HISPA PROGRAMMING
2020-21
ANNUAL REVIEW

We all need role models who can inspire us to reach our full potential, but not everyone has access to them.

HISPA mobilizes Hispanic professionals to inspire Hispanic students to discover their potential and ignite their desire to embrace education and achieve success.
Hispanics Inspiring Students’ Performance and Achievement (HISPA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to developing the Hispanic educational pipeline and creating a workforce of highly-skilled leaders to contribute to America’s economic future.

Many children never have to ask themselves, “Can I really be a teacher, doctor, astronaut, politician?” Unfortunately, many Hispanic youths have never seen role models that look like them in those professions. For this reason, it is important to provide credible Hispanic role models to students.

HISPA mobilizes Hispanic professionals to serve as role models. Because HISPA Role Models reflect students’ heritage, language, and culture, they help to demonstrate to students that they, too, can overcome obstacles and attain success through education.

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Recognized with the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), with the National Science Foundation (NSF), has named 12 individuals and three organizations as recipients of the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring (PAESMEM). HISPA was one of the three organizations recognized with the highest national mentoring award bestowed by the White House.

PAESMEM recognizes the outstanding efforts of mentors in encouraging the next generation of innovators and developing a science and engineering workforce that reflects the diverse talent of America. Nominations and awards are facilitated by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and the National Science Foundation.

Presidential award for STEM mentors

PAESMEM recognizes the critical role mentors play outside the traditional classroom setting in the academic and professional development of the future STEM workforce.

"The Presidential Award represents the opportunity for HISPA to recognize the thousands of individuals—our HISPA Role Models—who have stepped into classrooms and inspired Latino students to discover their potential," said HISPA President and CEO Dr. Ivonne Díaz-Claisse. "This award means HISPA can celebrate and honor the mentors who have invited our youth to their corporations and colleges, leading lab tours and workshops that have ignited students’ desires to embrace STEM education and achieve academic and professional success."

Colleagues, administrators, and students nominate individuals and organizations for exemplary mentoring sustained over a minimum of five years. Since 1995, PAESMEM has honored the hard work and dedication which mentors exhibit in broadening participation in the STEM pipeline.

Mentors support learners from kindergarten through the collegiate levels, as well as those who recently started their careers in STEM. Mentors share their expertise and guidance with learners, sometimes through formal mentoring programs. Mentors have demonstrated impact on individuals historically underrepresented in STEM.
The **HISPA Role Model Program** enables Hispanic professionals to step into predominantly low-income, public middle school classrooms to serve as positive examples for our youth and encourage student success. HISPA Role Models emphasize the importance of higher education and introduce potential future careers. In light of the pandemic, 2020-21 marked HISPA’s first-ever all-virtual school year. With the Virtual ‘Live!’ Role Model Program, role models stream to classrooms, allowing for real-time interaction.

Since launching in New Jersey in 2008, the HISPA Role Model Program has expanded to New York, Texas, Florida, and Pennsylvania. In that time, HISPA has made 1,886 visits, reaching 17,278 students. In 2020-21, HISPA completed 341 virtual Role Model Program visits, reaching 1,941 students in 29 schools: 20 in New Jersey, four in Texas, three in Florida, one in New York, and one in Pennsylvania.
Creating a College-Bound Culture

**HISPA’s programming is strategic and research-driven.** The Role Model Program targets middle school students, given that studies reveal that early intervention and having a role model strongly correlate to the pursuit of higher education. Throughout the academic year, the HISPA Role Model Program arranges six hours of programming during which HISPA Role Models emphasize the importance of education to future success and introduce students to careers in the public and private sectors.

**Educational Empowerment**

A diverse roster of Hispanic professionals—approximately 50% with a master’s degree or higher—shares their cultural backgrounds and educational and professional journeys, relating the key experiences that allowed them to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals. These visits provide:

- **A valuable opportunity for students to identify with Hispanic professionals**
- **Practical information (e.g., pathways to AP classes and career opportunities) and non-academic life skills (e.g., social-emotional learning competencies, self-efficacy)**
- **Promotion of bilingualism and biculturalism as assets in the 21st-century global economy**

**A Record of Impact**

Our research—tools and metrics designed and analyzed with our partner ETS—shows that the HISPA Role Model Program positively impacts student attitudes toward and awareness of college and career. Indeed, after experiencing HISPA programming in 2020-21:

- **97% of students** learned more about possible careers
- **96% of students** found the role models’ presentations interesting
- **95% of students** were inspired to do better in school
- **94% of students** were inspired to set going to college as a goal
HISPA ROLE MODEL PROGRAM KICK-OFF AND RECRUITING EVENT

Our programs rely on volunteer role models to share their educational experiences and professional careers, relating the key events that allowed them to achieve their goals. These stories show students that they, too, can pursue productive academic and career development efforts. Our annual Kick-Off and Recruiting Event is essential to engaging the community and recruiting volunteers. Thanks to this event, HISPA registered 100 volunteers for our virtual educational programs in one night.

October 1, 2020

Sharing Our Past to Impact the Future

Welcoming Remarks – Dr. Ivonne Díaz-Claisse, HISPA Founder & CEO
Keynote Address – Dr. Betty Uribe, Internationally Renowned Entrepreneur, Speaker and Author
Testimonial – Lauren Volpe, 7th & 8th Grade English Language Arts Teacher, Juan Pablo Duarte - Jose Julian Marti School No. 28
Call to Action – Rod Colón, HISPA Role Model Development
Special Remarks – Oscar Hernández, Four-time Grammy Award Winner
Our HISPA Imagine Day Corporate Visits immerse students in the corporate environment.

Touring labs and facilities and working with technology alongside highly skilled professionals introduce students to potential career opportunities and encourage them to envision who they want to become and what they must do to get there. In 2020-21, HISPA held two simultaneous virtual visits, with 15 volunteers from Office Depot hosting 66 students.

Rene Herrera, HISPA Board Member and Director of IT Audit at Office Depot, spoke of the visit: “As the school year ends, I’m so proud and thankful of all our HISPA role models from Office Depot who volunteered... Our SOMOS Office Depot team members hosted the students in a virtual [HISPA Imagine Day Corporate Visit] and delivered some great presentations about jobs at Office Depot. It was a greatly rewarding experience for all of us...Hopefully, this day will create many memories and new dreams and aspirations for these young students.”

2020–21 IMAGINE DAY CORPORATE VISITS:

Office Depot – June 2, 2021

45 students from Conniston Community Middle School
West Palm Beach, FL

21 students from L. C. Swain Middle School
Greenacres, FL
COVID-19 created many programmatic challenges. However, HISPA transformed these challenges into opportunities. As the pandemic unfolded and delayed event planning, **HISPA decided to bring the workplace to students—virtually!** HISPA’s STEM Panels united Florida families with STEM professionals who shared their upbringings, cultures, educations, and careers.
A HISTORY OF IMPACT: ROLE MODEL PROGRAM

Students: 17,346

HISPA Role Models: 1,457

HISPA Role Model Visits: 1,886
A HISTORIC YEAR: 2020-2021

Anson Jones Middle School, San Antonio, TX
Brentwood STEAM School of Innovation, San Antonio, TX
Wrenn Middle School, San Antonio, TX
Memorial High School, San Antonio, TX
L. C. Swain Middle School # 21, Greenacres, FL
Okeecheelee Middle School, Greenacres, FL
Conniston Community Middle School, Palm Beach, FL
Nicholas S. LaCorte-Peterstown School No. 3, Elizabeth, NJ
Jerome Dunn Academy # 9, Elizabeth, NJ
Elmora # 12, Elizabeth, Elizabeth, NJ
Benjamin Franklin # 13, Elizabeth, NJ
Abraham Lincoln # 14, Elizabeth, NJ
Christopher Columbus # 15, Elizabeth, NJ
Woodrow Wilson # 19, Elizabeth, NJ
Sonia Sotomayor School # 25, Elizabeth, NJ
Dr. Antonia Pantoja # 27, Elizabeth, NJ
Juan Pablo Duarte - José Julián Martí # 28, Elizabeth, NJ
Mario J. Drago School #3, Passaic, NJ
Martin Luther King, Jr. School #6, Passaic, NJ
Theodore Roosevelt School #10 Main and Anne Frank School #10 Annex, Passaic, NJ
William B. Cruise Memorial School No. 11, Passaic, NJ
Daniel F. Ryan School #19, Passaic, NJ
Passaic G & T Academy School #20, Passaic, NJ
Passaic Preparatory Academy School #27, Passaic, NJ
Trenton High School, Trenton, NJ
Grace A. Dunn Middle School, Trenton, NJ
Pace Charter School, Hamilton, NJ
Eisenhower Science and Technology Leadership Academy, Norristown, PA
Manhattan Bridges High School, New York, NY

Virtual 'Live!' Role Model Program 2020-21 Results

- Inspired to do better in school: 95%
- Learned about career paths: 97%
- Inspired to set college as a goal: 94%

Organizations

- Verizon: 83%
- AT&T: 35%
- UPS: 29%
- Bloomberg: 27%
- Merck: 24%
- BMS: 23%
- US Navy: 19%
- ETS: 10%
- Bank of America: 10%
- Other: 91%
**Oscar Hernandez**  
**Musician and Musical Director**  
**The Spanish Harlem Orchestra**

Four-time Grammy Award winner Oscar Hernández has long been considered one of the most gifted and prominent pianists, arrangers, and producers on the contemporary Latin, Latin-jazz, and salsa music scene. His family came to New York from Puerto Rico in the 1950s. He has achieved legendary status for his career spanning over 40 years. He is the leader of the world-renowned Spanish Harlem Orchestra and has performed and recorded with artists including Latin music king Tito Puente, Queen of Salsa Celia Cruz, and Latin pop star Julio Iglesias.

**Fernando Pellerano**  
**NESC Chief Engineer**  
**Goddard Space Flight Center, NASA**

Fernando was born in the Dominican Republic and grew up in Puerto Rico. At 13 years old, he became fascinated by space when he saw the first NASA Space Shuttle mission launch. His dream of working for NASA came true when he was recruited and hired by the Goddard Space Flight Center. His responsibilities have ranged from designing antennas and communication systems to developing instruments to monitor the Earth’s environment. Fernando earned his degree in electrical engineering from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus.

**Rear Admiral Dennis Velez**  
**Commander**  
**Navy Recruiting Command**

Velez has served in various roles at sea and ashore, including senior military assistant to the 76th Secretary of the Navy. Rear Adm. Velez received the Navy League of the United States 2016 John Paul Jones Award for Inspirational Leadership. His military decorations include the Defense Superior Service, Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service, the Navy Commendation, and the Navy Achievement Medals. He is most proud of his appointment as an honorary chief petty officer by CMDCM Steve Fontenot onboard USS Donald Cook.
HISPA ROLE MODEL VIPS: LEADING BY EXAMPLE

**Melissa Cristina Márquez**
Marine Biologist and Ph.D. Candidate
Curtin University

Known as the “Mother of Sharks,” Melissa became a household name on Discovery Channel’s Shark Week and was hailed as “everything that’s right with Shark Week” for her enthusiastic performance as a TV presenter. Melissa’s work has been featured in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Popular Science, BBC Wildlife Magazine, Forbes Science, and more. She also hosts a podcast, has published a book, and is the founder of The Fins United Initiative. Melissa received her B.S. in marine ecology and conservation from New College of Florida, her M.S. in marine biology from Victoria University of Wellington, and is earning her Ph.D. in environment and agriculture from Curtin University.

**Carmen Sachiko Villar**
Vice President, Office of Social Business Innovation
Merck & Co.

Carmen joined Merck as the Vice President of Social Business Innovation in 2017. Carmen began her career working with Diane Martinez, who was running for California Assemblywoman in the 49th district. Carmen took her next job with the AIDS Healthcare Foundation as a Government Affairs Coordinator. Carmen spent the next 20 years with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); living in Africa, Carmen worked to fight, treat, and prevent HIV and AIDS. She went on to become CDC Chief of Staff. Carmen earned both her bachelor’s and master’s at the University of California, Berkeley.

**Dr. Miguel Cardona**
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education

Dr. Miguel A. Cardona was sworn in as the 12th Secretary of Education on March 2, 2021. Secretary Cardona began his career as an elementary teacher, served as a school principal, and won the 2012 National Distinguished Principal Award for the State of CT and the Outstanding Administrator Award. He assumed the role of Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning and then served as the Commissioner of Education in Connecticut. He attended CCSU for his bachelor’s degree and UCONN for a master’s in Bilingual/Bicultural Education, Administrator Preparation Program, Doctorate in Education, and Executive Leadership Program (Superintendent) Certificate.
On June 2, 2021, HISPA hosted a brand new educational experience: the Discovery Summit - i4 (I to the 4th Power). Sponsored by AT&T, Comcast, Merck, SOMOS Verizon, CoolSpeak, and AT&T HACEMOS, this day-long virtual summit united 100 role models with 333 students from Jerome Dunn Academy in Elizabeth, NJ, and 20 students from Eisenhower Science and Technology Leadership Academy in Norristown, PA.

**INSPIRE Speakers**
Professionals share their stories, describing how they overcame barriers to get to where they are today.

*Rear Admiral Dennis Velez* – Commander, Navy Recruiting Command  
*Melissa Cristina Márquez* – Marine Biologist and Ph.D. Candidate, Curtin University  
*Dr. Miguel Cardona* – Secretary of Education, U.S. Department of Education

**IMAGINE Workshops**
Interactive challenges prompt you to solve real workplace problems.

Presented by Association of Naval Services Officers, AT&T, Bristol Myers Squibb, Educational Testing Service, Lockheed Martin, London Stock Exchange, Merck, Prudential, Tracfone, UPS, and Verizon

**INFORM Sessions**
Learn what steps to take in high school, college, and beyond to achieve specific career goals.

Presented by Association of Latino Professionals For America, Cabrini University, Columbia University Chapter of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, and Comcast/NBCUniversal

**IGNITE Address**
A guest speaker delivers a powerful, motivational address.

*Juan Cangas* – Motivational Speaker, CoolSpeak

“On behalf of Jerome Dunn Academy School No. 9, it is my honor to thank you for the incredible opportunity you presented to our scholars. In one virtual sitting, our scholars and teachers were inspired; they were able to imagine beyond the classroom; they were informed with a plethora of knowledge and wisdom, and it ignited a passion to pursue and succeed.”

– Principal Yalitza Torres, Jerome Dunn Academy
HISPANIC LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP SERIES

In partnership with the Center for Hispanic Policy, Research and Development

Hispanic college students often face unique professional challenges—including less access to leadership development, career networks, and role models—that affect their future educational and employment opportunities. In 2011, HISPANIC began the Leadership Workshop Series for students of the New Jersey Governor’s Hispanic Fellows Program, sponsored by the State of New Jersey and overseen by the Center for Hispanic Policy, Research and Development. The HISPANIC Leadership Workshop Series addresses systemic disparities and delivers leadership development led by diverse professionals. Each workshop has a unique focus and develops skills key to success in any field.
New Jersey Governor’s Hispanic Fellows Program Kick-Off Event
June 4, 2021

Session #1:
Leadership in Academia
In partnership with Princeton University Graduate School
Week of June 7, 2021

Session #2:
Leadership in Nonprofit Management
In partnership with Educational Testing Service
Week of June 14, 2021

Session #3:
Leadership in Corporate America
- Telecommunications
In partnership with AT&T
Week of June 21, 2021

Session #4:
Leadership in Corporate America
- Services
In partnership with UPS
Week of June 28, 2021

Session #5:
Leadership in Government and the Non-Profit Sectors
In partnership with the Center for Hispanic Policy, Research and Development and Verizon
Week of July 12, 2021

Session #6:
Leadership in Corporate America
- Finance
In partnership with Bloomberg, Bank of America, and the Association of Latino Professionals For America
Week of July 19, 2021

Session #7:
Leadership in Corporate America
- Pharmaceuticals
In partnership with Bristol Myers Squibb
Week of July 26, 2021

Session #8:
Final Student Presentations
Week of August 2, 2021

New Jersey Governor’s Hispanic Fellows Program Graduation
August 6, 2021

“This Leadership Workshop Series has been life-changing for me. I have grown personally and professionally. Through these workshops, I have found out who [I] truly am and what I am passionate about. I have found my calling from reflections and looking within; I have learned how to brand myself and truly be the CEO of [me]. I can proudly say that I am a completely different and more confident person after this, and I am ready to make a difference and take on the world.”

“I am not the same person from the start of the program. I gained more confidence and learned more about myself. The leadership workshop series was a great way to unleash more potential within me and make long-lasting connections!”
LATINOS IN COLLEGE
In partnership with the New Jersey Institute of Technology
Funded by PSEG

Seeing the results of HISPAs Leadership Workshop Series, HISPAs established the Latinos in College program in 2015 to expand these benefits to students beyond the Fellows program. In 2020-21, with the support of PSEG, HISPAs delivered Latinos in College workshops in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 to the New Jersey Institute of Technology students. The Latinos in College program brings various leadership and professional development opportunities to help foster academic and professional success.

Fall 2020

September 23, 2020 - The CEO of Me, Inc. Mind-Set: Empowering the Latinx Community as the CEO of Me
October 7, 2020 - LinkedIn: The Professional Networking Tool for the Latinx Community
October 21, 2020 - Leverage Your Latinx Brand for the Job Search, Interview, and Negotiations
November 4, 2020 - Advanced Networking Techniques
December 2, 2020 - Power of You with Addriana Montalvo-Andujar
December 9, 2020 - Navigating Careers in STEM - Panel Discussion and Networking with STEM Leaders from Bristol Myers Squibb

Spring 2021

March 10, 2021 - Own Your Career: Build CEO Mind-Set for Career Management
March 17, 2021 - Beyond the Resume: Wisdom from Verizon’s Talent Acquisition Sr. Manager Arti Pandit
March 24, 2021 - LinkedIn: The Professional Networking Tool for the Latinx Community
March 31, 2021 - Master the Job Search, Interview, and Negotiations as a Latinx Professional
April 7, 2021 - Overcoming Obstacles: Low Motivation and Vulnerability
April 21, 2021 - Navigating Careers in STEM - Panel Discussion and Networking with STEM Executives from Bloomberg

“The program literally changed my life. It gave me a sense of worth and value that I didn’t know I had. [The mentors] have shown much enthusiasm for my growth and have contributed immensely to my professional journey by coaching and being personally involved.”

“I really needed to hear you today. You said, ‘Make my dreams and purpose non-negotiable and accept that quitting is not an option.’ I was considering taking a semester off but not after this... moving forward in my purpose.”

“I wanted to let you guys know how important this program is for students in college. Everything that was taught gave me so much invaluable information and tips in my first year, which eventually landed me an internship for my first summer in college. I really appreciate all the people helping the program make an impact on students like me. I really appreciate all the help and support. Thank you!”

“...You made me think that impossible is really ‘I’m possible.’ I’m going to write that on a note to remind myself. Thank you so much for sharing.”
HISPA ROLE MODEL PROGRAM
STUDENTS SAY...

I liked HISPA because it really makes me feel like anyone can do anything. It doesn’t matter who you are. I learned that the history and background doesn’t matter. Thank you for inspiring us to make good choices and to keep on going no matter what.

I hope to see more Role Models like this so I can learn more. I learned to never give up and to push yourself to the fullest and to always try to reach your goal. I learned this because she worked so hard to get her masters and doctors degree. I respect and enjoyed how hard she worked and I want to work hard too.

What I liked was that she came from the place I came from which is Cali, Colombia. I felt that even from the beginnings she came from, she traveled the world and did cool stuff. It just reinforces that I can truly do anything I dream, I just have to work towards it. I could do whatever I desire and that societal setbacks don’t mean a lot because there are always chances to break through that and do something greater. Thank you for using your time to come and talk to inspire us to dream big.

I liked how she grew up here and became something big later on through hard work. Thank you for making me believe in myself.

Thank you for giving me motivation to complete school for a better life.

Thank you for making me less scared for the future, I really love your speech and it motivated me to move along from my problems and don’t let it block me from my goals/dreams. Thank you again, it really inspired me today.

I liked how even though many people told him he would fail, he used that as motivation instead of using that as another reason to quit. I learned to reach for the stars for my goals because anything is possible if you put your mind towards it.

I learned that going to college is very important and that no matter what situation you are in you can still go to college.

I enjoyed a lot about the HISPA role model’s life story… She managed to accomplish such high standards while coming from a different country at such a young age, not being the most fluent speaker, she still managed to do so much. She did that with hard work and dedication which is what we students need nowadays. We don’t really get inspired as we did when we were younger because we have learned so much about failure and disappointment that we are all scared to fail. I enjoyed listening to her amazing speech, and I hope to listen to more role models like her.

I liked her inspiration and her determination to be able to push through and be able to get financial aid to go into the colleges. You gave me hope to be able to have the determination to do anything I will want to do in the future.

I liked how she was being honest and mentioned how she wasn’t wealthy when growing up. I learned how you can be at your lowest and still end up in a good position by being positive and believing in yourself. I would like to thank you for sharing your story with me and my peers influencing us about how we can live better lives.
HISPA
ROLE MODELS SAY...

"Excellent. Great questions, [students] were very engaged, and seem to appreciate the opportunity of hearing my story as much as I enjoyed interacting with them."

"It was wonderful. The teacher and the children collaborated and made it very special."

“I am glad for the convenience of being able to participate in this program online and I am impressed with such a well-structured program to help the youth, with so many busy people donating their precious time as a demonstration of pure love and hope of a better future for the youth and even hope of a better world.”

“Thanks for the opportunity to share my story to such a great cause to motivate our future generations.”

"I always get inspired by the students and I'm also reminded why this work is so important. So, thank you Ivonne and team!"

“This is a wonderful program and I can see many lives being positively impacted by these sessions. Thanks for this opportunity!”

“I enjoyed the well-planned and executed program. The timing was perfect! Absolutely loved being able to share my story. Based on the questions asked, it seemed like some of the students resonated with what I shared.”

"This was my first time doing one of these sessions and I had fun!"
“I enjoyed [the HISPA Role Model’s] presentation. You were affable, genuine, and had a real connection with the students. I appreciate all your honesty when the students insisted on answers you may not have shared...As you mentioned, one should not let fear of failure or rejection hold us back.”

“Thank you for your time and encouragement to our students. You displayed tenacity and confidence that our students will use in their future studies.”

“La verdad estoy muy agradecida por tomar el tiempo para compartir con nuestros estudiantes tan motivadora historia. Gracias por compartir el discurso universitario, pues lo he compartido con otros profesores y están encantados. Como Colombiana, me siento muy orgullosa de ver que todavía hay jóvenes que aprecian y respetan la educación.”

“[The HISPA Role Model] spoke from the heart and discussed her journey from Puerto Rico to the United States. The students were impressed with her achievements and asked many thoughtful questions.”

“He was very motivating, spoke very well, and was excited to be with us. The students all shared that he was the best presenter so far and I just want to thank him again for sharing his story.”

“Estoy muy agradecida por compartir con nuestros pequeños experiencias de fracasos y éxitos. En realidad los niños han hecho comentarios de lo importante que es compartir con la comunidad. Le deseo muchos éxitos en su futuro y espero algún día nos visite en Jerome Dunn academy.”
Additional financial and in-kind support for HISPA programming was provided by:

- ALPFA
- AT&T
- The State of New Jersey Center for Hispanic Policy, Research and Development
- Investors Bank
- Novartis
- Office Depot
- PNC Bank
- Prudential
- Refinitiv
- Rider University
- The School District of Palm Beach
- UPS
- Visa