AT&T grant funds CSUCL’s High School Prep Program to support 8-10 graders

The CSUCL secured a $400,000 four-year grant from the AT&T Foundation to fund the High School Preparation Program, an effort to strengthen academic achievement among 8th-10th grade students at LEAP Academy. The program improves academic outcomes by targeting students who are behind in mathematics and language arts, providing professional development for teachers, and restructuring the curriculum.

The grant is part of AT&T’s Aspire Initiative, which recently donated $1.4 million over four years to schools in New Brunswick, Princeton, Cumberland County, and Camden to assist their high school retention efforts. President of AT&T New Jersey, J. Michael Schweder, said that the grants will benefit both students and his company alike. “Investing in the educational success of our youth is one of the most important things we can do here in New Jersey. This initiative helps us to prepare our future workforce.” Schweder said.

The grant was presented during a special ceremony at LEAP Academy on February 25th, when the Rutgers/LEAP community of teachers, students, parents, staff, Board members and friends were joined by local and state legislators and AT&T leaders at the event.

National studies have consistently shown that between the 8th and 10th grades, students are most prone to falling behind in their studies or dropping out of school. These trends are often a result of a combination of social and academic factors ranging from emotional and behavioral issues to learning gaps.
Why university engagement matters to students and community
Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Ph.D., Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor, Department of Public Policy & Administration, Rutgers-Camden

The recent Inaugural ceremonies have caused me to reflect on the fact that, for the first time in a generation, our society needs us to do more for the common good of all citizens. What better place to instill this sense of civic engagement than in a university? For as long as I have been in academia, I have worked within this great university, in large part, to prepare students for active citizenship and to produce knowledge that serves the needs of our society.

At a time when many have argued that colleges and universities have strayed from their broad civic mission—insead focusing on the narrow expectations and demands associated with departmental and professional associations—it is important in this dawning age of collective responsibility that faculty members and their students renew their focus on direct engagement with local communities. Otherwise, these institutions risk losing one of the cornerstones of their central identity and purpose—their service missions (Bok, 2003; Boyer 1994: Check way, 2001; Newmann, 2000).

In recognition of this important function, a primary activity of the Rutgers Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership is to convene faculty and students from different academic departments and disciplines to engage in service learning opportunities. And perhaps the most visible evidence of our University’s investment with the local community is the one that led to the founding of LEAP Academy. From the beginning, I view LEAP as more than just an opportunity for the University to dramatically improve the educational outcomes of children and youth in Camden City—important as this is. LEAP also serves as a hub where undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and community members might engage in teaching, learning, research, and community outreach and engagement—what I call the “scholarship of engagement.”

In previous issues of the Center Bulletin, I have often written about how LEAP is improving the lives of hundreds of children and families every year. In this issue, however, I want to also draw attention to how LEAP affords the greater University community with the space, place, and context for connecting the discourse of the classroom with real people, issues, and situations. In the 2008-09 Academic Year alone, over one hundred graduate and undergraduate students are engaged in some form of service learning at LEAP, whether through a course, a work-study experience, or as a volunteer. These opportunities are made possible in large part through the efforts of programs like JumpStart, our Rutgers/LEAP Pre-College Office, the Family Support Center and the Early Childhood Program.

Every day Rutgers students can be seen engaged in authentic work with children and adults that is directly tied to their coursework in childhood studies, teacher preparation, urban studies, and psychology—just to name a few. The reciprocal relationships that are formed through these exchanges provide students with more than a “living laboratory” for applied learning—it provides them with an opportunity to contribute to the education, health, and well-being of the larger community as well. LEAP gives these students more than a place for them to earn college credit; indeed, students are being exposed to the significant problems and pressing issues of schooling and society, including: creating genuine learning opportunities for children and adults; encouraging the development of political and social capital; developing and implementing new approaches to solving problems; and cultivating an awareness of the civic, social, and cultural perspectives of others. These experiences are priceless in that they are often the turning point in people’s career paths and moral compass.

Engagement as a service learning opportunity has become the new public scholarship that is producing civic minded graduates who are well prepared to take up the challenges of our society and succeed in their professions. In our near future, I predict that our University students will be even more aware and better prepared because we insisted in providing them with an excellent service learning experience that helped them improve in their problem solving and critical thinking skills, taught them how to work with others, be effective communicators and have instilled in them a genuine passion and commitment to serve.

CSUCL partners with Camden Board of Education to strengthen school leadership
In Camden and across the country, schools leaders are facing tremendous challenges in leading 21st century schools. The role of the school leader is no longer to simply oversee the delivery of student instruction and serve as a building manager. Their role is more about leading student learning, setting an all-embracing vision for its constituents, and effectively maneuvering through the complex process of aligning issues of compliance with standards for excellence. Portin, Schneider, DeArmond and Gundlach (2003), in their report on a national study of the principalship state that “In the great scheme of things, schools may be relatively small organizations, but their leadership challenges are far from small, or simple.”

“The Schools Leaders Academy provides the tools and environment for principals to transform their role as a school leader.” —Dr. Santiago

In urban cities like Camden, the complexity of public education is magnified by the ills of poverty, disenfranchisement, and neglect. The role of schools in such communities is critical to their survival. Consequently, school leaders need to bring a set of skills that are going to help them problem-solve in creative ways, while maintaining high morale and a clear commitment to what is important—the achievement of students. They must think out-of-the-box while maintaining a sense of order and structure in a system that is heavily regulated.

“The expectations for principals have changed dramatically in the last ten years, but while the demands have changed, the leadership has not. Effective principals in schools today need to do more and must be prepared to play a crucial role in improving teaching and learning and act as ‘leaders for student learning,’” said Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, CSUCL Director and Chairperson for the LEAP Academy Charter School Board of Trustees.

CSUCL partners with Camden Board of Education to strengthen school leadership

Rutgers MPA—Education Leadership concentration accredited by TEAC
Rutgers-Camden’s Department of Public Policy & Administration’s Education Policy and Leadership Concentration was accredited by the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC).

TEAC, created in 1997, is one of the country’s preeminent organizations in accrediting undergraduate and graduate college degree programs. However, TEAC has traditionally reserved accreditation for school leadership programs housed under schools of education rather than public administration programs, a fact that makes this all the more significant, said Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago.

“The program includes options that lead to eligibility for school administrator, principal, and supervisor endorsements in the State of New Jersey. We are extremely happy about this accomplishment and look forward to working with school districts, state government agencies, and educational institutions in the region in building capacity for their schools,” Dr. Santiago said.

The Master’s of Public Administration (MPA) Education Policy and Leadership concentration was created by the Rutgers DPPA in 2003 in cooperation with CSUCL’s Dr. Santiago in order to educate and train a cohort of aspiring school leaders from Camden City. The program prepares students for roles in educational settings as administrators or policy specialists.

Dr. Robyne Turner, Department Chair of Public Policy & Administration at Rutgers, said that there are currently 29 students enrolled in the Education Leadership track in the Master’s of Public Administration (MPA) Education Policy and Leadership Concentration. “The TEAC accreditation significantly adds to the value of the Rutgers—Camden MPA. It certifies that we are providing a rigorous program of study for educators who are seeking professional advancement by obtaining the MPA—Educational Policy and Leadership graduate degree,” Dr. Turner said.
Pre-K students learn new forms of artistic expression

Early Childhood Program partners with Rutgers Center of the Arts to give preschoolers an Art Start

Family Support Center targets community health needs with new initiatives

Through a partnership with the Rutgers–Camden Center of the Arts, the CSUCL’s Early Childhood Initiative is bringing art and theater to the preschool children of Camden City. The Center of the Arts’ Art Start program places local artists in Rutgers/LEAP Academy preschool classrooms in order to expand their learning.

“Art Start uses the arts to enhance early literacy in Camden. It’s a really unique experience. It’s great for kids to have the chance to work with artists,” said Noreen Scott Garrity, Deputy Director for Outreach and Curator of Education & Community Arts for the Rutgers Center of the Arts.

According to a study from the Arts Education Partnership, arts instruction can benefit students’ literacy, math and writing skills, motivation to learn, and social behavior, with even more significant effects for children of low-income families and those with reading difficulties in early grades. Art Start provides these unique arts education and creative activities by placing real artists in pre-K classrooms to lead lessons and expose students to new forms of expression.

“The kids love it. They get to do something fun and are not aware they are extending their learning at the same time,” said Christina Trzeciak, a Pre-K teacher in the Early Childhood program. “We’re bridging literacy with art.”

The Rutgers Center of the Arts coordinates with Christina and Early Childhood program teachers to arrange 6-8 artist visits per year. Artists from varying disciplines like dance, 3-D art, and music lead class activities while assisting students and teachers. “The objective for artists is twofold. One, to work with students; and two, to model and help teachers learn new art forms, which they will then able to teach themselves,” Garrity said.

Christina said she never considered herself an “arty” person and admitted that the program had opened her up to new art forms, like the time she was an artist for her class in paper-making. “[Art Start] has helped me think about things from a different perspective and learn how to incorporate art into our lessons.”

“Our goal is to incorporate entertainment with literacy to reinforce children’s emerging literacy skills.” – Noreen Scott Garrity

As a special part of the program, the Center of the Arts invites preschoolers to live theater performances 2-3 times per year at Rutgers-Camden’s Gordon Theater. All 90 preschool children and teachers attend the shows; the most recent was the “The Velveteen Rabbit” in January. “They loved it,” Christina said of her students, who always get front row seating thanks to Art Start.

Garrity explained that each show had a literature theme and was intended to enhance what children were learning in the classroom. “Our goal is to incorporate entertainment with literacy to reinforce children’s emerging literacy skills,” she said. The preschoolers will attend two more performances in March and June and have been invited to the Center of the Arts’ annual Summer Story program as well.

However, like many arts education programs in times of economic and budget concerns, Art Start faces an uncertain future. The program has been funded through a New Jersey State Council on the Arts grant, which is now in its third and final year. Unless the program receives new funding, it runs the risk of being eliminated entirely. “Without Art Start our children would lose valuable exposure to art and music media that strengthen their language and vocabulary, self-confidence, and awareness of other cultures and world languages,” said Rutgers Early Childhood program administrator Barbara Alley.

“There is a correlation between physical, mental, and behavioral health and academics; and these connections have to be made,” said Family Support Center Administrator Norma Agnon. “If we see the connections then we can understand and identify them, and help be a part of the solution.”

Schools themselves must provide the appropriate support services to prepare students, and the CSUCL, through its Family Support Center of Excellence, continues to develop health education and behavioral/mental health service initiatives designed to help students at LEAP Academy step into the classroom prepared to succeed. The Center also has programs designed for parents. “The goal is to build self-esteem and self-awareness,” said Stephanie Dauphin, a graduate intern from Rutgers-Camden who developed the program as part of her social work field practice placement.

As in previous years, LEAP 7th and 8th grade girls, meanwhile, are receiving character education as part of the FSC’s new Dare to Be Rare program. Weekly one-hour sessions allow the small groups of students to discuss relevant issues in their lives and also give them a clear understanding toward family members, and the community in a positive way. “The goal is to build self-esteem and self-awareness,” said Stephanie Dauphin, a graduate intern from Rutgers-Camden who developed the program as part of her social work field practice placement.

LEAP’s Senior Pre College Office

Pre College Office continues initiative to Higher Education

Once again, the CSUCL’s Office of Pre College Programs at LEAP Academy is leading the way for Camden City youth to realize their dreams of attending college. Since 2005, the Pre College Office has made it possible for four graduating classes and 222 Camden City youth from LEAP Academy Charter School to gain college acceptance.

This year, 13 LEAP Academy seniors have already received acceptance letters from top regional schools and will be attending college in the fall, with the remaining Class of 2009 expecting letters soon.

In an urban district like Camden City, where, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 54% of adults over age 25 have a bachelor’s or graduate/professional degree, the need to improve higher education opportunities and success for Camden youth is critical. The Pre College Office targets this problem by building on the existing school curriculum with college-oriented programming and guidance beginning in kindergarten and steadily increasing through 12th grade.

For the 2008-09 year, the Office created several new learning experiences to enhance students’ awareness and preparation for college. An SAT Preparation class was added using Collegeboard.com’s on-line SAT service. November’s LEAP College Fair introduced 300 students to 36 colleges and universities from across the country. Seventh graders to seniors met with representatives from schools like Rutgers, TCNJ, Duke, and Stanford.

The Pre College Office is also reaching out to help parents navigate the financial aid process. The Office hosted a Parent Night on Financial Aid in January, which 60 LEAP parents attended. A presentation by the Rutgers-Camden Director of Financial Aid and learned about options for their students.
CSUCL Creates Opportunities for Service-Learning for Academic Dept. at Rutgers-Camden

Ernest Boyer once said that “scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems.” This definition guides most of the work of the Center for Urban and Community Leadership. A significant element for strengthening this kind of scholarship has been the ongoing partnerships with various academic departments at Rutgers-Camden in order to engage students and faculty in service-learning opportunities that enrich their overall academic experience while bringing them closer to the community.

The programmatic focus of the CSUCL provides for opportunities to engage students in real-practice settings that prepare them for the world they will enter upon graduation, while also providing opportunities for bringing engagement into the curriculum. The CSUCL’s work on K-12 education, partnerships with various academic departments, and children and families is providing fertile ground for students to engage in practice, field placements, and internships as part of their degree requirements.

Courses such as the Urban Practicum and Psychology of Reading were developed with a strong practical/service focus that aligns theory with practice and in doing so provides for students to experience real-world issues. The results are amazing for both the student, who will go on to practice new skills and become more aware of issues, and for the community partners and people they serve.

With over 100 Rutgers undergraduate and graduate students currently participating in CSUCL-based initiatives, the Center is contributing to Rutgers-Camden’s efforts in preparing the next generation of professionals. Rutgers-Camden’s Department of Public Policy & Administration, Childhood Studies, Psychology, Social Work, Urban Studies, and the Teacher Preparation Program are benefiting from the service-learning opportunities created by the CSUCL.

Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Director of the CSUCL and Distinguished Service Professor concludes that, “Our university is built on the concepts of teaching, research and service. This has meant that its realm is one of generating and disseminating knowledge, much of which may be of immediate practical utility. The efforts of community building and service have great ability to effect positive change in our campus and in our society. Collaborating with departments who are engaged in this type of work makes learning rely on the praxis of thought and action and simultaneously produces better students and creates better communities.”

“The CSUCL is an invaluable resource for the Urban Studies program.” –Dr. Russell Harrison Department of Urban Studies

PUBLIC POLICY & ADMINISTRATION

The Center’s relationship with the Division of Public Policy & Administration dates back to 2003, when they developed the Educational Policy and Leadership Concentration, which has an effort to specifically train a cohort of 16 aspiring school leaders from Camden City. These educators completed their Master’s of Public Administration (MPA) in 2005 and have since placed in school leadership positions throughout the district. Recently, a second cohort of 16 educators was created in 2008 and is now completing its first year of study. The curriculum for this program, which recently received accreditation by the Teaching Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), includes an internship experience where students work in real-school settings.

Dr. Robyne Turner, Department Chair for Public Policy & Administration said, “Having a diverse student body is a hallmark of our MPA program and the Camden tenet: it’s an important and insightful perspective to our classes. In turn, we believe we are providing Camden teachers with a unique degree program that will not only serve their personal goals of professional advancement but also provide them with a public policy education that will be useful to them as teachers in an urban district.”

Education Fellowships have also been secured through the CSUCL’s partnerships with the LEAP Academy to support students in the Educational Policy and Leadership Concentration by providing tuition and stipend support to talented students who are engaged in various projects at LEAP while pursuing their degrees. Khary Golden is part of the program and also works as a graduate fellow at the Pre College Office at LEAP Academy, where he helps LEAP high school students complete their college application requirements. “My courses have taught me how to effectively communicate with students and administrators,” he said. “I’ve learned to think outside the box. I’m able to use a lot of concepts to get students to internalize in the college process and understand that it’s important.”

Likewise, he said that his placement at LEAP Academy has given him real life experience and has made him a better student and said he frequently encounters the topics that are discussed in his courses. “Just being in a school every day is helping me with my classes. I have a case studies every day,” he said.

TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM

In addition to creating a qualified pool of school administrators, an ongoing partnership with the Rutgers’ Teacher Preparation Program supports the preparation of the next generation of school educators through student teaching and practicum placements at LEAP Academy. Under the guidance of veteran faculty at LEAP, Rutgers student Monique Jenkins is completing her student practicum and student teaching requirements.

Monique, a senior in the Teacher Prep Program, was placed at LEAP Academy by the CSUCL where she teaches Spanish classes five days a week to 9th and 10th graders. She said the experience is teaching her a lot about what it’s like to be an urban school teacher. “I learned a lot on my first day. I learned to have patience, make class fun, and let students learn to think for themselves. I like it a lot,” she said.

In the classroom, Monique leads class lessons, creates and grades tests, and motivates students to learn. “At first the students were resistant, but I’ve slowly been able to win them over,” she said. Monique said that she specifically requested her student teaching placement be at LEAP. “I’ve heard a lot about LEAP Academy at Rutgers. I like the excitement in this building. If you can survive in an urban area, you can teach anywhere,” she said.

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK AND NURSING

Meanwhile, the CSUCL’s relationship with Rutgers-Camden’s School of Social Work has been able to create internships for graduate students completing their required field practice placements. Nursing students are also completing their nursing rotations under the Rutgers/LEAP Family Support Center. Margarita David, who serves as the High School Nurse at LEAP, supervises these students and allows them to engage in tasks that prepare them for their roles as nurses.

Stephanie Dauphin, a graduate Social Work student, has been placed at the Rutgers/LEAP Family Support Center to work with students in the Center’s behavioral health component where she has developed a character education program for 7th and 8th grade girls. Stephanie has worked as an undergraduate intern at LEAP Academy since 2004 and insisted her graduate field placement be at LEAP in order to give back to the school. “I wanted to work one-on-one with students and be able to help them and apply what I’m learning in the field,” she said.

Her class work at Rutgers and field placement with the Rutgers/LEAP Family Support Center have allowed her to take field experiences back to the classroom and in doing so she has been able to balance theory and practice. “They work hand-in-hand. It definitely helps when you ‘hit a wall’ to be able to find new methods and to apply them,” she said.

CHILDHOOD STUDIES, MATHEMATICS, PSYCHOLOGY, & URBAN STUDIES

The Center has also been instrumental in creating internship opportunities for students in other departments such as the CSUCL. The Center has co-developed an academic course with Urban Studies for 40 undergraduate students involved in the CSUCL’s Rutgers Jumpstart program.

Dr. Russell Harrison, a professor in the Rutgers-Camden Urban Studies department said, “The CSUCL is an invaluable resource for the Urban Studies program. Collaboration with the CSUCL has helped multiply the impact and recognition of the Urban Studies program, plus provided valuable experiential learning opportunities for undergraduates. Urban Studies is working with the CSUCL to provide dozens of internships for undergraduates, a program that will be greatly expanded in Fall 2009.”

In addition, an agreement with the Rutgers-Camden Mathematics Department has allowed students at LEAP Academy to receive tutoring from Rutgers professors. Celebrity basketball and faculty member in the Mathematics department, is working with LEAP high school students on Saturday mornings for eight weeks, teaching concepts from algebra, trigonometry, and more. In addition, she is involved with professional development for teachers.

“I learned to have patience, make class fun, and let students learn to think for themselves.” –Monique Jenkins

Dr. Deanna Burney, the Superintendent for LEAP Academy, said the collaboration between academic departments and the CSUCL allows LEAP to be utilized as a lab for learning and greatly benefits the students, families, and teachers. “Our partnership with Rutgers and the CSUCL quadruples the opportunities and advancement that we at LEAP can offer students. Through their efforts, our students are offered multiple opportunities for internships and advanced degrees and introduced to political leaders and corporate officers who can make a difference in their lives and open doors to possibilities that our parents only dreamed of.” Dr. Burney said.

The sweeping success and positive impacts of these partnerships are creating demand on the Rutgers-Camden campus for even more new programs, internships and service-learning internships and the Center plans to build on its success.
Mayor Faison kicks off Black History Month at LEAP Elementary

C Camden City Mayor Gwendolyn Faison was at LEAP Academy Elementary School on January 30th to commence LEAP’s celebration of Black History Month. Mayor Faison answered questions and read the story “Amazing Grace” to a group of 50 second grade children who in the next four weeks will learn about the contributions of African-Americans to the United States, including Dr. Martin Luther King, President Barack Obama, and Mayor Faison herself.

In anticipation of the mayor’s visit, LEAP students researched and created a biographical poster of her, complete with her birthday, education background, and a photo. The mayor urged the children to do well in school and to always do the right thing.

She also brought the class a gift, a copy of “The Little Engine That Could,” which she said was her own favorite book in grade school. Thanking her for visiting, LEAP students gave the Mayor a framed piece of student artwork, which the Mayor insisted they all come to see and visit her office at Camden City Hall.

Good Teachers: Made or Born?
by Dr. Deanna Burney, Superintendent of LEAP Academy

Gladwell argues in the New Yorker article that “nothing matters more than finding people with the potential to be great teachers. But there’s a hitch: no one knows what a person with the potential to be a great teacher looks like.” If the selection of teachers was modeled the way people are selected in other professions, Gladwell suggests, “You’d probably have to try four candidates to find one good teacher.” Gladwell’s article prompted several thoughtful letters in response. One person wrote, “Teaching is a delicate balance of subject-matter expertise, patience, firmness, discretion, and a genuine love of young people.” Another commented, “Teachers require the same kind of cultivation and focused attention as their charges. It may not be in the budget, but good teachers are made, not born.”

The article and responses highlight several important realities in the education profession. Here at LEAP, our teachers, who have been used to teaching behind closed doors, are learning to share their practices. They now invite other teachers into their classrooms to shed light on their success and to measure the outcome. It has become a combination of teachers who are “born great” and teachers who are taking up the tools of the trade to be “made great.”

First, teachers need plenty of opportunities to demonstrate effective practices, and to see it happen themselves. Unlike other professions, teachers seldom have formal opportunities to learn from their colleagues after they complete their student teaching. Teaching is largely a private activity conducted behind closed doors. The learning needs of a growing and diverse population of students requires that teachers continually hone their practice. Training teachers to new roles can only be achieved through frequent and ongoing collaboration.

Second, unlike other professions, there is no central knowledge base in education where teachers can access information about effective strategies for working with their blend of students. It is therefore critical that organized groups of teachers—whether at the grade, subject, school, or district level—have regular opportunities to share what they know about learners and the learning process, and for that information to be readily retrievable via print, audio, and video by anyone who needs it.

Third, sustained teacher engagement in the aforementioned activities requires capable school and district administrators who, like their teachers, view themselves as lifelong learners. They must be able to create and sustain the time, space, and place for teachers to identify student learning problems, develop strategies, and implement them, and to address and rectify whether those strategies had a positive impact on student learning. Finally, administrators must help ensure that the knowledge accumulated by the current crop of teachers is handed down to new teachers directly, through mechanisms like coaching and mentoring programs, and indirectly, through the transmission of a strong normative culture that values adult learning as much as it does student learning.

In response to these growing challenges and with the goal of propelling all students to new levels of excellence, LEAP created the School Leadership Academy, which was modeled the way people are selected in other professions. The school leaders selected to participate will cultivate and strengthen school leadership in Camden, the Camden Board of Education and the Rutgers CSUCL are launching the School Leaders Academy. The School Leaders Academy will prepare a cohort of existing school principals and assistant principals to meet the challenges of leading urban schools.

Beginning in February, 17 Camden City principals and 15 assistant principals will engage in a two-year intensive professional development process that will target their own growth and development as school leaders.

Over a two-year period, these principals and assistant principals will receive engage in a development process that will provide them with a number of tools, such as feedback, case studies, and simulations that will expose them to real school scenarios, and opportunities for reflection.

Delivered by a team that includes practitioners and individuals who bring national level expertise in school leadership, the curriculum is divided into six modules and uses a combination of training seminars, project-based learning and writing, assigned readings, and individual coaching and feedback. Dr. Santiago (Ph.D., CUNY) and Dr. Deanna Burney (Ed.D., Harvard University) will serve as lead faculty for this program.

In addition to their own development, selected principals will also help prepare the next generation of school leaders by becoming mentors for the Aspiring School Leaders Graduate Cohort. Last spring, the CSUCL worked with the Camden Board of Education and the Rutgers Department of Public Policy and Administration to select 17 Camden City teachers for enrollment in the Rutgers-Camden Master’s of Public Administration (MPA) Educational Policy and Leadership Concentration. One requirement for the MPA cohort is a full-year internship under the supervision of a mentor principal, who will coach and offer practical, hands-on experience to the aspiring principal.

With the success of the MPA Educational Policy and Leadership cohort and now the Principals’ CSUCL, the Principals is continuing its efforts to align university academic resources with the needs of the local neighboring communities. Dr. Santiago also emphasized that the School Leaders Academy builds on ongoing collaborations between Rutgers-Camden and Camden City that include other efforts such as the Early Childhood Development Initiative and the Teacher Development and Performance Institute.

“The job of a principal or school leader is daunting and requires the highest level of commitment. With this in mind, the Principals Academy provides sitting principals and aspiring principals with the tools and environment to reflect on their practices, rethink their approaches, and transform their role as a school leader,” Dr. Santiago said.
Annual Rutgers/LEAP Gala raises money for LEAP alumni

Over 200 members of the Rutgers/LEAP community gathered on December 5th, 2008 to raise funds for LEAP Academy graduates. The 9th Annual Rutgers/LEAP Alfredo Santiago Endowed Scholarship Fundraising Gala brought students, parents, and staff from LEAP and Rutgers University together with local business partners for a night of dinner, dancing, and entertainment on behalf of LEAP alumni. The event was held once again at The Mansion in Voorhees, New Jersey.

In all, the Gala raised over $93,000 for the Alfredo Santiago scholarship and continued to make it possible for dozens of current and future LEAP alumni to pursue a college education at Rutgers. A substantial amount of the money raised was generated by the Gala’s silent auction, which featured dozens of items donated by local organizations and original artworks from the students of LEAP Academy. One student artwork in particular, a 4’x5’ ceramic mosaic, sold for $1000.

The 2008 Gala theme, “From Cooper Street to College: LEAP Graduates Leading a Path for All to Follow”, was made all the more appropriate by the attendance of several past scholarship recipients from the Class of 2005, many of who will be graduating from college this spring.

These LEAP alumni joined current LEAP students in recognizing this year’s Gala Honoree, Mr. Dennis Bone, President of Verizon New Jersey. Mr. Bone was awarded the 2009 LEAP Leadership Award for his continued support of LEAP of Verizon New Jersey. Mr. Bone was awarded the 2009 Gala Honoree, Mr. Dennis Bone, President of Verizon New Jersey. Mr. Bone was awarded the 2009 LEAP Leadership Award for his continued support of LEAP of Verizon New Jersey.

The program’s Mathematics Navigator, Literacy Navigator, and Writing Aviator sections help 8th graders repair gaps and master concepts and skills that are critical for success. Meanwhile, the “Ramp-Up Math” or “Ramp-Up Literacy” sections, expand 9th and 10th graders’ standard classroom time to 90 minutes.

The program will be administered through the CSUCL’s Centers of Excellence and will focus on five elements: Academic Interventions, Teacher Development, Emotional and Developmental Support, Character and Leadership Development, and Family Support.

“By focusing on these elements, the High School Preparation Program will allow for early identification of students in need of support and be able to achieve increased graduation and on-time graduation rates, on-time grade promotion, and improved grades and attendance, while decreasing behavioral and disciplinary problems,” Dr. Santiago said.

Through the program, LEAP students also receive counseling support from the Rutgers/LEAP Family Support Center for any behavioral issues that may be affecting their performance.

Dr. Santiago said the program will have a resounding impact. “The High School Preparation Program will encourage student learning and offer critical preemptive assistance for students falling behind in math and literacy. Through this program, we will accelerate learning, raise test scores, break any cycles of failure, and establish patterns of achievement for our students, thereby increasing the opportunities for Camden youth to pursue higher education and professional careers,” Dr. Santiago said.

In response, the High School Preparation Program will deliver needed instructional resources as well as social and emotional support to LEAP Students.

The High School Preparation Program adopts the America’s Choice curriculum’s “Ramp-Up” and “Navigator” programs, which augment LEAP Academy’s existing math and language arts curriculum with focused instruction and supplemental learning support.

Rutgers Jumpstart corps members took a day off from preschool to volunteer their skills and enthusiasm to help clean schools in Camden City as part of Jumpstart’s Martin Luther King Community Service Day. On January 19 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., a team of 17 Rutgers students visited LEAP Academy Charter School and Urban Promise Charter School in Camden where they performed facility improvements and maintenance work.

Armed with scrub brushes and brooms, Jumpstart members scoured walls, mopped floors, and emptied trash at Urban Promise Charter School, and Jumpstart volunteer coordinator Morilli Azeez, a freshman at Rutgers–Camden, said it was great to help out. “The experience was unforgettable. Not only did we get to bond with our fellow Jumpstarters, we got to spread the word to Urban Promise and will be working with them again later this year,” she said.

At LEAP, Jumpstart members worked in classrooms from 3rd-5th grade, helping teachers with their Martin Luther King Day lessons and activities. Unlike most schools, LEAP remains in session for the MLK holiday and students in all grades help clean the school or volunteer for outside community service projects. Rutgers Jumpstart site manager Tatiana Poladko-Alloyne said, “At Jumpstart we strive to serve the community in a variety of ways on a daily basis. However, our Martin Luther King Day of Service allowed us to expand our services to the greater Camden City community.” Morilli added, “It’s always good to give back, to help out the less fortunate. It’s a sign that you’re more aware of what’s going on around you.”

Since it began in October, Jumpstart has provided one-on-one literacy training to preschool children in the Rutgers EarlyChildhood Literacy program at LEAP Academy. The program is part of a national organization that takes college students and places them in urban preschool classrooms in order to narrow the school readiness gap for children from low-income backgrounds.

In addition to its work inside classrooms this year, Jumpstart has hosted regular events intended to educate and entertain children, like October’s Fall Festival or December’s Winter Celebration. Next up is a special “Jumpstart For a Day” event in April, which will feature indoor and outdoor activities like art, dancing, sports, and many more.

LEAP Academy senior taking undergraduate course at Rutgers–Camden

Under the supervision of the CSUCL’s Pre College Office, LEAP Academy senior Robert Ransom has enrolled in an undergraduate history course at Rutgers–Camden this spring.

Robert, a National Honor Society member, is one of 14 LEAP seniors participating in LEAP’s “College Now” program, which allows exemplary students the opportunity to take college courses at Rutgers–Camden and Camden County College for credit. Robert is the only LEAP senior taking courses at Rutgers though.

His 200-level course meets twice a week for 80 minutes and covers U.S. History after the Civil War up to the modern 20th Century.

“It’s fun and enlightening. I’m meeting a lot of new people and being in college classrooms is preparing me. It’s one of the greatest experiences I’ve had so far at LEAP,” Robert said.

Meanwhile, Robert was already accepted to six colleges but is awaiting word from three more, including his top choice, Brown University, where he hopes to triple-major in Political Science, Philosophy, and Pre-Law, then pursue a law degree.
Early Learning Research Academy planning continues

The CSUCL is continuing development plans to construct the Rutgers Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA), a state-of-the-art education and research center that will provide early childhood education to Camden children from birth through age five.

The Center is currently in the process of selecting an architect for the project. The three-story building will be constructed on a lot at the corner of Cooper Street and 5th Street in Camden, placing it directly in the heart of the Rutgers University district.

Once completed, ELRA will continue the work begun by the Rutgers Early Childhood Literacy Initiative, which provides full-day preschool education and services for 90 three- and four-year-olds from Camden City.

The preschool program is an effort to strengthen early childhood education and family literacy in the city and is currently housed at LEAP Academy through the efforts of the Rutgers Centers of Excellence and funded through the Camden Board of Education’s Abbott Early Childhood Initiative.

The preschool program focuses on literacy, language, math, and social and emotional development, and creates learning experiences for students to build these skills. For instance, a recent activity in pre-K teacher Anita LaCroce’s classroom gave children a lesson on where food comes from, namely milk. Students took turns milking a demonstration cow (construction paper with rubber glove as an udder) followed by a lesson on how to make butter.

These types of pre-K activities incorporate many objectives into a lesson that apply learning and make learning fun, said Rutgers Early Childhood program administrator Barbara Alley. Topics like nutrition, language, and vocabulary were covered, even science like states of matter and experiments (turning liquid milk into solid butter).

“Because these activities set a positive and fun emotional tone, the children are more interested, pay closer attention, and retain the information for future lessons,” Alley said. “The lesson could have sparked a child’s interest in agriculture, nutrition, or the veterinary sciences; our teachers are laying the foundation for future teachers to build upon.”

The Rutgers Early Learning Research Academy will continue these lessons and activities for preschool students, but will also expand them for younger children (infants to age three), who will be a focus of the Academy’s research on the benefits of early education.

Meet the New Staff

Margarita David joined the CSUCL as the new Family Support Center Teen Clinic Coordinator and LEAP High School Nurse. Her duties include providing school nursing services and working with health staff to operate the Teen Clinic, which provides teen-oriented education and care for high school students. Ms. David earned her BS in Nursing from Drexel University and a BA in Business Management and Administration from City College of New York.

The mission of the CSUCL at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Camden Campus, is to foster understanding and acceptance of providing new organizational environments and strategies; and to build bridges and partnership among urban communities, academia, and organizations for dealing with race relations and urban development. Through social action research, leadership development, training, and community partnerships, the Center provides a forum for the analysis, discussions, and assessment of policy issues, while developing new knowledge regarding strategic approaches to meet the changing needs of urban communities.