



RUTGERS

Community Leadership Center
Camden



Annual Report 2021

Thriving in the New Normal



Table of Contents

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

Director’s Message.....	3
Global Partnerships: Paraguay	4
Caribbean Partnerships: Puerto Rico	10
Global Partnerships: Cuba	12
Returning to the Classroom: LEAP Academy Charter School.....	14
Early College Program Academic Spotlight: Research on Unlocking College Access	17
Alumni Achievements.....	19
Service and Experimental Learning: Programs with a Purpose	22
Contributions to Academia At Large	24
Alfredo Santiago Scholarship Fund.....	25
The 21st Annual Fundraising Gala: A Time to Rejoice, Recover, and Redefine	26
Donor Support.....	27



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A Message from the Director

Thriving in the new normal

Dear Friends, Colleagues, Partners, Funders, and Constituents,

We are pleased to share our 2020-2021 Annual Report that highlights the work spearheaded by the CLC locally as well as globally. This year has continued to present profound challenges on multiple fronts. An unprecedented global pandemic and the rise of calls for social justice and equity in the United States have shined a new light on the importance of the work we are doing to promote equity and transparency both globally and locally.

As we continue to work to build effective leaders, we are also working to transform our own institutions to become better stewards and promoters of a society that is ethical, equitable, and just. This pandemic brings to light the imperative for institutions of higher learning, the government, private sector, and civil society to redefine their roles and patterns of engagement to preserve the “common good” as a fundamental priority for nations. Universities are at the epicenter of this pandemic as institutions of higher education are called to capitalize on their missions as engines for innovation, research, capacity-building, and solution-generation.

This pandemic has been a catalyst for us to explore our collective needs and exchange perspectives about the most effective strategies for stabilizing communities and allocating resources to the most vulnerable populations in our countries, while also strengthening the principles of ethics, equity, and transparency as drivers of large-scale transformation. In the face of adversity, the CLC seized the opportunity to try new approaches.

Adjusting to the new normal, the CLC has learned new methods to deliver on our mission statement and took bold steps to deliver programming in innovative ways. We learned to re-imagine, re-energize, and re-think our work quickly. Through this pandemic we learned to reduce class size; adjust class schedules to do intermittent closings, when necessary, conduct online celebrations to keep students and families engaged; communicate effectively with families, teachers, and students and redesign bus schedules to distribute food to children and families; extend online and in person teaching and learning into longer dates, weekends options, evening, and summer specials for those students who are struggling.

The pandemic resulted in wide-spread learning loss across the county, stunting our nation’s youth specifically in language arts and mathematics. To address the loss in educational gains, we implemented rigorous tutoring programs, we trained teachers on how to develop personalized learning paths based on assessment data, we provided student academic and socio-emotional support, and we led personalized communication with the instructional team regarding daily teaching and learning strategies. Students and teachers have returned to the classroom, embraced the additional assistance and resources and are on their way to thriving in the new normal.

Our team maintains a ***whatever it takes mentality*** which drives them to go above and beyond to ensure that we are serving our community in the best ways that we can. We celebrate the staff that has gone out of their way to do the right thing. The new skills we have built will continue to propel our work forward.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago
Board of Governors
Distinguished Service Professor
Center Director



“As we continue to work to build effective leaders, we are also working to transform our own institutions to become better stewards and promoters of a society that is ethical, equitable, and just.”

Global Partnerships: PARAGUAY



Universidad Nacional de Asunción (UNA) is a public university located in San Lorenzo, Central Paraguay. It was founded in 1889 making it the oldest university in the country. It is also considered to be very traditional in its practice while at the same time expanding to explore a wide range of subjects of study and vocational pursuits. In addition to its main campus in San Lorenzo, UNA has facilities throughout the country. Notable graduates include Eusebia Ayala, the President of Paraguay.

Taking Our Mission to the Next Level: Implementation

The Community Leadership Center (CLC) at Rutgers University—Camden established the Higher Education Center for Ethics, Equality, and Transparency (HECEET) in Paraguay to strengthen rule of law while helping a culture of lawfulness flourish. Despite all the obstacles in travel and communications that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought before us, our team has been able to make great strides toward our programmatic goals.



The Journey Began with USAID Support

In year one of this endeavor the primary focus was on developing trust and building a thriving collaboration between the Rutgers University—Camden CLC and the Universidad Nacional de Asuncion (UNA). The HECEET led a comprehensive training program and capacity building initiative for Paraguay targeting public, government, and legislative officials; young professionals; students; K-12 school leaders; and higher education leadership including the UNA staff and faculty and the Chancellor's Office. The goal was, and continues to be, the strengthening of Paraguay's ability to build and sustain public structures that are founded on transparency, ethics, and equity in higher education as well as in government institutions.



The UNA continues to serve as the epicenter of the promotion of a culture of lawfulness, values, and practices based on ethics, equality, and transparency. It is, in effect, a journey toward self-reliance. To that end, the cultivation of ethics, equality, and transparency (EET) Ambassadors began with the EET Certification Leadership Program. This program serves as the cornerstone of the work done in Paraguay. Participants are selected through a highly competitive process from various multidisciplinary and diverse sectors. Selected participants engage in a two-module, four-day experience led by qualified professionals from Rutgers University, UNA, and the International Center for Creative Leadership.



The curriculum of the EET Certification Leadership Program includes a deep dive in value identification and clarification, positive self-awareness, and developing an understanding of ethical perspectives put into practice as well as strengthening the moral behavior of those in positions of leadership.



Although the pandemic forced an adjustment to the platform by which these programs were shared, the information was still able to successfully reach its end user. The virtual class structure was adapted quickly and efficiently, and participants still benefited from all that our training team had to give.

The Journey Continues

During this past year, the focus has shifted from planning to putting our plans into action. The pandemic continues to color how interaction occurs, but the program is thriving. HECEET was incorporated into the UNA structure, which was a year-one top priority brought to fruition.

Within the first half of 2021, 392 participants engaged in eight different EET trainings and institutes whose subsequent Zone of Practice projects impacted over 11,864 individuals. Additionally, round tables, partnerships and research projects spurred the exchange of ideas, and the online ethics compliance tool for UNA faculty and staff was developed.

Each of these steps were invaluable in building a sturdy platform from which continued progress and tangible change within the UNA and the targeted sectors can thrive. This coordinated effort continues to be aimed at improving Paraguay's culture of lawfulness by increasing ethics. Public trust and respect for law is encouraged to be shared by all members of society.



Ambassador Program

A pivotal part of this initiative is the continued cultivation of EET Ambassadors through the EET Certification Leadership Program. These Ambassadors serve as frontline standard bearers in our initiative to foster ethics, equality, and transparency. Seventy-three people participated in the HECEET-sponsored Ambassador Certification trainings. Of these 58% were female and 42% were male. There was strong participation from the youth sector as 11% of participants were between 10 to 29 years of age.

The 73 EET Ambassadors across two cohorts came from four specific sectors of the community at large: UNA and other higher education institutions; government and legislature; elementary education; and private sector workers including non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The training these individuals has prepared them to go into their communities to cultivate awareness and adaptation of a culture of lawfulness, ethics, equity, and transparency throughout Paraguay. In the end we hope our ambassadors will pave the way for a Paraguay free from corruption with a greater social responsibility and a commitment to equity and inclusivity.

ZONE OF PRACTICE PROJECTS FROM COHORT 1 AMBASSADORS:

- Together Let's Eliminate Everyday Corruption! (8,527 people impacted)
- Higher Education for Political Leadership and Senior Management Positions in Universities and Public Administration (75 people impacted)
- Young People and Women: Existing Gaps in Access to Elective Positions (200 people impacted)
- Overáva Leaders: For a Fair and Equitable Early Childhood (464 people impacted)
- Strengthening the Culture Toward Transparent Management at the UNA (270 people impacted)

ZONE OF PRACTICE PROJECT FROM COHORT 2 AMBASSADORS

- Promoting a "Culture of Lawfulness" at the UNA Based on Ethics, Equality, and Transparency Using Strategic Planning at Its Core (846 people impacted)—**Winning Project**
- CORRUPTION @ 911: From Awareness to Denunciation (550 people impacted)—**Winning Project**
- EET Culture at INAES [Instituto Nacional De Asociativismo Y Economía Social] (414 people impacted)
- Youth Tesapyso (112 people impacted)
- UNA Transparent (406 people impacted)



Institutes, Roundtables, & Conferences

The significant number of youth participants in the Ambassador program encouraged the development of a youth oriented EET Institute. This Institute was well-received with 82 participants, many of whom have begun implementing EET projects in their local communities. And this is the goal—to teach and inspire others to send out positive change to the country at large.

Another Institute that helped to forward our mission took place shortly after the youth oriented EET Institute. This Institute focused on the private sector. The private sector EET Institute garnered 179 participants and homed in on the concerns and challenges of people in the private sector and civil society.

These institutes along with the various trainings, forums, and certification programs offered through the HECEET have touched all sectors in the country of Paraguay and have successfully strengthened the EET values throughout.

Additionally, roundtables were held in partnership with SENAC (Secretaría Nacional Anticorrupción) in areas of youth engagement, higher education, and women's equality. These roundtables ensured that the rule of law and culture of law were topics that were embedded in the discussions in people's homes, workplaces, and communities.

Along with the institutes and roundtables, the HCEET hosted its second annual conference on August 4, 2021 entitled *Integrity and Anti-Corruption as Global Imperatives in Times of Pandemic*, which was attended by 490 participants.

EET Compliance Tool

The active momentum in putting our mission into practice is epitomized in the EET Compliance Tool, which began its pilot program in the fall of 2021. The focus has been to train most of the campus community through this software interface. The HECEET has partnered with Skillsoft, a seasoned affiliate on compliance training with Rutgers University, to develop and execute a program that is able to meet the needs of the UNA staff. The staff continues to forge an understanding of EET and how it can become a permanent fixture in their country's social fabric.

There will initially be 7,500 trainees in the EET Compliance Tool. This group will consist of members of the UNA community, staff, and faculty. The course development spanned June and July of 2021 with the program roll-out beginning in October 2021. This roll-out includes three courses in total:

- Global Code of Conduct (International)
- Global Ethics
- Academic Code of Conduct

SPOTLIGHT: WINNING ZONE PROJECT

This project took as its launching point the UNA's approval of a new university model established in November 2020. The main objective of the project was to help put ethics, equity, and transparency into practice using strategic planning as its guiding force.

The project developed 15 workshops that promoted the application of EET values. The workshops presented participants with concepts as well as methods to achieve applicability. As a result, 100% of the faculties and the Institute of Health Sciences Research were committed to the inclusion of EET values in their strategic plans. Workshop participants were invited to serve as promoting agents to help implement EET values in their faculties in an effort to achieve an overall culture of lawfulness at the UNA.

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THIS PROJECT WERE:

- 5% Authorities
- 5% Graduates
- 6% Officials
- 54% Teachers
- 30% Students

The project has had a lasting impact. Nine out of ten participants have committed themselves to promoting the values they garnered from this learning experience.

Zone of Practice Projects

This training and education would be meaningless if it were not put into practice in the world at large. To that end, the EET's Zone of Practice is a vital component to the EET Certification Program and EET Ambassador Cohorts. Through the Zone of Practice projects EET Ambassadors are required to develop and execute a culture of lawfulness project. This offers participants the opportunity to take what they have learned and sow the seeds of HCEET among the people.

Collaborative Process

The HECEET strives to develop a collaborative process that underlies its research, innovations, and practice components. To that end the program continues to work closely with Rutgers University to promote applied knowledge in EET. The driving force is to foster research directives that will impact policies and practices both within UNA and beyond. HECEET has championed an innovative cross-discipline approach that will aide in the examination of complex societal challenges. This work in research and innovation will then be put into practice to direct real change toward a culture of lawfulness.

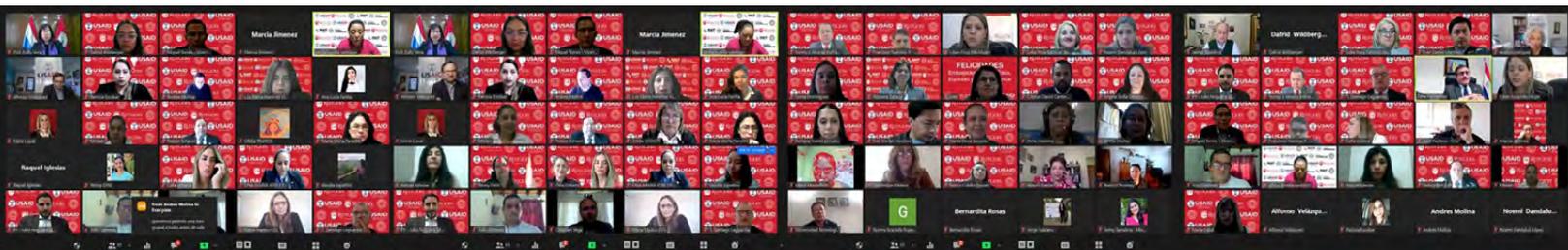
The research projects that are currently slated for publication aim at sharing methods that will support EET policies which will positively impact Paraguayan communities. They will also contribute to academia at large allowing others to participate in continual knowledge gathering and the application of varying perspectives intended to strengthen the EET cause. In the end this work is about securing partnerships between various sectors to create a collaborative force for a culture of lawfulness.

Stakeholder and Partnerships Across Sectors

The work of this second year has helped HECEET achieve greater recognition as a true resource for positive change. Thanks to the efforts of James Spalding, the president of the HECEET Advisory Committee in tandem with the leadership and staff of the HECEET and Rutgers partnerships with organizations and entities, our initiatives have expanded and are bearing fruit in both the private and public sector.

For example, the Minister of the Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Comercial (SENAC), René Fernández, and the Ecole Nationale d'Ingénieurs de Tunis (ENIT) collaborated in the development of the framework of the National Integrity Plan and executed a memorandum of understanding, which was signed on April 15, 2021. This effort is aimed at collaboratively developing and facilitating public and private round-table events centered on the continuing discussion of a culture of lawfulness as well as anti-corruption practices.

An EET Institute that focused on the private sectors of Paraguay was held on April 22,





2021, with 179 participants in attendance. The objective of this Institute was to raise awareness and invite participants to commit to strengthening EET.

Looking to the Future

Year 3 of the HECEET looks to be as productive as the years that have preceded it. Cohort 3 of the EET Leadership Certification Program is looking to train a total of 49 new people and will continue to focus on the Train-the-Trainer Model. The group will also benefit from the implementation of the EET Compliance Tool at the UNA. More research will be disseminated through publications as projects continue to be developed and put into practice. We will be working closely with Rutgers and UNA to expand on the academic collaboration and sponsorships of a research conference, a roundtable with the indigenous community, and special meetings with government officials and partners to expand the zone of projects, the delivery of the compliance tool, and solidify the work of the UNA.

Coming Together To Achieve Our Goals: A Historic Visit

With all the digital and virtual interfaces that have been part of the new normal, it was truly inspiring to have an actual visit and in-person intellectual exchange with a delegation of academic leaders from Universidad Nacional de Asunción (UNA). In many ways these visits to Paraguay and Rutgers epitomize the partnership these institutions have been working to forge.

Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, a Rutgers Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor and Director of the Community Leadership Center at Rutgers—Camden developed the partnership with UNA while she was a Fulbright Specialist in Paraguay in 2017-2018. Although there are many cultural differences between the two academic institutions, Bonilla-Santiago saw a like-mindedness when it came to a focus on developing a university of the future.

Bonilla-Santiago established the overarching goals of the partnership to include:

- Fostering research
- Transforming the UNA into a modern university
- Training ambassadors in Paraguay to support ethics, equity, and transparency in the country
- Building NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and reaching out to Paraguay's indigenous and vulnerable populations

The Higher Education Center for Ethics, Equity, and Transparency (HCEET) is a foundational development of the partnership. This three-year initiative spearheaded by the Rutgers University—Camden Community Leadership Center (CLC) has been

funded by a \$3 million grant awarded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The delegation from Paraguay was led by Zully Vera de Molinas, rectora of UNA. A rector is the American equivalent of the president of the university. Vera de Molinas' appointment in 2019 made her the first woman to lead the university in its storied 132-year history. Her insights were inspiring. As recounted in an article by Sam Starnes, Vera de Molinas' shared that the significance of the partnership expands beyond the walls of the university and is actively working for positive change in the community, "Our university is a university that is dedicated to make changes, not only for our students, but to our local and national community."

During the delegation's visit to Rutgers University—Camden campus, they spent four days meeting with deans and faculty. They then visited the Rutgers—New Brunswick campus to continue the exchange. The delegation from Paraguay included three deans and two executive team members.

This visit to New Jersey was precluded by a trip to Paraguay by Bonilla-Santiago. She was joined by Nancy Pontes, associate professor of nursing and Maria Solesio Torregrosa, an assistant professor of biology. Both visits were a great success and very productive. As quoted by Starnes, "These two weeks of collaboration, both here and in Paraguay, have been exceptional," Bonilla-Santiago said. "This partnership will benefit UNA and the nation of Paraguay, but will also enrich Rutgers University faculty, staff, and students through the connections we are making with our friends in Paraguay."

Caribbean Partnerships: PUERTO RICO



The LEAP (Leadership, Education, and Partnership) Academy University School continues to expand its global reach with the opening of the STEAM + E (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics plus Entrepreneurship) Puerto Rico LEAP School Resiliency Center in the Fall of 2021. This evolving academic and social endeavor is the product of our ongoing partnerships with the LEAP Social Enterprise. The goal of the center is to foster social change and create a positive economic impact in Puerto Rico. The center aims to achieve this by creating, for the first time, an integrated, feasible pipeline school to promote education, a pathway to college, industry-driven workforce development, and resiliency in low- and medium-income communities. This program is poised to provide holistic results and solutions to the entire region.

LEAP STEAM + E Puerto Rico LEAP School Resiliency Center is the result of a joint effort and partnerships between:

- Non-profit organizations (ie, LEAP Social Enterprise, Inc., Centro para Puerto Rico), academia (ie, University of Puerto Rico)
- The public sector (ie, Puerto Rico Public and Private Partnership Authority [P3], Central Recovery and Reconstruction Office of Puerto Rico [Core3], Puerto Rico Industrial Development Corporation [PRIDCO], Puerto Rico Department of Education [DOE])
- The private sector (ie, Holtec International, Advance Solar Products/ EOS Battery Manufacturer)

The project is consistent with the government of Puerto Rico’s Plan para Desarrollo Integrado (known simply as “Plan”), which highlights education as a critical component of a comprehensive economic development strategy. It fosters key initiatives such as bilingual and educational methods based on STEAM + E, the creation of jobs, and the promotion of Puerto Rico’s socio-economic development and competitiveness. The Plan further states that the establishment of public-private partnerships will promote the transfer of knowledge to the workforce and will collaborate with local higher education institutions in the evaluation, oversight, and execution of projects.

The project will also promote the efforts undertaken by the Innovation Clusters initiative to promote a workforce development strategy that will create a pipeline for employment in coordination with the private sector found within or nearby the location of the school.



Global Partnerships: CUBA



Despite the constraints placed on travel due to the pandemic, the Community Leadership Center (CLC) has strived to foster and maintain its ties with global partners. Cuba remains to be one of its most significant intellectual exchange partners.

Rutgers University has maintained a collaborative partnership with the University of Habana Cuba for over 18 years. During that time over 300 scholars and artists have embarked on interactive research and scholarship focusing on five overarching thematic areas:

- Community Development and Entrepreneurship
- STEM Fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, including Computational Science and Environmental Science)
- Population Health
- Arts and Humanities
- Law, Economy, and Constitutional Issues

This partnership has allowed Rutgers University and the University of Habana to engage in a fluid academic exchange between faculty and students at both universities. This collaborative relationship comes to life each year at an annual Rutgers University and University of Habana Collaboration Conference that brings Rutgers faculty together with their Cuban counterparts to discuss topics ranging from community development and social policy to STEM and biomaterial sciences, to the arts, and much more.

Although plans for an in-person conference were placed on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CLC hosted a virtual forum in 2020 that attracted 200 participants on the “Science Collaboration as an Opportunity for the US and Cuba: A Case for Addressing the COVID-19 Pandemic” to address the potential advantages of a collaboration between Cuba and the United States in the field of science to advance our understanding of various areas of study.



This research collaboration continues over a decade of work in cultivating academic opportunities for partnerships grounded on academic and scholarly interests. Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Rutgers Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor, has been leading these partnership efforts, and in the process, was able to create opportunities for Rutgers students and faculty to visit Cuba and collaborate with selected faculty on study abroad projects; study trips; visits to local development projects; and collaboration with scholarly presentations in international conferences.

In 2020, a special edition was published of the *Journal of the University of Havana: Vol. 8, Special Issue, 2020, Social Development Studies: Cuba and Latin American Journal*. The publication included numerous years of joint work between Rutgers and University of Havana faculty include:

- **Sustaining an Educational Pipeline in Urban America: A Case Study of Community Development Through University Partnerships** by Gloria Bonilla Santiago
- **Addressing Health Equity and Patient Safety** through Innovative Holistic Spanish Education for Nurses and Health Professionals by Ana M. Laguna and Nancy M. H. Pontes
- **Community Intervention in Context: Gender-Based Violence, Inequality, and Intervention in the United States and Cuba** by Victoria Chase and Sara Plummer
- **Redevelopment in Old Havana: The Master Plan and Achieving Equitable Resilience** by Maureen M. Donaghy and Tara Carr-Lemke
- **Mental Health in Cuba and the United States: Shared Learning** by Shiela J. Linz and Alexis Lorenzo-Ruiz

Although we have been unable to organize a recent in-person exchange due to the pandemic, we have high hopes for the future. This academic exchange and shared learning partnership will continue to inform and benefit both academic institutions involved.





RETURNING TO THE CLASSROOM:

Leap Academy Charter School

When you have a strong foundation, you can weather the storm when it hits. This past year has been one of the most challenging that the LEAP Academy Charter School has ever encountered. The pandemic has wreaked havoc on all sectors of society, but education's struggles were unique among them all.

Mission Statement

LEAP's mission is to enhance the opportunities for the children and families of Camden, New Jersey through the collaborative design, implementation, and integration of education, health, and human services programs and through community development. This remains the lightning rod guiding the strategic direction of the school, especially in turbulent times.

The LEAP Academy University Charter School has recommitted itself to fulfill its mission and to find a way forward in this new normal. To that end, teachers, staff, and students sought new approaches to solidify educational outreach encouraging innovation and creativity. We kept in mind the fragile nature of the community at large, and we found ways to make our school more inclusive, more resilient, and more just. It was not always easy as learning loss was a reality due to strained and limited classroom interactions. But we didn't shy away from this challenge, we met it head on.

The year brought a landscape charged with racial unrest that we had to lead our students through. The news was filled with stories of injustice and protestors finding their voices. We took these moments of trauma and made them teachable, made them accessible, and gave our students the space to vocalize and address their concerns in constructive ways.

Widening income inequality has made our families and students more vulnerable, and this was all magnified due to the pandemic. In this time of crisis, we had to find new ways to support the families of our community and each other.

LEAP stands for LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION, AND PARTNERSHIP. The LEAP Academy University School is a public charter school that serves families and children in Camden, New Jersey.

Finding a Way

Like so many other schools, LEAP Academy had to find a way to adapt to a new normal. As a result, learning platforms varied between virtual, hybrid, and in-person. Safety was the primary goal and the educational landscape was adjusted as needed.

In-person learning was accomplished through a commitment to safety protocols including the reorganizing of physical spaces in the school with a focus on social distancing, increasing testing for the presence of the COVID-19 virus, encouraging vaccination when appropriate, and always ensuring the use of masks. Despite all of these efforts a disruption in lessons could not be ignored.

Unfinished learning is a concept that many schools have grappled with over the past year and the LEAP Academy is no exception. A student that is facing unfinished learning has disengaged from school and has slipped backwards resulting in a loss of learning gains. Basically, the student has been separated from their normal learning environment and instead of holding steady to the progress they have made, they instead deplete their knowledge base and are unprepared as they move on to the next grade level. The building blocks of knowledge that are necessary in their educational journey are compromised and they are prevented from advancement. This, of course, did not occur in a vacuum. Our students struggled with social and emotional needs resulting from the pandemic. Many faced illness, isolation, loss of family income, and even the traumatic loss of family members. We kept this in mind as we built back our educational foundation and sought to provide our students with a position of strength and support to face the new normal.

We were undeterred and accomplished a great deal in conquering unfinished learning. By facing our challenges head on we remained focused on meeting our top priorities.

Four Top Priorities in Embracing Our New Normal

1. Safely reopen. Establish clear protocols to make sure that we can provide an in-person learning environment that meets the guidelines that have been provided to us. At the same time strengthen virtual learning capabilities so they can be utilized as needed, so as to limit instructional disruptions whenever possible.
2. Reengage students. Provide students with the resources they need to engage with the learning process. Teachers and staff are encouraged to include out-of-the-box activities and programs that can improve motivation and reach students on different levels through different approaches.
3. Support learning. Provide students with more opportunities for learning support including tutoring, summer programming, and extracurricular opportunities that are connected with learning and academic achievement.
4. Recommit and reimagine. Address the changing needs of the student body and utilize support structures such as FabLab, the Health Center, College Access, and Family Support Center. The goal is to maximize learning, foster student engagement, and encourage family assistance.

Goals Guiding the 2020-2021 School Year and Beyond

The Board of Trustees adopted the following goals for the 2020-2021 academic year while working very closely with the school's leadership team and administration. What is significant about these goals is that they were developed in a way to guide the current year while supporting the school's work in developing a charter renewal application that would have an impact on the school's priorities over the next five years. These goals guided all decision-making processes regarding resource and space allocations. The goals are as follows:

- To strengthen the instructional program across grade levels for students cradle-to-college.
- To enhance the academic performance of all students.
- To align the Centers of Excellence programs to the instructional core of LEAP.
- To heighten teaching and learning at all levels of the organization.
- To improve organizational capacity in areas of operations, finance, and technology.

It should also be noted that the following three objectives were a top priority of the 2020-2021 academic year:

- 1) 100% of high school seniors in the LEAP Academy will graduate from the LEAP Academy.
- 2) 100% of LEAP Academy seniors will complete dual college courses.
- 3) 80% of LEAP academy seniors will gain acceptance to a college or university upon their graduation.

LEAP met all three of these objectives—and in some cases surpassed them.

Within the LEAP Academy 2021 graduating class, 100% of the seniors gained admission to a college or university. In addition, the LEAP Class of 2021 amassed \$2.5 million dollars in merit-based scholarships. The academic institutions that extended admission to members of our senior class included, but was not limited to: Carnegie Mellon University, Howard University, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy & Health Science, Penn State University, Rutgers University, St. John's University, St. Joseph's University, Stevens Institute of Technology, and Villanova University.

It should also be noted that our seniors have been very smart about seeking admissions to Early College partnering institutions that will recognize the college credits they have already acquired, thereby maximizing the value of their education with the LEAP Academy.





EARLY COLLEGE PROGRAM

Academic Spotlight: Research On Unlocking College Access

We identified a gap in the literature regarding the study of early college programs. The programs that have been scrutinized by academics over the years had generalized populations. There has yet to be a study of an early college program wholly focused on serving a largely African American and Latino community located in an economically impoverished environment. These gap-identifiers, therefore, sought to provide a comprehensive analysis of the LEAP Academy Early College Program, which serves an African American and Latino community in the impoverished city of Camden, New Jersey.

The white paper that was developed as a result of our research began with a review of the literature on the challenges that have plagued students of color in attaining a college level education. Without this education, the prospects of these students are vastly diminished when compared to students who have successfully achieved a college degree.



College. These partnerships are active and immersive. Rutgers University, for example, offers over 50 courses to LEAP Academy’s high school students ranging from calculus to criminal justice. All students in their senior year participate in courses at these institutions; some LEAP students participate in this dual enrollment as early as their freshman year.

Paving the Way

Early college educational programs were developed to give high school students, who are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education, the opportunity to acclimate to a college environment before attaining enrollment. The immersion of these high school seniors in a college atmosphere has been shown to greatly increase high school graduation rates, college acceptance rates, and college preparedness.

When a student approaches college without the skills needed to navigate the environment, they often end up in remedial courses. These courses carry the burden of college tuition, but often do not contribute to college credits. This can discourage a student from even attempting to pursue a college degree. Preparedness, therefore, is crucial to college success.

An Early College (EC) high school initiative program, like the program established by Bill and Melinda Gates in 2002, sought to create early college high schools, which are now commonly referred to as early college schools (ECs). The purpose of this initiative was to provide students with the skills and abilities they need to successfully navigate college.

It remains unclear in the literature as to whether the success of early college programs can be attributed to the institutions or to the student body. Specifically, if an early college program is

populated with students who are already excelling in their academics and are motivated to attend college, then has their trajectory really been changed because they are part of an early college program?

CLC staff researchers with the assistance of graduate assistants have, therefore, taken it upon themselves to develop an internal assessment of the school to provide an example of a program that selects students at random rather than a program that hand picks the best and the brightest. This team of researchers have engaged in a mixed-methods case study that draws in both quantitative data and qualitative inquiry.

In addition to examining the significance of a randomly drawn pool of students, this study also sought to explore the significance of location in determining outcomes. Specifically, what effect does the proximity to a college campus have on determining outcomes. Does this motivate students more effectively? Does it acclimate them to the college experience more efficiently?

LEAP Academy University Charter School maintains unique partnerships with Rutgers University, Rowan University, and Camden County Community

Infancy to College Pipeline

LEAP Academy University Charter School does not just switch its students to an early college program. Furthermore, the college readiness standards are further developed to eliminate the need for remedial courses. This coupled with the promotion of self-management skills paves the way for college preparedness that leads to success.

The success of the program is undeniable. In the poorest quarters of the country only 30% of students attend college. Even though the pool of students attending the LEAP Academy Early College Program has been drawn from impoverished Camden, New Jersey, 100% of the attendants graduate high school and 100% are accepted into colleges. 41% of college students take remedial courses. 0% of the Leap Academy Early College Program graduates take remedial courses.

As documented at Rutgers University, LEAP students are not only outperforming fellow Hispanic and African American students, but they are also outperforming the average Rutgers undergraduate as well. See Figure 1.

Figure 1
Rutgers Student Grade Point Average (2020)



Academic achievement is very important, but so is mental wellness. A survey sent to LEAP alumni revealed that these students felt comfortable and confident taking college-level coursework as an undergraduate student.

Before and After the Early College Program

To offer some perspective, before the LEAP Academy's Early College Program was put in place, those alumni who attended Rutgers University accrued an average of 123.95 credits while those who had the benefit of the Early College Program earned 149.35 credits on average. Furthermore, after the Early College Program was established, there was a 10% increase in students taking SAT prep courses and a 30% increase in students visiting college campuses for tours.

Another benefit that came after the Early College Program was an improvement

in study skills, communications, writing, public speaking, and research skills. Students also became better versed in financial aid, identifying scholarship opportunities, and general college survival skills.

Resources in Place

The LEAP Academy's Early College Program would not be able to function at its current level of success without the support of strong staff members who have been put in place to support the program's mission. The Early College Director, for example, is a member of the Rutgers staff and serves as an advisor for all LEAP seniors. This position oversees the college application process, scholarship identification and application, and the transition between high school and college. The Early College Director also coordinates academic schedules, keeps students on task, reaches out to parents as needed, and addresses any

challenges. Additional support staff also are in place to make sure all the students' needs are met.

The program furthermore works to help students address the financial burden inherent in higher education. Scholarship opportunities have been developed and, of course, college credits are accrued during high school, which also lessens the cost of higher education.

Overall, the LEAP Academy's Early College Program has established a bevy of best practices that have carved a clear pathway for its students to not only obtain admittance to institutions of higher education, but to thrive there. Colleges that are fortunate to receive one of the LEAP alumni will have secured an undergraduate ready to learn and contribute to the campus community. Other early college programs can benefit from examining the practices and applications of this institute.

Alumni Achievements

Perhaps the most compelling testament to the success of the LEAP Academy are the inspiring stories of its alumni. Our graduates have gone on to do great things and are giving back to the community in big ways.

JOZIAN MOLINA

MPA, LEAP Academy Class of 2010

Jozian "Jozie" Molina is a Camden native who enjoys traveling to different countries, immersing herself in international culture and cuisine, touring art galleries, and composing eye-catching photographs. After graduating high school, she attended Rutgers University-Camden and majored in Childhood Studies. Even as she pursued her own studies, she made time to give back to the community by working as a tutor at LEAP Academy for students in grades 3-8, and as a K-12 substitute teacher.

Upon the completion of her bachelor's degree, she rejoined the

LEAP Academy family as a College Access Program Associate. Her work ethic and dedication to the LEAP mission ultimately elevated her to the position of Assistant to the Principal. This exposure to school leadership sparked an interest in Jozie that resulted in her acceptance into the Rutgers University MPA program with a concentration in Education Leadership. Shortly after graduating with her master's degree in May 2020, Jozie acquired her School Administrator certification and was promoted to Chief Academic Officer at the LEAP Academy. She plans to carve out a life-long career at the institution that helped to shape her successes. "I couldn't see myself doing this work anywhere else but here," Jozie said.

Jozie takes great pride in being part of the mere 4% of Latinas who have completed a master's degree by age 29 and plans to continue carrying that pride when she earns her PhD in years to come. And as she continues to grow and evolve her dedication to give back is as strong as ever, "I just want to be able to help the students here at LEAP Academy the way I was helped," she said. "Whatever you want to do is possible. Nothing is unrealistic."

Continued on next page

MARIAH CASTILLO

LEAP Academy Class of 2010

Mariah Castillo joined LEAP Academy in the fourth grade and continued through graduation as a member of the National Honor Society in 2010. She excelled in a plethora of extracurricular activities while at LEAP. Sports were an area of interest as she participated in basketball, field hockey, tennis, cheerleading, baseball/softball, and dancing. LEAP did not yet offer girls' softball when Mariah was a student, but this did not stop her from wanting to play. She conducted independent research and discovered that she had the right to try out for the boys' baseball team, and ultimately went down in history as the first and only girl to ever play LEAP baseball. She later petitioned to have girls' softball added to the variety of sports offered and became captain of the founding team.

Mariah has dreamed of serving in the military since she was in high school and continues to consider this career path. In her senior year at LEAP, she weighed joining the military against going to college, and was encouraged by her advisors to keep her options open. After being accepted to every college to which she applied, Mariah decided to study nursing at Rutgers University–Camden. In her third year at Rutgers, she had the life-changing opportunity to study abroad and volunteer at a hospital in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Upon passing the NCLEX and becoming a Registered Nurse, Mariah worked at the Intermediate Care Unit at Cooper University Hospital for a year and a half. However, the excitement of studying abroad sparked a love for travel that led her to pursue a career in nursing that requires travel throughout the country. Mariah has since taken assignments in Connecticut, Washington D.C., North Carolina, New Jersey, and Hawaii in cardiac, oncology, and progressive care units. Mariah is currently on crisis assignment in Brick, New Jersey where she is working tirelessly to help combat the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ABBY MORALES

LEAP Academy Class of 2016

While college students across America spent their summer months enjoying their time away from school, Abby Morales spent her summer holiday conducting research at an Ohio Air Force base as a Laboratory Intern, bolstering her already impressive resume. Though she could have easily used that time to take a break from her studies, Abby decided to maintain momentum toward her Spring 2021 graduation from Rutgers University where she earned a BS/MS in Chemistry.

After years of conducting lab experiments as an undergraduate

chemistry major, Abby has become familiar with PPE (personal protective equipment), making her uniquely equipped to deal with continuing her studies during quarantine. In addition to gaining more experience outside of the classroom, Abby used the past few months to continue co-authoring a research paper based on a morphology study she is leading. Her research involves analyzing silk cellulose biofilms infused with reduced graphene oxide based on polymer composition and conductive properties.

Though it may seem like she has a lot on her plate, Abby often reflects on her time at LEAP Academy as a source of motivation, remarking, “my LEAP teachers inspired me to pursue excellence in all my endeavors, and to never pass up the opportunity to learn and grow!” These words of encouragement have served Abby well, as she has represented her LEAP pride as a presenter at various conferences including the ACS National Expo in Orlando, Florida, and a presentation at the APS Mid-Atlantic Meeting in December 2021.

“My LEAP teachers inspired me to pursue excellence in all my endeavors, and to never pass up the opportunity to learn and grow!”

As she moves closer to achieving her academic goals, Abby is inspired by Latina scientists who have broken barriers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), exclaiming, “people like Ellen Ochoa, the first Latina to travel to space, and Sabrina Gonzalez, the young Cubana and ‘world’s next Einstein’ have paved the way for Latinas all over the world to leave our mark in STEM!”

Abby is currently in the process of applying to the Rutgers PhD program in the Computational and Integrative Biology program, and she hopes that her success will encourage future generations of Latina leaders to “stick with STEM!”

BRIAN GRAY

LEAP Academy Class of 2013

Brian Gray graduated from LEAP Academy in 2013 and completed a BFA in Visual Arts with a concentration in Design from the Mason School of the Arts at Rutgers University – New Brunswick. LEAP Academy’s college-centric atmosphere really allowed him to have a seamless transition from high school to college. LEAP was where he discovered his interest in visual arts through the school’s art courses. While at LEAP, he was a part of the student design team that worked on the mural for the STEM

Intermediate School. His experiences working on that project inspired him to pursue design as a career.

For his senior thesis project at Rutgers, he designed special spaces for the homeless to sit throughout cities, addressing common anti-homeless designs in public spaces. Public city benches, for example, are designed for temporary seating but are virtually impossible to lay on, which prevents homeless people from sleeping on them. In addition, various types of metal and concrete spikes are installed in places where the homeless usually seek rest and shelter, like underpasses. He created a poster that unfolds into a full-sized air/water resistant and body heat reflective blanket to accommodate a homeless person's basic needs.

Brian is currently pursuing freelance design work and attributes his success to believing in yourself and your ideas 200%—he feels like that is the secret to life.

MOISES URENA

LEAP Academy Class of 2013

Moises Urena started his journey at LEAP Academy in the 3rd grade where he met friends that he would go on to have for the rest of his life. While attending LEAP he learned very early on what it means to stick together, to persevere, and to strive for greatness. The culture around LEAP is one that is family oriented. Everyone there rallied around Moises to help uncover his talents. They encouraged him to be successful, and to learn as much as he could. No one there ever doubted him or made him feel as if his dreams were unattainable. He had the opportunity to take college level courses at Rutgers University with college students. Being given the chance to be immersed in that environment and given those college level expectations gave him an understanding of what to expect after high school. LEAP prepared him to enter his college career with a mind of his own along with college credits from Rutgers University. Not only did LEAP prepare him for college, but they helped make the process of applying and getting accepted to colleges/universities so much easier. Khary Golden, his counselor at the time, played a big role in making sure he had every tool he needed to smoothly transition into his next level of education.

After graduation from LEAP Academy, Moises happily received an acceptance to Rutgers University in New Brunswick. He had help paying for school through the Alfredo Santiago Scholarship and Rutgers Future Scholars Scholarship, which he was awarded while being at LEAP in the 7th grade. These two scholarships alone took a heavy financial burden off his family, which allowed him to focus more on his studies at Rutgers.

While attending Rutgers he had the chance to join many clubs

Moises' biggest advice for students entering college is to branch out into as many clubs and organizations as you can while still maintaining your grades.

and organizations that helped mold him into a better student and person. Being a part of the social setting on campus as well as thriving in the academic community was something that I learned while at LEAP. They give every student a chance to grow in more ways than just academically. Moises' biggest advice for students entering college is to branch out into as many clubs and organizations as you can while still maintaining your grades.

During his last year of college, he came back to his hometown of Camden to finish his degree at Rutgers University and to help his community. He became very involved in volunteering around the city as well as working with students from 7th grade through 12th grade with the Rutgers Future Scholars program. He graduated in May 2018 with in B.S. in Computer Science and landed a job at ASRC Federal as a Software Engineer. It has been a long journey from 3rd grade at LEAP Academy, but he still goes back to work with the students because it is a place he considers home.

Other Notable Alumni Highlights

- Two members of LEAP's Board of Trustees are LEAP Alumni. Thank you to Jonathan Gonzalez and Omar Samaniego for their continuing contribution to the advancement of our program.
- All College Access Faculty are previous LEAP Academy graduates.

THIS YEAR'S GALA WAS PROUD TO HONOR THE FOLLOWING DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI:

- Mariah Castillo, RN—LEAP Academy Class of 2012, Rutgers School of Nursing Class of 2016
- Julio Atenco-Sanchez—LEAP Academy Class of 2007, Rutgers School of Engineering Class of 2011



This photo was taken in 2017 before the COVID pandemic.

SERVICE AND EXPERIMENTAL LEARNING:

Programs with a Purpose

JumpStart

In 1993 JumpStart AmeriCorps 66 was founded to provide language, literacy, and social-emotional programming for preschool children across the country with the goal that every child enters kindergarten on equal footing and prepared to succeed. Jumpstart's focus is on under-resourced communities to ensure the availability of early learning. The organization accomplishes this by training college students and community volunteers to use JumpStart's curriculum to support these early learners. Since its inception the program has trained more than 58,000 volunteers and has shaped the lives of over 133,000 preschool children nationwide.

The Community Leadership Center (CLC) has forged an on-going partnership with JumpStart AmeriCorps 66. As a result, undergraduate Rutgers students are placed in pre-school classrooms to help them prepare for school. Annually, these undergraduate students provide 300 hours of service throughout the full school year and earn a federal work-study award or academic credit

while gaining valuable teaching experience helping to build young children's literacy and social skills. Additionally at the completion of the program, students earn a \$1500 award to defray their educational costs.

This partnership benefits both collaborators as it helps the children of under-served communities have access to quality early learning resources while simultaneously providing Rutgers undergraduates with real-life experience in teaching while enriching their community.

Young Education Scholars (YES) Institute

Student support and resource availability are both vital components to the success of any academic institution. The CLC has, therefore, partnered with the YES Institute to engage 26 Rutgers students to work as tutors in the LEAP Academy University School. This tutoring program provides assistance in cultivating mathematics and English language skills, as well as specialized tutoring support for our Early College programs in the sciences, history, and business coursework.

Tutors help students understand assignments, explain key concepts of course materials, offer feedback and encouragement, and share appropriate resources. They work in a classroom setting alongside a teacher to deliver immediate support and small group assistance to students who need extra help. The success of the YES Institute is apparent in the progress and performance of participating students. Students who participated in the YES tutoring program in Spring 2021, significantly improved their grades from Fall 2020 compared to students who did not participate in the tutoring. Participating students' grades increased 6.7% points in mathematics and 5.2% points in English language arts. The exhibited gains surpass those made by non-participating students twice as much in English and more than four times as much in mathematics. Programs that are this effective at mitigating learning loss, especially in the areas of mathematics, are crucial during these times.



YES Tutoring Program

Semester 1 to Semester 2 Avg ELA & Math Grades Comparing Students With & Without Tutoring



Semester 1 to Semester 2 Grade Gains



DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS & RESEARCH

Contributions to Academia at Large

Faculty Research

The faculty partnering with the Community Leadership Center in Camden remains committed to participating in the wider academic dialogue on a range of topics. This allows our faculty to remain active and on the cutting edge of new research through our contributions and through our exposure to new perspectives. The following are a few of the academic publications, research projects, dissertations, and fellowships that our faculty has developed in the past few years.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SLEEP AND SCHOOL READINESS

Dr. Santiago and Dr. Lauren Daniel from the Psychology Department published a paper on their cross-sectional, mixed-methods study to assess the needs and knowledge of a sample of families at ELRA (Early Learning Research Academy). This will inform future research efforts to understand longitudinal relationships between sleep, school readiness, and behavioral interventional development.

BODY IMAGE

Dr. Charlotte Markey is conducting a study on social media and body image with middle school age girls at LEAP Academy. As part of her study, she held small group sessions with girls using her book: *The Body Image Book for Girls* as a discussion anchor

ASTHMA SELF-MANAGEMENT.

Sangita Pudasainee-Kapri, Assistant Professor, Rutgers School of Nursing- PhD, DNP, RN, APN, FNP-BC, CPN, developed an article titled *Factors Impacting Asthma Self-Management and Inequalities in Asthma Outcomes, Quality of Life, and Academic Outcomes among Low-Income Minority Adolescents.*

VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Courtney Cavanaugh, Ph.D. & Gloria Bonilla Santiago worked on a project focused on advancing violence prevention through collaborative and community-engaged research. They are conducting a needs assessment for relationship violence prevention programming in Camden high schools,

enhance TakeCare to improve bystander behavior for preventing relationship and sexual violence, and to examine whether enhanced TakeCare is more effective than video alone in improving bystander behavior. This work is funded by a Rutgers University- Camden Multidisciplinary Grant.

BIOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGHS

Eric Klein, Ph.D. worked with two LEAP Academy students, Aimiya Coleman and Hung Nguyen on a paper titled *Convergent Evolution of Bacterial Ceramide Synthesis* that was published in the influential journal, *Nature Chemical Biology* in 2021.

Doctoral Dissertation Students & Graduate/Doctoral Fellowships

As students develop into scholars their work advances their career path and contributes to the conversation at large. The following are a few of the doctoral dissertations and graduate/doctoral fellowships from our community.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Wanda Garcia is completing her dissertation, "The History of the Charter School Movement in New Jersey: A Policy Case Study about Disruptive Change in Public Education." The purpose of her study is to explore the history of the charter school movement in New Jersey and explore the contexts, actors, strategies, and drivers behind the movement, policy, and political outcomes that resulted in passage of charter school law in New Jersey.

COLLEGE READINESS

David Masagnor continued his fellowship at the CLC and is preparing to defend his dissertation proposal examining the stages and resources at each step of the LEAP pipeline to better understand components that attribute to college readiness amongst minority students.

CHARTER SCHOOLS ABROAD

Giovanna Romero, a Ph.D. student in Public Affairs, has been working on the planning activities for the development of a public charter school in Puerto Rico and with the Paraguay project.



Alfredo Santiago Scholarship Fund

The students of Camden deserve the opportunity to achieve a higher level of education. To that end, the Rutgers University Alfredo Santiago Endowed Scholarship was established in 1999 by Community Leadership Center (CLC) director Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago in loving memory of her husband, Alfredo Santiago. The mission of this endeavor is to increase the number of children in Camden who are able to attend college.

The scholarship targets LEAP Academy University Charter School graduates and provides them with assistance to enroll full-time at one of Rutgers University's three campuses. It should be noted that the Alfredo Santiago Scholarship program has enabled over 191 LEAP Academy students from Camden to attend college. This is remarkable given the fact that in Camden only 5.5% of adults have achieved a bachelor's degree or professional degree and 51% of adults hold a high school diploma. The need is urgent. Camden's youth deserve greater access and greater affordability to higher education and this scholarship program is helping to pave the way.

Recipients of the scholarship are selected annually from a pool of eligible LEAP Academy graduates. The selection process is based on academic achievement and financial need with an emphasis on increasing the diversity at Rutgers University. Latino and African American students who are pursuing nontraditional areas of study including business, science, engineering, and pre-medicine, are given preference. Once a student is awarded the scholarship, they may renew the award for an additional three years (or four years if they are in a five-year program). Students must remain in good academic standing in order to be considered for renewal. Scholars who have earned degrees from Rutgers University have gone on to work for major companies and organizations and regularly participate in LEAP events. Every year a different LEAP and Rutgers Alumni and Alfredo Santiago Scholarship recipient returns to speak at our annual gala to raise funds for the endowment.



The 21st Annual Fundraising Gala



A Time to Rejoice, Recover, and Redefine

The Community Leadership Center was delighted to host its 21st annual fundraising gala on December 3, 2021 at the Curtis Atrium in Philadelphia. Attendees were able to reconnect with each other in person, and were led through the event by master of ceremonies, Aunyea Lachelle of NBC10 Philly. With over 150 people in attendance, the gala raised over \$350,000 through donations and auction items, including a variety of art work create by LEAP students.

After an inspirational short film presentation, attendees were welcomed via video message by Jonathan Holloway, President of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. His remarks were followed by Antonio D. Tillis the Chancellor of Rutgers University—Camden and Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Ph.D. Rutgers Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor and Founder and Board Chair of LEAP Academy University School. Collectively, they spoke on the importance of the Alfredo Santiago Endowed scholarship



and how it supports Camden students.

The presentation of awards commenced with the Rutgers University Alfredo Santiago Endowed Scholarship. The Distinguished Leadership Award was presented to Steven Korman, founder of Korman Communities, Inc. and Linda Richardson Korman, founder of Richardson. The Distinguished Board Leadership Award was presented to John Hall, Member of the LEAP Board of Trustees.

Two LEAP alumni who continue to serve as a source of inspiration and leadership to the academy were also recognized. The LEAP Distinguished Alumni Award was presented to Mariah Castillo, RN, LEAP Academy Class of 2010, Rutgers



School of Nursing—Camden Class of 2016 and Julio Atenco-Sanchez, LEAP Academy Class of 2005, Rutgers School of Engineering Class of 2011.

The Alfredo Santiago Scholar presentation was made by LEAP Academy's very own Tochi Nwanosike, who is a fifth grader at the school.

After dinner was served, the live auction commenced with the help of Patrick Tully. After the boisterous bidding, festivities continued with dessert and dancing.

The Community Leadership Center would like to thank everyone who supported and participated in this event, from the behind-the-scenes contributors to the active donators. We look forward to a bright and productive future ahead of us.

Donor Support

Rutgers CLC is grateful for the financial support of the following donors:

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