

Making a Difference in North Carolina

BY BRIENNE PASICK

In February of 1999, six North Carolinians came together and recognized the need to serve the new and growing population of Hispanic students through education. These six individuals were a part of a small but emerging community of Hispanic professionals in North Carolina, a community that they knew would only grow if they took action. Marco and Susan Zárate, professional engineer and high school



(l-r) President Scott Ralls, State Superintendent June Atkinson, President Ross, President A. Hope Williams, Marco Zárate, President of NCSHP, Yasmin Metivier and David Crabtree.

teacher, respectively, Fernando and Maria Elena Rodriguez, scientist and Kindergarten teacher, respectively, and Roberto and Gladys Santiago, IT administrator and Pre-K teacher, respectively, founded the North Carolina Society of Hispanic Professionals (NCSHP), a statewide 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, with the intention to bring together Hispanic professionals that could aid the success of Hispanic youth of North Carolina - with the sole mission of "promoting education among Hispanic youth".

When NCSHP was founded in 1999, five out of every ten Hispanic students were dropping out of high school. Students were faced with barriers such as language, parental involvement, and lack of cultural sensitivity in the school systems, while the growing Hispanic community possessed a lack of overall awareness of the importance of education as a dire tool to thrive in the United States. NCSHP looked closely at these barriers and developed educational initiatives and programs to address them.

In the last 15 years NCSHP has served over 11,000 Hispanic/Latino students from more than 50 school systems in North Carolina by offering annual educational summits, seminars, mentors, tutors, motivational presentations, and scholarships; awarded nearly \$250,000 in college scholarships to 170 deserving and promising Latino students; provided an annual forum for more than 2,400 teachers and school administrators from school systems across North Carolina to discuss methods and practices to help Hispanic students overcome barriers to academic success; promoted *Tu Vida, Tu Futuro, Tu Destino... Es Ahora...*

Educate! (Your Life, Your Future, Your Destiny ... is Now... Stay in School) Awareness Campaign in every county of North Carolina since 2002 and has reached more than 175,000 Hispanic youth and their parents; Launched the first "Stay in School" video contest among middle and high school Hispanic students; implemented *¡Graduate!*, a dropout prevention after-school program for Hispanic students and parents in two North Carolina counties; implemented "Good Stewards of the Environment," an extracurricular science program designed to pique the interest of Hispanic students in order for them to pursue science as a career; provided educational advocacy and represented interests of Hispanic students in key organizations, task forces, and advisory committees at the county and state level; delivered more than 25,000 volunteer hours by members, volunteers, and friends of the Society valued at more than \$450,000 for the benefit of Hispanic students in North Carolina; and established a professional Chapter in the TRIAD area (Greensboro, NC) to expand the reach of the organization's mission.

Recent data show great improvement in the dropout rate for Hispanic students since 1999. For the academic year of 2012-2013, approximately 3 out of 10 Hispanic students in North Carolina were dropping out of high school - a remarkable decrease compared to 1999 - while the graduation rate in 2013 was at 75.3 percent. Census data show that North Carolina has the 11th largest Latino population in the nation that grew by 111 percent with a median age of 25. These statistics tell us that NCSHP was proactive to recognize the growing population some 15 years ago, and that the focus on education was the right focus, as we now see more Hispanic students graduating high school and enrolling in college in North Carolina.

While the data reflect improvements in the academic success of Hispanic students, NCSHP

still continues to pioneer for improvement and positive change. In an effort to analyze the data and discuss what's next for this young and growing population in North Carolina, NCSHP recently held the first-ever public forum on "The State of Latino Education in North Carolina - Successes and Challenges". Recent statistics reflecting growth and economic impact Hispanics have had were presented and education leaders of North Carolina's K-12 public education and higher education systems participated in a panel discussion on this topic. These leaders not only came together, in a public setting, to acknowledge the growth and impact this population will have on the state and what an important role education plays in the economic impact they have, but also recognized the barriers that still exist for the Hispanic student population in North Carolina.

The North Carolina Society of Hispanic Professionals will continue playing a leading role as a non-profit organization regarding Latino education in North Carolina and continue to advocate for and assist the Hispanic students that are an integral part of the state and the Nation's future economy. It will keep the conversation going among education leaders to address the barriers Hispanic students face and it will continue promoting education and working alongside the school systems and educational institutions to ensure the academic success of these students. For more information about NCSHP visit www.thencshp.org.

Brienne Pasick is the Director of NCSHP.

