



LARASA Learning Centers
309 W. 1st Ave., Denver, CO 80223
Grades 6-12
Director: Polly Baca

LARASA (Latin American Research and Service Agency) has dedicated itself to the mission of improving the academic achievements of at-risk or disadvantaged youth. By partnering with Hope Online Learning Academy Co-Op, LARASA's Executive Director, former Colorado State Senator Polly Baca was instrumental in developing the LARASA Learning Centers.

Under the direction of Dr. Baca, these Learning Centers have trusted mentors who work one-on-one with students in a safe environment, with the guidance and support from a highly qualified Hope Online teacher.

LARASA's three Learning Centers are located in metro Denver neighborhoods where the community is best served. "The communities have actually asked us to open in their areas," says Dr. Baca, "most of our students had been expelled from, or otherwise pushed out of, their previous school. The majority of the students are Latinos from very low-income families that have lived here for generations, but the students were having academic and social problems in traditional schools."

Most of the Hope Online students at LARASA are from broken families or non-traditional households, and at least 68 percent of them are eligible for Free and Reduced lunch. Upon enrolling at Hope Online, students were a minimum of one grade-level behind, most of them were two, and some even more; one 10th grader was reading at a 4th grade level. Two-thirds had dropped out or were contemplating doing so prior to enrolling at Hope Online. Recalling one student, Dr. Baca says "he believed if it weren't for the Learning Center, he would be out selling drugs or locked up."

Over 20 percent of the Hope Online students at LARASA are teen parents who, in a traditional school, deprived of the support needed to continue their education and become self-sufficient. One young lady enrolled at Hope Online while she was pregnant; amazingly she has maintained nearly a 100 percent attendance rate. Most remarkably, she went into labor while in class on a Thursday, missed school on Friday, and returned to class with her baby in tow on Monday.

For many years, Dr. Baca has worked with at-risk youth but, with Hope Online, she is witnessing a marked difference. "This is the first time I can truly say that we have a model, we have a system, and we have a product that's working for these kids. I'm encouraged every day to watch these students growing into adults that won't become another statistic."

Learning Center Administration

Dr. Polly B. Baca - Director

In addition to serving as Director of the LARASA Learning Centers, Dr. Polly Baca serves as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Latin American Research and Service Agency (LARASA). She has over forty years of experience in planning, implementation and administration in the areas of program development, governmental relations, policy analysis, leadership training and development, marketing and media communications. She received a Bachelors of Arts degree in Political Science from Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado; an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley; and an Honorary Doctorate of Law from Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa. Dr. Baca is a former Colorado State Senator and served as Director of the United States Office of Consumer Affairs in Washington, D.C. and Regional Administrator of the General Services Administration for the Rocky Mountain Region VIII.

Mr. Miguel Barragan - Program Director

As the Program Director of the LARASA Learning Centers, Mr. Miguel Barragan administers the day-to-day operations of the Learning Centers at three campuses in the Denver metropolitan area. He has extensive experience working with at-risk youth as a counselor and program manager, and a former Arizona Corrections Officer. Mr. Barragan has over five years of experience in criminal justice education and more than 15 years of experience in program and project coordination, community outreach, customer service, multimedia production and media relations.

Hope Online Teacher

Aurora Gonzalez – Hope Online Teacher

Aurora Gonzalez is a talented and compassionate Colorado licensed teacher with a background teaching bilingual students. She previously worked in Denver Public School's bilingual education program. Ms. Gonzalez received her Bachelor of Science in Engineering from the Instituto Tecnológico in Durango, Mexico and is currently attending Metropolitan State College of Denver in Denver, CO.