

What is ASPIRA?

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The ASPIRA Story: from Small Local Counseling Agency to an International Network

The ASPIRA Association, a 501(C)(3) organization, is the only national Hispanic organization dedicated exclusively to developing the educational and leadership capacity of Hispanic youth. Since 1961, ASPIRA has been working at the grass-roots level to provide programs that encourage Hispanic students to stay in school, prepare them to succeed in the educational arena, develop their leadership skills, and to serve their community. It is organized in eight states and Puerto Rico and has extensive national presence through its partnerships with hundreds of regional, state and local education CBOs. It currently serves over 85,000 students each year through its ASPIRA Clubs in schools and its after-school education and guidance programs. ASPIRA is a very diverse organization working with substantial numbers of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Central Americans, Mexicans, and Cubans, as well as with African Americans, non-Hispanic whites, and Haitians, among others.

Ronald Blackburn-Moreno
President & CEO of the ASPIRA Association
Interview on the ASPIRA History

The ASPIRA Association is a confederation of ASPIRA statewide organizations, which provide various educational, enrichment and support services to Latino youth and their families in schools, community centers and ASPIRA Clubs. ASPIRA Associates develop partnerships with schools, community organizations, businesses, community leaders and parents to provide comprehensive programs to advance the leadership capabilities and educational achievement of Hispanic and other youth. Today, ASPIRA has over 450,000 alumni. Virtually every Puerto Rican leader, both nationally and locally, has been an *Aspirante*. ASPIRA is in a unique position and particularly suited to advance this project for the following reasons:

- **National scope.** One of the advantages of the ASPIRA Association is its widespread reach, with its offices in seven states and Puerto Rico. At these locations ASPIRA maintains its long-standing relationship with the community. In addition, ASPIRA has hundreds of partners nationally through which it has delivered ASPIRA-originated programming.
- **Youth leadership development.** Aspira has over 45 of experience in implementing youth leadership development programs in inner cities. Virtually every second generation Hispanic leader, in the Northeast, Chicagoland, Southeast and Puerto Rico, has been an *Aspirante*.
- **International outreach:** Aspira programs are used over 10,000 organizations operating telecenters in North America, Central America, South America, Africa, the Caribbean and Spain through several international cooperative agreements.
- **Extensive experience in the implementation of programs for youth.** ASPIRA serves over 85,000 students and parents directly each year through its Associate Offices and extensive on-line programs.

- **Proven track record with the Hispanic population.** Our record demonstrates forty-four years of experience in working with students and parents. In each of our offices, we have at least 35 years of service to the communities.
- **Rated as one of the top ten charities in the nation.** As reported by **Money Magazine**, the American Institute of Philanthropy rated ASPIRA an A+ organization, based not only on our compliance with programmatic standards, but also on program spending, fund-raising efficiency and size of reserves.
- **Rated by [2] Hispanic Business magazine in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 as one of the largest Hispanic nonprofit organizations in the U.S.** Based on its shared mission and governance structure, budget size, human and technical resources the Aspira Association has been rated as one of the three largest Hispanic community based organizations in the country.
- **Extensive capabilities in information technology.** Aspira manages over 20 web sites, provides web hosting for its affiliates and other community based organizations (CBOs), manages e-mail services, the organization extranet, the national online MIS system, operate or provides support to over 150 community technology centers, and provides networking engineering and security services and IT technical assistance and training.
- **Inclusive organization.** ASPIRA reaches out to the local community to provide programs and services to any youth and their families who wish to participate. ASPIRA services Puerto Rican, African American, and non-Hispanic Whites, as well.

Youth Participation in Governance and Planning – The ASPIRA Association is unique in its governance structure. No other youth organization in the country has the level of youth representation in governance that ASPIRA has. Youth are represented on all ASPIRA Boards of Directors (local) and each Associate has a youth representative on the National Board of Directors. In fact there are **7 voting members of the National Board of Directors** who are youth under the age of 25 (stated in the by-laws), which is **40%** of the National Board. The National Board has a **Committee on Student Affairs as a Standing Committee of the Board**, which is composed of the young people on the National Board. The Committee chair sits on the Executive Committee. In fact **ASPIRA has two youth members on the Executive committee (of 7 total)**. ASPIRA was incorporated in New York. The New York State legislature passed a law exempting ASPIRA specifically, from the requirement that board members be 21 or over. Currently, ASPIRA, by special legislation, can have board members who are **16 and over**.

The ASPIRA Process and ASPIRA's Success - Over the years, ASPIRA has developed a highly successful model for intervention called the "ASPIRA Process." This process teaches young people to become aware of their own situation and that of their community, to analyze the root causes of barriers to their success, and to take action for positive changes in their personal lives and the life of their community, all within the context of reinforcing pride in their cultural background as well as their self-esteem. Because of this process and the services ASPIRA offers, more than 95% of *Aspirantes* (ASPIRA's students) complete high school, and over 90% go on to college. Moreover, almost every Latino leader in politics, business and education in the cities ASPIRA serves has been an *Aspirantes*. A more recent example of ASPIRA's success is that ASPIRA was credited by the Superintendent of Bridgeport, CT public schools of cutting the Latino drop-out rate that city by half. Among many others, ASPIRA has also been recognized nationally by the U.S. Department of Education for its mathematics and science academy (MAS) and for its parent involvement program (APEX), as well as by the President's Initiative on Race, which designated ASPIRA as an "Exemplary Program."

Drop Out Prevention, Increased College-Going, an alternative to Gangs and Violence in Schools and a Commitment to Service

ASPIRA's Youth Development and Youth Leadership program has proven a highly effective national model for ensuring that students remain in school enhance their academic achievement, go on to college, pursue a career and engage in service. It has been the alternative in schools with high concentrations of poor Latino students in the inner cities ASPIRA serves, to gangs and violence. Through community service, each year thousands of hours are dedicated by *ASPIRANTES* to serving as tutors and mentors to younger children in their communities. As indicated, an overwhelming majority of ASPIRA Club members (currently over 15,000 nationally) all of whom participate in the program finish high school and go on to college.

The impact of ASPIRA's youth leadership program is best exemplified by the number of Latino leaders in the states served by ASPIRA who are today leaders in their communities. In fact, almost every Latino leader in these states has been an *ASPIRANTE*, and many leaders across the country were ASPIRA Club members in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, including politicians, college presidents and a host of professionals.

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