

Our History

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In 1961, Dr. Antonia Pantoja and a group of Puerto Rican educators and professionals created ASPIRA (which means aspire in Spanish), to address the exceedingly high drop-out rate and low educational attainment of Puerto Rican youth. They were convinced that the only way to free the Puerto Rican community from poverty and to promote its full development, was by focusing on the education of young people, and developing their leadership potential, self esteem and pride in their cultural heritage. This was the best way, they believed, of ensuring that youth would become not only productive members of society, but leaders the development of their own community. ASPIRA conveyed in its name the expectation that Puerto Rican youth could succeed if they dared to aspire.

After extensive research on youth, ASPIRA founders developed a process for leadership



development that remains the core of all ASPIRA activities: The ASPIRA Process. Since its formation over 47 years ago, ASPIRA has grown from a small nonprofit agency in New York City to a national association with statewide Associate organizations in Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Puerto Rico, with its National Officer in Washington, D.C. In the last three decades, ASPIRA has become an inclusive organization. While still mainly a Puerto Rican organization, it now reaches out to include all Latinos and a significant group of non-Latinos throughout the United States.



Presently, ASPIRA serves over 85,000 students each year in over

400 schools, through its core activity, the ASPIRA Clubs. ASPIRA provides leadership training, career and college counseling, financial aid, scholarship assistance, educational advocacy, cultural activities, and most importantly, continuing opportunities to implement community action projects. Throughout its existence, ASPIRA's commitment to its initial mission of leadership development has remained unchanged. All programs still aim to help Latin• youth develop their intellectual and leadership potential so that they can achieve educational excellence and make a long-term contribution to improving their own lives and that of their community.

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