

# Unique Adult Education Program Helps Immigrants Attain Academic and Employment Success



## Overview

- The Carlos Rosario International School has been helping Latino immigrants in the Washington, D.C. area for over 35 years, providing services that include English as a Second Language (ESL), GED preparation, and vocational training.
- The Carlos Rosario Career Center uses PLATO® Adult Education and GED Preparation Solutions in their GED program. Almost all of the school's programs utilize technology in some way to enhance classroom learning.
- After completing the GED and ESL programs at the Carlos Rosario School, 100 percent of students maintained or improved their employment status.

Carlos Manuel Rosario, the namesake of the Carlos Rosario International School, was born in Puerto Rico into a family of educators. He moved to Washington, D.C. in the early 1950s and later joined the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Rosario soon realized that better services needed to be provided to the Latino immigrant community. He embarked on a mission to establish organizations to meet those needs.

Rosario founded The Program of English Instruction for Latin Americans (PEILA) in 1970 to address the critical problems created by language barriers and by the lack of culturally appropriate information available to the immigrant community. PEILA grew rapidly, with continuously full adult education classes. In 1972, Rosario met Sonia Gutierrez, a professional educator from Puerto Rico who had recently arrived in Washington. He persuaded her to volunteer at PEILA; within a few months she was running the program.

Ms. Gutierrez transformed the small, under-funded ESL program into a comprehensive adult education program. In 1974, PEILA was integrated into the city's public school district budget. The Office of Right to Read of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare named it one of the best literacy programs in the nation. In 1992, Ms. Gutierrez renamed the school the Carlos Rosario Adult Education Center, in honor of her mentor and the founder of the school. The school was serving over 2,400 students every day, and had over 50,000 alumni from its ESL, job training, and adult education programs.

However, the program almost didn't succeed. In 1996, the D.C. school district faced a financial crisis that eliminated all adult education programs, forcing the Carlos Rosario Adult Education Center to close. Ms. Gutierrez promised her students that they would reopen the school. She began running the school from the basement of her house and worked to secure funding to

**INSTITUTION:** A nationally recognized, accredited, and award-winning model in the field of adult education, the Carlos Rosario School has been successfully training and mainstreaming the diverse workforce of our nation's capital for over 35 years.

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reopen the center. Over the next year, she raised \$100,000 to reopen the school as a private non-profit; the Carlos Rosario Career Center was open again, with Ms. Gutierrez as Executive Director.

In 1998, the program opened the nation's first and only adult education charter school. Two years later, the program had expanded to six different locations around the city. While the expansion was exciting, it was difficult for the program to be so split apart. The Career Center and Charter School moved into a new building in 2004, complete with six fully-wired computer labs.

"Currently, the Carlos Rosario Career Center and Charter School serves approximately 1,500 students," said Laura Griep, acting academic director at the Career Center. "About 750 of those are from the Career Center, where they are studying ESL, preparing for the GED, and participating in the Spanish Family Language Program in partnership with the city's school district."

"The new building and the new computer labs have really invigorated the school," said Griep. "They make technology an integral part of what we do."

### Looking Beyond ESL to Long-Term Success

The Carlos Rosario International School provides numerous programs and training for its students.

"We offer vocational training certificate courses in technology and culinary arts, and we are expanding to offer a nursing program," said Griep. "We have also partnered with vocational training organizations in the city."

Because the school serves a wide range of students with varying skills and needs, they have implemented curriculum at all levels and in various programs, including ESL and GED preparation.

"The ESL curriculum is very integrated with all language skills," said Griep. "There are six levels, including a literacy level class for students who are illiterate in any language. Each class also has a technology component. Each class goes to the computer lab at least two times every month."

Along with academic programs, Carlos Rosario offers supportive services programs. Bilingual counselors are available to help students at all levels. Each student is also

assigned a job developer to help them get new jobs or advance at their current job. The school offers a leadership program that allows instructors to nominate students for intensive leadership training. Even more, the school offers a scholarship program to help students pay for their first year of college.

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### Implementing Technology For Student Success

Carlos Rosario utilizes PLATO® Adult Education and GED Solutions in their GED programs. "It's the only courseware we've ever found with materials in Spanish," said Griep.

"The GED program typically serves younger students, usually in their early to mid-20s," said Griep. "The students have lower levels of home country education. It's a challenge because you may have students who finished sixth grade math or eleventh grade reading in the same class."

At the Charter School, students can work towards their GED in Spanish or English; at the Career Center, the curriculum is available only in Spanish. There are two semesters each year. The GED class begins with an assessment, which the instructors use to tailor the class to the needs of the students. The students regularly go to the computer lab to use the PLATO® courseware to practice what they learned in class or work

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on areas of weakness. The instructor monitors their progress and helps out when necessary.

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Aside from the statistical evidence, the school has seen individual student success stories. One clear example is William Barrios, a young man who came to the United States from El Salvador and enrolled in the Carlos Rosario School. Barrios started at a low level in the ESL program and improved his English quite a bit in a short time. However, improving his English was not his only goal; he was motivated to get his GED to support his young son. Using the PLATO courseware in the GED program, Barrios passed the GED assessment and received his certificate. He also continued on through another level in the ESL program.

Because Barrios had enjoyed his time using the computer and PLATO courseware so much, he enrolled in the technology certificate program that trains the school's students in hardware and software certification. To be certified, he would need to pass the A+ certification. Barrios stuck with it and passed the exam to become certified. Through the Career Center, he got an internship with the IT department at the National Council de la Raza. The staff fell in love with Barrios, and when his internship ended, he was hired on full-time.

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