From the Top

In preparing this newsletter, we began with the same intent as former newsletter editors and that we have followed in the past, i.e., we wanted to chronicle our activities in order to promote our involvement, productivity, and our continued pursuance of our mission. In reading the contents, you will find we have done so. Shortly, I will give you a quick overview.

However, and more importantly, in reflecting on the contents of the newsletter, I began to think of the school officials and students who have met and interacted with during the course of our planned events. In so doing, I realized the impression they have made on, not just me, but on others as well. To be more exact, as the executive director, I am privileged to come in contact with numerous persons, varied in background, strong in character, with diverse experiences, and all accomplished and successful. They are school board members, educators, and administrators from across the United States. They are school officials from the local, state, and federal levels, business persons, civic leaders; and they all are from different states and cities. To try to capture the high quality of persons engaged with HBLI, we start a new page called “Our Stories—Si Se Puede.” Here we provide stories of two persons, and we plan to continue these stories in future newsletters.

With regard to our activities, I want to highlight three for your consideration because they represent HBLI’s continued development. The first is our newest programmatic initiative, which we call Early Start to College. The Lumina Foundation gave us seed funds to encourage 200 eighth- and ninth-grade Latino students from low-income communities to consider going to college. The program has been in operation for only six months and the response to our activities has been overwhelming, so much so, that over 300 students are participating. In addition, we are providing financial assistance to parents about financing their children’s college education, and because over 90 percent of the parents speak only Spanish, we provide the information in English and Spanish.

Second, Congressman Ciro Rodríguez, Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), asked me to moderate the all-day session on education at the Washington, D.C., annual CHC Institute conference. The reason I bring this activity to your attention is because as the moderator I heard from participants, what came from the floor, and from the country, reinforced the original premise on which HBLI was founded in 1996. In short, the negative conditions still persist and our strategy of systemic change via change agents is needed more than ever before.

Third, our work with school board members through our leadership seminars continues to garner praise from the participants and our recognition by state associations is increasing. To name a few, we are connected to the Texas Mexican American School Board Association, California Latino School Board Caucus, NELI of the National Association of Latino Elected Officials, California School Board Association, Celebrating Opportunities Conference, and the Colorado Latino School Board Caucus. With a few of these we are formalizing our connections into relationships. While our format of intense engagement by board members with experts and providing alternative viewpoints on issues of import accommodates only a small number, it is a rich experience. This format has gained us support from the Western Regions Office of the College Board.

On behalf of the HBLI staff, I extend best wishes for the holidays. As our custom, we give thanks to all those persons who contributed their time and efforts this past year to improving the educational system. And we look forward to another productive year.

Feliz Año Nuevo
Leonard A. Valverde

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