



INDIANA COMMISSION *for*  
HIGHER EDUCATION

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## **New Initiative Helps Indiana's Hispanic and Latino Learners Obtain Education and Training Beyond High School**

(INDIANAPOLIS) – The [Indiana Commission for Higher Education](#) announces today a new initiative aimed at increasing student access and attainment to higher education for the state's Hispanic and Latino learners and families.

Funded by [Indiana's Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs](#) (GEAR UP), five Padres Estrellas – translated as “Star Parents” – will work with community organizations focused on empowering Hoosier Hispanic and Latino communities to provide college and career support to students and families across the state.

The Padres Estrellas will connect with schools, neighborhoods and community partners and focus on helping students and families enroll in the [21st Century Scholars](#) program and the [Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant](#).

“We are committed to increasing access to the opportunity a quality degree or credential provides for Hoosier students,” said Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education Teresa Lubbers. “Hoosier students are becoming increasingly diverse and economically challenged and we know we must do more to meet these needs and close educational achievement gaps.”

The Commission's [College Equity Report](#) reveals that Hispanic Hoosiers are one of the fastest growing populations of high school graduates in the state of Indiana, but also one of the most likely populations to come from low-income households. Hispanic high school graduates are also 10 percentage points behind the statewide college-going rate, 53 percent to 63 percent, respectively.

Hispanic Hoosiers in the 2017 high school graduating class who were part of the 21st Century Scholars program defied the average college-going rates for their racial/ethnic peers and the statewide average. The college-going rate for Hispanic Hoosier Scholars was 86 percent, compared to just 40 percent of their low-income, non-Scholar peers.

“The Scholars program is clearly working, however we must do more to ensure that eligible Hispanic and Latino Hoosiers are applying in seventh and eighth grade,” said Lubbers. “One of the biggest challenges is simply awareness of the program, and we hope that Padres Estrellas can help increase awareness and enrollment by meeting families where they are.”

Alfonso Vidal has represented the 8th Congressional District on the Commission for Higher Education since 2017 and is president of Evansville-based Vidal Plastics. The creation of a program such as Padres Estrellas has been a goal for Vidal to see come to fruition in Indiana.

“I am very excited about this initiative because I can see the huge potential to connect a growing need with available opportunities that are being wasted. As an immigrant Latino and adopted Hoosier, I am experiencing firsthand the complexity of navigating higher education choices with my own children. As a Latino advocate working for the Latino community in Evansville and the state, I have also seen the challenges many Latino parents have in understanding and even being aware of the options their children have to be able to reach their potential,” said Vidal.

## Meet the Padres Estrellas:



**José Juárez, family and community engagement coordinator at Indianapolis Public Schools (Indianapolis)**

Juarez coordinates with family and community engagement liaisons in various districts to assist in developing partnerships with parents and leaders in the community. Juárez's goal through his involvement with Padres Estrellas is to help Hispanic and Latino families overcome the barrier of access to information on their path toward greater success in Indiana and the United States.



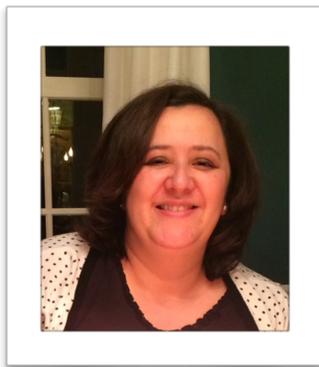
**Marlen Ortiz, family resource specialist at La Casa de Amistad and teacher at Starz Academy (South Bend)**

As lead preschool teacher at Starz Academy, Ortiz works primarily with three- and four-year-olds. One of her objectives with her work through Padres Estrellas is ensuring Hispanic and Latino families are aware of the available college and career options in Indiana.



**Lauro Zuñiga, instructional assistant at East Noble High School (Fort Wayne)**

Zuñiga works with special education students to create a one-on-one learning environment so that students feel motivated and supported to complete their work in a timely fashion. Through Padres Estrellas, he aims to better the Hispanic and Latino community by providing students with the tools needed to become leaders in their community.



**Maria Rising, Latino community coordinator for Family School Partners at Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation (Columbus)**

Rising coordinates all Latino Family Connection services and builds relationships with families in their neighborhood by sharing information received from family school partners and other Latino community organizations. Her involvement with Padres Estrellas will complement her existing work to expand the educational opportunities in the Hispanic and Latino community.



**Nancy Londono, outreach coordinator for HOLA (Evansville)**

Londono facilitates leadership workshops, recruits participants to various HOLA programs and assists the Hispanic and Latino community at related events. She looks forward to informing the community of new opportunities to build a better future for generations to come through her involvement with Padres Estrellas.

The Commission has also identified five key partner organizations in several regions around the state to serve as primary pilot locations to support the initiative and the Padres Estrellas, including:

- La Casa de Amistad (South Bend);
- El Mexicano (Fort Wayne);
- Indiana Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs (Indianapolis);
- Latino Education Group (Columbus); and
- HOLA (Evansville)

“As one of HOLA’s founders, I am very excited to be part of an organization that will be reaching out to parents directly and see the impact of the Padres Estrellas’ work,” Vidal said. “I am thrilled to see that the Commission has made Padres Estrellas a reality for Hoosiers.”

For more information, visit <https://www.in.gov/che/5014.htm>, or contact program director Greg Harrell at [gharrell@che.in.gov](mailto:gharrell@che.in.gov).

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**About the Indiana Commission for Higher Education**

The Indiana Commission for Higher Education is a 14-member public body created in 1971 to define the missions of Indiana’s colleges and universities, plan and coordinate the state’s postsecondary education system, and ensure that Indiana’s higher education system is aligned to meet the needs of students and the state. The Commission includes representatives from each Congressional district, three at-large members, a college faculty representative and a college student representative. Learn more about the Commission’s *Reaching Higher, Delivering Value* strategic plan at [www.in.gov/che/](http://www.in.gov/che/).