original model, which is the foundation of the program today, leveraged tutoring, college preparation, technology skills development, academic advisement, and career guidance to assist students in their preparation for post-secondary education and careers. However, at the very core of the model, the case management function was the critical piece that allowed the program to focus on some of the socioeconomic barriers that were preventing young people from being successful in school. Many of the traditional barriers facing Latino youth, such as limited language proficiency in English, single parent households and low expectations were prevalent in the neighborhoods AltaMed serves. Consequently, the case management function has allowed program staff to assess the basic needs of each student and set up a plan to address those needs through mentorship, tutoring, coaching, and referral when necessary.

CHALLENGES

The AltaMed Escalera Program was the initial pilot site participating in the NCLR initiative. Consequently, there were many early challenges associated with the implementation of the program. "We were leading the way, in terms of implementing this program," said an AltaMed Senior Executive. "There was no blueprint to follow, so

we had to figure things out as we went along.” Moreover, unlike the Instituto del Progreso Latino (IPL) model, the AltaMed Escalera Program is a school-based program, whereby most of the programming is conducted at the partnership schools. “Once we addressed these early issues, we still had challenges with solidifying space. Space is a premium at the local schools we serve, so it has always been a challenge finding space that is conducive to meeting our program needs. Specifically, if we are trying to develop technology skills with our students, then the question arises whether we can identify and secure the infrastructure at the local schools to meet those needs.

The communication loop between AltaMed, NCLR, and PepsiCo early on was not clearly defined. NCLR has always been positioned as the hub in the network design; communication between the Affiliates sites and corporate sponsors was coordinated typically by NCLR. As the program grew, the network communication was more of a peer-to-peer network, where AltaMed would communicate directly with NCLR and directly with PepsiCo depending on their needs. This streamlined communication has its benefits. However, at various points in the implementation stages, coordinated communication broke down leaving partners feeling like they were isolated. In Phase I of the evaluation, the feedback from the stakeholders clearly demonstrated a continued need to have frequent communication. Further, the stakeholders added that the communication should be coordinated by NCLR and should include all of the major players involved in program processes.

In response, NCLR has adopted protocols to mitigate these communication challenges. First, NCLR has established an EAG comprising Escalera alumni, PepsiCo corporate, PepsiCo Foundation, Affiliate staff, and key NCLR staff to guide the program moving forward. Second, NCLR hired a full-time NCLR Escalera Program Coordinator to manage the network and establish ongoing technical assistance to the Affiliate programs. The Program Coordinator has been instrumental in coordinating monthly conference calls with the Affiliate programs, which has been helpful in bridging the communication gap. An AltaMed staff person noted, “The new team (NCLR) is taking steps in the right direction. Frequent communication is important, especially for new staff who could really benefit from the technical assistance NCLR could provide.”

The staff support spoke of the challenges in getting consistent participation from Escalera students and parents in program functions. “When we have our presentations (Career Exploration), it is very difficult getting students to participate in these activities. Only about half of our students show up consistently to our events.” Another AltaMed staff person added, “It’s really tough to get the parents involved in the Escalera Program. Many of the students’ parents just do not get involved in their child’s education.” Finally, the staff spoke of the capacity issues they face in implementing the program. “It is really difficult for me to manage this project on a part-time basis (Note: The AltaMed Escalera Program at that juncture was staffed by two part-time staff that oversaw the day-to-day operations of the program). It is really difficult juggling all of the responsibilities of the project while I am attending college at the same time.”

In late 2006, the AltaMed Escalera Program addressed the program capacity issue by leveraging increased full-time and part-time support. The program added a full-time Senior Case Manager to oversee program functions and assist with case management. AltaMed also hired two part-time Escalera alumni to provide program support and facilitate workshops. In fact, the Associate Director charged with leadership of the program volunteered to take on a case management load of ten students to build the capacity of the program.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The critical components of the AltaMed Escalera Program model include: academic enrichment, career exploration, personal development, case management, and leadership development. Each one of the components has subcomponents that speak to the overarching goals of each developmental area. For instance, technology skill development is a subcomponent directly tied to academic enrichment and the career ladder is a subcomponent of the career exploration objective.

The glue that brings all of the components together is the case management function. Each student is given an initial assessment, which allows AltaMed staff to identify student interests and academic needs and devise an individual plan of action for each student. Pre-testing is also administered to provide baseline data regarding student academic levels in core subject areas. Once the initial assessment is complete, the role of the case manager shifts to more of a support function – keeping students informed of key program milestones and closely monitoring student progress.

EDUCATION COMPONENT

The students participating in the AltaMed Escalera Program are all required to meet the state's A-G graduation requirements. Consequently, AltaMed focuses heavily on monitoring student progress toward meeting these core requirements. AltaMed provides intensive academic advisement for each student and carefully tailors academic support plans for each student. Tutoring is a core academic support function that the program administers at each partner site. At the time of this report, AltaMed reported having three academic tutors that supported Escalera students. Tutors do not deliver curriculum-based instruction, per se. Instead, tutoring is more of a homework help function, whereby students are given assistance with their homework in an after school setting.

The AltaMed Escalera Program provides additional academic support through technology skills development, which is a core competency for each NCLR Escalera Program student. Students learn how to utilize Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel as tools to perform post-secondary and career functions. Learning these fundamental tools also increases opportunities for students to compete in a global market. Each AltaMed Escalera student has the opportunity to present his or her Career Ladder to PepsiCo representatives using PowerPoint as a communication platform.

Additional academic support is administered through SAT Test preparation, CASAS testing and college preparation workshops.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Initially, the AltaMed Escalera Program administered workshops, such as time management and goal-setting, which align with the personal development objective. However, personal development was not a clearly delineated function of their original model. AltaMed staff worked closely with IPL Escalera Program staff to define the objective and share curriculum ideas. The personal development objective was designed as a measurable outcome at the evaluation planning session in April 2006.

In early 2007, AltaMed adopted a comprehensive personal development curriculum to respond to the needs of the students. AltaMed leveraged its organizational expertise in health/wellness to access and implement curriculum that educates its students of high-risk behaviors, teen pregnancy, and other health related factors. In addition, AltaMed has added sections on financial literacy and time management to augment its personal development efforts. The evolution of the Personal Development component at AltaMed perfectly illustrates the value of network peer exchange. IPL in some ways planted the seed to addressing the social development needs of students. AltaMed was able to capture the spirit of personal development by leveraging its organizational expertise to cultivate a curriculum and service delivery plan to develop life skills among its program participants.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

AltaMed has an exceptional, well-coordinated leadership component. The Summer Leadership Academy is a six-week segment that focuses on building communication skills, presentation skills, and marketable tools for students to effectively transition from school to the workplace. During the six-week segment, students develop a Career Ladder, which maps out the logical sequence of events from high school to career. As part of the process, students hone their technology skills by developing PowerPoint presentations to articulate their plan. The Career Ladder project culminates with students presenting their plans to PepsiCo staff for feedback and critique. Feedback from PepsiCo staff suggests that the presentations have been effective in building student confidence, developing communication skills, giving students the opportunity to use technology as a tool, and allowing students to experience how a meeting is facilitated in a professional environment.

Second, AltaMed develops leadership through NCLR Escalera Program internships. The internships are driven by student interests and take place during the Summer Segment. Internships give students the opportunity to apply what they learn in a classroom setting to real world, career settings.

Third, research projects are also conducted during the Summer Segment. Students conduct market research, develop their presentation, and ultimately present their findings to PepsiCo staff. The research projects develop basic market research skills and create a fundamental understanding of market forces, demand, positioning, and product placement.

CAREER PATHWAYS/EXPLORATION

During the winter workshop series, AltaMed coordinates its College 101 component to meet its Career Pathways/Exploration objective. The workshop series takes place every Saturday for a six-week period, focusing

primarily on working with high school seniors. The College 101 curriculum guides students through the college entrance and financial aid requirements, serving as a blueprint to navigating the post-secondary system. Students receive assistance on how to apply for financial aid, how to research potential scholarships – including the Pepsi Diamond Scholarships – and learning what it takes to be a college student. On a concurrent track, the high school juniors take part in SAT workshops in preparation for their college entrance exams.

In addition, AltaMed uses career inventories to assess student interest in career choices. The inventories are administered to every student as a baseline career assessment and are used as a guide to help formulate student goals and provide a pathway for students to achieve their goals. Once the goals are established, AltaMed facilitates the development of individual Career Ladders with each student.

Further Career Pathways/Exploration strategies include the development of student portfolios, résumé-writing instruction, internships, and presentations.

PEPSICO LA

The PepsiCo corporate partner in LA is highly engaged in developing and promoting the Escalera model, both within the company and in partnership with NCLR and AltaMed. When asked about PepsiCo's role with the program, the representative defined it as an executive sponsor that has supported the program through local funding, event sponsorship, scholarships, and corporate volunteerism. Further, the partnership with PepsiCo is unique, in that the philanthropic and corporate divisions of the company each mobilize their constituents to support the program. The regional corporate team generates much of the volunteer support. While the PepsiCo Foundation generates the grant award for the program, the PepsiCo, Inc. provides additional support by sponsoring students to attend the NCLR Annual Conference, providing gift certificates, and providing scholarship awards to outstanding students. In the past program year, the AltaMed Escalera Program had ten Diamond scholarship winners, which was more than any other program in the country.

For all its current successes, the partnership with AltaMed and NCLR did not come without its start-up challenges. "In the first year of the program, there was not much involvement on the PepsiCo side," said a PepsiCo representative. "My corporate team and I had to do our share of educating the company about Escalera." Now, the program is highly visible and has become part of our business culture. I think it is very important that the corporate side is involved in the program." The interview with PepsiCo also reinforced the communication challenges between AltaMed, NCLR, and PepsiCo at the early stages of the program. Some of the communication challenges were attributed to turnover of NCLR staff at various points of the program. Also, in the early stages of the program there was a lack of full-time, dedicated support on NCLR's end to help coordinate the various stakeholders in the program. NCLR has recently added a full-time Escalera Program Manager and by all accounts communication across program partners has improved. At the local level, PepsiCo communicates regularly with key AltaMed staff to offer ongoing support and technical assistance when needed.

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

According to the Los Angeles PepsiCo representatives, the NCLR Escalera Program is having a “phenomenal impact” on how PepsiCo does business. “The NCLR Escalera Program is aligned well with our corporate strategy for diversity and inclusion. As such, we are inspired by the passion and perseverance of the Escalera students. We probably learn more from them than they learn from us.” Further, it seems that PepsiCo’s involvement has led to increased visibility and community buy-in for the program. “PepsiCo’s involvement has helped spread the word about Escalera in these communities with our vendors. That has helped us win new customers, since they know we are reinvesting our resources in their communities. We are using social philanthropy to initiate community development.”

The PepsiCo Corporate team continues to support the program through their volunteerism. The team frequently participates in mock interviews, community outreach events, graduation ceremonies, and fundraising events to lend a hand when needed. It was clear during the interview that PepsiCo staff had a sense of passion and commitment for the program which is unwavering and will probably transcend the funding cycle for the program. Furthermore, testimonials from the student focus group suggest that the AltaMed Escalera students felt “supported” and were “motivated” by PepsiCo’s ongoing involvement in program activities.

CORE COMPETENCIES

Competing in a global economy, Escalera students are faced with the challenges associated with globalization and competing markets. Conversely, the program expectation is that students will develop core competencies that translate across sectors and across national borders. As part of the assessment process, the lead evaluator spoke with a PepsiCo corporate representative to determine what core competencies are essential for students to develop to compete in a global economy. The core competencies that were identified included: computer literacy, strong writing skills, ability to network, critical thinking, and public speaking skills. The PepsiCo representative believes that AltaMed has had a positive impact on their students by reinforcing the development of these core competencies at the community level. “The presentation skills of these students have been very impressive. Carlos’s (Carlos Venegas) commitment to putting students in leadership capacities has allowed youth the opportunity to put skills learned in a classroom setting into practice.”

PepsiCo representatives also highlighted key attributes students should have to be successful in the workplace. “Self-confidence and self-esteem are critical in the business world. I have young people that come into the corporate world with impressive résumés and degrees, but if they don’t have self-confidence they don’t get very far in this business. AltaMed has the coaching part down to cultivate self-confidence in their students.”

STUDENT OBSERVATION: INCREASING STUDENT EMPLOYMENT NETWORKS

The first hour of the student portion of the site visit was dedicated to observing a career presentation led by a local civil engineer serving in the Public Works Division of Los Angeles County government. The purpose of the

presentation was to expose Escalera students to the field of engineering. Specifically, the workshop focused on what a typical day looks like in the Public Works Office, academic requirements to become an engineer, skills necessary to become a successful engineer, and financial aid available for students interested in pursuing civil engineering as a career. The presentation was well attended, including at least 25 Escalera students. According to the AltaMed Escalera Program Coordinator, this particular workshop had one of the best student participation rates of any of the previous presentations.

The student questions at the end of the presentation offered some insight as to what they were really interested in regarding academic and career requirements. Foremost, students were interested in finding out how college was financed. Many of the students alluded to not having the resources to attend college and not knowing what scholarships might be available to them to subsidize college. The presenter offered a resource for students interested in pursuing civil engineering as a career. The Civil Engineering Society provides 11 scholarships per year for students in Los Angeles County interested in pursuing civil engineering as a career. The scholarships present a tremendous opportunity for students to subsidize their education at an approved post-secondary institution. However, for the 11 scholarships available, the Civil Engineering Society only received ten applications in the previous year. In this case, supply outweighs demand or maybe the scholarship opportunity is not promoted well enough so students understand that the opportunity exists. In any case, this particular example illustrates the value-add of Escalera students connecting to broader networks for information and support. Connecting to a mentor and accessing the mentor's extended networks creates tremendous opportunity for Escalera students. Without this broad stakeholder support, opportunities to access resources to augment student success might go unrealized.

Second, students were particularly interested in what the presenter looks for, in terms of skills, attributes, and qualifications of candidates as a hiring agent for his organization. Foremost, the presenter reinforced the need for students to develop their communication skills. "I look for applicants with great communication skills, specifically, good writing and presentation skills. GPA (Grade Point Average) is important. However, I am more interested in recruiting candidates with good writing and speaking skills."

ALTA MED ESCALERA STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

The second part of the student assessment included structured focus groups with AltaMed Escalera students and alumni. The purpose of the focus groups was to gauge student satisfaction with the project, garner student opinion as to what works and does not with the program, and seek student input on how to improve program processes to best meet their needs.

Students participating in the focus group were primarily first-generation English speakers, many with parents who speak little to no English. Also, the students in the group could be best characterized as average to slightly above-average students by traditional academic standards. Most of the students were in the 2.7-3.2 grade point average range, while many of them also were the first in their families to actively pursue college as a viable option. Two

of the participants were Escalera alumni currently attending college in California. Most of the students in the group learned about the program through friends and had mixed expectations upon entering the program. However, it was clear during the course of the interviews that the program was having a tremendous impact on the students' lives.

The feedback provided by the focus group was extremely positive. Students were very pleased with the level of support and guidance they received from AltaMed Escalera Program staff in meeting their academic and career goals. "The case managers really helped me frame my career goals. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do in terms of a career. The Career Inventory really helped identify my interests and the Career Ladder helped me to map out the steps it would take to reach my goals." Further, AltaMed Escalera students felt that the Career Exploration component presented the greatest benefit to each of them in their development. "The internship gave me the opportunity to be involved, hands-on in a field that really interests me." Another student added, "The internship also helped me realize that what I thought I was interested in just really wasn't my thing."

Many of the students in the group felt a connection with program staff and fellow students characterizing the experience as being part of a "family." Another student added that being part of the program gave her a "sense of belonging," which speaks to much broader positive youth development outcomes. Furthermore, the connection established among students as a peer-to-peer network with a common vision has created another layer of support for Escalera students. "It makes it easier for me to continue to work hard and achieve my goals knowing that I have the support of other students in the program," added an Escalera student. Also, the Escalera students demonstrated a high-level of commitment to the program by overcoming potential roadblocks that might have kept them from participating. "I had to change tracks (A,B,C) just to be involved in the program" (*Note: The local school district coordinates students on separate educational tracks. The AltaMed Escalera Program is only offered during select tracks*). Another student added, "We volunteer to be here, so I think that shows how committed we are to this program."

From a development standpoint, the consensus from the group was that the Escalera Program really helped in developing their communication skills. Some of the testimonials included: "The program really helped me be more confident when speaking in large groups;" "I learned to communicate better;" and "I feel much more confident speaking to other people now." In addition, the Escalera Alumni added that they "feel much more prepared for college" as a result of participating in the program and added that the technology training and the oral communication development were "extremely important" in preparing them for college.

Overall, the feedback from the student focus groups were extremely positive and reinforced the positive impact that the AltaMed Escalera Program is having in their educational and personal lives. As we closed the session, a student offered these final thoughts; "This is a great program. I hope it keeps expanding to serve more students."

ALTAMED ESCALERA STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The AltaMed student focus group offered several suggestions to improve the program at the local level. The following represents the authentic feedback from the student group:

- **Have the AltaMed Escalera Program get involved in all educational tracks.** As previously mentioned, the AltaMed Escalera Program is only offered during select tracks. The students suggested that offering it during all tracks would make decisions easier for prospective students that are not enrolled in a track when the AltaMed Escalera Program is being offered.
- **Increase the capacity of the program by bringing on more case managers.** The students felt that they could benefit from more individualized attention and that the program could expand to greater levels by increasing the case manager support function.
- **More guest speakers at the beginning of the program.** The students really enjoy the guest speaker format and felt that the presentations and the networking with professionals were valuable pieces to the Career Exploration component. However, they felt that the guest speaker series should begin earlier in the program year.
- **Involve Escalera Alumni and current students as mentors.** The students were really interested in Escalera Alumni returning to the program to do presentations on college life and what it is like to be a college student. They were also interested in seeing Escalera Alumni and second year Escalera students involved as mentors to younger students in the program. The group suggested that an Alumni or second year student could be paired with an incoming student to provide mentoring, tutoring or any other assistance that an incoming student might need.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW

The AltaMed Escalera Program has strong, committed relationships with the Los Angeles Unified School District and the California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA) system. Each partner leverages extensive resources to provide quality opportunities for *Escalera* students to develop in the local educational system. The Lead Evaluator had the opportunity to interview a representative from both CSULA and the Los Angeles Unified School District to assess the breadth and depth of their partnership with the AltaMed Escalera Program. Further, the interview aimed to assess the efficacy of the AltaMed Escalera Program in meeting the needs of their students. Each partner organization has a vested interest in the development of *Escalera* Students. First, the L.A. School District is interested in mitigating the challenges associated with local dropout rates and the increasing achievement gap among Latino and non-Latino students. Second, the California State University, Los Angeles system is concerned with student readiness-- both academically and socially as they enter the post-secondary system.

In assessing program impact, the stakeholder group illuminated distinct program processes that they felt were critical in the development of AltaMed Escalera students. “The mentoring and role model component of the program is critical in filling some of the gaps at home. A lot of the students in the program do not have the support systems at home. That is why the mentoring that AltaMed provides is so critical.” Also, the students here at the school (Garfield High School) really benefit from the tutoring provided by the program.” Another respondent added, “They (AltaMed Escalera Program) set a standard of excellence with the students. Carlos Venegas’ commitment to developing youth leadership is what makes the program successful.” The stakeholder group also spoke of the empowering lessons that Escalera students were learning through peer-exchange. They reinforced the value of students connecting with their peers, thereby creating a support structure that is essential to student success. Further, through the partnership with CSULA’s Educational Participation in Communities (EPIC) program, AltaMed Escalera students have early and ongoing exposure to the post-secondary education system. The EPIC program institutes a summer leadership program in collaboration with AltaMed that brings Escalera students to the CSULA campus during the summer months. “We drill higher education into these kids during the week-long event,” said the CSULA representative. “When the leadership institute ends, they (the students) have a firm understanding of what it takes to be a college student.”

The stakeholder group reinforced the core skills and attributes AltaMed Escalera students should have upon completion of the program. Consistent with the observations of AltaMed staff and PepsiCo representatives, the stakeholder group highlighted computer literacy, writing, reading, communication skills, critical thinking skills and self-esteem as core skills and attributes students should have to be successful in college and careers. From this list, the stakeholder group highlighted communications skills as the most fundamental and important skill Escalera students should have in their “tool kit.” Furthermore, the stakeholder group was impressed with the ongoing development of the Escalera students’ communication skills. “The presentation skills of the students have been very impressive. I have seen the Career Ladder presentations from the students and I must say, I have been very impressed. I think a lot of it has to do with Carlos Venegas’ commitment to putting students in leadership capacities.”

Finally, the stakeholder group offered some final thoughts about the program’s impact on students. “I believe the AltaMed Escalera Program has impacted a small number of students in a real positive way. They provide a valuable service to the “middle-ground” students who might not otherwise attend college without the support.” Also, the stakeholder group offered a suggestion to further improve the program: “Parent involvement is essential to the success of the students. AltaMed needs to find a way to get more parents involved in the tutoring sessions or through other program means to ensure the parents participation in their child’s education.”

CONCLUSION

AltaMed was the Affiliate trailblazer in this initiative. With no blueprint in place, AltaMed and NCLR tested and re-tested the program design to effectively meet the needs of its students. Many of the lessons learned at this pilot site

have been incorporated in the program design to assist future sites with replication. For instance, the case management model was an innovation of the early architects—AltaMed and NCLR. IPL and Promesa/EHCCI have taken the original framework and lessons learned established by the architects and have added their own unique flavor to the initiative.

In response to early challenges, NCLR's development of communication protocols, such as the monthly conference calls, site visits and advisory meetings have stimulated network communication. At present, there are high-levels of engagement at all levels of the partnership. Further, high-levels of engagement exist with the program partners, including the post-secondary institutions and the local PepsiCo affiliate. The integrated partnership with California State Los Angeles (CSULA) to deliver Career Pathways/Exploration curriculum through their summer institute is a promising practice to be examined for replication network-wide.

The AltaMed Escalera Program has done an outstanding job of leveraging Escalera Alumni to provide critical capacity support. Creating pipelines for leadership, AltaMed has achieved a high-level of program continuity by allowing Escalera Alumni to return to the program in a mentor capacity. Furthermore, by leveraging existing staff resources, AltaMed was able to mitigate some of their early capacity issues by involving organizational staff in an increased capacity.

Student and stakeholder satisfaction with the AltaMed Escalera Program was extremely high. The student focus group data suggests that students were extremely satisfied with the services provided by AltaMed. Also, the PepsiCo and stakeholder data suggests that the AltaMed Escalera Program is having a positive impact on the students it serves.

Finally, the data collected from the various interviews suggests that the formation of positive peer groups can positively impact high school retention. Data from the focus groups and stakeholder interviews suggest that positive peer influence is a contributing factor to student success. Furthermore, the structural development of these positive peer groups recreates a family atmosphere that is at the cornerstone of Latino culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:

- **Continue to develop and monitor the progress of the Personal Development component.** AltaMed has worked diligently on defining the Personal Development component of the program. AltaMed should evaluate their current efforts by creating a feedback loop with students to assess the impact of their initial efforts. This program component of their program is fairly new. Consequently, it is important to assess, adapt and continually refine program content to continually improve its impact.
- **Integrate community service as a strategy to develop student leadership skills.** The AltaMed model currently does not integrate community service or service learning activities in their leadership component. The current body of youth leadership research suggests that volunteerism and civic

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT (CONT.):

engagement—defined more broadly as “youth being actively involved in their communities” are key indicators to developing successful youth leaders.

- **Identify ways to actively engage parents in program activities.** By all accounts, parent involvement in the AltaMed Escalera Program activities was low. Getting parents involved through volunteerism at Escalera events and making it a requirement for parents to participate in program activities might also help with bolstering student participation at key functions.
- **Continue to involve AltaMed in the program replication process.** Promesa/EHCCI cited AltaMed as a major contributor to their successful program launch. AltaMed has developed a comprehensive list of intake and assessment tools, along with other program tested data collection tools that could be standardized for use across the network.



ALTA MED ESCALERA ALUMNI JANIL ALVAREZ: IN HER OWN WORDS

At a simple glance of my appearance, one would not be able to know my story. My whole life I have lived in East Los Angeles, a community with limited opportunities. It was difficult to maintain a 3.8 grade point average at Garfield High School while taking Advance Placement

classes and not being able to get any help from my non-English speaking parents. All I knew was that the only way out of the cycle of poverty was through higher education. With this goal in mind, nothing could stop me. I knew I needed help. At that time, an older classmate introduced me to a program that changed my life. The program she mentioned to me was the Escalera Program. The Escalera Program was introduced to the world just a year before I applied to it, and its goal was to guide Latinos from Garfield High School into getting admitted to a college or university and staying there. It was the Summer Academy that taught me how to write a résumé, cover letter, and personal statement; plan my career; and learn about marketing and networking. This prepared me to fill out college and university applications, which the Escalera Program encouraged us to do early so that we made sure our applications were complete and correct. Our case managers really cared about our admission into college.

Once the college and university applications were submitted, we began working on our financial aid and applications for several scholarships. The Escalera Program encouraged us to fill out and turn in as many scholarships as I could and that was exactly what I did. I probably applied to about ten different scholarships and out of those ten I got two. The two scholarships were the Diamond

Scholarship and the Education First Scholarship. I made sure that most, if not all, of my education was covered and paid for.

I began my college experience at the early age of seventeen. I attended the Educational Opportunity Program Summer Bridge Program of 2004 at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona as a mechanical engineer major. I planned to make and design automobiles and earn at least \$80,000 per year to be able to return and give back to my community. I knew I wanted to make a difference, and I learned that Mechanical Engineering was not fulfilling my dreams to the maximum. It was when I began volunteering and then working for the Escalera Program that I felt satisfied and enjoyed what I did.

I began taking sociology and social work classes, which came easily to me. This turn of events influenced me to change my major to sociology-criminology. In the fall of 2007, I will begin my fourth year at Cal Poly Pomona and plan to maintain my position on the dean's list with a 3.5 grade point average or higher. I will graduate within the next year to year and half, depending on whether I study abroad or not. I will continue my education by obtaining a master's degree in social work or business administration.

I love working with people and love to advocate for youth because they are the future. I want to make a difference in many people's lives. To do that, I must have an influence, and I will continue working in this field while I maximize my strengths. I want to make sure I help the next generation the way the Escalera Program guided me. I will make sure I open the doors that were once closed to underprivileged individuals like me. In my family, I was the first to be born in the United States, the first to graduate from high school, the first to enter and continue at a university, and I will be the first to graduate from a university. I will make sure that I am not the last.

Instituto del Progreso Latino

Chicago, Illinois

Instituto del Progreso Latino (IPL) has been a 501(c)(3) organization serving Chicago's south side Latino families for more than 26 years. Having grown from an English language program in a few church basements in Chicago's Pilsen community, IPL supports a vibrant educational and community center with four community-based Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Career Centers located in key south side Latino neighborhoods. Its mission is to contribute to development that fosters full participation in a changing society, while preserving cultural identity and dignity.

BACKGROUND

IPL has been involved with the NCLR Escalera Program since 2003, serving as the second Affiliate site of the initiative. Being an emerging site presented the challenges normally associated with a new program, specifically in the transformative process from concept to implementation. Further, engaging PepsiCo in Escalera Program activities presented initial challenges as well. Knowing who to engage and how to engage them was a process that became clearer as the program matured. "Once we established relationships with the local PepsiCo affiliate, we began to invite them to some of our program events," said an IPL staff member. "Before long, PepsiCo was sending several volunteers to help with fundraising activities, family events and social gatherings and now the students are accustomed to seeing PepsiCo representatives regularly at program functions."

Defining the NCLR Escalera Program mission and aligning it with the goals and objectives of IPL's site-based initiative presented early issues. "From our standpoint, it seemed like the original mission was to create a pipeline for recruitment for the private sector," said Miguel Cambray, Program Director. "However, through the evolution process, it is clear now that the program is really focused on meeting the academic and social needs of our students."

As the program came together, NCLR and its Affiliates drew from some of the lessons learned during early implementation to develop a shared vision for Escalera. Moreover, through the Escalera Advisory Group, evaluation planning, and periodic conference calls, the NCLR Escalera Program has developed a continuous improvement process that involves all of the stakeholders in the strategic direction of the initiative. With systems and protocols in place, there is a greater sense of shared responsibility and shared contribution to the overall direction of the program.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

IPL provides a number of activities to develop students and prepare them for college and the workforce. To meet students' academic goals, IPL provides tutoring to students mostly through homework assistance. IPL staff clearly pointed out that tutoring is not delivered in a traditional curriculum-driven format. Instead, it is driven by student need and students' personal capacity to effectively complete assignments. There is much debate in the research community regarding the impact of curriculum-based tutoring versus homework help in meeting the academic needs of students. However, in Latino communities where predominant barriers to educational success include access to resources, low family expectations, and language barriers, homework help becomes a

viable strategy to effectively mitigate these challenges. Moreover, as a large percentage of students in the Escalera Program have Spanish speaking parents, additional assistance outside the classroom and the home becomes paramount to student success.

Additional academic support is provided through technology skills development, communication and presentation skill development, and support in the areas of language acquisition and writing. While academic support in the form of skill development and homework help is essential, the advocacy and mentorship provided by IPL staff to students speaks to a broader concern involving Latino students – access to the systems that ultimately affect them. The testimonials provided by students had a common strand in that attending college and/or any post-secondary institution was an incomprehensible dream prior to enrolling in the program. “I didn’t even know that I was eligible to attend college prior to enrolling in the Escalera Program” said a program participant. “I am an undocumented citizen and didn’t think that they (colleges) would let me in since I don’t have a Social Security number and my parents are undocumented.” Without the advocacy and mentorship provided by IPL staff, many of these young people would fall through the cracks and continue the cycle of poverty and low expectations. Moreover, IPL leverages its referral network and various in-house social service programs to focus on the comprehensive needs of the Escalera students and their families. This wrap-around approach focuses on the whole student, not just the educational needs of the student, thus targeting many of the traditional barriers to academic success in Latino communities.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Another critical investment IPL makes in its students involves life skills acquisition through personal development curriculum. The personal development component allows for student self-exploration, confidence building, career mapping, and goal-setting to help students navigate their future. Particularly noteworthy is the “Who Am I” curriculum, which allows students to reflect on family history, cultural identity, origins of their name, and context of “self” within the broader context of the environment they live in. During the visit, the evaluator had the opportunity to observe the “Who Am I” curriculum in action. The activity focused on the origins of each student’s name, the reasons behind why they were given their name, nicknames each student possessed, and why they were given their particular nickname.

There was a deep sense of pride and connection to family and family values. In Latino culture, the family is widely considered the single most important institution in society. Many of the students were named after a prominent family figure and demonstrated a strong connection to their heritage and social context. Further, many of the participants had biblical names that they tied to familial spiritual traditions. However, what stood out most was the sense of self-confidence each student possessed when delivering their presentations. Students were proud of their heritage and brimmed with confidence when speaking about the origins of their name.

The facilitators’ efficiency in conducting the activity was noteworthy. The program coordinator and a youth coach facilitated the activity with a group of approximately 15 students in a small classroom setting. Their facilitation style was engaging and thought-provoking. To engage students, the facilitators would voice “volunteer or victim” to let students know that they would have to participate in either one of the two capacities. Not surprisingly, most chose the volunteer option.

Much of the data involving the personal development activities are captured in student journals. Each Escalera student keeps a journal and makes regular entries. Additional personal development activities include: critical thinking activities, team building, healthy lifestyle curriculum, service activities, and intervention curriculum for high-risk behaviors.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The primary strategy IPL uses to develop leadership qualities in Escalera youth involves service learning and community action. Students assist in the development of service projects by developing action plans, fundraising, mobilizing volunteer support, and coordinating the logistics for the service events. Escalera staff articulated that having service projects that are student centered – meaning that Escalera students are involved and engaged in all levels of service project development from planning to implementation – has led to greater buy-in from students. Further, according to Escalera staff, students have demonstrated a deep commitment to fundraising for program activities. For example, Escalera students held a series of fundraising events to pay for their registration fees to attend the 2005 NCLR Lideres Summit. The local PepsiCo affiliate was so moved by the students' fundraising efforts that they leveraged resources from the PepsiCo Foundation to augment their fund development efforts.

Community action efforts are a major focus of the IPL Escalera Program for a couple of reasons. IPL is dedicated to developing a spirit of service among Escalera students. Staff continually point out that Escalera students have a “civic responsibility” to improve the conditions of their community. They envision Escalera students as change agents who would complete their postsecondary education and consequently return to their community to make a difference. IPL staff voiced concern over the “brain drain” dilemma, whereby educated, highly-qualified young adults in the community leave to seek employment opportunities outside of their host community. IPL as an organization embraces the community asset approach by employing young, talented youth practitioners from the communities they serve. The core IPL Escalera team (youth development director, program coordinator, and youth coach) were all recruited from the South Chicago area.

CAREER PATHWAYS/EXPLORATION

IPL uses a multipronged approach in developing career pathways for Escalera students. First, IPL Escalera staff work closely with students to identify career interests. The program administers skill inventories and career assessment tools to match students with career interests, while developing core competencies to meet career goals. Also, Escalera staff work closely with the IPL Workforce Development Division to administer job searches and engage partners for the internship component of the program. Internships are developed based on student interests and a database of governmental, nonprofit, and private sector partners has emerged. In some cases, students request nontraditional internship placements. For instance, one Escalera student was interested in forensic science and requested an internship placement closely associated with the field of study. “We were surprised when a student approached us with a request to do her internship at a morgue,” said an IPL Escalera staff member. “Given that our internships are based on student interest, we picked up the Yellow Pages and looked for a partner in the field. We will do whatever we can to accommodate a student’s interest.” IPL staff members did mention, however, that they could really benefit from having a proven workforce development curriculum to strengthen the Career Pathways component. They were interested in finding out if NCLR through its extensive partnerships could identify a curriculum to meet their workforce objectives.

Second, IPL also takes tours of traditional corporate sites to expose their youth to numerous career opportunities. The tours are designed to expose Escalera students to real-life, workforce environments and to allow students to engage with professionals to learn more about career choices. Past tours have included visits to Lucent Technologies and the local PepsiCo affiliate.

Third, IPL seeks to develop core workforce competencies within the Career Pathways/Exploration component by: providing workshops in résumé-writing, administering mock interviews with PepsiCo staff, and hosting Career Nights, during which Escalera students can visit with post-secondary and workforce representatives. The mock interviews in particular, provide a built-in mechanism to engage PepsiCo staff in Escalera Program activities. In public/private partnerships, it is paramount to have defined methods to engage partners in program activities. Recent research in volunteerism and mentoring clearly suggests that service placements that are intentional, well planned, organized, and ongoing (at least six months in duration) yield the best outcomes. “I’ve been involved in volunteerism through coaching baseball in my community for 28 years,” said a local PepsiCo volunteer. “I must say that volunteering at IPL for the Escalera Program is the most fulfilling thing I’ve done in that 28-year time span. I think I get more out of it (volunteering) than they (students) do.”

PEPSICO

The role of the PepsiCo Foundation and PepsiCo, Inc. can best be described as engaged philanthropist, meaning PepsiCo as a company and a foundation is involved in the program much deeper than the traditional donor/grantee. In Chicago, PepsiCo representatives are active contributors to meeting program objectives through volunteerism, mentoring, and job shadowing. Further, PepsiCo employees give back to the program by leveraging their personal time to conduct mock interviews with students, attend program fundraisers and events, and conduct presentations to Escalera Program participants and their families.

PepsiCo employees were passionate about volunteering in the Escalera initiative for various reasons. First, many of the PepsiCo staff interviewed were born and raised in the South Chicago area. Also, many of the staff came from the same socioeconomic background as the participants in the program. “We can be positive role models for the youth in the program because we come from very similar backgrounds,” added a PepsiCo representative. “I think it’s very important that we show them the path to success and also be a catalyst for what they do to make their community a better place.”

Second, it was evident that PepsiCo employees volunteered their time to the Escalera Program because it gave them a tremendous sense of fulfillment. There was a deep concern for the students in the program and a strong resolve to create viable opportunities for students to be successful in school and their careers.

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

During the interviews, the question was posed: “What type of impact, if any, is the Escalera Program having on your organization”? The responses clearly indicate that the IPL Escalera program has impacted PepsiCo and its organizational culture. “We have a Power of One initiative at PepsiCo that promotes collaboration between the various PepsiCo

companies (Frito-Lay, Quaker, Pepsi, etc.). Escalera has brought us together through volunteerism at IPL and has influenced the way we do business back at the office,” said a PepsiCo employee. “Essentially, we are fighting for the same cause.” Also, Escalera seems to be impacting how the community perceives PepsiCo as well. “We were attending a parent meeting for the Escalera program when a parent stood up and said that she refused to drink any other cola products because of our involvement with the program,” said another PepsiCo employee. “We are involved in this initiative strictly for the academic and career advancement of the students. However, it was nice to see that parents from the community appreciated our efforts.”

CORE COMPETENCIES

Being the private sector partner in the initiative, PepsiCo, Inc. offers a unique perspective regarding student outcomes. In the youth development process, one could say that PepsiCo is standing at the finish line anxiously awaiting students to develop into contributing members of the workforce. Through the interview process, PepsiCo illuminated a set of core competencies that students need to develop to be successful employees. Communication skills, technology skills, and leadership qualities were among the core competencies PepsiCo staff identified as being essential for workforce success. A PepsiCo member mentioned that she had been impressed with the development of the IPL Escalera students in the core competency areas: “Students have really developed their communication and presentations skills through the PowerPoint presentations. I have observed a major difference in students’ self-confidence from the mid-point of the program to the end.” PepsiCo staff also reinforced the importance of the internships in cultivating core competencies among Escalera students: “Internships are extremely important in developing core workforce competencies. The internships have made a difference in developing student presentation skills, interviewing techniques, and technical writing skills.”

LEVERAGING CORPORATE RELATIONSHIPS AND EXPANDING NETWORKS

PepsiCo staff demonstrated a willingness to build a stronger base of support for the NCLR Escalera Program. It was clear that PepsiCo staff wanted to increase the volunteer base at the corporate level to build the capacity of the program. “We could use more volunteers to support the needs at the local level,” said a PepsiCo staff member. “We currently have about ten rotating volunteers that support IPL’s efforts. We also have about another ten employees that we can mobilize when needed. However, there is always a need to recruit more volunteers.”

Moreover, PepsiCo staff suggested that NCLR leverage PepsiCo’s corporate relationships to build the corpus of funding to support programming. “We need to continue to search for other companies to contribute to the program. We can challenge our vendors and corporate partners to raise money to help sustain the program.” This approach is an interesting idea to explore further for sustainability purposes. It was clear in the staff interview process that IPL staff members could really use the assistance of NCLR in fund development efforts. Nonprofits as a sector generally lack the capacity to effectively fundraise to sustain programming after grant-funding cycles are exhausted. Leveraging existing relationships – in this case leveraging PepsiCo relationships with its corporate partners – seems to be a viable strategy to increase the corpus of funding for the NCLR Escalera Program moving forward.

NCLR has provided a substantial investment in establishing the Escalera Program in regional markets. Furthermore, NCLR has continued to work to build the capacity of its Escalera Affiliates to market the program and leverage other

funding sources. For instance, EAG and Local Escalera Advisory Groups (LEAG) were designed, in part to mobilize local and national stakeholders to create and implement sustainability plans for the program. Also, IPL has done an incredible job of leveraging local WIA resources to build local capacity.

IPL ESCALERA STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

The purpose of conducting the student focus groups was to gain a better understanding of the: programmatic process, background of participants, needs of participants, and student-centered recommendations for continuous program improvement. First, the barriers to academic success these students alluded to were consistent with the body of research that speaks to the academic achievement gap that exists between Latino youth and their non-Latino counterparts. The language barrier (all of the students in the focus group were native Spanish speakers) was a major obstacle to student success. Further, many of the students asserted that their parents did not speak English, which consequently made parental support in facilitating homework help difficult.

Second, low expectations to attend college or vocational school from a family standpoint were prevalent. “I didn’t really care about school,” said an IPL Escalera student. “My parents didn’t expect me to go past high school, so I didn’t really even think about it.” Third, access to resources and information were major barriers to academic success. “I don’t have a computer at home, so using the computer lab at IPL is really helpful.”

Finally, the IPL Escalera Program provided information that debunks the myth that college is an unattainable goal for them. Program participants were asked: “How many of you planned to go to college prior to enrolling in the Escalera Program”? Less than half of the participants raised their hands confirming that they had planned to go to college prior to enrolling in the program. The follow-up question was: “How many of you plan on going to college now that you are enrolled in the program”? Every participant raised their hand indicating their commitment to attend college.

IPL ESCALERA PROGRAM CRITICAL COMPONENTS: A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Escalera students were very satisfied with the support services provided by IPL staff. Students spoke highly of the academic support, the internship opportunities, the team-building opportunities, and the PowerPoint presentations. However, the case management function of the program was clearly the most critical component. “The IPL staff have given us emotional support and encouragement,” said an Escalera student. “They deliver on their promises,” said another student. “This place (IPL) has become a second home. I would have settled for a lot less if it wasn’t for the Escalera Program.” One student in particular spoke of the transformative change the program has made in her life: “The program has taught us to be leaders. It has really built my self-confidence that I can go to college. It (the program) hasn’t just helped me academically – it has changed my life.”

Navigating the post-secondary system is a daunting task for any young person. However, the challenges Latino youth face in navigating the system, along with accessing important information, makes the case management function even more important. Students continually spoke of the mentorship provided by the youth coaches and IPL staff. One student said, “The youth coaches help us to identify colleges and help us with all the paperwork we need to turn in. They stay on us, making sure we turn everything in on time and monitor our progress.” The youth coaches, along with IPL staff, essentially act as information brokers – allowing Escalera youth to access their information systems, resources,

and networks to meet their educational goals. Furthermore, the IPL staff serve as positive role models to the Escalera students. Escalera key staff members were recruited from the South Chicago neighborhoods the program serves. Consequently, Escalera students have role models from similar demographic backgrounds that have been successful in post-secondary education settings and understand the issues they face in their daily lives.

STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

While students were satisfied with the services they received, they illuminated a few possible strategies to improve the program. First, students requested more alumni involvement in program activities. Some made the following suggestions: “Involve alumni more in curriculum and workshops. Alumni could come back to the program and let us know what it’s like being on a college campus and what to expect;” “Have alumni mentor younger students in the program.” The alumni participating in the focus group also recommended increasing their involvement in program activities: “We would like to give back to a program that gave so much to us. We would love to come back to mentor some of the students in the program.” Second, students suggested that NCLR create an Escalera Conference that focuses solely on youth at the various Affiliate sites. They spoke of opportunities to meet students from other sites, share information, and network with other program participants. Third, students suggested making the program longer by adding a sophomore segment. They felt that earlier involvement in the program would help younger students understand that college is a possibility for them. This would also provide earlier intervention to students at risk of dropping out of school, and help them become that much more prepared.

CONCLUSION

The IPL Escalera Program has an exemplary service delivery model. It is truly centered on student need and focuses heavily on meeting the developmental and social needs of its students. The wrap-around approach – which places a high value on the case management function to meet the comprehensive needs of young people either through support programming or referral – is a prominent feature in the IPL model. In educational reform, access to resources continues to underscore the inequities faced by Latino youth in closing the achievement gap. Consequently, any education initiative lacking emphasis on meeting the social needs of Latino students is missing the mark.

There are high levels of engagement in every program partnership, from the local PepsiCo affiliate to the post-secondary institutions. The IPL Escalera Program also benefits from the level of direction and support it receives from its executive branch. The Executive Director at IPL sets the tone for the organization and takes a very hands-on approach to developing staff, engaging students, and leveraging existing resources to build the capacity of the initiative. IPL has an exceptional program team of dedicated staff, organizational leadership, and board of directors support, which largely contributes to the overall success of the program.

Finally, student satisfaction with the IPL Escalera Program was extremely high. Students spoke with passion about the program and the transformative change the program has had in their lives. However, IPL and the entire NCLR Escalera Program network still have some work ahead, identifying innovative ways to engage program alumni and parents in the overall program design.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

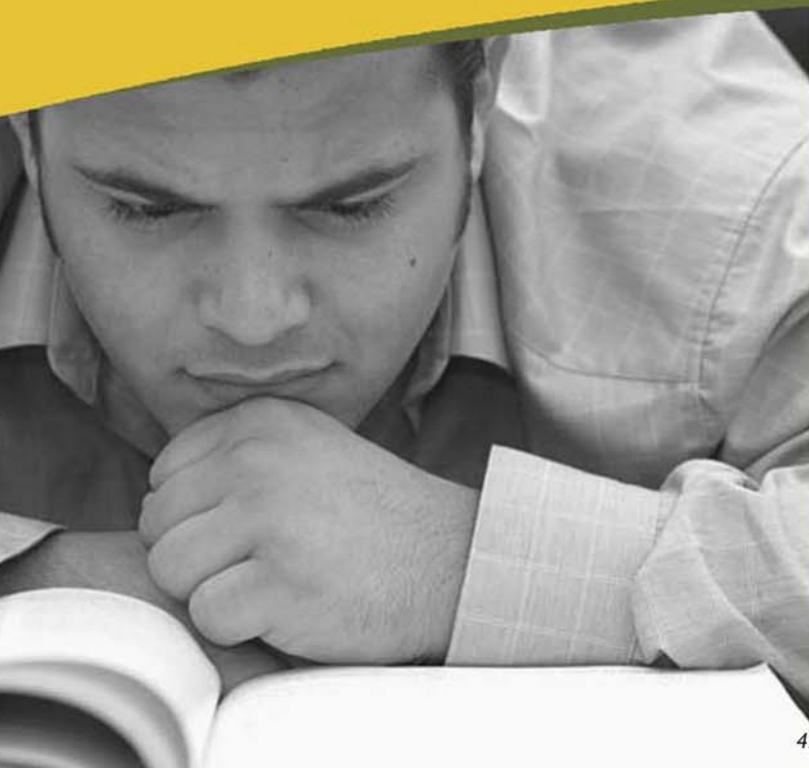
- **Identify ways to involve Escalera alumni in program activities.** Alumni were looking for defined ways to contribute to the program. IPL hosts regular College Cafe nights to engage alumni in a peer-to-peer exchange. However, it was evident that Escalera alumni would like to be involved in mentoring younger students in the program. Alumni could possibly be involved in facilitating presentations, partnering with a younger student in the program, tutoring, and assisting with program recruitment.
- **Involve PepsiCo and local stakeholders in the fundraising and sustainability efforts.** It was clear through the interview process that PepsiCo would like to mobilize its networks to increase the corpus of funding for the NCLR Escalera Program. To continue to build the initiative and sustain the existing programs, fundraising will have to take place at all levels of involvement. At the local level, IPL has tremendous opportunity to involve private industry and other stakeholders in sustainability efforts through their Local Escalera Advisory Group.
- **Further define relationships with the post-secondary institutions.** It was stated during the interview process that formalized agreements (i.e., Memoranda of Understanding) were difficult to coordinate with the post-secondary institutions given the multiple layers of bureaucracy that exist. However, it is important from an accountability standpoint that the expectations and deliverables for the partnership be clearly defined. Are they going to track students longitudinally? Are they going to provide support to alumni? Are they going to provide a pathway for Escalera students? These are just a few of the questions that should be explored to further define the partnerships with the post-secondary institutions.
- **Leverage the Rudy Lozano School as a recruitment base for the Escalera Program.** IPL has the luxury of having an alternative school on site. The Escalera recruitment criteria aligns well with the student demographic represented at the alternative school. Also, the ability to track student outcomes and provide ongoing support increases by engaging students who are on site and are supported by multiple programs. With an enrollment of more than 80 students at the school, only two students were participating in the Escalera Program.
- **Continue to engage IPL in the program replication process.** The IPL Escalera Program model should be considered a best practices model for meeting the needs of Latino students. Finding a mechanism where IPL can continue to mentor emerging Escalera sites should be explored further. Some possible levels of engagement could be facilitated through site exchanges, where new Affiliate sites could shadow IPL staff; online training and technical assistance; conference calls; and blogs.

IPL STUDENT SUCCESS STORY,**ADRIANA CRUZ, IPL ESCALERA ALUMNI**

Having recently graduated from high school, Adriana Cruz was looking at ways to create positive change in her community. After spending the past two years in the IPL Escalera Program, Cruz, now an Escalera Alumni, was looking for ways to apply the leadership skills she learned through the program in ways that could benefit her neighborhood. "I was taught through Escalera the importance of helping others and to be a leader in my community," stated Cruz. "After graduating from the program, I was looking at ways to empower Latino students in my community. Many of the students in my neighborhood are not looking at college as an option. In my own experience, if it wasn't for the NCLR Escalera Program, I might not have graduated from school and enrolled in college."

In response to the local dropout problem, Cruz, five other students, and community leader Francisco Rios founded LATINOS Organization. The mission of LATINOS is to empower students and parents to make educated decisions about post-secondary education. Cruz actively works with students from Farragut, Hoover, and Kennedy High Schools in Chicago helping to bridge the gap between high school and college. "As an organization, we host college fairs, conduct parent involvement sessions, and work closely with students in preparation for college" said Cruz. "We have also been working closely with Northern Illinois University (NIU) and Chicago State to provide enrollment opportunities for the students we serve. Escalera planted the seed in me to be a leader. I will continue to take what I learned from the program and apply it to my community to make it a better place."

In addition to her community work, Cruz is currently enrolled in a Chicago-area community college.



PROMESA: East Harlem Council for Community Improvement, Inc. New York, New York

PROMESA is a Community Development Corporation whose mission is to enable residents in urban settings to become self-sufficient citizens who contribute to the quality of life of their communities. PROMESA works towards achieving its mission by assuming a leadership role in serving the underserved in health, education, employment, economic and community development, and housing.

East Harlem Council for Community Improvement coordinates and delivers quality human services to residents of upper Manhattan. The agency serves children and young adults with developmental disabilities. Founded in 1979 by concerned residents and community leaders, East Harlem Council for Community Improvement has evolved into one of New York City's major social service providers, meeting the needs of thousands of individuals and families each year.

BACKGROUND

Unlike AltaMed and IPL, PROMESA is still in the very early stages of program development. The PROMESA/EHCCI Escalera Program site was launched in February 2007 after a six-month planning phase. In coordination with the launch, the lead evaluator conducted site-based interviews with key program staff, students, and local stakeholders to gather baseline data primarily to learn about the needs, issues, and opportunities associated with a start-up program.

The leveraging of partner resources, such as intake and assessment documents, program tools, and Affiliate expertise has provided PROMESA with the systems and supports that were not previously available to the pilot sites. Furthermore, the Escalera network – inclusive of program partners, advisory group, and PepsiCo partners – is much better coordinated and defined to support replication than in previous years. Specifically, PROMESA praised NCLR and the entire NCLR Escalera Program network for their assistance in preparing them for their program launch. In many ways, the communication issues that existed during the early phases of the NCLR Escalera Program have been addressed and the ongoing support of a dedicated, full-time NCLR support person has provided the Affiliates with increased capacity for replication. “NCLR has been heavily involved as a funder on the front end,” said Carol Santiago, Associate Director. “I hope that we can keep up this level of interaction moving forward. We couldn’t ask for anything more, in terms of support. They have been great.”

EARLY CHALLENGES

Much like the pilot sites, one of the early challenges that arose at PROMESA was parental involvement. At the very core, parental involvement is essential for parents to connect with the program, and ensures that the necessary familial support is in place for students. According to a recent report, parental involvement was cited as one of the most essential elements in the success of students and their schools.¹ Engaging Latino parents in mainstream education is an even greater challenge. Monolingual, Spanish speaking parents are at a major disadvantage since most of a child’s school correspondence is delivered in English. Systemically, engaging the Latino parent in the educational process is a major policy challenge at the local, state, and federal levels.

¹ It takes a Parent: Transforming Education in the Wake of the No Child Left Behind Act. Appleseed, 2006.

“We are looking at creative ways to engage parents in program activities,” said a PROMESA staff member. PROMESA incorporates several strategies to engage parents in program activities. First, in partnership with the local school district, PROMESA works with the Parent Education Coordinators at the local high schools to involve and inform parents. Coordinators’ sole function is to increase parental engagement in the educational system. Second, PROMESA provides a parent orientation to every parent with a child participating in the program. The overarching goal is to inform parents about the program and the value of their involvement in their child’s education. Finally, the organization facilitates several parent workshops that are driven by the interests of the parents. Their holistic model focuses on the entire family, not just the student, to address the numerous socioeconomic issues that affect academic performance.

Fundraising to meet the program’s fiscal matching requirement was also cited as an early challenge. However, much like the two pilot sites, PROMESA has been able to leverage local WIA funds from the Department of Youth and Community Development to ensure program matching requirements are met. Across the NCLR Escalera Program network, the targeted resource used most often to provide capacity-building and sustainability support comes from state and local WIA funds.

EDUCATION

To meet the academic assistance needs of Escalera students, PROMESA will leverage partner support from EHCCI to deliver tutoring in house. Tutoring will primarily be focused on supporting students in need of remediation. However, tutoring will be readily accessible to any Escalera student in need of academic support. In addition, PROMESA has strategic alliances with Kaplan and Princeton Review to support Escalera students with career exploration, SAT Test preparation, and financial aid assistance.

PROMESA plans to incorporate a wide range of learning strategies into its program to engage students in education-related activities. The organization has extensive experience implementing experiential learning pedagogy that allows students to make critical connections from the classroom to real-life applications. Also, to develop critical thinking, analysis, and writing skills, PROMESA uses court cases as a teaching methodology. Through the cases, students are able to gain an understanding of the judicial process and learn valuable 21st-century applied skills. Other approaches will include, instruction in creative writing, visual arts through multimedia, and teaching technology skills for business applications.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Thinking holistically, PROMESA believes that students must possess certain life skills before they can ever consider being successful in an academic environment. Through case management, the organization has historically worked closely with youth to address the issues that ultimately affect their success as engaged, thriving, and contributing community members. At the core of the model, the case management function allows PROMESA Escalera staff members to engage students at a far more intimate level to truly understand the students’ social conditions and supports needed for success.

Not only is PROMESA trying to educate youth, it is working to mentor young people to make informed life choices. “As an organization, we have a very comprehensive life skills curriculum,” added Nilsa Orama, Program Coordinator. “Our Overcoming Obstacles curriculum serves as an educational tool that allows us to truly understand student barriers to success. Once we do the initial assessment with the student, we can start to set goals and map out an improvement plan with each student.” She continues, “Through the assessment, we also have the ability to identify other service needs of the student and their families, which we can either provide in house or through referral. The curriculum has been highly successful in other programs we operate within the organization.” Other key features of PROMESA’s life skills curriculum include sections on financial literacy and money management, a section on health and wellness issues that affect youth and their families, time management, and communication skills development.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

A guiding principle in the PROMESA Escalera model is youth civic engagement, whereby students actively seek out the answers to issues that affect them in a community and global context. Guiding their work, PROMESA Escalera students will constantly be asked: “How can youth effect change.” This is a fairly new paradigm in thinking where youth take the lead in creating positive social change. PROMESA does not maintain the old tenet that youth are problems to be fixed. Rather, it takes a proactive approach to developing future leaders.

One unique strategy PROMESA plans to implement is creating social change through policy research. Specifically, the program intends to look at policies that affect youth, analyze their implications within their communities, and begin to take a youth-driven approach to developing social policy relevant to their community. This approach is aimed at developing critical thinking skills, so young people can analyze a social condition and strategically think through possible solutions. This approach also provides a targeted activity to develop communication and debate skills. Being able to effectively articulate issues surrounding a social ill and effectively communicating a thoughtful strategy to mitigate the problem is extremely important in developing young leaders. Finally, the policy research activity is very useful in developing an understanding of how policy is created and implemented. Typically, youth as nonvoting members of society do not know how they can participate in the construction of policy. Many youth believe that they cannot affect social change without voting rights. However, PROMESA believes that youth can be key contributors to social policy through debate, advocacy, and community mobilization.

PROMESA also seeks to develop and empower youth leaders through service learning projects, through the internships and by creating workshops that are youth-led. Furthermore, through the leadership component, PROMESA hopes to develop Teen Ambassadors who are viewed as leaders within their schools and within their communities.

CAREER PATHWAYS/EXPLORATION

With extensive experience in workforce development, PROMESA has a clear vision of how youth can develop transferable skills for their careers. PROMESA, along with their sponsor agency EHCCI are highly regarded for their adult employment and training programs in the New York area. The organization plans on implementing the age-appropriate components of its successful adult model to fit the Escalera model.

PROMESA's career pathway approach moves in sequential order from concrete to theoretical to practical. In the concrete phase, PROMESA works closely with students to develop tangible products and skills to promote themselves. For example, students develop their employment portfolios, which include résumés and cover letters. Students then work on their interview and presentation skills with staff and adult mentors. PROMESA hopes to engage the local PepsiCo team in this component much like IPL has in the Chicago market.

In the theoretical phase, staff assess student career interests through appreciative inquiry. "What do you want to do?" is a fundamental question. This broad question leads to operationalized actions, such as conducting market research, identifying high-demand careers, researching educational requirements, and constructing timelines to achieving career requirements. PROMESA staff begin to engage students in the early decision-making process of identifying careers.

As the name implies, the practical phase begins to drill down a little deeper into the requirements of each career choice. By practical, PROMESA does not aim to set any type of limitations on student achievement. Rather, the organization takes a closer look at each student's educational history and begins to educate students about the necessary coursework, remediation needs, and preparatory work that must be completed to fulfill their career goals.

In addition to the market research, PROMESA plans on engaging students in career exploration through a guest speaker series, where local professionals provide insight from their career experience. Furthermore, PROMESA has a well defined pool of internship placements for students to engage in the workforce. Currently, the organization has more than 60 internship partners from its existing pool, which will expand to meet the needs of the NCLR Escalera Program.

NEW YORK PEPSICO TEAM

The New York-based PepsiCo team played a key role in the development of the program. According to PROMESA staff, PepsiCo attended early planning meetings and offered support through staff volunteerism once the program reached implementation. The local PepsiCo team's involvement in the planning phase of replication was a direct result of the lessons learned from the two pilot sites. The collaboration of NCLR, the Affiliates, and PepsiCo on the front end ensures that each of the partners contributes to the strategic direction and development of the initiative.

Additional in-kind support has been leveraged through the donation of PepsiCo products for Escalera events. However, at present, PROMESA is still exploring integration strategies to effectively involve the local PepsiCo team in program activities. As previously mentioned, PROMESA hopes that PepsiCo can assist in developing youth interviewing skills by providing critical feedback and tips for improving student communication skills. Further, PROMESA believes that PepsiCo support is essential to bridging the gap to the workplace. "We want to be able to visit their facilities and develop an employer network with them," stated a PROMESA staff member. "Their involvement is critically important to developing job shadowing opportunities, internship possibilities, and career pathways for our students." Another staff member added, "It would be incredibly helpful if we could establish a mentoring component with them, where they would periodically stop by and speak to our young stars."

One possible strategy to promote mentorship opportunities would be to involve the local PepsiCo team in the guest speaker series through the career exploration component. Another more involved strategy would be to develop job-shadowing opportunities for interested Escalera students.

Consistent with the two pilot sites, PROMESA staff and stakeholders are interested in developing relationships with the private sector through the facilitative leadership of PepsiCo. The nonprofit agencies involved in the NCLR Escalera Program understand clearly their limited access to corporate America. However, they also clearly understand the impact Hispanic consumers have from a marketing standpoint. Bridging the two worlds – corporate and nonprofit – is key to the program’s sustainability. PepsiCo with its extensive reach in the private sector can prove to be invaluable.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES

PROMESA through its strong relationships with workforce partners and post-secondary institutions is perfectly positioned to develop defined career pathways for Escalera students in New York. Founded with a community vision in mind, Boricua College and Hostos Community College are designated Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) that primarily serve the needs of Latino students. PROMESA currently has formal agreements in place with both of these two-year institutions to provide support for its youth and adult programs. PROMESA’s integration strategy to involve Boricua College and Hostos Community College in Escalera activities will provide presentations and workshops for students. The intent is for these post-secondary institutions to raise awareness about college life as part of the career exploration component of the program. However, PROMESA is positioned to engage the local colleges in a deeper, more meaningful way.

First, PROMESA should consider mobilizing the local colleges to provide academic support services to ensure a successful transition for Escalera students from high school to college life. What seems to be missing from the program design, is a point person at the local colleges that connects them on the post-secondary end of the bridge. This issue is systemic throughout the Escalera network. For bridge programs to be successful, there needs to be dedicated support on the college end to ensure a successful transition to the post-secondary institution. Also, the support systems that Escalera provides students to get to college do not necessarily exist once students are enrolled in college. If they do, the student typically has to identify what supports are available to them at their respective school. Furthermore, having dedicated support on the postsecondary end allows program staff to track student progress toward educational and career goals over the course of their college careers. While Escalera staff provide encouragement and support for students to attend the institution of their choice, the reality is that students overwhelmingly attend colleges that are in their immediate area. A few strategic relationships with local colleges will invariably serve a significant proportion of Escalera students.

Second, based on student interests PROMESA can begin to define logical career pathways with the colleges and workforce partners through coordinated efforts. Obviously, the workforce partners are invested in developing a pool of well qualified candidates to fill positions with their companies. Involving the workforce partners in the career component of the program makes logical sense to ensure that core workforce competencies are being taught. The engagement

of private sector partners also ensures that there are targeted jobs available to Escalera students when they graduate from a post-secondary institution. The local PepsiCo team could also be a catalyzing force in developing pathways for Escalera students to become PepsiCo career professionals. Fertile ground to launch this type of collaboration would be through the local advisory groups that are in the process of being established in each market.

Representation in the local advisory group from Boricua College, Hostos Community College, and other four-year institutions, such as Columbia University and New York University (NYU), can open up opportunities for integrated, post-secondary support. This integrated support also builds the capacity of the Escalera Program to support and engage Escalera alumni in meaningful ways.

CONCLUSION

As previously mentioned, PROMESA is in the very early stages of program implementation. Accordingly, it is far too early to tell how the proposed interventions will impact the students in the program. However, it is clear that the systems and tools instituted by NCLR are proving to be effective in the replication of the program. As noted in the study, PROMESA staff are pleased with the level of support from NCLR and the Affiliate organizations, specifically citing the Peer Exchange session and the site-based training provided by NCLR as “extremely helpful” in launching the program in New York. NCLR’s investment in providing the critical supports necessary to replicate the program is paying off.

Furthermore, the six-month planning phase provided ample time for PROMESA to align resources, identify curriculum, and mobilize partners for the successful launch of the program. As a learning model, the NCLR Escalera Program network has incorporated an extensive planning period into the replication process.

Finally, PROMESA is uniquely positioned through its workforce and post-secondary partnerships to begin to define a structure that supports students and alumni at all levels of the partnership. In the early stages of development, PROMESA has the opportunity to involve their partners in a very intentional way to best support students. NCLR and PepsiCo could provide critical support through advocacy and network mobilization to begin to develop a true pathway approach. Furthermore, NCLR will continue to incorporate promising practices from the field into their program design, which allows PROMESA and other Affiliates to test innovative strategies that could potentially be replicated network-wide.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- **Continue to connect with the NCLR Escalera Program network for technical assistance.** The systems and tools instituted by NCLR were intentionally designed to support emerging Escalera Programs with technical support. In the study, the systems and tools were evaluated based on their uses for replication purposes. However, the Peer Exchange session, in particular, was designed to be a launching point for the exchange of program tools and ideas. PROMESA should continue to connect with the NCLR Escalera program coordinator and key Affiliate staff to ensure they are on track to meet the program’s intended outcomes.

- **Continue to connect with the NCLR Escalera Program network for technical assistance.** The systems and tools instituted by NCLR were intentionally designed to support emerging Escalera Programs with technical support. In the study, the systems and tools were evaluated based on their uses for replication purposes. However, the Peer Exchange session, in particular, was designed to be a launching point for the exchange of program tools and ideas. PROMESA should continue to connect with the NCLR Escalera program coordinator and key Affiliate staff to ensure they are on track to meet the program's intended outcomes.
- **Continue to flesh out the level of involvement of the workforce and postsecondary partners.** PROMESA has a real opportunity to define the level of engagement of external partners on the front end of implementation. Getting the workforce and post-secondary partners on board for integrated support at all levels of the partnership could potentially redefine the program. Real opportunity exists to move the program from a bridge to a career pathway approach.
- **Early planning for the integration of Escalera Alumni in program activities.** PROMESA has the opportunity to take lessons learned from the pilot sites to begin to address alumni engagement on the front end.
- **Continue to develop strategies for parent involvement.** It was clear during the initial site visit that PROMESA is proactive in developing strategies to involve parents in program activities. The organization should continue to promote parent involvement and share some of their successful strategies to engage parents with the network.

PROMESA ESCALERA STUDENT PROFILE: BARBIE RODRIGUEZ

Barbie Rodriguez, an 11th-grade student of Puerto Rican descent is not your typical high school student. With a father homebound with a physical disability and a mother who works tirelessly to support the family, Rodriguez had to grow up at a much faster pace than students of similar age. She began high school as an above average student, but quickly started to see her grades dip as she became disinterested in school. "I had a lot going on at home, where I had to step up and take on some of the responsibilities to help my mom," said Rodriguez. "At the same time, my sister dropped out of school which was real difficult for me. I looked up to my sister as a role model. When she dropped out, I started to ask myself why should I care?"

In 2004, Barbie got involved with PROMESA through its summer youth employment program. Her first summer job was working for Harper Collins, a renowned publishing company with offices in Manhattan. Through the summer job, Barbie discovered a passion for photojournalism. It was this early exposure to career opportunities that fuels her passion to complete her high school education and move toward fulfilling her dream. "I have

narrowed down the colleges I want to attend to NYU, Pine Manor, or Five Towns in Long Island." She continued, "I have done the background research and found that all of these schools are excellent photojournalism schools."

In February 2007, Rodriguez enrolled in the PROMESA Escalera Program and served as the keynote speaker at their Escalera Launch event. Having previous experience with the organization, she believes the program will continue to help her build her self-confidence and assist her with college preparation. She said, "I think I can really benefit from the SAT preparation the program has to offer. I also know the staff at PROMESA will help guide me in making smart decisions about college."

A born leader, Barbie has a simple leadership philosophy: "Show your leadership by getting involved in your school and community. If you are a true leader, you will find ways to get other kids involved in whatever you are leading."

SECTION III.

NCLR ESCALERA PROGRAM IMPACT DATA

OVERVIEW

The NCLR Escalera Program has proven to be a demonstrated solution to the educational and youth leadership challenges in the communities it serves and has provided participating youth with a proven pathway to success. Escalera Programs run by the AltaMed in Los Angeles and Instituto del Progreso Latino in Chicago have achieved tremendous results. Since the program's inception, 98% of all participants have graduated from high school and 96% of those who completed the program have been accepted to college. Comparatively, recent data from a 2004 study by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University shows that 53% of Hispanics nationally graduate from high school.² Further, the National Center for Education Statistics found that in 2005 only 38% of Latino youth in the U.S. go on to college and just more than 11% graduate from college.³

TABLE 2. TOTAL STUDENTS SERVED BY SITE AND COHORT GROUP

Site and Cohort Group	# of students served
AltaMed Seniors (2007)	26
AltaMed Juniors (2008)	38
IPL Seniors (2007)	28
IPL Juniors (2008)	35
PROMESA: EHCCI Juniors (2008)	15
Total Students Served	142

TABLE 3. TOTAL NUMBER OF NCLR ESCALERA PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS AND COMPLETION RATES

# of Participants Enrolled (2002-07)	# of Participants Graduated (2002-07)	Program Completion Rate (%)
127	124	98

² Taken from data included in the report, *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis*, Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2004.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, "Current Population Survey Reports, School Enrollment – Social and Economic Characteristics of Students," 1984-2004.

TABLE 4. AVERAGE STUDENT GPA BY SITE (2007 COHORT)

Site	Average GPA
AltaMed	2.85
IPL	2.93

TABLE 5. COMPARISON OF NCLR ESCALERA PROGRAM HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES AGAINST NATIONAL AVERAGES

Indicator	NCLR Escalera Program Graduation Rate (%)	Hispanic National Average	U.S. National Average
High School Graduation	98	53.2*	68*

*Source: *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis*, Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2004.

TABLE 6. COLLEGE ENROLLMENT AND GRADUATION RATES

Measurement Group	College Enrollment (%)	College Graduation (%)
NCLR Escalera Program Youth	96	N/A*
Hispanic National Average	37.6**	10.9**
U.S. National Average	46**	28.7**

* The first NCLR Escalera Program graduating class would currently be seniors in college.
 **Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Current Population Survey Reports, School Enrollment – Social and Economic Characteristics of Students," 1984-2004.

SECTION IV.

NEED FOR FURTHER STUDY

To truly understand the impact of the NCLR Escalera Program, further study is needed including correlating and comparative analyses that confirm factors that prevent dropouts and promote post-secondary success. Also, it is extremely important to understand the longer-term implications of participation in the NCLR Escalera Program, such as post-secondary preparedness, post-secondary graduation rates of Escalera Alumni, workforce preparedness, and economic mobility implications of Escalera graduates.

A longitudinal study that tracks Escalera students through all the segments of the program, the college enrollment process, and the undergraduate years would begin to illuminate just how well prepared Escalera students are for post-secondary education and their careers.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Appleseed (2006). *It Takes a Parent: Transforming Education in the Wake of the No Child Left Behind Act*.

Casner-Lotto, J., et. al (2006). "Are they really ready to work? Employers' perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st-century U.S. workforce." The Conference Board.

Chapa J., De La Rosa, B. (2004). Latino Population Growth, Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics, and Implications. *Education and Urban Society*, 36: 130-149.

Maslow, A.H. (1943). "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review*, 50: 370-396.

Gandara, P., Gibson, M. and Koyama, J. (2004). *School Connections: U.S. Mexican Youth, Peers, and School Achievement*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Orfield, G., Losen, D. and Swanson, C. (2004). *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. Contributors: Advocates for Children of New York and the Civil Society Institute.

U.S. Census Bureau (2004). "Current Population Survey Reports, School Enrollment – Social and Economic Characteristics of Students," 1984-2004.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2007). "The Condition of Education 2007 (NCES 2007-064), Indicator 23.



NCLR would like to thank Frank Mirabal, lead consultant and author of this evaluation, for his deep commitment to the NCLR Escalera Program and the Latino youth it serves.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Frank A. Mirabal, principal investigator and lead author of this report, is a research and policy expert with substantial experience working on Latino issues. He has previously authored reports on national service in Latino communities, career pathway approaches, positive youth development and network-based approaches to systems change. Frank has spent the past four years as a principal partner in Nterlink Consulting, LLC, which is an independent consulting firm focused on organizational development, policy and research. In 2007, Mirabal launched Contigo Research, Policy and Strategy, which is an independent research and strategy firm aimed at providing evidence based solutions to nonprofit and social service providers.

REPORT DESIGN AND LAYOUT:

Leon R. de Herrera

