

# Mentoring Latina and Latino Educational Leaders

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*There will be many educational issues to address in the 21st century. The growing diversity and changing demographics of the State of California are among the most critical. Preparing and mentoring Latino leaders to transition to "shared power" is important not only for Latinos but for the future of education.*

## Introduction

In November 2004, the first eight mentor and protégé pairs of the California Latino Superintendents and Administrators Association (CALSA - now the California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators) Administrator Mentoring Program convened in San Diego, California to develop goals and a mentoring agreement for 2004-2005 signifying their two-year commitment to the newly formed program. The programmatic basis of the CALSA Administrator Mentoring Program was the result of the doctoral dissertation study titled, *Lending a Helping Hand: Mentoring Tomorrow's Latina and Latino Leaders into the 21st Century* (Magdaleno 2004) completed at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2004.

The data collected as a result of this research revealed a statistical shortage of Latina and Latino school

district superintendents and administrators in California when noted in comparison to the percentage of Latina and Latino students attending California schools. In a public school system where 2,961,101 students, or 46.84 %, were Latina or Latino, 2004 - 2005 demographic data indicated that Latina and Latino administrators serving as public school educational leaders totaled only 4,077, or 15.4 % of California's administrators (CDE 2006). For members of the California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators, the data was even more disturbing. Data collected indicated that in 2003-2004 there were 1056 school districts in California led by school superintendents; only 75 (7.1 percent) of these superintendents were either Latina or Latino. Of the 75, only 61 (5.8 percent) were males and 14 (1.3 percent) were females (California Department of Education, 2004b). With the increasing number

Recepción: 7 de junio de 2006

Aprobación: 19 de junio de 2006

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of Latina and Latino students in California schools, the need developed for a mentoring program that not only increased the growth rate, but also supported the retention rate of Latina and Latino school superintendents and educational leaders. Latina and Latino educational leaders are most often perceived by Latina and Latino students as role models who represent their future.

Having encountered years of lower expectations, the continued presence of a career "glass ceiling," and the failure of school boards and human resource leaders to adequately address the issue of equity in educational leadership, Latina and Latino educational leaders frequently find it difficult to ascend and to sustain positions at their subsequent level of school administration. As a result, the number of positive role models in leadership positions essential for Latina and Latino students is limited and the educational system runs the risk of reduced legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of its constituency, the Latino educational leadership community and the millions of students they serve.

The disproportionately low number of Latina and Latino school superintendents and administrators and anxiety over their opportunity to provide leadership in a system where 46% of the total student enrollment is either Latina or Latino substantiates the need for a proactive approach to meet the needs of a changing population. As a historically underrepresented group in educational leadership, the changing ethnic diversity of California compels Latina and Latino leaders to take on a more significant role as site, district, and state educational leaders.

Implementing and sustaining an administrator mentoring support program that improves the probability of success for future Latina and Latino educational leaders is essential to the future of California's educational

system. Latina and Latino leaders are readily conscious of the obstacles and issues members of their ethnic group face in leadership roles. Veteran Latina or Latino mentors skilled in confronting and then overcoming the difficulties of serving as district and site leaders are capable of guiding their protégés through the racial and gender barriers they face based on his or her own personal and professional experiences.

The CALSA Administrator Mentoring Program connects its protégés with mentors who can be of assistance as both current and future leaders navigate the inherent landmines that arrive with leadership positions. Learning from mentors who have gone before them and who share significant lessons learned through personal experience brings added value to program participants and makes position success and sustainability more likely to occur. George F. Dreher, in an article titled, *Race, Gender, and Opportunity: A Study of Compensation Attainment and the Establishment of Mentoring Relationships* wrote of mentoring:

The formation of a mentoring relationship has clearly been shown to have positive career effects for the protégé. Previous research has found that mentoring is related to advancement in organizations, organizational influence, salary attainment, and satisfaction with salary and benefits, (Dreher and Cox 1996)

For Latina and Latino educational leaders, mentoring by an experienced educational leader is a priority; mentoring by an experienced educational leader who understands and shares common experiences, a common language, similar racial and equity concerns, and who can also relate to the specific cultural experiences of his or her protégé is even more crucial. Several traits shape the many aspects of cultural assets for Latinos which make a same-race mentoring

program more likely to succeed. Of these assets familialism is consistently at the forefront. Familialism (also called "familism" or "familismo") denotes a cultural value which involves individuals' strong identification with and attachments to their nuclear and extended families, strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among members of the same family. This value appears to help protect individuals against stresses by providing natural support systems. Traditional leadership characteristics such as familialism and loyalty become primary for mentors and protégés when the value of caring for each other is not considered a duty, but an honor (Marin and Marine 1991). Juana Bordas asserts that the Latino vision of society is one that drives a collective, people-centered view of Latino leadership that is highly distinctive from a more individualistic one. Latino leaders, because of their inherent diversity and humanistic values, are strategically poised to help create a culturally accessible and compassionate society that values people and community before material wealth and individual advancement (Bordas 2001).

#### Description of the Mentoring Program

The mission of the California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators is to develop a cadre of competent, credible, and confident Latina and Latino leaders. The CALSA Administrator Mentoring Program strives to develop leaders who can serve as mentor and protégé models for present and future cohorts. Established in 2004 - 2005 with the introduction of Cohort #1 and its 16 members (8 mentors, 8 protégés), this formal, structured program is currently serving Cohort #2 (9 mentors and 9 protégés) and recently began the recruitment process for Cohort #3. Characteristic

of the extensive need for mentoring among Latina and Latino leaders, the first two cohorts consisted of 17 current and retired superintendent mentors while program protégés include a former superintendent searching for mentoring assistance, two assistant superintendents (one of which became a superintendent early in the program), two program coordinators, three directors, six principals, and three assistant principals.

Program participants were selected through a process of submitting an application and taking part in an interview conducted by selected members of the CALSA executive board, the mentoring program coordinator, and executives of companies funding the mentoring program. Interviews were not held to determine whether or not an applicant would take part in the program (this was completed through an application screening process) but rather to determine a mentoring pair designation. Once they become members of the mentoring program, mentors and protégés are required to develop a mentoring agreement and a year-long developmental plan. Both the mentoring agreement and the developmental plan are reviewed on at least two other occasions throughout the year. Program participants are also required to meet a minimum of four times a year at selected sites throughout the state and must make contact with each other at least every two weeks, either personally or through a pre-arranged method of distance mentoring after which protégés are required to submit their mentoring program experiences to an online mentoring log web page.

#### Program Assessment

Although the CALSA Administrator Mentoring Program has experienced its share of challenges over the last two years, program participants continue

to speak highly of its effect on them both professionally and personally. Outcomes to date, as a result of six-month and end-of-year assessments include the following comments from program protégés:

\* I have learned an enormous amount from ----- sharing personal stories and experiences, including things that I should not do and some potholes I have been able to avoid

\* I've learned to evaluate and analyze who I am compared to the opportunity before me

\* I've learned to recognize who the key players are, to keep superiors and other decision-makers aware of my activities, to know when to ask for help, not to burn bridges, and that relationships are key

\* I've learned to continue listening to and observing other leaders

\* To be introspective and sure about wanting "the position"

\* I've taken part in IBB training, developed interview skills and resume building

\* Learned how to network

\* Learned how to successfully leave a position through the development of an exit plan

\* Identified areas of growth

\* Learned how to work through difficult situations

Other benefits I've received from this mentoring relationship:

\* I've gained a confidant

\* I've gained an advocate

\* I've gained a racial, cultural, and linguistically matched mentor

\* The concept of racial congruence

\* I've gained a sounding board

\* I've learned from the intense learning opportunities and relationships developed through the program

\* Being able to speak with other protégés

\* Knowing there is a support (formal) network

\* Being able to speak with other mentors

\* Support when questions arise

\* Networking

Things I've come to value about our relationship

\* My mentor is an extremely visible, busy, ACSA member and superintendent. Yet, I have always felt like I am a priority when I e-mail, telephone, or visit him

\* The experience and wisdom of my mentor

\* How passionate and committed the superintendent is to the students for which he is there to advocate

There will be many issues for new superintendents and educational leaders to focus on in the new century. The politics of working with school boards, the growing diversity and changing demographics of communities, the budget problems facing California schools, and the overcrowding of urban schools are critical areas awaiting the expertise of present and future educational leaders. Latina and Latino school leaders must be prepared and mentored to be successful in such an endeavor. The presence of Latina and Latino school leaders able to mentor and support each other will help make the transition to "shared power" efficient and enduring.

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