

CENTER *update*

LEAP Academy to build a S.T.E.M. high school



Working closely with the Rutgers CSUCL, LEAP Academy University Charter School has purchased a property on Cooper Street that will be the site for a new high school building for the LEAP Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (S.T.E.M.) program.

The property, located at 528-532 Cooper Street (directly across the street from LEAP’s current high school building), will be completely renovated and equipped with state-of-the-art technology, math instruments, and science laboratories. The 49,000ft² school will hold two 100-seat lecture halls, 14 classrooms, and six labs. The renovated facility will eventually house space for LEAP’s full enrollment of 240 S.T.E.M. students (grades 9-12).

LEAP and the CSUCL hope to have the facility renovated and opened for the 2012-13 school year. “This building will support our mission to increase the number of Camden City students who master science, math, engineering and technology,” said CSUCL Director and LEAP board chair Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago.

LEAP Academy’s S.T.E.M. project has been developed through ongoing collaboration with Rutgers University and other institution of higher education. A curriculum/academic committee made up of university faculty has worked closely with LEAP teachers and instructional personnel to develop the academic program. Rutgers professors Alessia Marigo and Benedetto Picolli are collaborating with LEAP administrators to design the math curriculum for STEM.

“There is a continuously growing demand for specialized employees within medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, engineering, computing and business,” said Dr. Marigo. “The mastery of mathematical skills is of fundamental importance when students enroll at highly ranked colleges and universities where they can access advanced college level studies.” Dr. Picolli agreed. “A rigorous and innovative STEM curriculum will provide students with exposure to college-level courses and help them become highly competitive for accessing colleges,” he said.

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Inside: 20 years of the Center

2010 marked the 20th Anniversary for the CSUCL at Rutgers-Camden
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Merit pay is about teacher excellence

Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Ph.D, Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor, Department of Public Policy & Administration, Rutgers-Camden

It is no surprise that Gov. Chris Christie's call for merit pay for teachers was met with immediate resistance from the New Jersey Education Association. The union

responded to the Governor's "State of the State" address by dismissing merit pay for having "no record of success" as a school improvement strategy. The LEAP Academy Charter School in Camden is living proof that pays for performance can work.

When we founded LEAP in 1997, our founding Board struggled to find the best and brightest teachers to work at a charter school in the heart of decaying city. We were offering positions that required them to work extended school hours and a longer school year, which was a departure from what teachers are accustomed to work in traditional public schools. Two years later, we launched a merit pay program for our teachers as a strategy to recognize and promote quality teaching and reward teachers based on the academic outcomes of the students they teach. We believe that this approach also allows LEAP to attract talented teachers and retain those that can demonstrate that they can thrive in a setting that expects rigor, innovation, and genuine commitment to student growth and achievement.

LEAP Academy's Performance Based Compensation Program is aligned to LEAP Academy's mission and priorities. At LEAP, we believe that every student deserves a quality teacher and teachers are rewarded based on their ability to help students make significant academic gains and contribute to school-wide success. The program provides incentives for teachers based on high standards, expectations, and willingness to take on added responsibilities and to learn new skills. Ultimately, the Performance-Based Compensation Program at LEAP recognizes that teachers cannot help students learn more if they do not have sufficient resources, quality training, access to data and the necessary time to learn from each other. It also takes into account that teachers bring different levels of skills, knowledge and ability to their work. Accordingly, the Performance-Based Compensation Program incorporates a rigorous and targeted professional development program designed to provide resources, training and ongoing feedback to teachers. It also incorporates a system of varied assessments to measure student academic progress in meeting learning objectives.

Contrary to what the NJEA may claim regarding merit pay for teachers, at LEAP, it is simple: teachers receive salary increases and bonuses based on their effectiveness in the classroom, leadership contributions, and student achievement rates. In the Governor's speech, he said, teaching can no longer be the only job where you have no consequences for failure to perform. At LEAP, as we celebrate the successes of each senior class, we consistently prove that merit causes teachers to excel—no matter what the union claims. ■

The national discourse on teacher compensation has gained momentum, as states and the federal government are

pushing for major restructuring in the way in which teachers are compensated. Seniority pay is not longer the best alternative to promote high levels of performance among teachers. The basic question is "why should a solid teacher that is making great strides in getting students to perform at higher rates be compensated in the same manner as a mediocre teacher?" TeacherSolutions, a network of teachers created and supported by the Center for Teaching Quality and the Teacher Leaders Network engaged in the national discussion regarding merit pay and they conclude that "a carefully crafted professional-compensation system has huge potential to transform the teaching profession in ways that can help all students learn more. We do not shy away from the principle that teachers who perform at high levels deserve extra compensation for their performance" (Center for Teaching Quality, 2007).

We are convinced that a good performance based compensation plan that addresses teaching quality, student achievement and leadership contributions motivates teachers to work harder and to have a clear focus on the students they teach. Seniority pay—the standard by which teachers are compensated in most districts in New Jersey—can often produce an atmosphere of low expectations for teachers and limit the potential of student success. Those working by the edict of a contract quickly find that the best staff members are not always the ones with the six-figure salaries.

In developing the merit based program at LEAP, we also acknowledged that individual student learning is significantly influenced by more than just individual teachers. The Performance-Based Compensation Program at LEAP recognizes that teachers cannot help students learn more if they do not have sufficient resources, quality training, access to data and the necessary time to learn from each other. It also takes into account that teachers bring different levels of skills, knowledge and ability to their work. Accordingly, the Performance-Based Compensation Program incorporates a rigorous and targeted professional development program designed to provide resources, training and ongoing feedback to teachers. It also incorporates a system of varied assessments to measure student academic progress in meeting learning objectives.

With considerable dialogue and collective improvement, we have been able to incorporate performance based compensation as the mechanism for determining teacher's salary increment and performance bonuses into the teacher's contract. LEAP is the first unionized school in New Jersey to give salary increases to teachers based on performance. Our approach to teacher compensation could serve as a state and national example for the success that can occur in all public schools.

Alfredo Santiago Endowment reaches \$1.2M after 2011 Gala

Despite facing a two-year economic recession that has tightened corporate budgets and reduced foundation giving nationwide, the CSUCL's annual Rutgers/LEAP gala successfully raised the fourth highest yearly total in the scholarship's 11-year history.

The December 3rd event raised a total of \$120,000 for the Alfredo Santiago Scholarship, which provides financial aid for LEAP Academy graduates who attend Rutgers University. The fundraising mark was made possible by the support of official 2010 Gala sponsors Wells Fargo, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Rita Allen Foundation, Brandywine Senior Living, Congressman Robert Andrews, Genova, Burns & Giantomasi, PSE&G, TD Bank, and Verizon, who together accounted for 58 percent of the fundraising.

"We're overwhelmed with the amount of support that our sponsors and friends have shown this year," said the CSUCL's Katie Mills, who coordinated the gala fundraising efforts. "It proves that even economic uncertainties can't discourage the generosity of businesses and the public or their desire to help Camden students attend college."

Over 250 members of the Rutgers/LEAP community (including President Richard McCormick and Chancellor Wendell Pritchett), students, parents, and regional stakeholders were on hand at the Adventure Aquarium for a night of dinner, dancing, and a celebration of LEAP alumni at Rutgers.

Twenty-five LEAP alumni returned for the event, including 11 scholarship recipients and two recent graduates from Rutgers. Two alumni who have received the scholarship had the chance to address the audience also. Julio Atenco (Rutgers-Camden) and Julianna Perez (Brown) thanked everyone for their financial support of the scholarship and asked guests to continue their work on behalf of children in Camden City.

The gala also welcomed this year's guests of honor: Brenda Ross-Dulan of Wells Fargo & Company, Elizabeth Christopherson of the Rita Allen Foundation, and Peter Burke of Brandywine Senior Living (and the current LEAP Academy board treasurer). All three honorees received the 2010 Rutgers/LEAP Leadership Award for their continued support of LEAP, Rutgers, and the residents of Camden City.

"We're grateful to have the support of so many regional business leaders. Their continued vision and leadership, along with the support of so many others, have created college opportunities for Camden City children that would have been impossible otherwise," said CSUCL Director Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago.

The scholarship was created by the CSUCL in 2000 in order to increase the number of Camden youth who attend college, specifically to support LEAP Academy graduates who enroll at Rutgers University. In the last 11 years the scholarship endowment has grown to \$1.2 million; since LEAP's first class graduated in 2005, the endowment has provided over \$130,000 in financial aid to 30 LEAP alumni. ■

The 12th annual gala has been announced for Friday, December 2nd, 2011 at The Mansion in Voorhees, NJ.



Pictured (from top): (1) 2010 honoree Brenda Ross-Dulan with Dr. Santiago and LEAP senior Ashley Satterfield; (2) Rutgers President Richard L. McCormick; (3) LEAP alumnus Julio Atenco; (4) 2010 honoree Peter Burke with Dr. Santiago and LEAP senior Geehem Smith; (5) 2010 honoree Elizabeth Christopherson (center) with guests.

“My School, Mi Escuela”

ELRA building opens in July with space for infants, toddlers, and pre-k

ON a brisk day in late November, preschoolers Ceyanie Alford, Kevin Castaneda, and Jada Robledo went to school like it was any other day. As part of their morning routine, they had desayuno and círculo or “circle time” (after all, Mondays are “Spanish-only” instruction days in all ELRA classes). When their teacher, Carrie O’Connor, told the class, “Pongansen sus chaquetas,” they did and with 27 other children in the program marched from their classroom at LEAP Academy Elementary School to the Rutgers-Camden campus, where a crowd of 150 people had gathered to break ground on their future school, the John S. and James L. Knight Early Learning Research Academy.

passed through the Rutgers/LEAP Early Childhood program, and like Ceyanie, Kevin, and Jada, they were all housed either in rented space at LEAP Academy Charter School or in modular trailers on Rutgers’ campus. But in July, when the three-story, 12,000ft² ELRA building is opened, not only will the students finally have their own school but generations of Camden City children will finally have the new beginning for early childhood learning and development they have been waiting for.

Since 2001, the Rutgers Early Childhood program (now ELRA) has provided full-day preschool education and health services

“The program is working,” said Emily Meredith, ELRA’s Director of Dual-language instruction. The program’s goals for students (as native English-speaking children in preschool) are immersion and recognition. “Students are learning through routine and are constantly encouraged to speak as they develop their vocabulary.”

The program has evolved significantly since its early days, raising the level of instruction and support for students, but also providing increased professional development for teachers. ELRA is the only dual-language early childhood education program in the Camden City district and the Board of Education has taken notice. “The Board has contacted us about involving outside teachers and administrators and offering them the same professional development in dual-language learning that we offer our ELRA teachers,” Emily said. “That’s something we hope to be able to offer in the new building.”

New professional development space and conference rooms are just a few of the new additions the ELRA facility will

program will service children and families from 6-months old. The program will enroll 12 infants and 20 toddlers and increase their exposure to language and build their literacy, while providing for their health and social development as well. “I think it’s awesome that infants and toddlers will be able to learn in a dual-language environment,” said Emily.

ELRA teacher Carrie O’Connor thinks that having an Infant and Toddler program in the same building with a preschool program will inform her work as a teacher. “It’s good for us as teachers to be able to see that range of development, which happens so quickly,” Carrie said. “I’ll be able to know what learning is going on *before* preschool.”

Along with program cohesion, the new building will foster communication. “It will definitely help keep us all on same page,” said ELRA teacher Maritza Lopez. Emily agreed and also emphasized the classrooms would enhance the preschool instruction. “The new classrooms and resources will allow us to tailor our curriculum more inventively and allow us to create a more language-rich environment,” she said.



Steps away from the construction site, the 30 ELRA students sat wearing red helmets and watched as a whirlwind of media coverage and speeches from university and public officials went on around them. All the while, Ceyanie, Kevin, and Jada sat front row center, smiling and holding a 4x5-foot banner with a brightly-colored painting of the ELRA building and four words that summed up the event’s spirit more than any others spoken that day: “My School, Mi Escuela.”

In the last ten years, nearly 500 Camden City children have

to three- and four-year old children in the city. It is funded as part of the Camden Board of Education’s Abbott Early Childhood Initiative and currently enrolls 90 students in six classrooms (four at LEAP and two at Rutgers). The program emphasizes cognitive, social, and emotional development through literacy, group activities, and experiential learning. However, the program’s most notable feature is its dual-language component, which involves instruction three days a week completely in Spanish. Through reading, visual aids, and interactive play, students are immersed in the language and are demonstrating strong progress in language acquisition.

provide to ELRA staff. Phase One of the building, which will open this summer, will create six new state-of-the-art classrooms, childhood study labs, and more. In all, 62 Camden City children will be accommodated through Phase One. Two of the ELRA program’s six classes will relocate to the new facility, while the remaining four classes will allow the CSUCL to launch its new Infant and Toddler literacy and development program.

The success of the preschool initiative has revealed the need to reach students at an even earlier age; the Infant and Toddler

ELRA’s addition of the Infant and Toddler program fills in the only missing piece to the CSUCL’s vision for a Birth-to-16 “Educational Pipeline” along Cooper Street. Rutgers-Camden’s strong partnership with LEAP Academy Charter School (K-12), combined with ELRA (0-5), will make it possible for a child to be educated from birth through college (and even graduate school) along Cooper Street. “Most children in Camden begin school up to two years behind their suburban peers and that deficit compounds each year,” said Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Director of the CSUCL.

see **ELRA BUILDING** on page 11

Give to the ELRA Capital Campaign

To make a gift to the Early Learning Research Academy please contact the Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership at 856-225-6348, or donate online at <http://cfsucl.camden.rutgers.edu/>

1 ELRA preschoolers Kevin Castaneda, Jada Robledo, Ceyanie Alford hold up a sign at the groundbreaking for the John S. and James L. Knight Early Learning Research Academy.

2 Breaking ground for ELRA: James Carll, Sen. Robert Menendez, Chancellor Pritchett, Dr. Santiago, President McCormick, Donna Frisby-Greenwood, Rep. Rob Andrews, and Commissioner Rochelle Hendricks.

3 ELRA preschoolers look on during a visit to the construction site for the Early Learning Research Academy in September.

4 ELRA teacher Carrie O’Connor attends the groundbreaking ceremony with preschooler Ceyanie Alford and students.

The CSUCL celebrates *twenty years* at Rutgers–Camden (1990 to 2010)

Creating Community Development and opportunity in Camden and the region

This fall, the Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership is celebrating twenty years at Rutgers University–Camden. Since 1990, the CSUCL has grown to become the largest center on the Rutgers–Camden campus with over 30 full- and part-time employees and more than two dozen initiatives and programs that span the fields of education, research, health and human services, childhood studies, urban reform, public policy and administration, professional development, and civic engagement.

But like all successful initiatives, the Center had humble beginnings. It began, in fact, as a simple idea by founder Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, a professor at Rutgers–Camden. In 1989, Dr. Santiago’s work at Rutgers led her to create three programs to provide leadership training to professionals and college students seeking careers in public policy: the Hispanic Women’s Leadership Institute, the Latino Fellows Public Policy Leadership Institute, and the Executive Management Leadership program.

The success of these pilot programs underscored the need to bring the same innovative, civically-active practices into Camden, a city in dire need of investment in leadership and education reform. So in the Fall of 1990, Rutgers approved Dr. Santiago’s proposal to create the Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership in order to broaden the university’s impact in revitalizing urban communities, specifically Camden City.

Since then, the Center has steadily grown and prospered through its tireless efforts to create partnership and collaboration between the university, city officials and stakeholders, and residents. This collaborative approach was quickly demonstrated in 1993, when the Center brought residents together to speak with Camden City officials about community development plans at Rutgers–Camden’s first ever Urban Summit.



The summit revealed Camden residents’ greatest concern: the need for quality schools in the city. The Center quickly seized on that need by creating an exploratory committee called the Rutgers/LEAP Initiative to begin laying the groundwork for a public charter school in the city. With the support of a \$1.5M grant from the DRPA and hundreds of parents and community stakeholders, Dr. Santiago and the Center brought the plan to two New Jersey governors and in January 1997, Gov. Christine Whitman signed the NJ Charter School Act.

Little more than a year later, in September 1997, the LEAP Academy University Charter School opened its doors to 324 students (K-5), becoming one of the state’s first charter schools. LEAP has since grown into an 870-student K-12 charter school and is governed by its independent Board of Trustees, comprised of university faculty, business entrepreneurs, and parents.

Rutgers remains a part of the school’s Board and also supports the school through the CSUCL’s Centers of Excellence, which provide academic, health, and social support to the entire school community, has achieved 100% graduation and college acceptance for all six of its senior classes.

LEAP’s successful K-12 model encouraged the Center to expand its investment in students, both before and after their LEAP years. So in 1999, Dr. Santiago established an endowment scholarship for future LEAP alumni to attend Rutgers called the Rutgers University Alfredo Santiago Scholarship. The scholarship was created in memory of her beloved husband Alfredo and today has grown to \$1.2M and provided over \$130,000 to 30 alumni. Two years later, in 2001, the Center created a Rutgers preschool program for three and four year olds in partnership with LEAP and the Camden Board of Education’s Abbott Early Childhood program. This pre-K program would inspire the Center to found the Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA) in order to provide education and health services to children from birth.

At the same time, the Center’s leadership and professional development initiatives continued to cultivate local leadership in Camden by training thousands of parents and community business leaders. The Center would expand these initiatives to school leaders and faculty at LEAP and in Camden City, and even partner with the Rutgers–Camden Department of Public Administration to create a program for 50 Camden City school teachers to pursue Master’s degrees at Rutgers and become school administrators.

The Center has also applied the same development model to college students and each year provides experiential learning opportunities to over 100 Rutgers–Camden students through internships, fellowships, academic coursework, and work-study placements. These students support the mission and programs of the Center while gaining firsthand, professional experience for their future careers in education, social work, medicine, law, and business.

Together, LEAP, ELRA, and the Center’s many other efforts combine to advance the university’s mission and fulfill its responsibility to the people of the city. The impact that these initiatives have had cannot be understated. In the last two

decades the CSUCL has transformed the landscape of the City of Camden, literally. Two new LEAP Academy school buildings now anchor the city’s “Education Corridor” along Cooper Street. In July, the CSUCL will add a third with the John S. and James L. Knight Early Learning Research Academy and through its collaboration with LEAP Academy is leading the charge to complete a S.T.E.M. high school building in 2012.

But more important than the physical improvements to the city in the last twenty years, the CSUCL’s focus on partnership and collaboration has brought residents, K-12 students, college faculty and students, parents, businesses, and stakeholders together for the benefit of its people and has changed their future opportunities for the better. Now, where once-deserted lots sat, school buildings and playgrounds are educating and entertaining the young; where once-forgotten children and families lived, informed and empowered residents are building strong communities; and where a once-abandoned city stood, a town is poised to lead itself on the road back to social and economic prosperity. ■

IMPACT IN NUMBERS



Students in the 2010 Latino Fellows Leadership Institute meet Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno at their graduation ceremony in August



Seventy-five Rutgers-Camden students join Dr. Santiago, CSUCL staff, and Dept. of Public Administration faculty during the Center’s 2010 service learning student recognition ceremony in June

PREK-12 EDUCATION INITIATIVES

- 780 students (K-12) every year since 1997
- 90 preschoolers every year since 2001
- Six years of 100% graduation and college acceptance rates for LEAP high school seniors

HIGHER EDUCATION INITIATIVES

- Over 500 Latino college students in New Jersey trained for public policy careers
- 130 Rutgers students engaged in service learning initiatives every year
- A \$1.3 million scholarship endowment fund to support LEAP graduates attending college

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 325 Camden teachers
- 148 classroom aides
- 50 aspiring school leaders completing academic credentials for principalship

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- \$30 million in capital building projects to create three school buildings on Cooper St
- Over 1,000 community members enrolled in the Rutgers/LEAP Health Center
- 210 immigrant families served through the new Health Education Literacy Project (HELP)
- Over 2,000 parents, 100 parent-educators, and 1,000 community leaders trained

Twenty years at Rutgers-Camden (1990 to 2010)



The Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership is created at Rutgers University-Camden to help revitalize urban communities through education and leadership

Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago creates the Hispanic Women's Leadership Institute to train Hispanic women for positions of leadership in New Jersey

The Latino Fellows Leadership Institute is created with the NJ Department of Community Affairs to train New Jersey's Latino college students for careers in public policy

The Leadership for Urban Executive Management program begins training urban leaders in the region

1990

1992

The CSUCL receives a \$1.5M grant from the DRPA to develop the Rutgers/LEAP strategic plan for a public charter school



1993

The CSUCL hosts Rutgers-Camden's first Urban Summit to bring community leaders together with Camden City officials to discuss city development plans

The Rutgers/LEAP Initiative is formed to develop a strategic plan to create a public charter school

The Center begins its "Engaged Scholarship" initiatives by placing Rutgers students into service-learning internships in the city



1996

The CSUCL receives a \$180,000 grant from Prudential to create the Parents Academy for School Reform, which will develop parenting skills in Camden City



1997

The Rutgers/LEAP Initiative applies for a school charter after NJ Governor Christine Whitman signs the New Jersey Charter School Act

LEAP Academy University Charter School is granted a charter by the NJ Dept. of Education and opens its doors with 324 students (K-5)

The CSUCL's Centers of Excellence begin providing health & human services to the LEAP Academy school community

1998



The 1st Annual Rutgers/LEAP Gala raises over \$125,000 for the Rutgers University Alfredo Santiago Endowed Scholarship to help graduates of LEAP Academy to attend Rutgers

2000



A \$200,000 donation from TD Bank helps create the Alfredo Santiago LEAP Academy Foundation Scholarship for alumni attending colleges outside Rutgers

2002

1999

CSUCL receives \$1.08M grant from the GEAR-UP Pre-College Program

CSUCL receives \$330K grant from William Penn Foundation for the Parents Academy

The South Jersey Regional Leadership Institute is formed to train corporate, non-profit, and public leaders in South Jersey

The Rutgers University Alfredo Santiago Endowed Scholarship is created to help graduates of LEAP Academy to attend Rutgers

LEAP Academy opens its new elementary school building



2001

The Rutgers/LEAP Early Childhood Initiative is created to provide full-day preschool education for 45 children in Camden City (now 90 students)



2004

CSUCL receives \$693K grant from William Penn Foundation for the Rutgers/LEAP Early Childhood Initiative



2006

The Alfredo Santiago Scholarship receives a \$100,000 donation from Holman Enterprises



2005

LEAP Academy opens its new high school facility and graduates its first senior class



2007

The Center receives a \$2M grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to build the Early Learning Research Academy, which will provide early childhood health and education (ages 0-5)

The Young Educated Scholars Institute (YES) is approved as a supplemental education services provider by the State of NJ

Gloria Bonilla-Santiago is awarded the 2007 Mujer Award by the National Hispana Institute

The first 17 graduates of the MPA Cohort for Aspiring School Leaders complete their MPA degrees at Rutgers and are placed in school leadership jobs in Camden City



2008

The CSUCL and Rutgers-Camden become the first university in New Jersey to partner with Jumpstart, a national early childhood mentoring program for preschoolers

Gloria Bonilla-Santiago is nominated as one of 20 nominees for L'Oreal's 2008 Women of Worth Award



2009

The CSUCL and the AT&T Foundation create the ASPIRE mentoring program to reduce high school dropouts in Camden City

The CSUCL creates the Health Education Literacy Program (HELP), a community partnership to provide basic medical knowledge to immigrant families in South Jersey



2010

The endowment for the Alfredo Santiago Scholarship reaches \$1.25M after the 11th Annual Rutgers/LEAP gala fundraises over \$100,000

Phase one of construction for the Early Learning Research Academy will be completed, creating a 12,000 square-foot state-of-the-art education and research center at Rutgers-Camden

The CSUCL & LEAP Academy receive Rutgers University's Human Dignity Award from the Office of Social Justice

The CSUCL's civic engagement initiatives create service-learning placements for 160 college students

Construction of the Early Learning Research Academy begins (opening Sept. 2011)



2011 & beyond



2011: Phase one of construction for the Early Learning Research Academy will be completed, creating a 12,000 square-foot state-of-the-art education and research center at Rutgers-Camden

2012: Facilities for a new LEAP Academy S.T.E.M. high school will be completed

2012-2015: The Center will continue its emphasis on expanding and replicating its urban reform model, including plans for a new K-8 school in Camden's Cramer Hill community

RWJF-funded Project HELP continues ‘health literacy’ outreach in Camden



The CSUCL’s Health Education Literacy Program (Project HELP) is working with community partners to provide a targeted health education program to immigrant families in Camden City. Project HELP, which is funded through a \$250,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is a dual-language health education project designed to improve the “health literacy” of over 200 immigrant parents in Camden City, and the health outcomes of their children.

The CSUCL and its partners recently concluded their fall training schedule for HELP, which began in September for groups of 15 immigrant parents from Camden City. The weekly host sites, which are all located in Camden City, include LEAP Academy Charter School, St. Anthony of Padua, Broadway Family Center, Hispanic Day Care Center, and El Centro Comunal Borincano Day Care. Training at each site lasts six weeks concluded in December.

The training began by welcoming families to the project and introduced them to personal methods to improve their own health. For the next six weeks, these same participants were educated in ways to effectively communicate with doctors and pay for healthcare, followed by sessions on child health, nutrition, and ways to create a healthy home.

“These valuable skills allow immigrant parents to increase their English literacy and provide their children and families with a healthier lifestyle,” said the CSUCL’s Stephanie Rogers, who supervised the HELP training sessions at each of the sites. A team of bilingual certified parent educators, who each completed the CSUCL’s Certified Parent Educator Institute, delivered the training curriculum.

The project addresses both a local and national need for more health education and awareness. In fact, studies show that

46 percent of American adults lack the functional literacy to navigate the U.S. healthcare system, according to the American Medical Association. That number is even greater among immigrant families, who traditionally face difficulty obtaining healthcare due to cultural and linguistic barriers.

HELP focuses on educating parents; however, its ultimate goal is to improve childhood health in Camden City.

“You can’t have healthy children without healthy parents,” said Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Director of the CSUCL. “A child is totally dependent on his parents to know and understand basic medical conditions and to provide healthy and nutritional habits in the home. This program will not only allow parents to identify common medical problems, it will provide them with the resources to find medical help to treat—and even prevent—their child’s illnesses.”

The RWJF-funded project began a pilot program in March 2010, when 15 parents completed the six-week training session. At the end of the six weeks, the first cohort of parents were equipped with the necessary health knowledge and “HELP kits” (basic first aid and over-the-counter medication) to interact more confidently and effectively with health professionals and begin preventative care in their own homes.

The RWJ Foundation has been one of the largest funders of the CSUCL’s work, providing over \$2.4 million in grants since 1996, primarily for health initiatives related to the Rutgers Health & Family Support Center at LEAP Academy. The Health Center features a family medicine practice operated by Cooper Hospital, which provides primary medical care to children and parents at the school and is also open to residents of the city.

Recently, the foundation hosted part of its annual board meetings at LEAP Academy, one of the HELP partners and training sites. The RWJF’s visit allowed its board members and leadership the opportunity to see the success their funding has made possible at the Center and LEAP Academy. The visit also included a brief tour of the LEAP elementary school building. RWJF members made a stop at the Health Center, but also visited kindergarten and preschool classrooms where they met students and had the chance to speak with some parents and staff.

Meanwhile, Project HELP is funded through 2012 and by its conclusion will have trained 215 immigrant parents from the city. The CSUCL and its partners are currently planning and recruiting participants for their Spring 2011 HELP session, which begins in March. ■

ELRA Building from page 5

“ELRA will provide a system to engage children in essential learning from birth to erase that deficit as we track their academic progress throughout their K to 12 education and on through college.”

Of course, ELRA is more than just a learning center—it’s a research center, too. Part of the building’s design creates space for four observation rooms that will allow researchers and experts from Rutgers (and outside universities) to document and publish groundbreaking studies in early childhood development. The areas provide the necessary access for researchers, but also are sensitive to the work of teachers and children.

“I’m excited about the observation areas. We want visitors to be able to observe the children freely without interrupting,” said Emily, who added that the rooms would help her work observing teachers and instruction much the same. ELRA teacher Carrie O’Connor anticipates that bringing in outside observers and researchers will create more learning “on both sides of the glass.” “I think we can learn from others just as they can learn from us, and that can only be beneficial.”

Despite the increased attention on them, ELRA faculty say they welcome observations of their teaching. “I think our best teaching comes out when eyes are on us,” Carrie said. “I’ll be interested to see what research comes from it.” Maritza Lopez agreed. “If something is working, it’s good to share with others,” she said. “We need to reach more than just 122 kids in Camden—we need all children to have an equal opportunity.”

Though ELRA will work directly with 122 children each year, the research produced in its observation areas has the potential to influence hundreds of early childhood educators and policymakers

and thousands of children. ELRA’s staff are aware of the Academy’s potential to become a national model for early childhood development and say the program has a lot to offer. Maritza, a former kindergarten teacher, said there are stark differences in school readiness for children who attended preschool and those who didn’t. Children with a pre-k background “definitely come in with more knowledge of their letters and numbers and are more disciplined,” she said, noting that non-preschool children were sometimes more easily frustrated which sometimes led to behavioral problems in class.



Carrie, meanwhile, said not all states prioritize preschool education like New Jersey. “I think we give a lot of lip service to how important preschool is, but most people still think it’s just daycare. It’s not. ELRA can serve as a model to show others how important ‘zero-to-five’ education really is,” she said, singling out the dual-language program in particular. “I’d like to see the national opinion on bilingualism shift, and I think ELRA can influence that opinion. It’s important because we’re a much more diverse community than we used to be.”

With Phase One construction underway and ready for July, the CSUCL is fundraising for Phase Two, an 8,000ft² addition that will add space for the remaining four preschool classrooms and allow all students in the program to be under one roof. To finance the needed \$2 million dollars the CSUCL has organized a series of strategic

community events to raise awareness for the project. Until Phase Two is financed and completed, four of the six preschool classes will remain at their temporary space at LEAP; but staff say that won’t dampen their students’ mood when the building finally opens. “Students are already really psyched about it. I think they will be excited and proud because they know this building is for them,” said Emily.

The preschoolers have kept close watch over the progress, making weekly visits to the construction site last fall where they met and talked to workers. Carrie’s class made a photo book of the site’s progress and still read its bilingual captions almost daily. During one early visit to the demolition site, one of Carrie’s students said, incredulously, “This is a lot of work.” “It was great for them to have the opportunity to see the construction and be able to reflect on the process,” Carrie said. “I think that was important for them to see that doing something well and making something beautiful takes a lot of hard work.”

Likewise, educating students has taken much the same work during the last decade and the ELRA program’s resilience and success as “a school without a building” is proof of its effectiveness. “ELRA shows that children can learn at an early age,” said Maritza. “The sooner you start teaching them, the more they will love to learn, and if we can make it easy for them to love learning they will carry that with them forever.”

The first step begins this fall, when Ceyanie, Kevin, Jada, and the first group of preschoolers look up at their new building and see the iron-cast letters E-L-R-A donning the facade. “It will be nice to have a home of our own,” said Emily. “This is *our* building.”

My School. Mi Escuela. ■

Center places another 100 students in service-learning initiatives

An important component of the CSUCL for the last 20 years has been its focus on creating service-learning opportunities for college students at Rutgers–Camden and other local schools. Each year the Center has created placements for an average of 90 to 100 students, with the vast majority coming from Rutgers. Each semester the CSUCL has increased its number of service-learning placements and continues to employ the largest number of student interns on the Rutgers–Camden campus.

Once again this semester, the Center has helped create 100 service-learning placements for Rutgers students and others. These college students are currently placed in professional settings at the Center and at LEAP Academy University Charter School, which allows them to blend the academic work they learn in the classroom with firsthand in-the-field experience.

The placements include the CSUCL’s Health & Family Support Centers, where students are assisting with character building programs for high school students, the Early Learning Research Academy preschool program, where students are working to build literacy for three- and four-year olds, and several other programs.

Rutgers student Marie Sandona, a first-year graduate student in the Master’s of Public Administration program, is placed in the CSUCL’s Center for College Access, where she introduces students at LEAP Elementary school to important career skills. “It’s been really helpful to see a successful school with innovative practices,” said Marie, who plans on a future career in public policy. “It’s given me great examples of successful policies and programs that I think should be expanded elsewhere.”

Meanwhile, Rutgers junior Bashawn Moore is in his third year of work with the CSUCL’s Jumpstart initiative, which mentors preschoolers and builds their literacy skills in preparation for kindergarten. “I’m definitely gaining experience for teaching. Working with these kids has helped me understand human growth and how children interact with each other,” said Bashawn, who wants to become a high school teacher and has not ruled out returning for a fourth year with Jumpstart in 2011-2012.

Classroom experience is not the only benefit for students like Maria and Bashawn. Many students are earning academic credit towards their degrees through two Urban Studies courses supervised by the CSUCL’s Associate Director Wanda Garcia this semester. Meanwhile, the majority of students are also earning money to pay for their education, be it work-study, fellowship stipends, tuition assistance, or other financial compensation.

This combination of professional experience, academic credit, and financial assistance, not to mention the overall contribution to the Camden City community, is the cornerstone of the CSUCL’s civic engagement agenda and the reason why the Center continues to be the most successful work placement center on the Rutgers–Camden campus. ■

STEM BUILDING from page 5

2010 marked the inaugural year for the S.T.E.M. program at LEAP, which welcomed its first cohort of 60 ninth grade students last September. Since then, students have engaged in advanced coursework and project-based learning in S.T.E.M. subjects, in addition to their core requirements like English, History, and Foreign Languages. Meanwhile, the program’s focus on applied learning recently brought all 60 students to Rowan University’s physics laboratory in Glassboro, NJ to experience the college environment of science.

Dr. Santiago said the program is helping more urban youth attend the colleges that help produce some of the nation’s leading minds in math, science, and engineering. “We need to encourage more minority access to S.T.E.M. college majors and careers,” she added, citing a 2010 survey by the Bayer Corporation that concluded “significant numbers of women and underrepresented minorities are missing from the U.S. STEM workforce today because they were not identified, encouraged or nurtured to pursue STEM studies early on.”

Despite the program’s infancy, its success has already attracted future applicants. Over 100 Camden City parents attended a S.T.E.M. open house in December, when staff answered questions and offered critical information on how they can prepare their students to apply for the 2011-2012 program.

LEAP’s S.T.E.M. program is part of a national movement to advance education in math and sciences in order to compete internationally in 21st Century STEM careers. U.S. teens ranked 25th out of 34 nations on a 2009 international math assessment and ranked 17th in science on the same test, according to a report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development, which administered the test.

“America is quickly falling behind the rest of the world in science and technology education and we want to put a stop to that, beginning right here in Camden City,” said Dr. Santiago. ■

Rutgers and LEAP continue *dual-enrollment partnership*

The CSUCL believes that preparing LEAP students for college means preparing them for the rigor of college coursework. That is the reason why, for the fifth consecutive semester, Rutgers–Camden and LEAP Academy Charter School have partnered to offer dual-credit opportunities to LEAP students through the Rutgers University High School Scholars Program.

“LEAP students have performed very well and in many cases are outperforming their college peers,” said Scott Owens, senior admissions officer at Rutgers–Camden. “This is just another example of how strong LEAP Academy’s efforts are in preparing their students for college and beyond.”

Studies consistently show that students who are introduced to college-level courses during high school are much more successful with the transition to college and have lower college dropout rates and higher GPAs. During the Fall 2010 semester, eight LEAP Academy students completed college classes at Rutgers in one of two courses: Introduction to Human Reproduction and Development, and Introduction to Psychology.

“College access for students in urban areas is extremely important to helping them develop academic and social skills that will give them a distinct advantage in college,” said Owens. “These classes enable them to not only gain that college classroom experience, but to see that, yes, they can achieve and perform at the collegiate level.”

Ashley Satterfield was one of the LEAP students taking classes at Rutgers and will be able to transfer these credits to her future college in September. “It was challenging, but I like a challenge; it was a lot of fun,” said Ashley, a National Honor Society member and LEAP’s current valedictorian. Ashley narrowly missed earning an ‘A’ in the human reproduction course, but said her ‘B+’ is an important first step towards her future medical degree.



LEAP’s High School Scholars (from left): Abigael Ortolaza, Gregoria Lora, Geehem Smith, Richelle Reddick, Omar Samaniego, Ashley Satterfield, and Shaquille Sanchez

The introductory course was held in a lecture hall with over 100 other students—quite a contrast to the traditional 16-20 in LEAP classrooms. “I enjoyed the independence and added responsibility. No one’s going to do it for you,” said Ashley. Her classmate, LEAP senior Richelle Reddick, echoed her sentiments. “The course gave me a good perspective on what to expect next year. I’ve always had good study skills but they’ve definitely improved.” Richelle, LEAP’s current salutatorian, earned a ‘B’ in the course and was grateful for the experience. “It was a lot of students, but being around other college students sets a good example and shows us this is what we need to do to go to college.”

At the heart of the partnership lies the necessity for high schools to create opportunities for exceptional students to experience college academics. At LEAP, the partnership has several benefits, which include positioning the program as an academic incentive for juniors and seniors who wish to participate, creating a tangible experience to reinforce LEAP’s “Pre-K to college” goal, and acclimating students to the independent, fast-paced nature of college coursework. These benefits are critical for a college preparatory school like LEAP Academy, which has successfully helped 100 percent of its students gain admission to college for the last six years.

Khary Golden, senior administrator for the CSUCL’s Center for College Access, which supervises the dual-enrollment

students, said the High School Scholars program offers LEAP Academy students so much more than just a chance to gain early college credit. “Having the practical experience of registering for classes, keeping up with course readings, attending lectures, and sitting side by side with college students provides our students the opportunity to not only create a vision for their long-term academic and professional success, but actually see this vision through to fruition,” Golden said.

Abigael Ortolaza, a senior at LEAP who is interested in studying biology, nursing and pre-medicine, said participating in the the program was extremely beneficial. “I’m really interested in what I’m learning and I’m happy they are giving us a chance to take dual-enrollment classes,” she said. “College takes a lot more effort than high school, but that pushes us and keeps us motivated.”

Building on the success the program has had for students like Abigael, Ashley and Richelle, the CSUCL has continued to work with the university to expand the dual-enrollment program for Spring 2011. Beginning this month, they and six other LEAP seniors enrolled in Rutgers undergraduate courses such as Introduction to Psychology.

“I am fully confident that this program has made and will continue to make a tremendous impact on the students who have been able to take advantage of this opportunity,” said Khary Golden. ■

Center to co-sponsor “Caribbean Cityscapes” conference in New Brunswick

The CSUCL is working with the Department of Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies (LHCS) at Rutgers–New Brunswick and other university departments to co-sponsor a spring conference called “Caribbean Cityscapes” on February 17th and 18th.

The conference is a two-day event that is inviting international experts and scholars to Rutgers to speak about the social and economic connections between cities in the Caribbean and U.S. and how these urban landscapes create a distinct experience for those living within them.

On Friday, February 17, the LHCS and the Center for Latino Arts and Culture will host an evening reception in New Brunswick that will showcase cultural art (public art, photography, film, music, spoken word) representing or inspired by cities in the Caribbean. Artists and performers include: Celestino Martínez, Brayán Collazo, JR, Llorens Torres, and musical group “Krudas.”

The conference will continue the following morning at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, where three discussion panels and a roundtable will discuss

city planning, security, and preservation in cities like San Juan, Puerto Rico; Havana, Cuba; Kingston, Jamaica; Port-au-Prince, Haiti; and more. Panelists and speakers include: Mario Coyula-Cowley, Patricia Rodríguez, Brooke Wooldridge, Victor Cummings, and many more.

The conference is a collaborative effort between the CSUCL, the Department of Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies, SAS Office of the Executive Dean, SAS Office of the Dean of International Programs, SAS Office of the Dean of Humanities, Office of Undergraduate Education, Multicultural Engagement, E.J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Center for Latino Arts and Culture, Center for Latin American Studies, and Center for Race and Ethnicity.

For more information on the conference, contact the Department of Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies at (732) 445-3820. You can register for the event online at: <http://cfsucl.camden.rutgers.edu/CityScape/CaribbeanCityscapes.html>

CSUCL/LEAP efforts in urban education reform gain national attention

The work of the Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership has been attracting significant attention during recent months, with the Center’s urban reform model being highlighted in news and at conferences around the country.

SEPTEMBER | A national report on public education from the Center for American Progress highlighted the work of the CSUCL’s Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago and LEAP Academy Charter School. The report cites LEAP’s “community school” model and its extended school day and school year as effective ways to address public education in the nation’s lowest-performing schools.

OCTOBER | Dr. Santiago and LEAP Academy’s chief officer Dr. Deanna Burney were featured panelists at the Coalition of Urban & Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) conference at Fresno State University. Their panel focused on the partnership between Rutgers–Camden’s CSUCL and LEAP Academy to create educational opportunities for students in Camden City, and discussed ways to replicate the Rutgers/LEAP “Birth-to-16” model.

NOVEMBER | Dr. Santiago traveled to Miami, Florida to present at the National Hispana Leadership Institute’s 2010 Executive Leadership Training Conference and Mujer Awards. Dr. Santiago, who received a National Mujer Award from the NHLI in 2007, discussed the work of the CSUCL and presented a leadership module on effective organizational communication.

DECEMBER | The American School Board Journal featured Dr. Santiago and LEAP Academy Charter School on the cover of its December 2010 issue. The journal discusses the charter school movement and catalogs the success of the Rutgers/LEAP urban reform model in Camden City.

JANUARY | The New Jersey Network (NJN) visited LEAP Academy to interview Dr. Santiago on charter schools and LEAP’s “pay-for-performance” incentive structure.

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