

ASSURING NEW JERSEY'S™ FUTURE BY INSPIRING LATINO YOUTH: A CONFERENCE AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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Princeton, NJ – More than 150 Hispanic middle school students heard powerful messages about staying in school, excelling and planning productive careers at an innovative conference at Princeton University in early June.

Organized by Hispanics Inspiring Students' Performance and Achievement (HISPA), and co-sponsored by Princeton University's Human Resources department, the gathering was the fifth annual youth conference that puts dynamic Latino role models, many of them professionals in STEM fields, before Hispanic and other students. HISPA is national nonprofit organization with programs in New Jersey, New York and Texas. "New Jersey's population will be one-third Hispanic in a generation," says Ivonne Díaz-Claisse, Ph.D., president of HISPA. "We must inspire these students now to pursue higher education and reassure them that with hard work and dedication they will succeed. These Latino professionals are here to instill self-confidence and prove that the dream of a successful career is attainable."

With the theme "Take Action! Achieve Your Dreams," the program included motivational speakers, a keynote by Princeton University Professor Dr. María Garlock on the nature of structural engineering, hands-on workshops in STEM, and a teamwork exercise that illustrated the importance of design and engineering sponsored by the Siemens Foundation.

The eighth grade students came from schools where HISPA has sent its Hispanic role models, professionals who tell their personal and professional stories. This year, school districts represented were Newark, New Brunswick, Perth Amboy, Princeton and Red Bank. For most it was their first time on a university campus. That experience, many said, was an "eye-opener." Hearing the inspiring stories of scientists, researchers and other Latino professionals, HISPA believes, can be a transformative experience. And they heard a persistent message from presenters: Preparation for college begins on the first day of high school.

Among the speakers carrying valuable messages were Gian Paul González, a motivational speaker of national renown, and Nate Santana, a HISPA role model and a systems analyst at Educational Testing Service. Yvette Donado, a HISPA board member and Senior Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer of Educational Testing Service, spoke to the volunteers and role models. "I salute you for all that you do," she said. "Reaching these young people at this delicate stage in their education can be a life-changing experience."

For the second year, HISPA is collaborating with the Center for Hispanic Policy, Research and Development (CHPRD), facilitating Governor Chris Christie's Hispanic Fellows Program. Nineteen undergraduate and graduate students spend 8 weeks with a variety of New Jersey-based organizations, gaining experience, serving and learning.

"We are delighted with the outstanding professional development program that HISPA conducts for our fellows," says Abraham López, Executive Director of the CHPRD. "As with the HISPA Youth Conference, the summer fellowship program helps produce leaders in our state who will make immeasurable contributions in their careers."

Romy Riddick, Princeton University Director of Diversity and Inclusion, delivered welcome remarks. David Mejías, president of the Latino Princetonians Employee Resource Group, hosted the concluding Professional Networking Reception.

The Lead Conference Sponsor was AT&T, and the Event Sponsor was NOVARTIS. Collaborator companies were Bristol-Myers Squibb, Johnson & Johnson, Merck, PSEG, Siemens and Verizon. HISPA's annual partners were Educational Testing Service (ETS), and Southwest Airlines, HISPA 2013 Official Airline Partner.

Other partners were AT&T HACEMOS, Verizon HSO, Merck HSO, PSEG Adelante, Latino Princetonians, Johnson and Johnson HOLA, BMS Unidad Hispana, Latina Style Magazine, Parents Step Ahead, Latino Magazine, New Futuro, Rod Colón Consulting, Turnkey Telesummits, The College Board, Samsung, Kean

University, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, The Partnership For a Drug-Free New Jersey, Stevens University, ID Educational Solutions, NACME and Pulse Two Consulting.

HISPA president Dr. Díaz-Claisse said she was indebted to Princeton University for hosting the program and to sponsors and partners for making the program possible. "They understand that these middle school students and the CHPRD fellows represent future leaders in business, government, academia and science and technology. The students are so impressive. They will find their place in a more prosperous New Jersey."

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WHERE :

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