Reducing the Achievement Gap for Georgia’s Latino Students
Notes from the Executive Director

The Center for Latino Achievement and Success in Education – CLASE – was created in 2003 through a generous grant from the Goizueta Foundation, to support the educational success of the growing Latino population in Georgia. Now, the Center has become a recognized Research and Development (R&D) center with multiple research, professional development and outreach initiatives serving the Latino community and P-20 educators.

Housed within the University of Georgia’s College of Education (see www.coe.uga.edu/clase), the Center’s operations contribute to the University’s combined missions of teaching, research, and outreach as they relate to the education of this new population. CLASE engages and assists first and second generation, predominantly Latino, English-learning children as well as their parents and educators using a multidimensional framework focused on reducing the academic achievement gap, while promoting strong bicultural identities and resilience, as means to support positive integration into the majority society.

The “achievement gap” between the academic performance of Latino students groups and that of majority students is well documented. English language learners (ELLS) and students living in poverty are especially vulnerable. If not appropriately addressed by our schools and communities, the continued growth and relatively young age of the Latino population across the country, coupled with this group-based inequality of educational achievement outcomes, is creating conditions that have been characterized as “risking the nation.” CLASE’s multilayered research, development and outreach initiative promotes the long-term success of this at risk population through critical investments in educational programs and research that impact policies and practices that mediate that success.

We invite you to join CLASE in our ongoing efforts to reduce the achievement gap for Latino and other children placed at risk in Georgia and the Southeast.

All the Best,
Dr. Pedro Portes

The Goizueta Foundation Distinguished Chair of Latino Education, and Executive Director of CLASE

CLASE’s innovative model, conducted in close collaborations with school districts, community stakeholders and other institutions of higher education, includes:

1) Direct services to Latino students in the form of mentoring/tutoring and enrichment programs; 2) Professional Development and resources for K-20 educators; 3) Research and Analysis of best practices and project outcomes to reduce the achievement gap; 4) Dissemination of research findings and policy recommendations to local and national stakeholders.
Mentoring and Tutoring builds bridges between University students and the local Athens community.

Tutor/mentors give their time and knowledge to Latino and English language learning children, and in return, they receive a personal knowledge and understanding about the Athens Latino community. Tutor/mentors also help serve as a role model for the children, offering them a window into the possibilities engendered by education and making a significant impact on their lives.

Generally, tutor/mentors help students understand and complete homework; help with reading skills, especially for elementary children; and also have the opportunity to do learning games with the students. In some cases, tutors work with students individually, in other cases, in small groups.

“The most eye-opening and rewarding of all my experiences this semester”
—CLASE Mentor

“Being a part of this community, and seeing what positive things go on has really opened my eyes and taught me many things”
—CLASE Mentor
As part of its mission, CLASE has developed several initiatives to provide English language learners with the tools necessary to apply for, enroll in, and finish college. This begins in high school. Through SALSA (Summer Academy for Language, Science and Aspirations), a major initiative to reduce the achievement gap and promote a pipeline to college, CLASE works with rising 9th and 10th grade high school students in a four-week summer enrichment program. This unique model coordinates school district and university partnerships and focuses on science, academic language and college awareness and aspirations. This initiative is pivotal in identifying and encouraging future Latino college students and providing future leadership for the community. Like the tutoring program, the SALSA program provides a pipeline of support where Latino college students assist younger students just determining what their educational path will be. The SALSA programs have had impressive results. Over 85% of the SALSA students have graduated from high school (compared to the average of less than 55% of students from comparable demographics). Furthermore, over 60% of the students who graduated from the first cohort are currently attending college.

In another collaboration with teachers at local high schools, CLASE runs an after school scholarship-writing club, which culminates in a weekend writing retreat. UGA undergraduate and graduate students participate as tutors and mentors for ELLs and other students drafting scholarship and college application essays. CLASE also collaborates informally and formally with individual Latino undergraduate and graduate students and student groups at UGA to promote their retention, academic success and graduation.

“After I finished the program, I was so motivated, I didn’t want to keep it to myself; I wanted to share it with my friends”
—SALSA Student
Developing the Next Generation of Educators

CLASE provides Latino-oriented expertise, short and long-term professional development and workshops regularly for schools, media, community groups, non-profit organizations, governmental agencies, courts, and more. However, a key to CLASE’s model to reducing the achievement gap is the professional development of teachers. Most of the educators in the “new South” are ill-prepared to deal with the particular needs of the growing number of English language learning (ELL) children and other at-risk students, particularly immigrants and children of immigrants, in their classrooms. Over the course of the last 9 years, CLASE has developed many teacher professional development initiatives, e.g. workshops, school partnerships, and teacher summer institutes (including a unique study abroad opportunity for teachers integrating language goals into science instruction). In 2010, CLASE was awarded a 2.9 million dollar grant through the US Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES) to implement and study the impacts of the Instructional Conversation (IC) pedagogy on the academic success of English language learners.

The IC focuses not only on academic achievement, but also second language acquisition by increasing the rate and intensity of interactions with peers and expert teachers. The level of professional development and support that is being offered in this project is unprecedented. After attending a one-week summer institute focusing on the cognitive theories behind IC and the practical issues involved in implementing this pedagogy in the classroom, teachers in the treatment group are supported with coaches and trainers for a full academic year. Teachers in Georgia who have been introduced to this pedagogy and experienced this support report that they believe it has enabled them to cover more material in more depth.

CLASE has been working in close collaboration with several school districts across the state to develop this project which is in line with the common core standards and will be sustainable for systems and schools even when the project is complete since participation in the project is an investment in each system’s most valuable asset toward reducing the achievement gap: their teachers.
Research and analysis of best practices and project outcomes are key to CLASE’s initiative. In addition to conducting long-term quantitative and qualitative analyses of CLASE’s professional development and direct interventions to measure program impacts, the Center is researching and disseminating best-practices shown to be effective to close the achievement gap for Latinos and other students placed at risk.

In addition to the research on the Instructional Conversation pedagogy in the classroom, CLASE is investigating the impacts of its tutoring and SALSA programs and is conducting a longitudinal study on the cultural adaptation of Latino students P-20. Faculty and graduate students regularly present and publish on related research and policy issues. Central to the research agenda is the model laid out by the Executive Director, Dr. Portes in his 2005 book *Dismantling Educational Inequality: A Cultural-Historical Approach to Closing the Achievement Gap*. In 2011, Dr. Portes published an edited volume giving contemporary perspectives on Cultural Historical theory entitled: *Vygotsky in the 21st Century Society: Advances in Cultural Historical Theory and Practice with Non-dominant Communities*. Portes’s interests center on linking primary prevention practices to human development within a cultural-context perspective, improving teacher and counselor education, and educational policy. CLASE’s research and policy impacts include a consistent stream of requests for research, academic presentations, and publications that help document and extend our work.

“We believe that education is the key to our nation’s success and we are committed to finding a path that ensures educational equity for all”

—Pedro R. Portes
Policy recommendations to local, regional and national stakeholders are a natural follow-up to the direct intervention and research components of the model and help to “get the word out” about the findings of our and others’ work. CLASE presents research findings and disseminates “what’s working” at national, regional and local conferences and venues. Additionally, CLASE has collaborated and co-sponsored programs with organizations such as NLERAP, MALDEF, the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, The White House Initiative, the Mexican consulate, HACU, USG Partners, the SEF, the Georgia Department of Education, area RESAs and the Latin American Association in forging a policy agenda for students placed at risk. For instance, CLASE has co-produced a series of DVD and online resources for health and risk communicators to reach immigrant audiences. CLASE also maintains a web page and list-serves reaching some 500 educators, policy-makers, and others, through which resources, information, and opportunities related to education of Latino and immigrant students are shared.

In October 2009, CLASE organized and hosted the First Triennial Conference on Latino Education and Immigrant Integration, bringing together researchers, practitioners and policy-makers from across the country. The conference focused on issues of policy and research related to immigration and education, and helped set the policy and research agenda related to immigrant integration, and disseminate these recommendations. One product of the conference, an edited volume with research and policy recommendations regarding Latino education, is scheduled to come out in the spring of 2013.

Dissemination

Getting the Word Out: Policy and Best Practices
CLASE’s initiatives have received grants and support from:

- US Department of Education’s Institute for Education Sciences (IES)
- UGA College of Education and the University System of Georgia
- The Goizueta Foundation
- CompuCredit Foundation
- Home Depot Foundation, and others

_Become part of the solution by becoming a CLASE sponsor!_

CLASE is seeking support for the above models through corporate and individual donations, gifts and sponsorships. We invite you to join us in our efforts to reduce the achievement gap for Latino and other students placed at risk. Checks should be made payable to _UGA Foundation_ and you should write CLASE in the memo portion of your check. Using the envelope provided as the insert in this publication will assist in making sure your contribution is deposited into the correct UGA-CLASE account.

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If you are interested in becoming a CLASE sponsor, contact Paula Mellom at pjmellom@uga.edu or Aldon Knight at aknight@uga.edu.