



INDIANA COMMISSION *for*
HIGHER EDUCATION

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Higher Ed Commission to Welcome Four New Padres Estrellas

Initiative helps Indiana's Hispanic and Latino learners obtain postsecondary education and training

(INDIANAPOLIS) – The [Indiana Commission for Higher Education](#) will welcome four new Padres Estrellas – translated as “Star Parents” – during the initiative’s annual training session on December 1.

Funded by [Indiana's Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs](#) (GEAR UP) and created in 2019, Padres Estrellas connect with Indiana schools, neighborhoods and community partners. Padres Estrellas focus on helping Hispanic and Latino students and families file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), access state financial aid, and enroll in the [21st Century Scholars](#) program and the [Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant](#).

“Higher education is the best pathway to future opportunity and economic mobility, and we are committed to ensuring all Hoosiers have access to pursue education beyond high school,” said Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education Teresa Lubbers. “As high school classrooms become more diverse and low-income, it’s imperative that we equip students and families with information to make responsible decisions regarding higher education.”

The Commission’s [2021 College Equity Report](#) reveals that Hispanic and Latino students are poised to become the second-largest racial or ethnic group among Indiana high school seniors, but they’re also more than twice as likely as White students to be low-income. Hispanic high school graduates are also 10 percentage points behind the statewide college-going rate, 59 percent to 49 percent, respectively. Hispanic men have the lowest college-going rate of all race and ethnic groups at 42 percent.

Nine out of 10 Hispanic Hoosiers in the 2019 high school graduating class who were part of the 21st Century Scholars program went directly to college. This rate is 39 percentage points higher than their higher income Hispanic and Latino peers and 54 percentage points higher than their low-income non-Scholar peers.

“The 21st Century Scholars program has made transformative change in the college-going rate for Hoosier students; however, we must ensure that more eligible Hispanic and Latino students are applying in seventh and eighth grade,” said Lubbers. “One of the biggest challenges is simply awareness of the program, and our Padres Estrellas help address this issue. They meet students and families one-on-one, assist with the application process and make sure current Scholars are meeting program eligibility requirements.”

The Commission works with partner organizations in several regions around the state to support the initiative and the Padres Estrellas. Juntos 4-H Purdue Extension is the newest community partner.

“I am excited about the opportunity to work alongside the Commission and the Padres Estrellas to increase the resources of the Juntos 4-H program in Marion, Lake and Dubois Counties,” said Xiomara Diaz-Vargas, Indiana 4-H state specialist in new audience initiatives at Purdue University. “This unique partnership will provide access to more young

Hispanic and Latino Hoosiers and their families to gain the knowledge and skills they need for academic success and to design pathways to help sustain these efforts.”

Meet the new Padres Estrellas:



Anahi Santos, 21st Century Scholar at Indiana University Kokomo (North Central Region)

Santos is a current 21st Century Scholar pursuing her Bachelor of Science degree in criminal justice and psychology with a minor in Spanish at Indiana University Kokomo. As a Scholar herself and a first-generation college student, she understands the value of the Padres Estrellas program and the difference it can make for students and families. Santos' mission as a Padre Estrella is to help connect families to information, resources and services that can help them achieve their goals as it relates to higher education.



Luz Neira Cruz H., Juntos 4-H Bilingual Assistant and Director/Founder of Escuela de Vida para Padres (Central Region)

Neira Cruz is a positive parenting discipline educator with a specialty in culture and child development. She is also a Spanish as a foreign language educator. As a Padre Estrella serving the Metropolitan School District Wayne Township, Neira Cruz's objective is to guide families in achieving their students' educational goals in the short, medium and long term through knowledge of the American educational system. Also, to provide tools to the strengthening of family relationships with workshops for parents or caregivers.



Luis A. Santiago, Extension Educator, County Extension Director, Purdue Extension-Daviess County (Southwest Region)

Santiago works to serve as liaison between Purdue University Extension Service and the Latino audiences in Daviess County and is the Juntos 4-H Coordinator in Dubois County. He seeks to establish partnerships with other community organizations and families, with the purpose of coordinating and delivering outreach and engagement programs to address the needs of Latinos and other underserved/under-represented audiences. For Santiago, the goal of partnering with the Padres Estrellas program is to empower families and their students to actively seek available opportunities and help them achieve their dreams of better success in life.



Noemi J. Lozano, EL SEL Parent Liaison and Juntos 4-H Coordinator at River Forest Community School Corporation (Northwest Region)

Lozano serves as a parent liaison for the EL parents and community members. Her goal through her involvement with Padres Estrellas is to inform and educate families about the resources available to support their children's education and promote parental involvement in the school community.

Current Padres Estrellas members include:

- José Juárez (Central Region)
- Lauro Zuñiga (Northeast Region)
- Marlen Ortiz (Northwest Region)
- Mayita Rising (Southeast Region)

Current partner organizations include:

- Indiana Latino Institute (Marion County)
- La Casa de Amistad (South Bend)
- El Mexicano (Allen County)
- Community Education Coalition (Bartholomew County)

For more information, visit <https://www.in.gov/che/5014.htm>, or contact program director, José Medina at JMedina@che.in.gov.

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About the Indiana Commission for Higher Education

Created in 1971, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education plans, coordinates and defines Indiana's postsecondary education system to align higher learning with the needs of students and the state. The Commission also administers Indiana's financial aid programs, including the [21st Century Scholars](#) early college promise scholarship, which celebrated 30 years in 2020. Learn more about the Commission's [Reaching Higher in a State of Change](#) strategic plan at www.in.gov/che.