



**The Demonstrated Effectiveness
Centro Hispano Marista
GED Program**

2020-2021



Table of Contents

Background.....	3
Leadership Team	4
Teacher Volunteers and Credentials	5
Academic Results.....	6
Marist School.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Funding.....	8
Successful Programs from Marist School	9
Other Supporters	9
Attachment 1	10
Attachment 2	12
Attachment 3	13
Attachment 4	14
Attachment 5	17
Attachment 6	18
Attachment 7	19
Attachment 8	21
Attachment 9	22
Attachment 10.....	24
Attachment 11.....	26



The Demonstrated Effectiveness and Service of the Marist Hispanic Center (Centro Hispano Marista) GED Program

Background

The roots of the GED program started from Atlanta Catholic parishes and agencies over 10 years ago. The original GED program was offered at the St. Vincent de Paul Society. When the St. Vincent de Paul Society no longer offered a GED program, some local Catholic parishes in the Archdiocese of Atlanta stepped up to continue the program.

The Spanish GED Program was resumed in 2010 at the Holy Spirit Catholic Center in Sandy Springs, GA with the following results: number of students registered: 21; number of students dropped: 7; and number of students graduated: 5.

Aware of the critical need for education and faith formation among the growing population of Hispanic young adults in the Atlanta area at that time, the Very Reverend Ted Keating, S.M., Provincial of the Society of Mary U.S. Province, expressed his intention that the Marist Fathers and Brothers make their resources and connections available to promote the education of adult Hispanics. The Marists (Society of Mary), a Catholic religious order, identified that one of the most pressing educational needs among Atlanta Hispanics was for a credible and effective GED program.

Fr. Keating envisioned that Marist School and Our Lady of the Assumption Parish, staffed by the Marist Fathers, would jointly engage in this effort. Fr. Jim Duffy, S.M., the pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption Church, has been strongly supportive and agreed that the GED program should move from his parish church to Marist School to take advantage of greater facility resources. Fr. John Harhager, SM, president of Marist School, was called upon to supervise Marist School's response to this transition. Fr. Bill Rowland, SM, was delegated to coordinate Marist School's response to this need.

In 2011, the program operated out of Our Lady of Assumption Catholic Church. It was transferred to Marist School when Centro Hispano Marista opened in August 2012. The GED program, also known as Centro Hispano Marista, has been hosted by Marist School and was founded by Mr. Carlos Vizcaino, with Mr. Ed Prieto and Mr. Salvador Arias. Please read [attachment 1](#).

In August 2012, Centro Hispano Marista, also known as GED Program at Marist School, opened at Marist School campus with the purpose of providing the GED program a suitable place with better resources.



Both Mr. Vizcaino and Mr. Prieto had previously worked together in administering and teaching the GED program when it was located at the St. Vincent de Paul Society and at Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church (read [attachment 2](#), and [attachment 3](#)).

Mr. Salvador Arias led the program as a volunteer Program Director from the opening in 2012 to May 2015, alongside Mrs. Mary Ann Arias, who volunteered by coordinating operations and volunteers. Mr. Vizcaino, Mr. Prieto, and Mr. and Mrs. Arias have retired from Centro Hispano Marista but they are still strong supporters of the program.

Leadership Team

The following leadership team currently leads Centro Hispano Marista GED program since May 2015:

Fr. Bill Rowland, Acting President for Marist School, is a member of the Society of Mary. Father Rowland has a Master of Theology Degree from the Catholic University in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Leticia Valencia, Program Director, has a Doctor of Business Administration degree from the University of Phoenix, where she specialized in leadership development of Hispanics. She holds a Master of Business Administration from Georgia State University and a Bachelor of Science of Industrial and Systems Engineering from ITESM in Mexico. She also holds a Financial Success for Nonprofits Certificate from Cornell University.

Ms. Cecilia Phillips, Registrar, graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from the University of Carabobo, Venezuela. Mrs. Phillips has extensive experience working in the technology field. She also served previously as teacher at Centro prior to becoming the Registrar.

Mrs. Vicky Gastaldi, Volunteer Coordinator, joined in August 2016. Mrs. Gastaldi has a Bachelor of Arts in Architecture from Belgrano University in Argentina. Mrs. Gastaldi has volunteered in several positions in Marist School and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.



Teacher Volunteers and Credentials

The GED program is implemented and taught by very well educated and experienced volunteers.

Ms. Megan Mavity, former Academic Dean until 2016, graduated from Davidson College with a Bachelor's degree in Hispanic Studies and a minor in Educational Studies. She is also a Marist School graduate. Ms. Mavity provided ESL education programs to immigrants and refugees in North Carolina prior joining Centro Hispano Marista. She implemented study plans and syllabi for teachers to follow.

All Centro Hispano Marista teachers must have at least a bachelor's degree. About half of the faculty usually holds master's or Doctorate degree. They also must complete the program's training and are assessed in a regular basis.

For more information about our current teachers, tutors, and subs please visit <http://centrohispanomarista.org/ourteachers/>

Founders and Supporters

Carlos Vizcaino, M.S. Renewable Energies, International University of Andalusia, Spain
BS Science Mechanical Engineering, National Polytechnic, Ecuador
Current Chair and Mathematics Teacher, Cristo Rey High School, GA
GED Instructor at Centro (2012-2014), GED Instructor at Holy Spirit Catholic Church (2010-2012). GED Instructor at St. Vincent de Paul, Atlanta (2002-2008)

Salvador Arias, MBA, University of Chicago
B.S. in Mathematics, University of Alabama
Adjunct Professor, Kennesaw State University, Georgia

Ed Prieto, M.A., George Washington University
M.B.A., Nova Southeastern University, Florida
B.A. in Accounting, St. Thomas University, Florida
GED Instructor at Centro (2012-2014), GED Instructor at Holy Spirit Catholic Church (2010-2012). GED Instructor at St. Vincent de Paul, Atlanta (2002-2008)

Consuelo Leon, M.A.T., Georgia State University, Atlanta (specialties Spanish, Education)
B.A., Barry University, Florida (Spanish and Education)
Over 25 years of administrative and teaching experience in Foreign Languages and in English as a Second Language (certified in Georgia, Florida and Maryland). Retired Head and Teacher of Foreign Language Department, St. Pius X Catholic High School, Atlanta



Jesus Leon, M.B.A., Georgia State
A.B.D. in Electrical Engineering, Georgia Tech
M.A. of Systems Engineering, University of Florida
B.A. of Science in Electrical Engineering, University of Florida
Part time faculty at Georgia State University
Graduate Teaching Assistant, Georgia Tech

For more information about our supporters and sponsors, please visit:
<http://centrohispanomarista.org/supporters/#tab-id-5>

Academic Results

The program keeps in contact and seeks frequent counsel with Mrs. Latanya Overby, Director of GED testing at the Office of Adult Education for the Technical College System for the state of Georgia. She has asked that we expand our GED classes to cover both the GED in Spanish and English to aid the state with their increasing constraints. Also, she recently counseled that the GED students at Marist begin testing. Mrs. Overby called Centro Hispano Marista “the most advanced Spanish program in the metro area.”

Centro Hispano Marista GED program utilizes proven pedagogical methods and books, and is starting to graduate students with the GED diplomas from the state of Georgia. CHM uses a combination of Steck-Vaughn PreGED and GED material for the English and Spanish program and well as other supplemental material.

Based on the experience of its former academic deans, the GED classes are arranged according to the educational level of the student. This is determined by a placement tests at the time of enrollment and re-enrollment. The class rotation is set according to the placement test for one semester for the advanced classes, two semesters for the average student, and three semesters for remedial classes. Before each semester, teachers meet in workshops to define the curriculum and implement best practices in education.

Centro Hispano Marista used the computer lab, sponsored by Marist School, which allows students to practice GED Ready exams and to learn the basic computer skills and typing skills that they need to pass the exam. The GED Ready measures a student’s likelihood to pass the GED. After 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Centro Hispano Marista moved their lab operations and many of their classes online using different online platform to aid students virtually.



Graduates

Centro Hispano Marista graduated 37 students who received their GED diploma from the state of Georgia in 2013. Please read [attachment 4](#).

GED test was redesigned on 2014 and all students needed to start from zero. Despite this extra challenge, including all computerized version and higher academic level required to pass, CHM celebrated its 2015 graduation for 10 students in December 15th, 2015 (see [attachment 5](#), Spanish publication about Centro Hispano Marista, and the Georgia Bulletin publication about the graduation in [attachment 6](#)).

Following the positive trend, in the 2016 Graduation, we had 63 graduates (see [attachment 7](#)). In the 2017 Graduation this December 12, 2017, we had 83 graduates (see [attachment 8](#)).

Enrollment in 2018 declined after we had to increase our student tuition fees to fulfill our financial duties. This was reflected in the following graduations. The 2018 Graduation had 53 graduates (see [attachment 9](#)), followed by 46 graduates in the 2019 Graduation ceremony (see [attachment 10](#)).

In 2020 we were hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. This event forced us to move all our classes online. It also impacted the GED testing centers, which were closed for over half of the year. Despite all this, Centro Hispano Marista open extra sessions online during the summer and the fall. In December 13th, 28 graduates got their GED diplomas (see [attachment 11](#)).

Society of Mary and Marist School

Centro Hispano Marista GED program is hosted by Marist School, a nationally respected independent Catholic school renowned for its academic excellence.

Centro Hispano Marista is an outreach program the Society of Mary in Georgia hosted in Marist School. Marist School, which is a Catholic, private, nonprofit, college preparatory, coeducational day school for students in grades seven through twelve. The school is owned by the Society of Mary, a congregation of priests and brothers, and is managed by a Board of Trustees. Marist School is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, as well as by the Southern Association of Independent Schools, and holds memberships in numerous professional and educational organizations.



The mission of Marist School is to form the whole person in the image of Christ through instruction grounded in religious values, the teachings of the Catholic Church, and the spirit of the Society of Mary. This mission is advanced through communal pursuit of excellence in academic, religious, extracurricular, leadership, and service programs.

Teachers average 19 years' experience. Advanced degrees are held by 52% of the professional staff and the average class size is 18.

Funding

Centro Hispano Marista GED program funding comes from tuition student fee of \$100 per class session (since 2018), small revenues from materials are used to pay for books, donations and sponsorships, and the in-kind sponsorship from the Society of Mary through Marist School that covers 55% of the total budget.

Centro Hispano Marista still needs about 20% of its budget to come from donations, sponsors, or grants to keep running. In the past, Centro Hispano Marista has received funds from the Society of Mary in 2018, Catholic Foundation of North Georgia in 2019, and Dollar General Literacy Foundation 2017. Many personal donors have supported the program.

Centro Hispano Marista is under the Marist School umbrella and thus shares its non-profit organization status. Marist School(c)(3) tax-exempt status letter from the IRS can be downloaded by [clicking here](#) or visiting our website at <http://centrohispanomarista.org/supporters/>

For more details about the program's financial statements, please contact Dr. Leticia Valencia at centrohispano@marist.com



Successful Programs from Marist School

Reach for Excellence: An Example of a Successful Program Sponsored by Marist School

Marist School will only attach its name to an enterprise that is an expression of its mission and that has the same commitment to academic excellence.

“Reach for Excellence” is an example another program that Marist School has successfully sponsored by permitting the use of its facilities and resources. Reach for Excellence offers a mixture of academic, cultural, and community-based experiences to underserved and academically at-risk middle school students of limited income. The goal is to equip them for success in college-preparatory high schools and, later, in colleges or universities.

Students and families make a three-year commitment to attend weekend and summer classes. The student population is comprised of at-risk but academically talented students who have the determination to succeed despite the socioeconomic challenges facing them. Since the program began in 2001, nearly 200 students have benefited from the Reach for Excellence education. Students from Reach for Excellence have been accepted at nearly 100 colleges and universities, including Harvard and Princeton (see the web site <http://reachforexcellence.org/results>)

Other Supporters

Centro Hispano Marista GED program has received letters of commendation from the leading non-profit organizations serving Atlanta Hispanic community. The leaders of the following leading organizations that serve the Hispanic and immigrant community in Atlanta have sent letters of commendation about CHM and the GED program:

Society of Mary

Catholic Foundation of North Georgia

Dollar General Literacy Foundation

Archdiocese of Atlanta

Latin American Association

Catholic Charities of Atlanta

Consulado de México and Guatemala

Welcoming Atlanta, Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs

For more information about our program, please visit our website:

www.centrohispanomarista.org.



Attachment 1

Marists Expand Outreach To Hispanic Community

Published: March 14, 2013, Georgia Bulletin

ATLANTA—This February Marist School hosted more than 130 young Hispanic men and women for a seminar to teach them how to become pastoral leaders in their community. The seminar, put on by the nonprofit organization, Fe y Vida, is part of a major initiative by the Society of Mary to better serve the Hispanic community in Atlanta.

According to Marist Father Ted Keating, provincial for the Society of Mary's U.S. province, "The United States will be more than one-half Catholic within 20 years; it will be mostly Hispanics leading that increase. If we don't develop young Hispanic lay leaders now, how will we do it then?"

The need for more pastoral leaders in Atlanta's Hispanic community is a recent development. The closing of Our Lady of the Americas in Doraville when the mission moved to Lilburn left many in the community without a parish to attend. Our Lady of the Assumption Church, in Brookhaven, welcomed the parishioners as they did the Indonesian community many years ago but struggled to meet the needs of the population because the identity of the parish was very different, and the needs of the parishioners varied.

Many of the new parishioners were low income and without cars to drive to Mass. Marist School Men's Bible Study organized the use of the school's buses to pick up groups of parishioners at the Chamblee MARTA station and deposit them at Our Lady of the Assumption—a group that has grown to roughly 300 people.

"In the immigrant experience, people become so stressed that religion becomes critical to them. It holds them together culturally, courage wise, faith wise—even more so than in their own country," said Father Keating.

Because each place, parish, and group of people is socially different, it is critical to develop lay leaders who truly identify with and understand the needs of the community.

This led the Society of Mary to bring in Fe y Vida, the only organization in the nation that focuses solely on the formation of young Hispanic leaders. Their goal is to institutionalize leadership in communities through ongoing formation and development programs. The February seminar was the first step.

Father Keating insists that this initiative is separate from the Society of Mary's vocations work, and in fact, many of those participating in this program do not have the education necessary for admittance to a seminary program. Instead, he says, "It's preparation for the



future but also to strengthen this community and take people who might not have other education opportunities for leadership and form them as leaders in the parish and hopefully in society as well.”

Another way that Marist School is reaching out to the Hispanic community is by offering GED courses on campus in the evenings.

The school initially expected at most 100 people, but the popularity of the program has spread so much that there are now about 500 participants.

Sal and Mary Anne Arias, parishioners at Our Lady of the Assumption Parish and parents of two Marist alumni, and Carlos Vizcaino, the coordinator for the Hispanic community at Our Lady of the Assumption Parish, have recruited more than 30 volunteer teachers and 20 Marist student volunteers who are the backbone of GED program.

“Sal, Mary Anne and Carlos are passionately committed to responding to the plight of the Hispanic immigrants. Without their involvement and leadership, the Hispanic Adult Education and Formation Center at Marist School would remain a dream and not a reality,” said Father Bill Rowland, SM, alumni chaplain and assistant to the president at Marist School.

Father John Harhager, president of Marist School, has committed Marist’s resources—including classrooms, cafeteria, and educational technology—to be available for use by the adult learners. The teachers have permitted their classrooms to be used on Thursday evenings. The cleaning and grounds keeping staff have also contributed their services.

“It is a wonderful example of the laity and the Marist religious forming a partnership to make this program happen. Both will attest that this is truly ‘a work of Mary,’” Father Rowland said.

According to Father Keating, “The name of Marist School has spread throughout the city and the migrant communities. ... They see it as a place of welcome, comfort and safety, where they can flourish and get the education training by way of GED that they can’t get anywhere else. It has blossomed more than any of our expectations.”

The Society of Mary’s initiative to work within the Hispanic community is one that is lasting. “This work of bringing people and nations together in communion in Christ is the church,” said Father Keating. “It’s not a distraction or project. It’s being a church.”

» PERFIL

EDDY PRIETO

Abre las puertas de la educación

JINRA CAROLINA PÉREZ
Escritora de la columna

El deseo de ayudar a los hispanos a superarse ha llevado al cubano Eddy Prieto a dedicar los últimos cinco años de su vida a ser profesor voluntario en la Sociedad San Vicente de Paúl.

Todas las semanas, Prieto dedica en español clases de preparación para el Examen de Educación General (GED, por sus siglas en inglés). Sus alumnos son latinos que no terminaron la escuela secundaria y desean acceder a mejores oportunidades laborales.

"Son personas que trabajan y quieren mejorar. Aquí se les da la oportunidad de aprender el GED en su idioma", dijo Prieto, jubilado de la empresa BellSouth.

El diploma del GED se obtiene tras pasar un examen sobre conocimientos en redacción, estudios sociales, ciencias, literatura y matemáticas. Este título equivale al que obtienen quienes se gradúan de la preparatoria.

Con base en sus experiencias como estudiante en este país, Prieto enseña con paciencia y

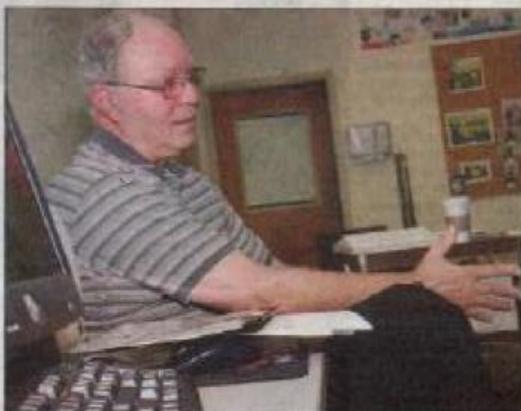
dedicación cada una de estas materias y prepara lo mejor que puede a sus alumnos.

La educación es la única cosa que nadie les puede quitar.

Eddy Prieto

"Es un excelente profesor; le quedan ganas de volver a clase", expresó Gloria Montes, una de las estudiantes de Prieto. "Nos motivó para que no nos conformemos, para que sigamos adelante", agregó.

El cubano, quien reside en Georgia desde hace 15 años, aseguró que el respeto y la afinidad con sus alumnos lo han llevado a establecer un ambiente propicio en las clases, a las cuales asis-



» BUEN CORAZÓN. La motivación y el apoyo para Eddy Prieto es ver que sus alumnos pasan el examen del GED o cursan los cinco años de las clases.

ten entre 12 y 15 personas por semana.

"Como excitado, yo pasé por dificultades, pero no son ni la mitad de las que pasaron mis estudiantes.

Muchas veces los discriminan; si salen a la calle no saben si van a volver a su hogar", aseveró Prieto.

La mayor satisfacción para este maestro es ver a sus alumnos

obtener un diploma o graduarse de las clases.

"La educación es la única cosa que nadie les puede quitar. No solo en este país, porque si algunos tienen necesidad de salir, lo que aprendan les sirve en todos los países", indicó.

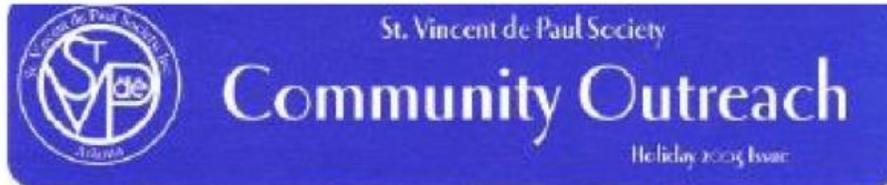
Prieto dijo también que es importante que más hispanos presenten servicios como voluntarios.

"A las personas que como yo han tenido una oportunidad en este país, recuerden que nuestros hermanos los necesitan. Hay niños que necesitan tutores, personas que necesitan aprender inglés. Las necesidades son muchas", concluyó el cubano.

GED en español

Dónde: San Vicente de Paúl
220 Chamber Street, Room 5A, Ft. C.
Cuándo: Curso de preparación empieza el 12 de noviembre.
Horario: las clases pueden ser lunes de 4:30 a 6:30 p.m., martes y sábados de 6 a 8 p.m.
Costo: 120 dólares por curso.
Información: (757) 411-1117.

Attachment 3



Dedication Pays Off for Spanish-Language GED Students

For a year, six students arrived at the St. Vincent de Paul Community Outreach center every Tuesday and Thursday morning at 8:00 AM to pursue a dream.

Recently, through hard work and dedication, their dreams have come true. They are now proud recipients of a Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED), made possible through their enrollment in the Center's Spanish-language GED test preparation course.

"It was a wonderful experience to teach to such a group of motivated students," said instructor Ed Prieto. "Even though some of them worked or had a family to take care of, they stuck to the program for a whole year until they accomplished their goal."

Continued on page 3



Proud diploma earners (l-r) Beatriz Villegas, Maricela Cornejo, Susie Madrid, Heriberto Cornejo, Beke Villegas and Adriana Villegas pose with instructor and SVdP Executive Committee member Ed Prieto. (Photo: Mark Kayell, SVdP Communications)

Spanish Language GED Students *Continued from page 1*

Ed, who is also an SVdP Executive Committee member, got involved after reading that Hispanics/Latinos have the highest high school dropout rate of any ethnic group in

**"The GED is important to me..."
"I'm confident now. (I feel) I can do anything I want."
-Maricela Cornejo**

Georgia. "I had the feeling that if we offered the GED program in Spanish, we might get a good turnout and perhaps offer one last opportunity to those that either could not attend High School or had to dropout," he said.

Maricela Cornejo, who has a 14-year-old daughter, Claudia, in 9th grade, was "...married very young." "I never thought I'd finish school. I want to improve for my children - give them a better education."

Maricela, like her fellow graduates, is looking forward to continuing her education. "The GED is important to me," she said. "I'm confident now. (I feel) I can do anything I want."

For his part, Ed feels as if he received more from the students than he gave. "I can't wait to



Mark Kayell, SVdP Communications

start the new program in 2004," he said. He acknowledged the success of Dr. Maria Rangel who volunteered to teach the nighttime sessions of the Spanish-language GED class. Ed also recognized former SVdP Learning Center Director Kathy Fries, who initially approved the curriculum and provided support and encouragement, and Sara Tesfayghi who continued the hard work after Kathy retired. "Without their efforts our program would not have been successful," he said.

What's next for the students? "They are very happy because now they can apply for a better job. Oh yes, they want us to begin a program to help them prepare for the College Entrance Examinations," Ed added. ☺



Attachment 4

Marist Center opens doors for ‘Dreamers’

By ANDREW NELSON, Staff Writer | Published Thursday, January 9, 2014

ATLANTA—Lucio Parro would wrap up his workday on Thursdays by telling his crew at a Tennessee construction site where to focus their work before he drove onto the highway so he could make it to class.

It was a weekly routine for the 32-year-old foreman as he pursued his high school equivalency certificate. When he wasn't driving to class at Marist School, he huddled over his schoolbooks and homework in his hotel room after hours. He said it was all worth it.

“I feel like I got 17 years back in my life. This was my dream always,” said Parro, dressed in a blue graduation cap and gown with a sash around his shoulders as the class valedictorian on Dec. 19. He was moments away from leading a line of students into Marist's Centennial Center where spouses, children and friends filled the bleachers.

Parro and some three dozen other women and men celebrated as the first graduating class of Centro Hispano Marista. Hundreds of adults have converged on the new program since the fall of 2012 to prepare for the General Educational Development test, or GED. Nearly all are so-called Dreamers who attended to fulfill immigration regulations giving deferred action status to immigrants brought to the country as children. Those who fulfill a list of criteria, which includes earning the GED, can apply for a renewable two-year deferment and work authorization.

Parro came to New Mexico as a teenager illegally. He attended school for a year. But tough times for his family made him leave school to work at 15. It was a dream to return to school even though he was a leader in a successful construction business with some two dozen workers. When his wife phoned him about the news announcing the deferred action program, Parro knew he needed to fulfill his dream.

“I knew it's not going to be easy, dealing with family, dealing with work. It's going to be a challenge, but the result is happiness,” said Parro, who has since received his work authorization.



Valedictorian of the first graduating class at Centro Hispano Marista, Lucio Parro is a 32-year-old construction supervisor. Photo By Cindy Connell Palmer



December was a big month for Parro. He marched in the graduation procession and his marriage of 10 years was blessed at Prince of Peace Church, in Flowery Branch. He is a father of three boys. Indeed, his effort in the classroom was to serve as a good example to them in school as they grow up, he said.

In his speech to the supporters, he encouraged his classmates and others to remain focused on the future.

“Embarking on this journey was not the most difficult part. The most difficult part was being able to combine school with work and family; that, as most of my colleagues know, is a big challenge, but in the end it was worth it. I would like to continue studying and we are only one step away from achieving the real goal—a professional career,” he said.

The GED began in 1942 for returning World War II veterans to be tested in math, writing, science and social studies. The veterans who passed the test could apply for jobs or college. Today, it is most often used by people who quit high school. In Georgia, about 1.3 million adults don't have a high school diploma. In 2011, approximately 18,000 people in the state passed the test to earn their GED. The U.S. Department of Labor reports a person with a high school diploma or GED certificate will earn \$7,658 more annually than a non-high school graduate.

Marist opened its doors without charge in August 2012 to serve Dreamers with educational and spiritual needs. The Marist religious community embraced the project as part of an initiative to serve the Atlanta Hispanic community. The goal is to attract adults from Mexico and Central America who lack education and English language skills. According to Centro Hispano Marista, this group represents 14 percent of the total Catholic population in the Archdiocese of Atlanta. A grant from the Catholic Foundation of North Georgia provided some scholarship funds.

Organizers expect 645 students to register for the next round of classes, which are held on Thursday nights from September to May. The program is unique in being the only Spanish and English GED program open to people who are undocumented. More than 50 volunteers teach in the classrooms.

Salvador Arias, one of the founders, said nearly 70 percent of the recent graduates are women. The program touches every part of a student's life, from home to work, he said. Earning the GED can lead to being accepted for deferred action, which is life changing for immigrants.

“They can legally get married, legally drive, legally work,” he said, adding they no longer have to worry about being deported from their children.



Gloria Pacheco, left, helps friend Angelica Tax with her cap and tassel prior to the graduation. Photo By Cindy Connell Palmer

Ed Prieto, 70, a retired project manager with an MBA, volunteers as an academic adviser and teacher for the advanced classes. Students are “trying to improve themselves by completing their education. They are hard working and good students, for the most part,” said Prieto, a member of Our Lady of the Assumption Church.



The program's success can be seen in the large number of graduates, he said. Out of his class of 20 or so students, 16 graduated, he said.

"That's going to triple or quadruple next year. We are happy for that," he said.

The program also offers a spiritual component, with Mass in Spanish celebrated before class. More than 100 Hispanic adults attended a retreat organized with Our Lady of the Assumption.

To be eligible for deferred action by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, applicants must have arrived in the United States before turning 16, have continuously lived in the United States since June 15, 2007, have a clean criminal record and either be an honorably discharged veteran, currently in school, or recipient of a high school diploma or GED certificate. The applicants also have to have been younger than 31 on June 15, 2012.

Yolanda Abarca, 26, left a Fulton County high school just months before graduation when she became pregnant. She said the GED allows her to close that chapter of her life and look ahead to college. A challenge for her was "being a good mother and being a good student," she said, adding she'll encourage her own daughter to focus on schooling. Her goal is to attend community college and complete a degree in business administration. "I'm so nervous, so excited," she said.

Martha Cruz, 30, juggled cleaning apartments on the overnight shift and classwork.

"I always wanted to finish, but I couldn't. I just want to finish high school. I want to keep studying more," said Cruz, who hopes to become a nurse.



CENTRO HISPANO MARISTA: EDUCANDO Y AYUDANDO A HISPANOS A MEJORAR SU CALIDAD DE VIDA

ATLANTA- Hace tres años, los jóvenes que no pudieron culminar sus estudios secundarios ni obtener una certificación, actualmente pueden hacerlo gracias al programa que ofrece el Centro Hispano Marista, que actualmente representa un auténtico recurso de superación para los latinos en la comunidad. El Centro Hispano Marista es un programa para adultos hispanos que fue creado con la ayuda de la Sociedad de María en la Escuela Marista (Marist School) en agosto del 2012 y desde su creación ha registrado 950 alumnos. Actualmente tiene a 530 estudiantes inscritos—en su mayoría mujeres—madres de familia— quienes comenzaron clases el 22 de septiembre del 2015 y culminarán el 17 de mayo del 2016. El programa cuenta con más de 55 maestros voluntarios quienes dictan clases en 28 aulas.

Su misión es ofrecer una oportunidad a adultos jóvenes hispanos para prepararse a obtener su certificación del examen de desarrollo de educación general, GED® (General Educational Development) que es el diploma equivalente a la escuela secundaria en los Estados Unidos. Este certificado, les permitirá continuar sus estudios universitarios y obtener mejores empleos.

El Centro Hispano Marista se dedica a ayudar generalmente a "Soñadores", que son inmigrantes, traídos a este país siendo menores de edad y también ayuda a adultos hispanos.

El programa ofrece clases de preparación para el examen GED® cada martes de 7 p.m. a 9 p.m. desde septiembre hasta mayo, en las instalaciones de la Escuela Marista en Atlanta.

"Ayudamos a que las personas obtengan su certificado de equivalencia a la educación preparatoria para capacitarlos a tomar mejores oportunidades para ellos y sus familias", dice la directora del Centro Hispano Marista, Dra. Leticia Valencia, de origen mexicano quien aclara que aunque el examen de GED no se toma en este centro, los

El Centro Hispano Marista se dedica a ayudar generalmente a "Soñadores", que son inmigrantes, traídos a este país siendo menores de edad y también ayuda a adultos hispanos.

alumnos reciben una fuerte preparación académica.

Cecilia Phillips de origen ecuatoriano, es la registradora de este centro educativo y afirma que el 75% de estudiantes son de origen mexicano y que antes de rendir el GED hacen un pre-test.

El Centro Hispano Marista tiene la capacidad de albergar a un máximo de 700 estudiantes, afirma. "Este programa busca mejorar la vida de los hispanos, al lograr aprobar el GED conseguirán trabajos mejor remunerados y mejorarán la calidad de ellos y sus familias", agrega.

Megan Mavity, maestra decana de GED y exalumna de Escuela Marista graduada en el 2010, se siente muy orgullosa de haber regresado a su alma mater para poder contribuir en la educación de los adultos hispanos.

"Los estudiantes hispanos se sienten motivados, lo puedes ver en sus rostros, en sus ojos, ellos se esfuerzan por la superación de sus familias", sostiene la joven maestra de antecesoras



De izquierda a Derecha: Padre Bill Rowland, asistente del presidente de la Escuela Marista y director de desarrollo, Dra. Leticia Valencia, directora del programa, Cecilia Phillips, encargada de admisiones, Megan Mavity, decana académica y exalumna de Marist School. Foto: Irene Diaz-Bazán



IMPACTO POSITIVO
Ángela Tax, de 29 años, oriunda de Quetzaltenango, Guatemala es mánager en un restaurante de comida rápida. Esta centroamericana quien es madre de tres menores, afirma que es beneficiaria del programa Acción Diferida para los

Llegados en la Infancia (DACA) y que tuvo que demostrar a inmigración que estaba estudiando para obtener el GED y así recibir el auxilio migratorio que suspende la deportación de indocumentados. Esto lo logró gracias a sus estudios en el Centro Hispano Marista.

"Para mí ha sido una gran ayuda, un impacto muy positivo. Los maestros son muy buenos enseñando y son excelentes personas", dice la centroamericana quien comenta que aún le falta aprobar uno de los cuatro

SU IMPORTANTE MISIÓN

El sacerdote, Bill Rowland, director de la Escuela Marista (Marist School) la cual fue fundada hace 114 años, destaca que un aspecto importante de la misión del Centro Hispano Marista es alcanzar, en el nombre de Jesús y la espiritualidad de María, su Madre, a aquellos que han sido olvidados por la sociedad. Rowland expresa que el impacto más significativo del Centro Hispano Marista es permitir a los soñadores salir de las sombras. "Aquí tienen las puertas abiertas, tomen esta ventaja, tienen la oportunidad de construir un futuro mejor", expresa. Muchos jóvenes hispanos pueden evitar la detención y deportación al solicitar el estatus DACA y esto es posible por el hecho de que están inscritos en el programa de preparación al GED del Centro Hispano Marista, explica. La Escuela Marista, forma a estudiantes con la visión de llegar a ser líderes importantes de la sociedad pero con espíritu compasivo y solidario.

INFORMACIÓN

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Dirección: 3790 Ashford Dunwoody Rd NE Atlanta, Georgia 770-742-9090
Página web en inglés y español: <http://centrohispano-marista.org>





Attachment 6

<http://www.georgiabulletin.org/news/2016/01/10-graduate-from-volunteer-run-ged-program-at-marist-hispanic-center/>

PAGE 24

ARCHDIOCESAN NEWS

JANUARY 7, 2016 | THE GEORGIA BULLETIN

10 graduate from volunteer-run GED program at Marist Hispanic Center

ATLANTA—The 10 most recent graduates of Centro Hispano Marista are now equipped to find better employment and to pursue further studies.

Centro Hispano Marista, also known as the Marist Hispanic Center, held commencement ceremonies for 10 graduates of its Adult Education GED program Dec. 15. Graduation was held in the Centennial Center of Marist School in Atlanta.

Director of the Centro Hispano Marista program, Dr. Leticia Valencia, greeted graduates and guests. Father John Harhager, SM, president of Marist School, presented the welcoming address.

"All the hard work, the sacrifices, your commitment and dedication to your studies has finally paid off. While you may not notice an immediate change in your lives as a result of your graduation, the diplomas you receive today represent a turning point for you," said Father Harhager. "Take advantage of what your graduation signifies and the opportunities presented to you."

The Centro Hispano Marista is a program for Hispanic adults that opened with help from the Society of Mary at Marist School in August 2012. Its purpose is to offer an opportunity for young adults to obtain GED certification. This enables them to pursue higher education and obtain better jobs. More than 650 students

enroll every year. Dedicated volunteers teach the GED classes.

In her address to the assembly, Valencia said the graduates have accomplished a great milestone against all odds.

"As many of you know, the GED exam is harder to pass since 2014," said Valencia. "This may have slowed us down but will not stop us or our students from achieving their educational goals. It will just make all our graduates better prepared for better jobs and ready to continue into college."

Megan Mavity, academic dean, explained that with the joint effort of more than 40 volunteer teachers, substitutes and other volunteers, the Centro Hispano Marista can provide an affordable and quality educational program.

Leticia Ramirez, a representative of the 2015 class, was keynote speaker at the GED graduation. A native of Mexico and mother of four children, Ramirez enrolled in the program last January. She decided to pursue her dream of finishing her secondary education.

Conquering the fear of being too old to study and arranging her schedule to dedicate time for the program, Ramirez shared a conversation she had with Marilyn Albach, a former teacher.

Albach told her, "If you had waited one more month, you would have been one month



December 2015 graduates of the Adult Education GED program of Centro Hispano Marista are (l-r): Rodrigo Lopez Antonio, Angela del Carmen Tax Sique, Arizbeth Vazquez, Jayro Javier Euceda Adriano, Luis Enrique Cano Nambo, Agustina Hernandez, Jairo Fabian Valadez Valadez, Leticia Ramirez and Eloisa Zarate Garcia. Israel Roman Sanchez, not pictured, also earned a diploma.

older, and if you had waited one more year, you would have been one year older. So it is better to start now!"

Ramirez ended her remarks by encouraging the students preparing to take the GED exams.

"Please students, take advantage of this opportunity that the priests and teachers offer us here at the Centro Hispano Marista," she said.

Father Harhager presented

each graduate with a diploma declaring the recipient to have formally completed studies at the Centro.

The 2015 Centro Hispano Marista GED graduates are: Arizbeth Vazquez, Agustina Hernandez, Rodrigo Lopez Antonio, Eloisa Zarate Garcia, Angela del Carmen Tax Sique, Jayro Javier Euceda Adriano, Luis Enrique Cano Nambo, Leticia Ramirez, Jairo Fabian Valadez Valadez and

Israel Roman Sanchez.

Angela del Carmen Tax Sique was the winner of the school's Perseverance Award for her refusal to give up and to continue taking the exams until she passed. She epitomized the values of persistence and dogged determination that the Centro tries to instill in students. The valedictorian for the 2015 class was Jairo Fabian Valadez Valadez.



Attachment 7

<https://georgiabulletin.org/news/2017/02/marists-centro-hispano-graduates-63-ged-program/>



Atlanta

Marist's Centro Hispano graduates 63 in GED program

Published February 24, 2017 | **EN ESPAÑOL**

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ATLANTA—Centro Hispano Marista, also known as the Marist Hispanic Center, recently held its third commencement ceremony for 63 graduates at Marist School.

The program director of Centro Hispano Marista, Dr. Leticia Valencia, greeted the graduates and guests. Marist Father John Harhager, president of Marist School, said, “While you may not notice an immediate change in your lives as a result of your graduation, the diplomas you receive today represent a turning point for you. Take advantage of what your graduation signifies and the opportunities presented to you.”

Centro Hispano Marista, with more than 55 teacher volunteers, eight tutors, and 75 Marist student volunteers, encourages its students to dream big.

Sandra Ferreras, a 2016 graduate of Centro Hispano Marista, was the keynote speaker at the GED graduation. Valedictorian of the 2016 class was Oralia Estrada Plascencia.

The Centro Hispano Marista is a program for Hispanic adults that opened with the help of the Society of Mary at Marist School in August 2012. It offers Hispanic adults an opportunity to obtain their high school equivalency certification to pursue higher education and to obtain better jobs. More than 650 students enroll every year. For more information, visit www.centrohispanomarista.org.



Graduation 2016



2016 Graduation



Attachment 8

Graduation 2017





Attachment 9

Graduation 2018

From: <https://georgiabulletin.org/news/2019/01/centro-hispano-marista-hosts-2018-ged-graduation/>



PHOTO BY CHRIS HERRIN

Centro Hispano Marista, the Marist Hispanic Center, held its fifth commencement ceremony for 52 graduates on Dec. 11 at Marist School, Atlanta. Each graduate obtained their GED diploma.

Atlanta

Centro Hispano Marista hosts 2018 GED graduation

Published January 10, 2019 | **EN ESPAÑOL**



ATLANTA—Centro Hispano Marista, also known as the Marist Hispanic Center, held its fifth commencement ceremony for 52 graduates, all of whom obtained their GED diplomas, on Tuesday,



Graduation 2018



Attachment 10

Graduation 2019

MundoHispanico | Atlanta | 19 al 25 de diciembre de 2019

18 | www.mundohispanico.com

Educando a los más necesitados

Desde 2012 el Centro Hispano Marista ha ayudado a centenares de adultos latinos a obtener su diploma de GED con miras a mejorar sus vidas.

Graduados. Nunca es tarde para retomar los estudios, así lo comprueban estos 35 estudiantes de los 46 que se graduaron del programa de GED del Centro Hispano Marista el 10 de diciembre en la Marist School de Atlanta. Ahora con su GED podrán postular a mejores trabajos y/o alcanzar niveles educativos más altos.

• **Alberto Brown Rodriguez**
arodriguez@mundohispanico.com

A casi un año de haberse matriculado en el programa de GED del Centro Hispano Marista, Filemón Nieves obtuvo su ansiadísimo diploma rodeado de familiares y amigos el pasado 10 de diciembre durante una emotiva ceremonia de graduación en la Marist School.

"Sentí muchas emociones encontradas desde alegría hasta nervios porque después de tanto trabajo estábamos ahí recibiendo el diploma y pensando en el siguiente paso a seguir", dijo Nieves, de 30 años y oriundo de México.

Nieves formó parte del grupo de 46 graduados de la sexta clase del Centro Hispano Marista (CHM), institución sin fines de lucro que desde su gestación en 2012 bajo el abrigo de Marist School y la Sociedad de María ofrece un

Valedictorian. Leticia Valencia, directora del Centro Hispano Marista, reconoce a Myralleidi Juárez (izq.) como la mejor de su clase.

Nada la detiene. La mexicana Susana Peralta, colaboradora de la Alianza Latina Pro Derechos Humanos de Georgia, obtuvo su diploma GED.

A paso firme. Filemón Nieves (izq.) y Francisco Languren, orador principal, obtuvieron su diploma de GED y ahora se enfocan en continuar su educación a niveles superiores.

"Nunca es tarde para cambiar tu vida con la educación, te va a abrir muchas puertas y nadie te la puede quitar. Con tu GED tendrás mejores oportunidades de trabajo y educativos".
Leticia Valencia, directora del Centro Hispano Marista

programa de estudios a adultos latinos para obtener el diploma académico equivalente al de la escuela preparatoria.

Para la mexicana Leticia Valencia, directora del programa del CHM, cada ceremonia de graduación es especial.

"Nuestros graduados son muy especiales. Muchos no terminaron su High School porque tuvieron algo difícil en sus vidas y hay chicas que quedaron embarazadas y están tratando de sacar a sus hijos y les es difícil tener un mejor trabajo", explicó Valencia.

Ahora Nieves -quien es un *Dreamer* y trabaja en una empresa de instalación de aire acondicionado- planea su siguiente meta: estudiar inglés en GSU para que en otoño del 2020 pueda comenzar sus estudios de Teología. Nieves desea divulgar la palabra de Dios a quien lo necesite ya sea como catedrático en una

universidad o en una iglesia como la que hoy le ha tendido una mano.

Otro de los componentes del éxito de este programa educativo son los profesores y tutores voluntarios.

"Tenemos más de 50 profesores voluntarios, son gente que les ha ido bien y quieren regresar muchas de las bendiciones que han recibido", mencionó Valencia.

Para matricularse en este programa, solo se requiere ser mayor de 18 años, tener una identificación y un e-mail pagar \$100 de colegiatura, registrarse en línea antes del 15 de enero y hacer un examen para analizar su nivel. ■

Centro Hispano Marista
Cuadrado Cursos de primer nivel (febrero-mayo) y nivel intermedio (septiembre-diciembre)
Cursos \$100. Dirección: 3790 Ashford-Dunwoody Rd., Gurn Building 236C, Atlanta, GA 30343
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Graduation 2019





Attachment 11

Graduation 2020 – COVID-19 pandemic

