Our Stories—Si Se Puede

Since the start of the HBLL (1996) and through our many activities, we have come in contact with many accomplished individuals. Many of these persons have overcome great odds and in so doing provided a better future, not just for themselves but for many others. We think there is value in telling our stories, which in turn will empower others to believe that si se puede.

—Valverde

JOE J. BERNAL, PH.D.
Texas State Board of Education, San Antonio, Texas

For over fifty years, Joe Bernal, a native of Texas, has provided strong leadership and service, primarily in education and government. He has served his community as a social worker and in education as a classroom teacher, school building principal, and assistant superintendent. As a public servant he was elected to the Texas legislature as a representa-
tive and senator. Currently, he combines both his educational and governmental experi-
ences as a member of the Texas State Board of Education. First elected to the state board in 1996, he was reelected in 2000. He served as vice chair of the 15-member state board from 2001 to 2003.

During his years in the Texas state senate, Bernal, a Democrat, was the primary author of bills enacted into law that provided elemen-
tary teachers a 45-minute planning time and a 15-year free statewide kindergarten for some five-year-olds, established the Uni-

Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

While Bernal takes much pride in his role of establishing UTSA and the dental and nursing schools, from a social and economic perspective, he believes that his lead-

erwhile a senator helping the farmworkers in 1967 was the high-

point. At the time, he was the only Latino senator and by challenging the state in its treatment of farm-

workers, the Texas Rangers did not agree to farmworker unioniza-
tion efforts.

Bernal is a World War II veteran, having served in the Philip-

pines and the Pacific. He earned a bachelor’s degree from Trinity Uni-

versity, master’s degree from our Lady of the Lake University, and a doctorate from the University of Texas at Austin. He is pleased to have known and studied under Professor George I. Sánchez.

While in his various roles as an educator, he also served for seven years as an executive board mem-

ber of the National Association for Bilingual Education, and he served as legislative chairman of the Texas Association for Bilingual Educa-
tion. In 1988, he was elected president of the 1,200-member San Antonio Area Retired Teachers Association for the year 2001-2002 and now serves as its legislative chair.

He is married to Mary Estel Bernal, an accomplished educator. They have four children, three sons and one daughter.

DORA GONZALES, MSW
School Board President, Comal Independent School District, Texas

Fifteen, an eighth-grade education, and pregnant. To this, the min-

dset of a school district that discouraged pregnant students from continuing their education, because it didn’t look good.” And a principal who did not mandate the withdrawal from school stated, “This is what happens to Mexican girls.” These events and circum-
stances were all the potential ele-

ments of a bleak future. In 1970 I never imagined the opportunities these struggles would create for me. Providing for the care and support of a new baby girl became my full-time job. I had always wanted to be the first of my family to go to college. Even with help from my family, returning to school seemed like an unattainable goal. I soon married the father of my baby. I became a stay-at-home mom and he, a second-generation textile worker, like many of the young people in our small community. A few years later we had our son. But the struggle to support two young children and living from paycheck to paycheck became too much. Soon I became a single parent again, but now with two young children. I joined the ranks of the textile workers, a job that provided a weekly paycheck but little control over the work. The drive to provide more for my children got me through a tech-

nical school. I was able to find a job as a dental assistant. A job I truly enjoyed and took great pride in doing. But several years later, due to health problems related to chemi-

cals used in the course of my job, I was unable to continue. I could no longer use the only job skills I had.

At thirty-eight years of age, I pursued my life-long dream, to go to college. With a GED in hand, lots of life experience, a grown and su-

cessful in their careers.

HBLI Helps with Unity 2003 California School Board Conference

The Hispanic Border Leadership Institute participated in the Unity 2003 Conference presented by the California Latino School Board Member Association, October 2-4, 2003, in Del Mar, California. The Unity Conference brings together the Asian Pacific Islander School Board Member Association, Cali-

fornia Latino School Board Mem-

ber Association, Coalition of Black School Board Members, the Cali-

fornia Superintendents Association, and the California Association of Latino Community College Trustees. This year’s conference theme was “The Time Is Now: Raising Our Voices for Needed Change,” with breakout sessions on topics such as the legal rights of immigrant parents and children, public school accountability, No Child Left Behind, and superinten-

dent evaluations. A youth leader-

ship seminar was also offered and included a panel of Latino profes-

sionals and role models who shared their success stories with high school and middle school students. The breakout session entitled “Everyone Wants High Achieve-

ment—How Trustees Can Make It Happen!” presented by Dr. Leonard Valverde was very well attended. Dr. Valverde talked about the impor-

tance of having teachers, principals, superintendents, and board mem-

bers create supportive environments that can increase student achievement. In addition, he talked about ways to maximize superin-

tendent and principal performance.

Lisa Murray, Program Coordinat-

or, organized and staffed an in-
formational table and provided tote bags for the conference. We reconnected with the HBLI Califor-

nia leadership seminar alumni and generated interest for our next Cal-

ifornia seminar scheduled for early spring 2004.

The leadership seminars contin-

ue to garner praise from the partici-

pants and presenters. By attending school board conferences, HBLI is attaining recognition among state school board associations like the Arizona School Boards Association, the California School Board Associa-

tion, the California Latino School Board Member Association, the Texas Association of School Boards, and the Texas Mexican American School Board Association. In addi-

tion HBLI is associated with the NALEO National Education Leader-

ship Initiative Program. Currently, we are working with the New Mexi-

co School Board Association and the Colorado Latino School Board Cas-

cus in preparation for the leadership seminar scheduled for January 29-

31, 2004, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Lilia Murray and Leonard Valverde continue to promote the HBLI lead-

ership seminars by participating in conferences like the California Unity Conference, Celebrating Opportu-

nity Conference, and the Texas Mexican American School Board conference. The leadership seminar format provides an opportunity for the board members and a view-

points by school board members and experts in an intimate setting to ultimately provide a rich experi-

cience for both seminar participants and presenters alike.