

EAST LOS ANGELES COLLEGE

ELAC, Cal State L.A. Tell Grade Schools: 'Prepare Now'*By Alejandro Guzmán*

"Parents think that college starts in high school," said Rafael Escobar, principal at Kennedy Elementary School in Los Angeles. "But we know that what they're doing now (in elementary school) lays a solid foundation for what they'll learn in high school and eventually college."

Escobar recently hosted members of the Go East L.A. initiative, which included East Los Angeles College President Marvin Martinez, Cal State L.A. President Bill Covino, and Los Angeles Unified School District Board Member Monica Garcia.

Martinez, Covino and Garcia each spoke to the group of students and their families, touching on the importance of building solid math and reading skills; getting good grades; seeking financial aid opportunities; and successfully navigating the college application process. These are just some of the topics that can help spark college-going environments within the East L.A. community, according to Julie Benavides, dean of student services at ELAC.

"By engaging families and the community, we help them understand how higher education can improve their social economic status, and we demonstrate that they are very capable of pursuing a college education," Benavides said.

The initiative also allows ELAC to accomplish its mission statement and one of its four goals of providing community-centered access. "It changes the way we work with our communities and puts us in a more active role."

As part of the Go East L.A. strategy, the collaborative visits elementary schools that feed into Garfield High School, which produces many of the students that end up at ELAC and Cal State L.A.

"Our initial target was Garfield High School, but as the program evolved, so too did the group of schools, which now includes all K-12 schools that feed into Garfield," Benavides said. "That way we can engage students in the earlier grades."

So far, the partners have visited 14 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and of course, Garfield High School. Participating schools get everyone involved, including their student bodies, parents, teachers and administrators.

"The energy has been magnificent as even young children are talking about college and their A-G requirements," Benavides said.

For the elementary schools, it's also an opportunity to show students and families that what happens there is crucial to future successes.

"We were excited to host the event," Escobar said. "The idea of going to college can seem like a non-reality, but with this type of program, you can instill in them the idea of 'yes, I'm going to college'."

Continue to repeat the message and say 'prepare yourself, we're waiting for you to enroll. Having that in place will pay huge dividends."



Members of the Go East L.A. initiative visited Kennedy Elementary School to talk about college and career opportunities with students and their families.

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— JULIE BENAVIDES, Dean of student services at East Los Angeles College

Escalante Program Proves Its Worth*By John C. Rude*

It was a long time coming, but the Jaime Escalante program, which has operated at East Los Angeles College for 32 years, recently confirmed its powerful ability to transform math achievement for young learners.

The unorthodox Bolivian high school teacher Jaime Escalante began his accelerated math program at Garfield High School in 1974, then brought his teaching methods to ELAC in 1983. As depicted in the 1988 film "Stand and Deliver," the Escalante method challenges low-performing students to tackle math problems at a higher level than they think they are capable of.

As a consequence, students become engaged and motivated learners. Escalante students succeed in regular math classes because of intensive tutoring that they receive after school and during the summer. Over 200,000 students have benefited from Escalante's teaching techniques over three decades. One of Escalante's early protégés, ELAC math professor Fernando Fernandez, is the program's current director.

The Escalante program has been limited in its ability to prove the reasons for, or extent of its success. Professor Fernandez could point to thousands of students and parents standing in long lines each summer to register. He could theorize about the intensity of the summer sessions — four hours per day, five days per week, seven weeks — 140 hours of math enrichment. He points with pride to his carefully-selected teaching staff, and to a series of locally-produced, user-friendly textbooks that are eagerly digested by students, tutors and family members.

But did the Escalante method significantly improve school achievement scores in math? If the answer was yes, how did it produce this unlikely result, in light of the fact that the vast majority of East Los Angeles middle and high school students fail to meet California's math achievement standards?

Last year, Bryan Bowen, a doctoral student in education from Azusa Pacific University, applied a rigorous analysis to a group of 2,386 Escalante students. The research compared these students to their 7th and 8th grade counterparts in the Garvey School District. Bowen (who himself taught math in high school) teased out the differences between participants and non-participants enrolled in pre-Algebra and Algebra classes over a two-year period.

Using standardized tests issued by UCLA and the State of California, Bowen discovered that Escalante students had significantly higher test scores than those who did not receive tutoring. The effect was especially strong when students enrolled for two consecutive summers in Escalante tutoring. Possibly the most surprising result was that Escalante tutoring had much greater impact on girls



From left: Fernando Fernandez, Director, Escalante Program; Gia Nguyen, Publisher, Escalante texts; Dr. Lou Hughes, ELAC Internal Evaluator; Dr. Bryan Bowens, Escalante Program Researcher

than on boys. Although both genders were successful as a result of Escalante instruction, the data reveals that girls, who are often stereotyped as "math avoiders," have the potential to take off as scientists, doctors or engineers if they are given the right start.

Escalante Director Fernandez was pleased with the research. "This is a tool that the Escalante program has needed to convince school districts and families to jump-start progress in a difficult subject."

East Los Angeles College Vice President Dr. Richard Moyer said, "I was impressed by the rigor of Dr. Bowen's research. All along, we believed that we've been faithful to Jaime Escalante's original vision. Now we are sure. If anything, the program has improved over time."