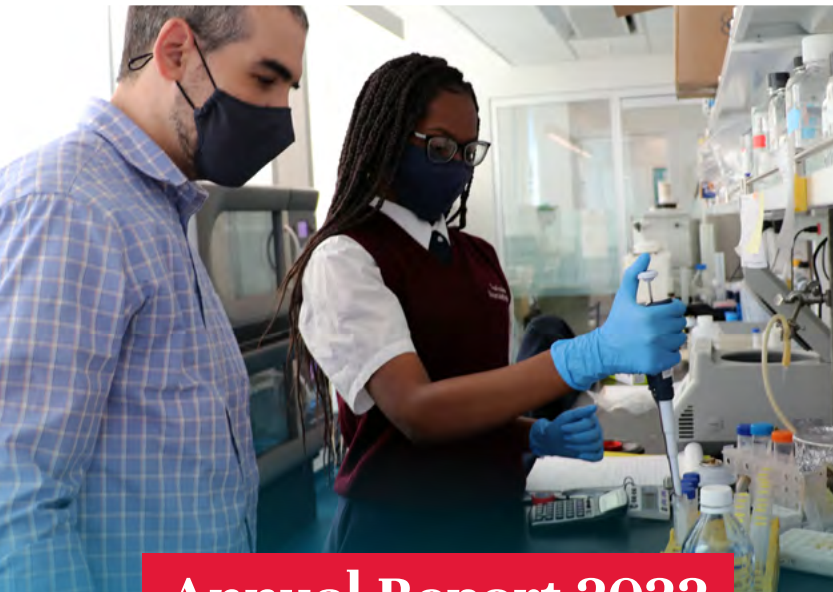




RUTGERS

Community Leadership Center
Camden



Annual Report 2022

Propelled by Hope: Global Connections, Local Commitment, and Academic Innovation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

A Note from the Director	3
PARAGUAY: A Global Collaboration with Lasting Impact – the Partnership of UNA and Rutgers	4
PUERTO RICO: LEAP as a Global Citizen.....	9
THE LEAP ACADEMY: Reinventing, Renewing, and Reinforcing a Strong Foundation	13
EARLY COLLEGE PROGRAM: Building a Path to the Future	19
ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT	22
EARLY LEARNING RESEARCH ACADEMY: Starting at the Beginning—The Cycle of Early Learning	25
CONTRIBUTIONS TO ACADEMIA: Bringing Theory and Practice through Applied Projects.....	27
COMING FULL CIRCLE: How the JumpStart Program Educates and Inspires	30
ALFREDO SANTIAGO ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUND: Making a Difference	34



RUTGERS-CAMDEN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP CENTER

501 Cooper Street
Camden, NJ 08102
(856) 225-6348
clc.camden.rutgers.edu

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Propelled by Hope: Global Connections, Local Commitment, and Academic Innovation



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

We are pleased to share our 2021-2022 Annual Report that highlights the work spearheaded by the CLC locally as well as globally. In many ways, the past year was one of transitions and readjustments as the world began to come back from one of the worst pandemics in our history. Now, with borders reopening, the physical world is once again reconnecting and more than ever, we have come to the realization that the bonds that bring us together are stronger and necessary for our collective survival. The work of the Community Leadership Center brings relevance to the concept of addressing local challenges through global collaboration as we have worked in upscaling effective practices while also looking for ways to collaborate with higher education institutions and government globally to extend our human and social capital to contribute to a better society.

Through our collective work at Rutgers Camden CLC, at UNA University in Asuncion, Paraguay and with Sagrado Corazon college and LEAP STEAM + E, along with 27 neighborhoods in San Juan Puerto Rico, we continue our efforts to collaborate with our institutions of higher learning and communities of practice to become better stewards and promoters of a society that is Ethical, Equitable, and Transparent. The most powerful aspect of our interconnected world is the ability of countries, communities, and individuals to learn from each other across borders. We need to remember that the challenges we are facing will affect us all, and, if we come at them collectively, the solutions will be mutually beneficial. We chose to reaffirm our investments in innovation, capacity-building, and solution-generation. In addition, we believe that “education is the greatest liberation mankind has ever known and the greatest force for social progress” (Gordon Brown, October 2007). Our schools as communities of practices and our graduates are a true example of that social progress as we celebrate 25 years of *evolution in education*.

One constant vulnerability over the last two years has been our feelings of uncertainty about the present and the future. Regardless, we chose to be positive, to live with a sense of urgency about our work, to care, to question and to be courageous about the opportunities and challenges ahead.

We hope that this report sparks your interest and reignites your commitment to work purposely and commit to be part of the solutions, as we **Propelled by Hope through Global Connections, Local Commitment, and Academic Innovation**. To get there, we will need the entire world’s creativity and intelligence to ensure that inclusion, equity, human rights, and peace define our future.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago

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

“We need to remember that the challenges we are facing will affect us all, and, if we come at them collectively, the solutions will be mutually beneficial.”

PARAGUAY

A Global Collaboration with Lasting Impact: The Partnership of UNA and Rutgers





The complexities of the world's problems from geopolitical to socio-economic challenges are driving our institutions of higher education to collaborate as a global community of educators, researchers, and influencers.

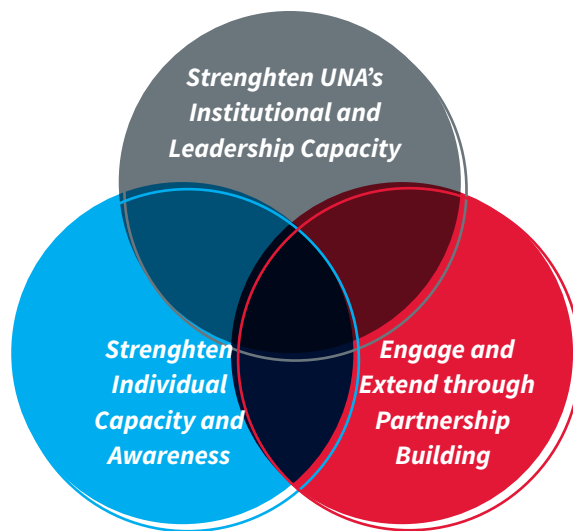
The scale of disruption that our world faces from economic and political turmoil to social and environmental challenges are vast. No single researcher, university, or nation can achieve a breakthrough solution alone. The challenges are too complex, and finding success is only possible when we work together. The opportunities to collaborate across borders, languages, industries, and disciplines have been at the core of the work of the Community Leadership Center, as it has embraced the call for forging international partnerships with universities that have the potential for impacting how they educate, research, and impact a disruptive future.

The work with the Universidad Nacional Asuncion (UNA) in Paraguay has been at the forefront of these efforts for the past four years and this commitment has now expanded to another five years of joint programming that anchors cross-discipline cooperation to increase the impact

of research and strengthen our students' education. Our joint work leverages the combined power of talent, resources, and vision of both UNA and Rutgers University-Camden and offers a range of opportunities for university education to grow and flourish at the individual level, institutional level, national level, and global level.

A visit from Professor Gloria Bonilla-Santiago in 2016 as a Fulbright Fellow provided an opportunity to engage with the UNA university faculty and academic leaders in devising a strategy to reposition the university as a national hub for research, teaching, and civic engagement. These early efforts culminated with a major conference guided by the theme The Future of the New University in Paraguay in 2019 and coincided with the US Embassy's efforts to strengthen higher education in Paraguay as part of its work in improving governance and transparency in Paraguay's public sector.

Ignited by a new Chancellor, Dr. Zully Vera, the first woman to ever occupy this post, and a grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the past three years have focused on the development of the Higher Education Center for Ethics, Equity, and Transparency (HECEET) within the UNA. Dr.



Three major programmatic priorities set the foundation for the HECEET and have been at the core of the work over the past three years.



Bonilla-Santiago, the Director of this initiative explains, “At the core of the HECEET has been working with its host institution, the UNA, to ensure that the university can become an epicenter for the promotion of a culture of lawfulness and EET values and practice, while it also travels through its own transformational journey of self-reliance.”

The positive impact of this partnership has permeated the UNA academic institution as well as the community at large. A multitude of research projects, conferences, and learning modules have been developed and executed, resulting in the dissemination of concepts and ideas vital to the establishment of foundational values including ethics, equity, and transparency.

On July 19, 2022, the USAID grant concluded with a closing ceremony that served two main purposes—to share the progress made and to reinforce the sustainability of this academic collaboration through expanded work in areas of research, curriculum, civic engagement, and student/faculty exchange. Dr. Antonio Tillis, Chancellor of Rutgers University-Camden, shared with those in attendance that this conclusion does not mark the end of their collaboration, but the continuation of joint work to achieve a society built through education that will champion the values of ethics, equity, and transparency. “Advocating for equity is not an easy mission; it requires a commitment to examine and correct bias and racism in everyday actions. To achieve equity, organizations must be willing to transform their beliefs, their values, and orient themselves in actions that change their behaviors and perceptions. This work must begin within the organization,” Dr. Tillis shared.

As we look to future collaborations with UNA and the people of Paraguay, what has been built during this timeframe will leave a lasting impact on the Paraguayan academic community and society. Furthermore, all the interactions between the Rutgers University staff, mentors, faculty, and the Paraguayan community of academics, ambassadors, and societal leaders have enriched the lives of all the participants both as scholars and as people.

After three years of intensive work in carving out a space for academic exchange, building trust, and institutionalizing the HECEET, we have reached several important milestones. This has positioned us to build on our academic relationship with a focus on joint programming and collaboration in the areas of academic scholarship and program development; research and publishing; teaching and student development; and extension programs—all of which are pillars of a public academic institution.

Embracing Academic Partnerships: UNA Bestows Honorary Degrees on Rutgers Camden Academic Leaders

On July 18, 2022, during their visit to the campus of UNA, Dr. Antonio Tillis, Chancellor of Rutgers University-Camden, and Dr. Gloria Bonilla Santiago, Rutgers Board of Governors, Distinguished Service Professor, and Director of the HECEET, received the honorary degrees of Doctor and Doctor Honoris

Causa, respectively. The degrees were presented to these esteemed academics by distinguished UNA authorities during a ceremony that took place at the St. Lawrence Campus Convention Center.

These honors and accolades are truly an expression of how these two academic pioneers have worked tirelessly to develop a productive partnership with UNA that will be mutually beneficial for years to come. It is representative of the kind of institutional partnership needed to launch and sustain global connections that result in better outcomes for society and a new approach to global institutional collaboration.

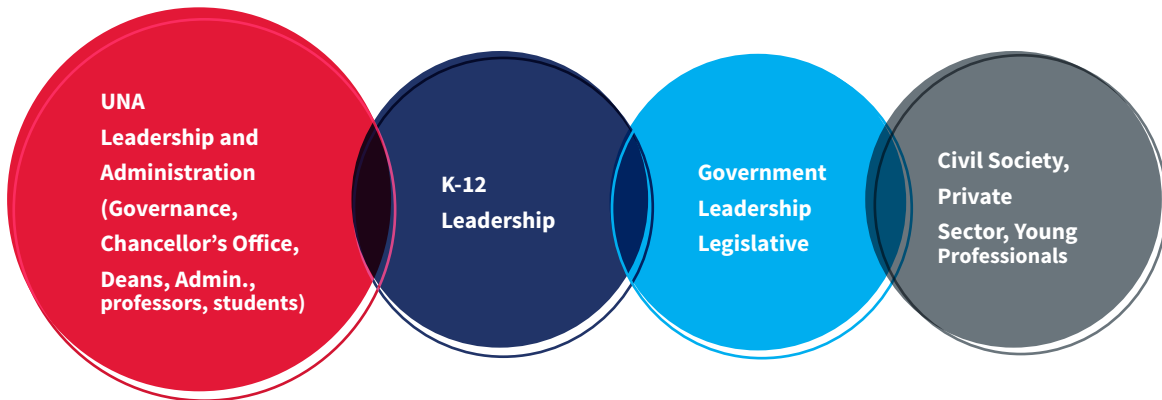
Dr. Bonilla-Santiago notes that “higher education must be the catalyst to move our societies toward democracy, sustainability,

and social justice, and away from autocracy, chaos, and inequity. The best measure is how we come together to deploy our biggest institutions’ strengths through education, research, diversity, democracy, and social inclusion for all.”

Building a Positive Exchange

The establishment of the HECEET has served as the catalyst to launch this important partnership with UNA in Paraguay. Academic partnerships are critical to the development of cultural exchanges which lead to the strengthening of the educational system. The HECEET has focused on the important priorities of developing the abilities and skills of four sectors in Paraguay as seen in the graphic below.

SECTORS OF SUPPORT



PARAGUAY: BRIGHTEST ACHIEVEMENTS

The following are some of the brightest achievements from the collaboration:

- 392 people trained in EET concepts (119 Ambassadors from 3 cohorts, 353 institute participants, and 83 pieces of training/coaching participants).
- 16 social projects designed by participants to apply new knowledge and skills to their real-world work and community with an impact on 17,461 people from Paraguayan society based on impact numbers per project.
- 490 people participated in EET focus groups, a nationwide EET conference, and other information-sharing events.
- 11 EET-related research projects started by UNA faculty researchers

with the support and guidance of six Rutgers research faculty mentors that were published in a special issue of the UNA Journal.

- An innovative online ethics compliance tool designed by the Rutgers-UNA project team has made it possible for over 10,000 UNA faculty and administrative staff to take, for the first time ever, EET-related video courses that emphasize the importance of compliance with institutional behavioral standards, practices in the United States and other countries. Currently, 2,837 people are enrolled in and in the process of completing the course and 770 people have already completed it.
- The UNA officially incorporated the HECEET into its organizational structure through the approval of its highest administrative authority, the General Assembly.
- An academic leadership institute

for UNA’s Deans and academic leaders is offering intensive training to continue the work to strengthen UNA’s capacity and align the HECEET and its program offerings with the larger agenda of the UNA’s New University’s effort.

- An intensive review of UNA’s academic curricular maps and integration of EET content across disciplines will be enacted.
- A multi-sector Advisory Committee brings together all the original partners and new partners that have been cultivated through the past three years.
- Several Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) have been issued to cement the partnerships and continue the work after August 11, 2022, when the project closed with USAID. These MOUs include Rutgers/UNA; Rutgers/ BECAL; HECEET/SENEAC.

These programmatic priorities have provided the direction for executing a plan of work that has established the Rutgers/UNA partnership. First, the role of the HECEET is strategically significant as it focuses on capacity-building through institutional actions that promote transparency, civility, citizenship, and equity as fundamental pillars of a democratic governance system and to install a culture based on ethics, equity, and transparency (EET) in the four sectors referenced above: higher education, K-12, government, and private/civil society.

Second, the HECEET, is dedicated to improving UNA's institutional and human capacity in Paraguay. This also includes institutionalizing the HECEET within the UNA organizational structure for long-term sustainability and impact.

Third, the HECEET has been positioned as an important anchor in Paraguay for addressing issues of government corruption, transparency and public accountability, integrity, equality, and civility through the development and facilitation of multi-sectorial training and capacity building.

THE COMMITMENT TO A SUSTAINABLE ACADEMIC COLLABORATION

The Rutgers-Camden Chancellor has pledged to sustain the partnership with UNA and invest \$250,000 over the next five years at the level of \$50,000 per year, beginning in Fall 2022. Supporting this long-term commitment is the signing of two important agreements. First, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to continue the Bilateral Collaboration between UNA and Rutgers University-Camden, signed by the Rector of UNA, Professor Dr. Zully Vera, and the Chancellor of Rutgers University-Camden, Dr. Antonio Tillis, on July 18, 2022. Members of the Rutgers Delegation to Paraguay, the Vice Chancellor of UNA, Deans, Vice Deans, Heads of Office, and General Directors attended this momentous event.

Second, promoting student exchanges is an institutional priority and the opportunities and synergies have been developed with Rutgers offering a variety of doctoral-level degrees. UNA is looking for strategies to increase the pool of doctoral-level faculty. Strengthening the doctoral and graduate degree offerings requires a cadre of faculty prepared in their disciplines. An important partner over the past three years has been a government-sponsored organization known as the Carlos Antonio Lopez Scholarship Abroad Program (BECAL). On July 19, 2022, an MOU was signed by Dr. Vera, Dr. Tillis, and Dr. Andrea Picasso, who is the General Coordinator of BECAL, that will



allow student and school mobility between Rutgers University-Camden and UNA to provide students and professors with opportunities for academic exchange, research, and graduate study abroad programs.

We are now capitalizing on the Chancellor's commitment and the newly signed MOUs with UNA and with BECAL. Thinking in terms of a five-year plan, we are working on the following annual priorities:

- **Year 1:** Continue the capacity-building work with Deans and academic leadership through the Academic Leadership Institute that began during the of summer 2022 and will continue through the Fall.
- **Year 2:** The focus will be on solidifying the student exchanges and developing those opportunities for joint courses to ensure that they can be launched by Year 3 of the exchange. Weaved into Year 2 will be the promotion and support of joint research projects that will lead to publications or scientific grants.
- **Year 3:** The focus for this year will be to inaugurate the first cohorts of graduate/doctoral and post-doctoral students coming to Rutgers to complete their degrees and academic preparation. The impetus is to help UNA build its doctoral-level programs by producing students with the credentials to be hired as faculty in various UNA academic departments.
- **Year 4:** The established exchanges will be sustained with opportunities for research presentations of students in the program and opportunities for advancement in areas of research and publishing.
- **Year 5:** The final year will focus on institutionalizing the exchange, documenting best practices, and planning for future work.

PUERTO RICO

LEAP as a Global Citizen





Growing LEAP Schools in Puerto Rico

Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, through her leadership and foundational role at the LEAP Academy University Charter School, which she founded and leads since 1997, and the Rutgers Community Leadership Center, is invested in a strategy for impacting the educational outcomes of children in Puerto Rico. Dr. Bonilla-Santiago was born in Puerto Rico and over the

years she has searched for strategies that can provide a vehicle for alleviating the socio-economic conditions of children and families on the island. The Community Leadership Center at Rutgers-Camden has served as a higher education partner to upscale the practices that have been developed locally to improve educational outcomes for minority children. When Dr. Bonilla-Santiago developed and launched the LEAP Academy, her vision was broader than Camden and she has been diligent about keeping this intention front and center when establishing systems that support children, especially in developing countries.





Working with the LEAP Social Enterprise, a non-profit organization created to upscale LEAP’s best practices, and with the LEAP Academy, over the past three years, Dr. Bonilla-Santiago has been focused on opening and growing LEAP Schools in Puerto Rico. The LEAP Academy University Charter School’s work over the years does not exist within a bubble. The knowledge base and best practices that have evolved over time are not to be hoarded but shared to improve children’s education on a global scale.

In August 2021, the LEAP STEAM+E (i.e., Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics plus Entrepreneurship) Academy of San Juan opened its doors in Sabana Llana, PR, a community ranked among the poorest and least developed on the island and surrounded by low-income housing projects. The LEAP STEAM+E Academy of San Juan is the largest Alianza School in Puerto Rico (Alianza School is the name used for charter schools in Puerto Rico), serving 600 students in grades K-9 and expanding to 720 when its student cohorts reach 12th grade. This is part of the collective commitment to advancing quality education in neighborhoods that need improved educational options and resources for their children.





Elements of the LEAP Instructional Foundation

LEAP STEAM+E Academy features many innovative programs that are all geared toward providing its students with the best quality of education, including:

- **Extended day and year.** This ensures that students are taking advantage of every opportunity to learn and prepare. School opens at 7:00 am and is serving students through 6:00 pm every day.
- **Small classroom sizes (20 students per classroom).** This safeguards that students are given individualized attention and that the instructional routines are better organized.
- **Applied learning through an integrated curriculum.** This capitalizes on project-based learning and access to a Fabrication Lab so students can learn by inventing and experimenting.
- **Students receive a computer to use at school and home.** This gives them access to technology and virtual learning opportunities.
- **Early College Program.** LEAP STEAM+E students participate in the Early College Program beginning in grade 10 to ensure that they earned dual college credits, which helps them get ahead as they begin their college careers. Students will attend classes at Sagrado Corazon University.
- **Solid and positive relationships with parents and community members.** The school provides access to teachers and staff and creates opportunities for developing a collaborative learning community through access to services, training, and job readiness preparation.
- **Pay equity is matched by opportunities for professional development.** Teachers at LEAP STEAM+E are valued and supported, and our school compensates our teachers with the highest salary in Puerto Rico with teachers making twice as much as other public school teachers in the area.
- **Ongoing assessment and evaluation.** These elements are in place to guarantee high levels of accountability for all.
- **Social and emotional development.** Programs are in place to support students beyond academic achievement.
- **Food and nutrition program.** On-site facilities serve breakfast and lunch every day.

Part of Dr. Santiago's strategy is also to bring the graduates from the Puerto Rico program closer to Rutgers University-Camden. She has already started the Alfredo Santiago Scholars Program which feeds into the Alfredo Santiago Scholarship Fund at Rutgers. This sets the foundation to offer scholarships to graduates of the school to attend college in New Jersey at Rutgers University.



Reinventing, Renewing, and Reinforcing a Strong Foundation

LEAP Academy

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.



Mission:

“To enhance the opportunities for the children and families of Camden through the collaborative design, implementation, and integration of education, health, and human services programs and through community development.”



The pandemic has left its scars on our educational system and studies have shown that the impact will be long-lasting. According to research by Emma Dorn, Bryan Hancock, Jimmy Sarakatsannis, and Ellen Viruleg published by McKinsey & Company, because of the pandemic, K-12 students are an average of five months behind in math and four months behind in reading. The effects of this unfinished learning crisis are far-reaching. Students are facing a diminished future unless steps are taken to combat this disruption in education. The LEAP Academy University Charter School began this year ready to meet these challenges head-on.

The past few years have taught the LEAP Academy how to reinvent itself and seize these challenges as opportunities to transform and improve upon the solid foundation that was already in place. There has been a sharp focus on evolving the way in which teachers and staff educate, relate, and nurture students to become global citizens and reach their fullest potential.

In adjusting to the new reality, the LEAP Academy, working with the Rutgers CLC and the Early Learning Research Academy, integrated four priorities into its core objectives:

- To safely reopen schools for in-person learning.
- To find creative ways to reengage students and create effective and targeted learning environments.
- To focus on supporting students in recovering unfinished learning and broader needs, including the social and emotional needs created by trauma, isolation, and uncertainty.
- To facilitate processes for staff and teachers to recommit and reimagine our educational approaches and strategies to ensure long-term academic success for all our students.

Rather than being hindered by the forced use of virtual platforms due to pandemic restrictions, the faculty and staff of the LEAP Academy have capitalized on the integration of new technology into the classroom. They have harvested the elements that were successful while moving toward an in-person learning environment. For example, virtual and hybrid learning has expanded connectivity and has provided extended learning opportunities. This is especially applicable to the engagement of the school’s stakeholders. The use of platforms such as Zoom has actually increased parent participation in school events.

Throughout the challenges—transitioning out of the classroom, transitioning back into the classroom, revealing gaps in learning, and facing general uncertainty—the LEAP Academy has held to its high academic standards, which have preserved a cohesive educational environment for its students. The following approaches to pedagogy remain the standard approach within this institution:

- Creating an effective and supportive learning environment.
- Collecting the right data to continually evolve and support the learning process.
- Maintaining instructional rigor and student engagement.
- Pursuing instructional relevance and knowledge of content.
- Achieving college and career readiness.



Outcomes Achieved

Every year the LEAP Academy sets a high bar for the goals it aims to achieve. This past year was no different. Despite transitioning back from the pandemic and the obstacle of lost learning, the LEAP Academy maintains its high expectations for excellence.

FIVE MAIN GOALS WERE PUT FORTH FOR 2021-2022:

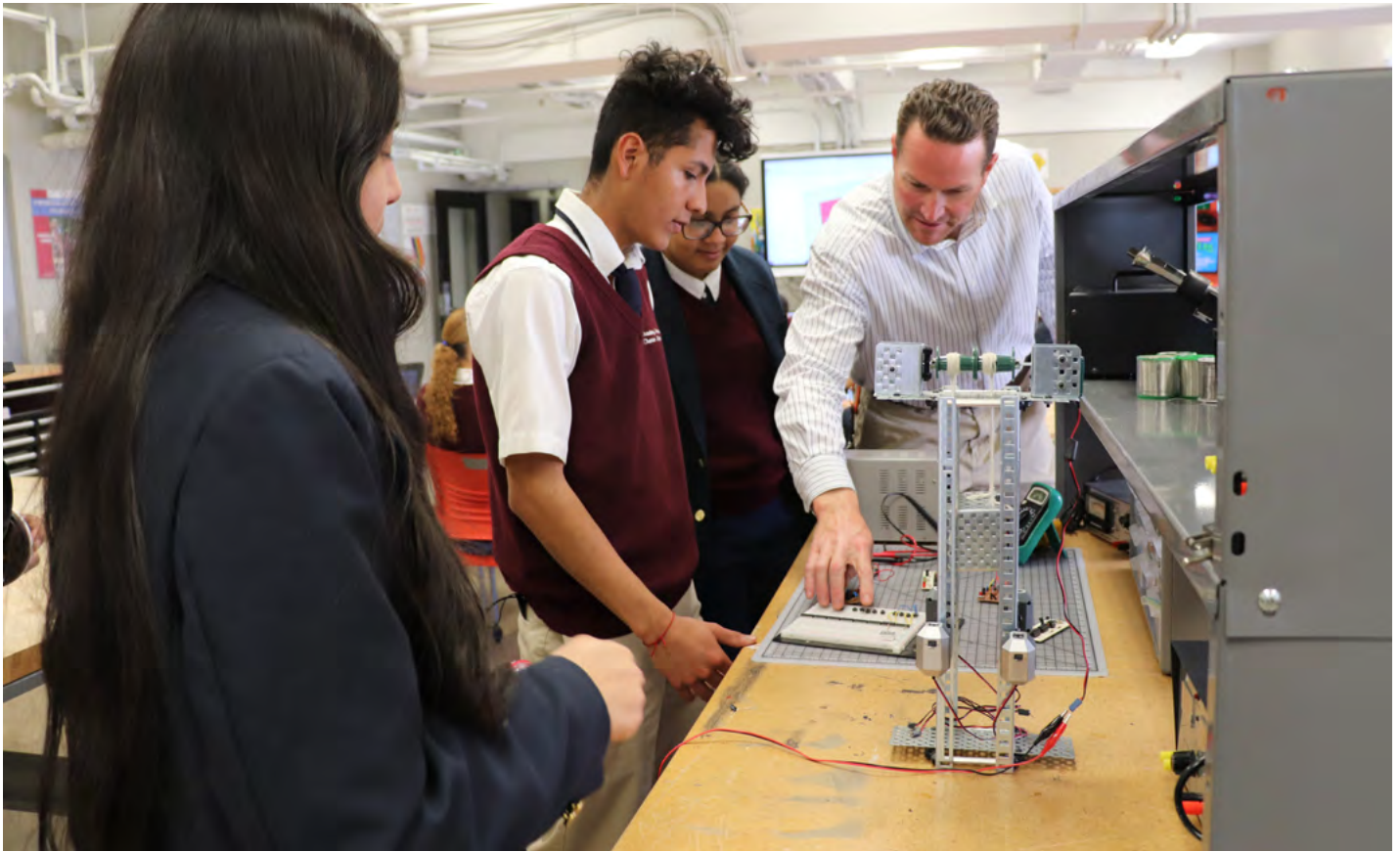
- **Goal 1:** To strengthen the instructional program across grade levels from infancy to age 16.
- **Goal 2:** To improve the academic performance of all students.
- **Goal 3:** To align the Centers of Excellence programs to the instructional core of LEAP.
- **Goal 4:** To improve teaching and learning at all levels of the organization.
- **Goal 5:** To improve organizational capacity in areas of operations, finance, and technology.

IN ADDITION, THE FOLLOWING TARGETS WERE MET THIS PAST YEAR:

- 100% of high school seniors graduated from the LEAP Academy.
- 100% of seniors completed dual college courses and obtained transferrable college credits.
- 80% of seniors will gain acceptance to a college or university upon graduation.

The LEAP Academy is a college preparatory school, and it is, therefore, the expectation that all seniors complete the Early College Program and other dual college credit opportunities. Ninety percent of the LEAP Class of 2022 graduating seniors completed coursework in the Early College Program and received transferrable college credits from prestigious academic institutions including Rutgers University-Camden and Rowan University.

The LEAP Academy senior class collectively amassed 1,644 total early college credits, which averages out to 15.8 college credits per student. This can potentially represent a full semester's head start for these students as they go forth into their first official year of college. In addition to the academic advantage of this achievement, students also benefit from a substantial financial advantage as well.



Holistic Approach Balancing Medical Wellness with Academics

The LEAP Academy has always prided itself on taking a holistic approach to the educational process. This has included parent, community, and stakeholder involvement. When the pandemic threatened to undermine all that the LEAP Academy has built over the years, it is no surprise that this academic institution stepped up its frontline approach.

One of the special resources put in place to combat and manage the challenges of the pandemic was a full-service pediatric office within the academy itself.

This begins with access to healthcare for both the students as well as their families. Students can receive care, including physicals and vaccinations, during school hours, which prevents absenteeism and parents no longer miss work to provide wellness care.

Absenteeism has also declined because of the whole family being served. According to Stephanie Weaver, the Chief Operation Officer, “One of the things we noticed in our community is that our families weren’t getting medical care.” By creating this inclusive approach to care, the program is extending beyond the classroom into the city’s

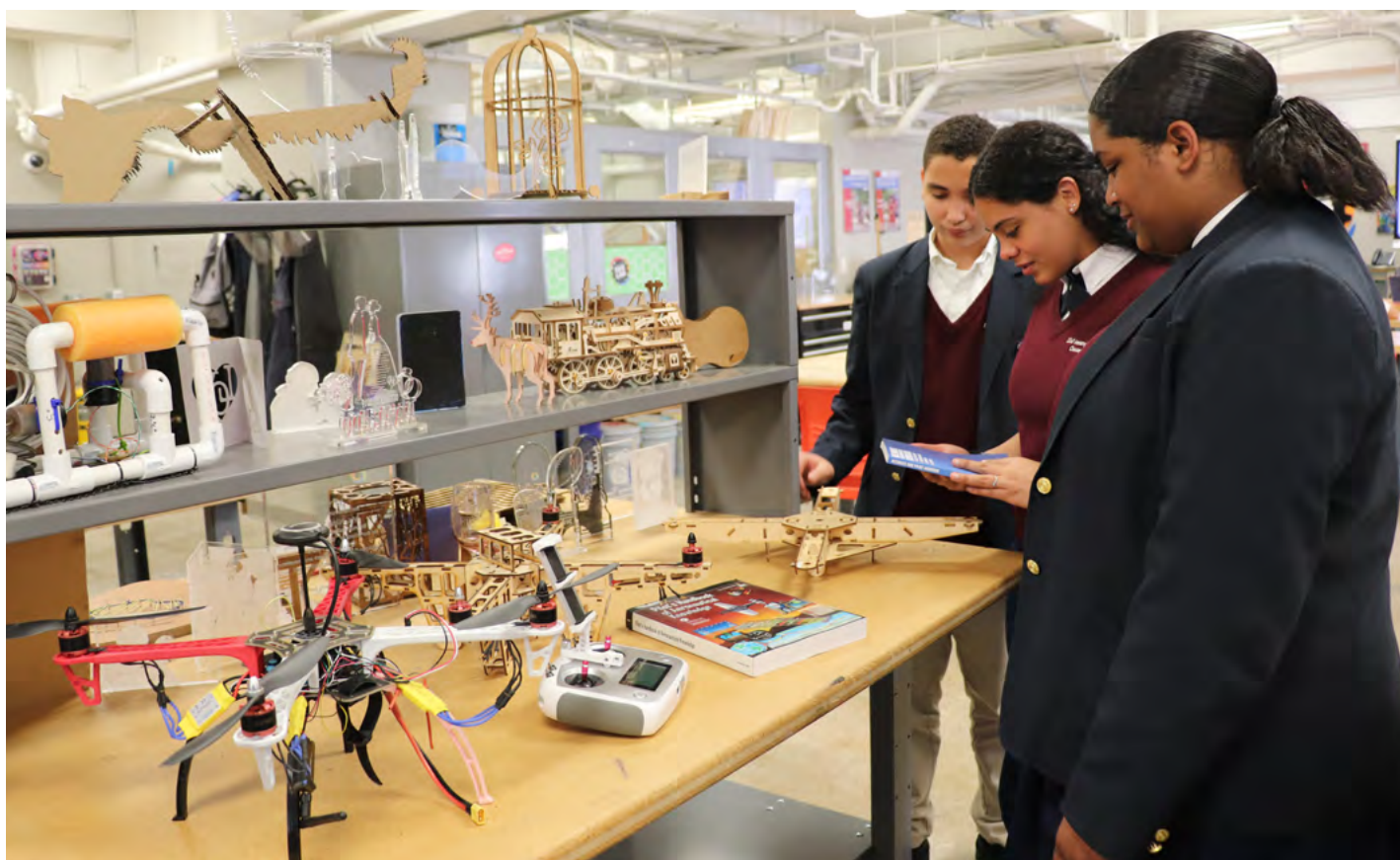
most vulnerable communities. The result is fewer missed days of school by the students.

This attention to healthcare needs is just one piece of the complete approach the LEAP Academy champions. The vision of this academic institution is to go beyond the classroom to strengthen the community.

Teacher, Mentor, and Student Collaboration

The LEAP Academy is working with the Rutgers University-Camden Center for Computational and Integrative Biology (CCIB) to create active mentor/mentee relationships between CCIB college students and LEAP Academy students to spark an interest in science. The CCIB mentors will work with the students to promote participation in the Coriell Institute Science Fair.

The 42nd Annual Coriell Institute Science Fair will take place on March 18, 2023, at the Blackwood Campus of Camden County College. Each year this event hosts the best and brightest aspiring scientists from Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester counties in grades 6 through 12. Students have the opportunity to showcase their projects, which can tackle subjects including



biochemistry, botany, computer science, mathematics, medicine, physics, zoology, and more. Winners of the science fair advance to the Delaware Valley Regional Science Fair where they can then advance to the highly acclaimed Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair.

The mentor program will focus on freshman students in the LEAP Academy Honors Biology course helmed by teacher Scott Davis. Students will be organized into groups of three to allow submission of their projects in the “Team Projects” category of the science fair. The Honors Biology course will be offered as a combined lecture/lab course with a lab period available every day.

CCIB mentors visit the LEAP Academy once a week to meet with students during their lab period in order to help them plan experiments, interpret data, and prepare their science fair presentations. When the CCIB mentors are not in class with the students, they will still be available to answer questions or offer guidance via email. To keep the collaborative process manageable, the Honors Biology course will be limited to 21 students, or seven teams of three students.

CCIB Faculty member, Eric Klein, visited the LEAP Academy campus with the participating CCIB mentors in September to tour the lab facilities and the fabrication lab. Since then, they

have worked with students to help them design projects that can be reasonably accomplished using the resources they have available. To that end, they are helping students come up with ideas, with the aim of beginning experimentation.

Since the Coriell Institute Science Fair takes place in March, there are plans to have a mini science fair at the LEAP Academy sometime in February 2023 so that the students can practice their presentations in front of their peers.

The facilitators of this positive collaboration are Scott Davis and Christopher McCrum, who are LEAP Academy faculty, Eric Klein, who is CCIB faculty, and Jahmal Ennis, who is a CCIB student and president of MACS.

Breaking the STEM Ceiling

The LEAP Academy Mathematics Club had a stellar year. Student members participated in the 2022 MathCON competition. They ranked above the 85th percentile while competing with students across the country. MathCON is a highly respected competition series and educational resource developed to enhance mathematics education for both students and educators. This high achievement will be an inspiration to future LEAP Academy math scholars.



Sonia Chugh Named Camden County Teacher of the Year

Sonia Chugh, an English as a second language (ESL) instructor at LEAP Academy, was recognized as Camden County Teacher of the Year, one of 21 teachers in New Jersey who were awarded this honor. Chugh, who holds a master's degree in education from the University of Northern Iowa, brings 20 years of experience to her students and creates an environment in her classroom where students of all backgrounds and cultures feel comfortable and ready to learn.

Chugh credits her award as Camden County Teacher of the Year Award to the support she receives from the administration and staff at LEAP Academy, her son and daughter, and most importantly her students who inspire her to be a better teacher every day.

"I am so overjoyed, honored, and privileged to be named Camden County Teacher of the Year," said Sonia Chugh, ESL educator at LEAP Academy. "I teach because I have the ability to make a difference in students' lives. My students inspire me every day as they overcome various obstacles with a positive attitude and strong determination. It is rewarding, exciting, and fulfilling to watch them grow and transform into young adults."

Chugh's advocacy for her students and their success has resulted in a 100% graduation rate. The autonomy of charter

schools allows her to offer culturally relevant lessons that are reflective of her students. In addition to their studies, Chugh's students participate in programs at Rowan University, the Puerto Rican Art Center Exhibit, theater and STEM clubs and dual college enrollment. Additionally, her students host various workshops that are open to parents, students and the entire Camden County community.

"Charter school teachers are among the most passionate and dedicated educators in New Jersey, and Sonia Chugh encompasses our mission to meet the individual needs of all students we serve," said Harry Lee, President and CEO of the New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association. "As an ESL instructor, she has a deep commitment to students from diverse backgrounds, both in and out of the classroom. Her dedication is unparalleled and receiving the title of Camden County Teacher of the Year is a well-deserved honor. We appreciate Governor Murphy's administration for recognizing charter school teachers as talented educators who work tirelessly to help their students achieve."

"At LEAP Academy University Charter School, we pride ourselves in nurturing and educating our students from cradle to college, regardless of background, and Ms. Chugh exemplifies this very goal," said Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Founder of LEAP Academy University Charter School. "On behalf of the entire LEAP community, we thank Ms. Chugh for her unwavering support for our students' success and congratulate her on this prestigious recognition."

EARLY COLLEGE PROGRAM

Building a Path to the Future



To reinforce LEAP Academy students' path to college, the school has established the LEAP Early College Program to ensure that students have every opportunity to reach advanced education.

Through the program, all LEAP Academy seniors will have the chance to earn dual credits and complete their year with up to 30 college credits—which can mean starting college ahead of most incoming freshmen.

Students who graduate from high school with this many college credits enter the university with an advantage in terms of college readiness, credits completed, and money saved for their first year of college. Across 5 years of student surveys, the number one reason students say they would not continue their education is the cost of college. The advancement provided by the LEAP Early College Program can help students afford their education, finish college on time, and perform at a higher academic level.



Getting Stronger

There has been an increase in the number of college credits earned over the years. Before 2017 the average amount of credits accepted before the Early College Program was 123.95. After 2017 with the establishment of the Early College Program, the average amount of college credits accepted is 149.35.

The LEAP Academy Early College Program consists of 100% of the target population. Sixty percent of the student class is Hispanic, and 40% is Black. In addition, the entire student population is classified as economically disadvantaged.

The program is a true introduction to actual college life including interactions with professors. LEAP Academy seniors are divided into two cohorts and attend classes specifically designed for them at Rutgers University–Camden (ie, the College of Arts & Sciences, School of Business, and School of Nursing) and Rowan University.

One hundred percent of the senior cohorts are immersed in the college environment and engage in the culture and life of the university. They attend lectures given by college professors



Rutgers University’s partnership with the LEAP Academy Early College Program is very strong. In fact, many of our graduates chose to continue with Rutgers as they pursue higher education.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total Students
Total LEAP Graduates	116	103	104	118	547
Committed to Rutgers – Camden	24	20	16	29	89
Committed to Rutgers – New Brunswick	1	4	3	5	13
Committed to Rutgers – Newark				3	3

twice a week and then meet with their high school teachers for recitations to discuss the material and prepare for written assignments, exams, and readings. The courses attended during the Fall of 2022 are Rutgers Camden CAS, Intro to Cultural Anthropology (2 sections); Rutgers Camden CAS, Intro to Criminal Justice (1 section); Rutgers Camden SOB, Intro to Finance & Investments (1 section); and Rutgers Camden SOB - Intro to Marketing Essentials (1 section). The projected coursework to be attended in the spring of 2023 include Rutgers Camden CAS, Intro to Cultural Anthropology (2 sections); Rutgers Camden CAS – Police & Policing (1 section); Rutgers Camden CAS - Intro to Criminal Justice (1 section); and Rutgers Camden SOB, Intro to Social Entrepreneurship (1 section).

The students start and finish their days earlier and later than the rest of the high school to accommodate their college schedule. LEAP College Access and High School staff oversee the program logistics, academic components, and student support services. A combination of public funding and scholarship grants is used for tuition. No LEAP students will have any out-of-pocket expenses. According to the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), LEAP is the first charter school in New Jersey to offer students a sweeping dual enrollment curriculum. The program reinforces LEAP’s college readiness culture and supports the expectation that each student will attend college and develop career aspirations. The Early College Program exemplifies LEAP’s comprehensive and innovative approach to community development and urban education, supported by its track record of 100% high school graduation

and college placement. Although Rutgers University is a top choice among our graduates, there are many academic institutions that have welcomed our scholars. Some of these esteemed institutions include Brown University, Princeton University, Penn State University, Rice University, Villanova University, and many more.

Early College Student Spotlight

The Early College Program is succeeding. Many LEAP Academy alumni have used this opportunity as a platform to find success and fulfillment. The program prepares students at an extremely high level. Not only are they academically prepared, but they also get a true sense of what college will be like. In addition, the program offers support and guidance so that students can fully engage with all the resources available to them.

For example, QuestBridge is a national nonprofit based in Palo Alto, California. Its goal is to connect low-income and first-generation students with partner colleges and universities. Three of the Early College Program seniors are 2022-2023 QuestBridge Applicants. These are Joseph Gonzalez, whose top college choice is Rowan University; Haleema Sylla, whose top choice is the University of Pennsylvania; and Lizmelis Nunez, whose top choice is Rowan University. These three scholars are also applying to several other competitive universities, and we are certain they will find success in their academic journey.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Alumni Spotlight

The greatest indicator of the success of the LEAP Academy University Charter School is the multifarious achievements of its alumni. Their positive contributions to the community and world at large are the greatest testament to the commitment and diligence of this thriving academic institution.

Rutgers University-Camden through its Community Leadership Center (CCL) has provided a myriad of opportunities for these LEAP alumni to engage in dual credit and early college options,

as well as to work hand in hand with university faculty around research opportunities. The CCL also provides the guidance and structural foundation for the College Access centers located in every building of the LEAP Academy. The program champions the value that “At LEAP college begins at infancy,” and the success of our talented alumni is evidence of the return on investment (ROI).

The following are just a few of the shining stars who are proud to have called the LEAP Academy their academic home.

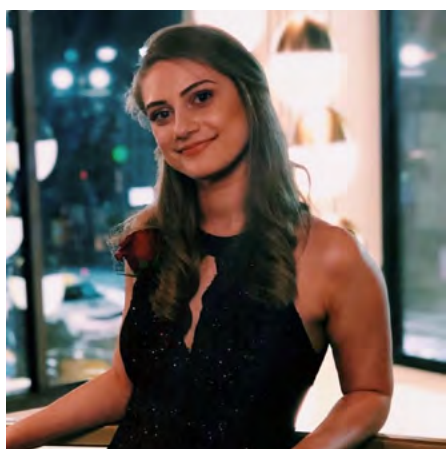


John M. Crespo

A member of the LEAP Academy class of 2020, John M. Crespo discovered an interest in biomedical science that was fostered by the faculty at the LEAP Academy. Mr. Crespo was able to secure a place in an internship program at Cooper Hospital in Camden, NJ, while he was a student at the LEAP Academy. During the internship program, Mr. Crespo developed a research poster for which he was given a Conference Poster Award, and he succeeded in publishing a research paper in the field of neuroscience.

Mr. Crespo was one of 700 applicants accepted to the University of Pennsylvania's IDEAL (ie, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Learner) Research Summer Undergraduate Program. His hope is that this challenging internship will lead to his acceptance into a PhD program in the near future.

Mr. Crespo acknowledges the role that the LEAP Academy has played in his success, “With the credit opportunities that LEAP has given me, I was able to be a part of this program and continue the path of my dreams.”



Liz Ramos

To fuse the beauty of mathematics and art is truly an impressive feat. LEAP Academy class of 2014 graduate, Liz Ramos, has managed to do just that. Taking full advantage of the options available to her through LEAP, Ms. Ramos decided to join the academy's robotics team, where she found her passion for science-art collaborations.

After graduating from the LEAP Academy, Ms. Ramos studied biology and studio art at Rutgers University. She was able to weave together these two divergent fields of study with great success that also provided personal fulfillment. After four years of studying science and art, Ms. Ramos decided to pursue a career path in biology for a company called CAR (Chimeric Antigen Receptor) T-Cell Therapy. She is currently helping cancer patients receive treatment and fight against cancer.

She looks back at her time at the LEAP Academy with great fondness and gratitude, “I appreciate that I was able to receive exposure to the STEM-based academic courses at LEAP; it provided me the direction I needed to settle on the decision to study in the STEM field while in undergraduate school.”



Preston Lindsay

Preston Lindsay, a proud member of the LEAP Academy class of 2008, is making a real difference in the world. He is working as an American organizational psychologist and educator specializing in multicultural and antiracist organizational development, organizational neuroscience, and facilitating radical and disruptive change for transformational outcomes.

Dr. Lindsay is currently the President and CEO of the Lindsay Group Co., which is an organizational development consulting firm that he founded in 2014. He is also a Professor of Practice at Harvard University's program for Industrial-Organizational Psychology and a Professor of Business at Saint Peter's University's (SPU) Guarini School of Business as well as a Clinical Professor of Psychology at the SPU Department of Psychology. In addition, he serves as a Professor of Psychology at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County in the Masters of Industrial-Organization Psychology program where he lectures on decision science and group behavior.

He credits the LEAP Academy as the catalyst of his success, "My career as a globally recognized Organizational Psychologist and Organizational Development Practitioner, a Professor, and CEO of an international organization development consulting firm would likely have been beyond my reach if it were not for the deep tradition of academic excellence and sense of community offered to me by LEAP all those years."



Julio Atenco-Sanchez

Julio Atenco-Sanchez enrolled at LEAP Academy in the ninth grade and was salutatorian of the school's first high school graduating class in 2005. Julio was a recipient of the Alfredo Santiago Scholarship, which gave him the financial ability to attend Rutgers University where he conducted research in organic chemistry involving the synthesis of nonlinear polar compounds, ultimately earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Chemistry from the Rutgers School of Engineering.

Julio now resides in Cleveland, Ohio with his wife, and has been part of the team at Novagard Solutions for the past five years, beginning as Quality Chemist, then transitioning to Development Chemist, and now acting as Research and Development Manager. He has devoted most of his work at Novagard to the development of two-component condensation cure products. During his time at Novagard, he has developed products for various markets, including the automotive, window manufacturing, and electronics markets.

Along with the constant support he received from his parents, Julio attributes much of his personal and professional accomplishments to his time spent at LEAP Academy. As an immigrant from Mexico, LEAP provided a safe community for him to become fluent in the English language, develop confidence, and be prepared for academic success as the first person in his family to attend university.

Julio plans to continue with his education in graduate school where he hopes to ultimately earn a Ph.D. in Polymer Sciences. He is still in contact with many of his teachers and fellow students from LEAP and will continue to cherish the relationships he developed at the school.

ALUMNI SHARE THEIR EARLY COLLEGE EXPERIENCES - IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Abby Morales

Abby Morales was born in Camden but spent her early years in Puerto Rico. When she returned to New Jersey, she enrolled in the LEAP Academy where she had the opportunity to participate in the American Chemistry Society SEED program (originally known as the Summer Experiences for the Economically Disadvantaged program).

Encouraged to aim higher by the faculty and staff at the LEAP Academy, Ms. Morales gained acceptance to Rutgers University-Camden.

As an undergraduate she worked in the lab and went on to graduate school as a chemistry student, participating in projects supported by NASA's New Jersey Space Grant Consortium and the National Science Foundation.



Ms. Morales is now a PhD student researcher working under the guidance of David Salas-de La Cruz, PhD, EIT, associate professor of chemistry at the Camden College of Arts and Sciences. Thanks to the Early College Program at the LEAP Academy, Ms. Morales has actually conducted research in Salas-de La Cruz's lab since her junior year of high school.

"For me to get to where I am, it started out as a dream," Morales

said. "Nonetheless, with the faculty, colleagues, and classmates who were placed in my path, I was able to make it a reality."

Ms. Morales acknowledged that her success has been significant to the entire Camden community. People who watched her grow up, or who were a part of her academic journey since grade school, now ask her to share her experiences with fellow Hispanics and first-generation college students who aspire to the same career.

"It's wonderful that I get to do this not only for myself but for others around me," said Ms. Morales, who hopes to work in a government lab one day. "My advice: Don't be afraid to stand out. You will surprise yourself with how far you will get when you are determined to succeed no matter the odds."

Bielka Gonzalez

LEAP Early College Program alumni, Bielka Gonzalez, is a shining example of the benefits of the program. She graduated from Rutgers University-Camden in May 2020 and began working at Protiviti, an international consulting firm that summer. Before her time at Protiviti, she had experience at PwC, a big four firm, in their Global Mobility Tax industry department. In this role, she filed individual tax returns for repatriates/expatriates, applied for foreign income treaties, and communicated with the IRS.

Currently, she specializes in internal audit and financial advisory, and in a few years, she has advanced at Protiviti while dealing with projects such as Treasury Audits, SOX Compliance Implementation and Testing, and NIST



CSF Framework Audits. This year, in July of 2022, she was promoted to Senior Consultant.

Ms. Gonzalez believes that taking courses at Rutgers-Camden while being a LEAP student set her ahead of the curve. "Not only did I have the

opportunity to receive college credits before even graduating high school, but I also learned early on that achieving a college education was easily accessible.

"Being able to go to college a little earlier than most showed me resilience, gave me the ability to adapt, and made me all the more ready for my first full semester on campus. Having classes already under my belt before formally stepping foot on campus helped me gain newfound confidence in venturing into the unknown world of undergraduate education, prior to even beginning my freshman year."

Ms. Gonzalez believes that her early learning experience instilled a sense of perseverance, and she is confident of the positive impact the program will have on the future students of Camden for years to come.

Starting at the Beginning: the Cycle of Early Learning



Studies have shown that what a child learns in their early developmental years can have a lasting impact. The educational trajectory that the Community Learning Center has been able to structure for Camden children and families starts at infancy at the Rutgers Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA) and focuses on providing a quality early childhood experience to children as young as 6 months of age.

Many Benefits

The drivers for investing in early childhood in cities like Camden are threefold. First, high-quality early education promotes children's development and learning and narrows socioeconomic inequities. Second, affordable childcare promotes parental employment and family self-sufficiency. And third, early childhood learning is a necessary component of the



economic infrastructure of a community. The Rutgers ELRA program serves students that are, for the most part, eligible to receive childcare subsidies and this program sets them on an educational and socio-emotional trajectory that continues for them as students at the LEAP Academy and eventually as Alfredo Santiago high school scholars that enter college at Rutgers and other universities.

The concept of educational pipelines is fundamental for the Rutgers/LEAP model, as the collaboration along Cooper Street between institutions of education makes it possible to provide students that are raised in fragile families with a continuum of education and support services.

Building on Teacher Collaboration

Teachers and staff at the ELRA work together to provide important childhood experiences that promote language exposure, cognitive development, problem-solving skills, social skills, teamwork, and mathematics. ELRA provides an environment that is warm, responsive, culturally relevant, and that offers developmentally appropriate stimulation.

The COVID-19 pandemic was disastrous for young children. These youngsters experienced learning setbacks and fewer social interactions. The ELRA staff worked hard to ameliorate these conditions and during the pandemic provided the youngest children with virtual experiences including activities as simple as singing a song with them or reading a children's



story to them. The focus of the staff was to ensure that children continued to have a daily routine, stayed in touch with the parents, and remained present in the children's lives. All children are now back, and the work is focused on lifting them again so that they can regain those lost skills and reengage in their educational journey.

We take pride in the ELRA program and our infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. We consider them to be the youngest Rutgers students on campus.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO ACADEMIA

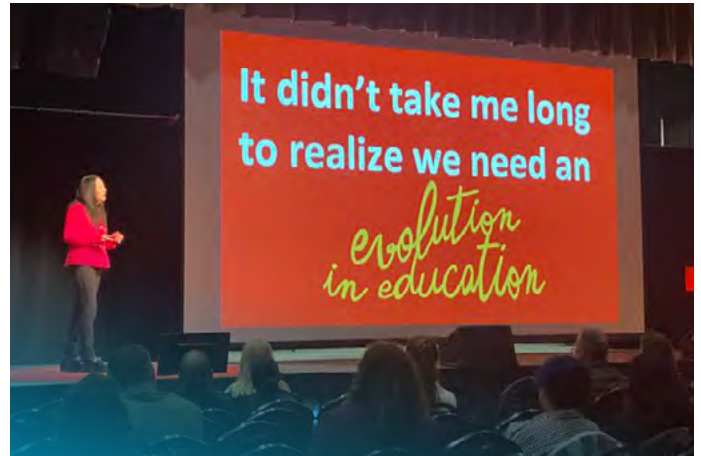
Bringing Theory and Practice through applied projects

The CLC has continued its track record of creating opportunities for faculty, students and practitioners to engage in real-life research opportunities that allow for the development of research, teaching and experiential learning. The opportunities for cultivating the necessary environments for engaging in projects that result in applicable knowledge that leads to improvements to society continue to be at the core of the overall work. These opportunities extend to campus faculty working with graduate and undergraduate students around important research; to high school students that are engaging with university faculty on research efforts that lead to publications; and students that are using the resources of the Center to engage in field practice, internships, practicums and as sites for developing their doctoral level dissertations.

Supporting Multidisciplinary Faculty Research

Two ongoing research studies have been hosted by the Early Learning Research Academy. These projects bring campus faculty and their students to engage with CLC staff working in early childhood and their families in important research with potential for influencing practice.

- **The Relationship Between Sleep and School Readiness:** Dr. Lauren Daniel from the Psychology Department have continued her work on Caregivers' perceptions of sleep patterns of their children. A research article titled, Caregiver Perceptions of Evidence-Based Early Childhood Sleep Health Promotion Recommendations: An Explanatory Sequential Study has been submitted to the Journal Behavioral Sleep Medicine for publication.
- **From Knowledge to Practice: Developing and Researching a New Questionnaire for Parents' Knowledge of Dual Language Development and Education (KnDLE):** Professor Rufan Luo is working with the ELRA staff in developing a questionnaire to understand parents' knowledge about dual language



development and bilingual education. Over the course of two years, Dr. Luo's research team plans to recruit approximately 10 Spanish-speaking parents for one-on-one, qualitative interview (Year 1) and 40 3- to 5-year-old, Spanish-English dual language learning children and their parents for parent questionnaire and child language assessments (Year 2). From 2018 to 2020, Dr. Luo conducted a research project examining preschool children's early language experiences in the home and school settings. She and her research team worked with over 60 families and 35 teachers at ELRA, and established a strong relationship with our teachers, staff, children, and families.

Global Academic Collaborations

The work in Paraguay provided the setting and opportunity to partner Rutgers Faculty with UNA faculty around a research agenda grounded on the topic of Ethics, Equity and Transparency. The results of these research efforts were celebrated in a special issue of the UNA Academic Journal (Revista Investigaciones y Estudios - UNA Edición especial 2022 ISSN 2709-0415 Volumen 13 - Número 1) where the articles were published.

PUBLICATIONS AND SYMPOSIA

- Bonilla-Santiago, Gloria. (2022). Ética, equidad y transparencia. Investigaciones y Estudios - UNA. 13. 10.47133/IEUNA221edrev.*
- Luo, Rufan & Song, Lulu & Villacis, Carla & Bonilla-Santiago, Gloria. (2021). Parental Beliefs and Knowledge, Children's Home Language Experiences, and School Readiness: The Dual Language Perspective. Frontiers in Psychology. 12. 661208. 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.661208.*
- Daniel, L.C., Stein, M.*, Dunmyer, L.*, Weaver-Rogers, S., Garcia, W., & Bonilla-Santiago, G. (2021, April). Caregiver perspectives on sleep interventions in an urban early childhood education environment. Symposium Presentation at the Virtual Society of Pediatric Psychology Annual Conference.*



Cultivating Research Collaboration

A group of UNA researchers collaborated with Rutgers faculty in developing publishable work addressing various areas of interest. The culmination of this yearlong endeavor was the publication of all the articles in a special issue of the UA Journal. The cultivation of research synergies is paramount in universities where the investigation and transfer of knowledge are essential to their instructional missions. This research work becomes key for also addressing societal challenges and finding solutions that can inform policy and practice. Two articles were published in other academic journals, as follows:

Dr. Santiago co-directed this special issue with Dr. Javier Enrique Barúa Chamorro, Director of Scientific Research and technology at UNA. She anchors this Special Issues Journal with an article titled: “Ethics, Equity and Transparency.”

UNA Principal Investigator	Rutgers Mentor	Project Name
Aida Lucía Maidana	Maureen Donaghy	Identification of incentives for the permanence of native students in nursing and midwifery careers
Federico Vargas	Maureen Donaghy	Equity, Transparency, and Resilience in Vulnerable Areas
Juana Elisa León	Patrice Mareschal	Strategies for the Reduction of Abandoned Animals in the Streets of the City of Concepción Through Shared Responsibility in the Framework of Ethics, Equity, and Transparency
Gladys Mercedes Estigarribia	Patrice Mareschal	Evaluation of an educational strategy on ethics, equity, and transparency in the Basic School Educational Community of Santa Rosa del Aguaray
María Soledad Meza Vera <i>Published in Journal of Dental Education</i>	Kimberlee Moran David Salas	Creation of Ethical and Transparent Processes for the Acquisition of Human Teeth for Teaching in Dentistry
María Laura Quevedo	David Salas	Planning for Forest Landscape Restoration: A Case of Gender Equity
Pablina Rodríguez	María Solesio	Improving Public Health and Quality of Life as a Mechanism for Increasing EET
Marta Antoliana Lara	María Solesio	Ethics, Equity, and Transparency in the Virtual Modality in Higher Education
Héctor Ramón Leguizamón <i>Published in Revista Científica de la Facultad de Filosofía de la UNA (RECIFUNA)</i>	Nancy Pontes	Obstacles and Alternative Solutions for Equity in Vulnerable Populations
Gloria Isildina Ortiz	Nancy Pontes	Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy: A Shared Ethical Responsibility for the Sexual and Reproductive Health of the Population.

For access to the journal featuring many of these research projects, visit <https://ceseet.una.py/investigaciones/>.

Academic Entrepreneurship and Experiential Learning

In its mission of engaging the campus community in efforts that enrich the research and experiential learning opportunities for students, faculty and staff, the CLC has to develop programs that extend the university resources to the larger community. The Community Leadership Center hosts students from Rutgers-Camden for numerous enrichment and work opportunities, bridging their academic studies to practical applications in the community. These experiences provide students, from undergraduate to the doctorate level, with the opportunity to develop a sense of social responsibility as well as strong and transferrable intellectual and practical skills. Students gain a deep appreciation of diversity and inclusion issues and develop their understanding of the principals of social justice, equity and civic leadership through a variety of programs that fall under the umbrella of our Service and and Experiential Learning Programs.

Fab Lab as a Place for Academic Innovation and Engagement

- Dr. David Salas from the Chemistry Department continued to work on a variety of school-based programs at LEAP Academy through the Fabrication Lab. They engaged other STEM faculty to support projects that will have broad impact for both LEAP and Rutgers University. This effort has already expanded to other faculty in the STEAM fields, particularly faculty in the Center for Computation and Integrative Biology.
- Dr. Klein from the Biology Department is active working with students from LEAP in various projects and this effort already resulted in a LEAP student serving as co-author of a referred journal. He is currently also working with LEAP students and Rutgers graduate students on developing projects to compete in the Corriell Science Fair, a prestigious local competition for high school students. Two of the LEAP students that have been working with him—Aimiyah Coleman and Hung Nguyen—are co-authors on a recently accepted paper in Nature Chemical Biology. This is a very high-impact journal and these two students performed an important genetic screen for this study.

Academic Internships

Each semester, the CLC supervises a number of for-credit academic courses at Rutgers-Camden. The Center works

with various graduate and undergraduate departments on campus to arrange these courses, such as Public Policy & Administration, Childhood Studies, the School of Social Work, the Law School, and the Dean's Offices at the College of Arts & Sciences, School of Nursing and the School of Business. The focus is on promoting the concept of engaged scholarship and civic engagement and allow eligible students to earn course credit through service-learning internships or to satisfy degree requirements for their undergraduate or graduate program's field-based hours.

Doctoral Dissertations

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION STUDENTS AND GRADUATE/DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS

- David Masagnor continued his fellowship at the CLC and is working on a study on the Early College Program and its impact on minority students. He plans to turn this into his dissertation topic.
- David Southgate is working on his dissertation on “Critical climate adaptation: Counter hegemonic possibilities to climate retreat for informal communities in south Puerto Rico’s largest coastal Barrio.” His research answers the following research questions: What are the determinants that allow informal communities to stay put amid hegemonic forces that would displace them due to climate change? How do displaced residents fare socially? How might adapting in place produce moral hazards?
- Giovanna Romero, an entering MS/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.
- Wanda Garcia is working on the final stage of her dissertation, “The Charter School Movement in New Jersey: A Case Study of Dynamic Change in Public Education.” This qualitative case study focuses on the evolution of the charter school movement in New Jersey, documenting the historical trajectory of the movement and the growing relevance of charter schools as a viable sector in public education, particularly in urban school districts. The focus is on framing the evolution of charter schools by applying the frames of social movement theory to acquire understanding of the changing contexts and directions of public education in New Jersey and the strategies that resulted in charter schools becoming an integral part of the public schooling landscape. Her dissertation traces and examines the factors, policy, political dynamics, actors, and actions that created the opportunity for charter schools to emerge and grow in New Jersey.

COMING FULL CIRCLE



How the JumpStart Program Educates and Inspires

Reaching Our Youngest Learners

JumpStart is a national early learning organization that seeks out and trains select college students and community volunteers to work with preschool children in low-income neighborhoods. Through a proven curriculum, these young children develop the language and literacy skills they need to be ready for school, setting them on a path to close the achievement gap before it is too late.

JumpStart at Rutgers-Camden will reach out to over 200 children at the Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA) with the vision to eventually expand to other childcare facilities in Camden in the following years. JumpStart's mission is greatly driven by the college students (JumpStart Corps Members) who commit to 300 hours of work during an academic year to contribute to an assigned child's growth and development.

JumpStart members serve their partner school part-time working 12 to 15 hours per week. They also provide outreach by communicating with teachers and families to share strategies for helping children. They expand their education through intensive pre-service and ongoing training.

Students that participate in the program can potentially earn Work-Study awards during the term of their service. They can also potentially earn AmeriCorps education awards to pay for tuition, loans, or other qualified expenses. Three course credits may also be awarded.

The participants have an extraordinary opportunity to make a positive and direct impact on the young lives they serve. In addition, many JumpStart students end up pursuing a career path in the early childhood education field. And what is even more extraordinary is that many return to the ELRA where they got their start as educators through the JumpStart program.

SPOTLIGHT ON JUMPSTART ALUMNI

JumpStart Alumni Enter The Early College Field As Professionals

Several JumpStart participants who are now excelling in careers at the ELRA took the time to share their experiences and their inspirations for pursuing a career in early childhood learning and development.

Thao Tran

Before joining JumpStart, I had recently changed my major to Childhood Studies and was overwhelmed with uncertainty regarding my post-undergrad life. I was immediately interested in the program after listening to a presentation delivered by active corps members. I recall how the corps members spoke positively about the program and their meaningful experiences working with young children from Camden. I quickly realized that being an AmeriCorps member with JumpStart would be a valuable opportunity and might help point me in the right direction as graduation was approaching. After being accepted into the program, I served on an amazing team with eight corps members; we provided weekly enrichment experiences for preschoolers. Overall, I am thankful for the meaningful experiences and skills that JumpStart offered.

After graduating from Rutgers, I continued to work with youth, gaining experiences that were significant to my decision to enter a career in early childhood education. I became a corps member with another AmeriCorps program called City Year and then a program manager at a community nonprofit organization in Philadelphia. As a City Year corps member, I served as a mentor to a vastly diverse South Philadelphia High School student population in several areas of need, such as academic achievement and social-emotional skills. At the community nonprofit, I managed an afterschool youth program that offered an inclusive and creative space for children ages 6 to 18. Both organizations collectively provided insightful experiences that ignited my drive to be a powerful resource and advocate for youth and their families. I realized I could make a difference as an early childhood educator by cultivating a foundation that inspires a love of learning.



JumpStart was a pivotal moment in my personal growth and career. JumpStart provided my team and me with meaningful experiences and skills such as problem-solving, planning, organizing, and community building. Most importantly, my participation in JumpStart helped prepare me to work with young children by teaching me the importance of building and strengthening rapport.

Building connection with young children helps them feel unapologetically curious, expressive, and valuable to themselves and those around them. Dedicating efforts to establishing meaningful relationships is beneficial in numerous settings but it is crucial for the growth and development of children starting at birth.

Jalyssa Cruz

Originally JumpStart was a way for me to test out what I wanted to do later in life. I wanted a taste of what it would be like to work with kids and JumpStart provided the perfect means. I built many meaningful relationships during my time there, specifically with the kids. One of my best memories as a JumpStarter was during teacher appreciation week when a parent had brought coffee for all the teachers on our floor, including the JumpStarters. When we tried explaining to the parent that while we appreciated the gesture, we were not teachers, the parent told us how much their child loves JumpStart and always talks about “my Jump Start friends” at home. It was in this moment that I realized even the smallest of efforts could make a big impact on a child.

It was very memorable working with the children, teachers, and JumpStart site managers. I loved every aspect of it. When it came time for me to make a career choice, I did a lot of reflecting on my time in the classroom with the children and the professionals who worked there. I saw the meaningful relationships that teachers had with families, and I felt the never-ending love the children had for everything. It was something I wanted to be a part of. So, when I finally made my career choice to move into early childhood education it felt right, as if I was always meant to be here building relationships.

When I started working as a professional at ELRA, I already



knew how to both talk to and manage children. During the time I spent at JumpStart I was able to watch teachers turn a very negative situation into a very positive one. When I became a professional, I tried to utilize the same techniques while also adding my own flair to things. It helped me reach a great balance between building relationships and classroom management. I truly appreciate the experience I had with JumpStart. In a way, the program helped me get a head start on my teaching expertise.



Rimi Weingardt

I joined JumpStart because I was interested in working with children and I wanted to see if early childhood education was where I wanted to be. My favorite aspect of JumpStart was being able to work in a team with a group of people who had very similar goals as me and of course being in the classrooms.

The teachers I had in school made a big impact on my childhood and I wanted to be able to do the same for other children.

JumpStart helped me get a feel for being in a classroom setting without all the responsibilities of an actual teacher early on in my college education. This helped me focus solely on interacting with the children in our care and learn how to communicate and relate to them more effectively. Also, being able to talk to the teachers about their experiences helped me decide on my career path.



Kyra Stauts

I originally joined JumpStart as a freshman in college because I was considering going into the education field and figured that it might be a good way to get a feel for what being a teacher might be like. I ended up staying with JumpStart for all four years of college, transitioning from a team member to a team leader to a volunteer coordinator. I ended up gaining invaluable experiences including teaching young children and building relationships with them, working with teachers and other JumpStart members, managing lesson routines and student behavior, communicating with parents and families, and finding and utilizing community resources that can enhance my teaching and the classroom experience. I truly feel that JumpStart provided me with knowledge and experiences that I could not have gotten anywhere else. It was a major factor in preparing me for a successful career as an early childhood educator.

I chose early childhood education as my next career move after JumpStart because I felt it is so important for kids to have positive school experiences early in their lives that will set them up for success in the future. I hope that if I can help students see preschool as fun and enjoyable, then they will also enjoy and see the value of attending school as they grow. Additionally, early childhood education is so crucial for giving students the foundational skills they need in elementary school. I love being able to help each child build a base of

knowledge that I know will set them up for successful future learning. Finally, I firmly believe in the value of learning through play, which is utilized most often in early childhood education but decreases sharply in kindergarten and beyond. I believe that children learn best through hands-on experiences and experimental play and am grateful to teach in an environment that allows me to provide these experiences rather than limited textbook or desk work.

My experience with JumpStart made my transition from college to my first teaching job much easier and smoother than it would have been otherwise. While I learned a great deal from my college classes on education and appreciated all that my professors taught me, there are many aspects of teaching that I simply don't think you can adequately prepare someone for with a textbook or a lecture. You can read all about things like classroom transition strategies or ways to deal with challenging student behavior, but you won't truly understand them and how to implement them until you're in a real-life classroom with a real-life class. In this environment, you must figure out what works for a particular student or group of students. JumpStart gave me the priceless experience of getting to test out and experiment with my book knowledge prior to being a lead teacher as well as observing and getting tips from my cooperating teachers. Instead of having a few months of student teaching to get this type of experience, I have four full years of it, which I believe made me a better and more prepared first-year teacher.

ALFREDO SANTIAGO ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUND



Making a Difference

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 focuses on 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 needs with an emphasis on increasing the diversity of the Rutgers University student body. 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.

DONOR SUPPORT

Rutgers CLC is grateful for the financial support of the following donors, as of 2021:

\$1,000,001-\$5,000,000

Delaware River Port Authority
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Morgan Funds Endowment
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
USAID

\$500,001-\$1,000,000

William Penn Foundation

\$100,001-\$500,000

Aireko
Asuntos Legislativos de Puerto Rico
AT&T
Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Foundation
Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago
Holman Enterprises
PSE&G
Steven Korman and Linda Richardson Korman
Vernon W. and Shirley Hill
Wells Fargo
William G. Rohrer Charitable Foundation

\$25,001 - \$100,000

Bowman & Company, LLP
Brandywine Senior Living
Columbus Foundation
Committee to Strengthen America
Conner Strong & Buckelew
Dilworth Paxson, LLP
Elizabeth and Arthur Reich Fund
Exelon Corporation
Fulton Bank of New Jersey
Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation
Independence Blue Cross
Joseph Coradino
JP Morgan Chase
Kresge Foundation
LEAP Parent Council
M&E Associates
Philip and Tammy Murphy
PREIT

Prudential
State Farm Insurance
Steven Korman & Linda Richardson Korman
TD Bank
The Beneficial Foundation
Verizon New Jersey

\$10,001 - \$25,000

Anne and Joseph Jacovini
Archer & Greiner P.C.
Campbell's Soup Foundation
Centro Para Puerto Rico
David Wright
Dr. Joseph L. and Susan N. Story
Flaster Greenberg
Garrison Architects
Genova, Burns, Giatomasi, & Webster
Hessert Construction
Jefferson Hospital
Kinesis
LEAP Academy Charter School
Lindy Family
Ortho-McNeil-Janssen Pharmaceuticals
Penn Mutual
PNC Bank
Public Housing of Puerto Rico
Rowan University
Rutgers-Camden
Shannon and Peter Burke
Virtua

\$2,001 - \$10,000

A. Pomerantz & Co.
Alan Gomez
Alma Saravia
American Water Company
Amy and Manuel Delgado
Angela and Dan Snyder
Ann Marie and Troy Clemente
Axalta
Bank of America
Bellia Work & Space Professionals
Blue Stripes Property Management Inc.
Bradford Mott and Marjorie

Gateau
Bright Horizons
Brown and Guarino, Inc.
Brownstein Group
Burriss Construction Company
Cabrini University
Camden Bar Association
Camden County College
Charisse R. Lillie
Congressman Rob Andrews
Connor Strong
Cooper Family Medicine
Cooper's Ferry Partnership
Create Architecture
DB Development Services
Denise Mason
Dr. Benedetto Piccoli
Dr. Donna Nickitas
Dr. Kriste Lindenmeyer and Donald Groff
Dr. Preston Lindsay
Dream BIG Enterprises, LLC
Drinker, Biddle & Reath
Duane Morris
Eckert Seamans Cherin & Mellott, LLC
EFK Group
Elizabeth Dale
Eustace Mita
Fund for New Jersey
Gladys and Eduardo Robreno
Goldman Sachs
Goulston and Storrs
Griselda DeJesus and Hector Nieves
Holman Family Foundation Impact PAC
J&J Snack Foods
Janice Strigh
Joan N. Stern
John S. Corzine Foundation
Jovita and Benito Veguilla
Judge Nelson Diaz and Sara Manzano-Diaz
Karyn and Scott Lunn
L-3 Communications
Macerich

Mary Sheil
Metz Culinary Management
Mike and Mary Ann Rielly
Mike Quick
Nadir Darrah
New Jersey Center for Hispanic Policy, Research and Development
New Jersey City University
NJ LECET
NJEA
NJM Insurance Group
Novagard
Peter Gold
Phillip D. Kunz Architects, Inc.
PNC
PSE&G
Raynier Foundation
Reed Smith, LLP
Republic Bank
Republic Bank
Rita Allen Foundation
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Roger Dennis
Rutgers University Foundation
Rycon Construction
Sandler O'Neill + Partners, L.P.
Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr
Saul Ewing LLP
Seasons Contracting Corporation
Stockton Real Estate
Susan and James Sasser
Tamara and Mathew Goodwin
The Governors Woods Foundation
The Honickan Foundation
The Honickman Foundation
Torcon
United Way
Wanda Garcia
Wendell Pritchett
Wills Eye Hospital
Winning Strategies



RUTGERS

Community Leadership Center
Camden