Message from the CEO

We are publishing this annual report during an extraordinary year, as the COVID-19 pandemic and the national reckoning for equity and justice continue to unfold.

This year, PUENTE is also celebrating 35 years of service. Throughout our organization’s history, we have stood in the right place: for increased access to education to help those who need it most. At PUENTE, we believe that education is the most powerful tool we have to transform the world.

PUENTE Learning Center started in response to community demand for high-quality educational options. Back in 1985, we disavowed the approach that a student’s success should be determined by their zip code or place of birth.

Since then, we have continued to build a community that celebrates learning and builds bridges to achievement.

At PUENTE, we believe that education is the most powerful tool we have to transform the world.

We are laying the groundwork for the next thirty-five years of hope and success. PUENTE has launched major initiatives for our preschool, elementary school, youth programs, adult education, and wrap-around services. We are renovating our facility to serve more people than ever before.

As a leader in providing our distinct model of multi-generational education for Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, and beyond, we continue to stand for personal and community transformation through the power of education.

Jerome Greening
Chief Executive Officer
Our Mission

Our Mission: People United to Enrich the Neighborhood Through Education.
Our Vision: Education is the bridge that empowers lives and builds thriving communities.
Our Values: Commitment to Education, Collaborative Spirit, Culture of Excellence

Each year, over 2,000 constituents come to PUENTE in an effort to improve their lives. They are welcomed into learning with respect, dignity, and a spectrum of services for children, youth, adults, and community. PUENTE’s four program areas reflect our distinct, multi-generational approach to education.

The key services we offer include:

1. **Children**: PUENTE provides a stimulating environment for young learners, and we thoroughly engage parents to provide a strong foundation for success.

2. **Youth**: PUENTE closes the achievement gap for youth and young adults as they persist through high school and college on their way to achievement.

3. **Adults**: PUENTE gives adult students the opportunity to excel through courses that improve language and academic skills, provide technical training, and increase employability.

4. **Community**: We offer wrap-around services and engagement workshops to help community members succeed in school and in life.
35 Years of Service

In 2020, PUENTE Learning Center celebrated 35 years of providing educational and wrap-around services to students and families, allowing them to access new opportunities and contribute fully to the community.
Sister Jennie Lechtenberg founded PUENTE Learning Center in 1985 to serve low-income children, operating out of a storefront location in Boyle Heights. From the beginning, PUENTE offered classes for parents as well as their children, educating each student within the context of her or his family and community. PUENTE also led the way by incorporating technology into education, an emphasis that continues today.

During the 1990s, PUENTE moved to its current location on Boyle Avenue. The organization initially provided services in ten double-wide trailers on the vacant lot. In 1995, PUENTE opened the Richard J. Riordan building, a new 40,000 square foot facility that remains a testament to the dignity of education.

In 2002, PUENTE opened the first charter school in Boyle Heights, serving kindergarten students. Our school has succeeded in part due to the trust that PUENTE built in the community we serve.
In 2015, PUENTE sold its South Los Angeles campus in order to expand programs and facilities in Boyle Heights. The organization operated programs at that facility from 1999-2017.

2018 saw PUENTE Charter School receive approval to grow from kindergarten-only to become a full elementary school. The school is expanding by one grade each year until 2022-23, when we will serve over 300 students in grades TK-5.

PUENTE Learning Center continues to serve students and families by building bridges to education and opportunity. PUENTE’s services reach over 2,000 constituents each year in four core program areas: children, youth, adults, and community. PUENTE maintains its distinct, multi-generational approach that incorporates educational and wrap-around services for Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, and beyond.
COVID-19 Response

PUENTE classes transitioned to distance learning in March 2020, and we remain on that status as of this annual report’s publication. We are following guidance from the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, and other regulatory agencies.

During COVID-19, PUENTE has adapted by providing high-quality distance learning—attendance rates have been as high as 96% for the elementary school—handing out hundreds of laptops and devices to families in need, and distributing thousands of free meals to our community members.

The best place for students of all ages to learn is in school. We are working hard to prepare for opening our doors to on-site classes again as soon as it’s safe. Even though the way we deliver programs has changed, our mission remains the same. We remain People United to Enrich the Neighborhood Through Education.
Maria’s Story

When a friend recommended PUENTE Learning Center as a welcoming environment to learn and grow, Maria did not realize at first what a difference that would make. She is currently enrolled in Career Skills classes, and her children both attend PUENTE Charter Elementary School.

From her first day at PUENTE, “everything felt different,” says Maria. Her children had a fun, stable place to go with guaranteed access to three meals daily and after school care. Maria especially cherished the opportunity to attend the school’s theatrical performances—an opportunity to see her children excel in the arts.

In Maria’s own classes, she had attentive instructors who helped her gain the language and professional skills needed to get a raise at work.

When COVID-19 hit, Maria’s family was sharing one cell phone for all their digital needs. PUENTE staff members lent both of Maria’s children laptops for high-quality distance learning. For months, the family was food insecure, and they took advantage of PUENTE’s free distributions of fresh produce. “The weekly box of food made such a difference in my family’s life. Times have been hard, and everything helps,” says Maria.

Remarkably, Maria is just one of over 110,000 Angelenos whose lives were changed through PUENTE over these past 35 years.

“The weekly box of food made such a different in my family’s life. Times have been hard, and everything helps.”
2019-2020 Highlights

Leadership Appointments

PUENTE has announced the appointments of Jerome Greening as CEO and Chun Wong as Board Chair. Jerome Greening was named CEO in Spring 2020, after serving as Interim CEO since October 2018. Chun Wong was appointed incoming Board Chair in Spring 2020, after previously serving as Board Vice-Chair and Board Finance Committee Chair.

“PUENTE has continued to strengthen its leadership with both of these recent appointments,” said outgoing Board Chair Albert Reyes. “I know Chun and Jerome will build on PUENTE’s 35-year history of offering academic services to children, youth, and adults.”

Facility Upgrade and Renovation

Lack of access to high-quality education options is a pressing barrier for residents of Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles. Since just 37% of service area elementary school students demonstrate grade-level proficiency and just 8% of service area residents ages 25 and older have a bachelor’s degree, building bridges to education is critical to creating more opportunity in our communities. To meet its growing service goals, PUENTE is upgrading and renovating its building with support from The Ahmanson Foundation, Great Public Schools Now, and the Walton Family Foundation. This will make PUENTE secure, modern, and welcoming for the next 35 years and beyond.
Studies indicate that low-income children benefit more than children from wealthier backgrounds when they have access to free preschool. In our service area, 43% of preschool-age children did not receive preschool services in 2019. With enhanced capacity to bring early education intervention, PUENTE Preschool began its first year as a site in the California State Preschool Program, prioritizing enrollment for the lowest income families and for English Learners.

**Elementary School Expansion**

PUENTE Charter Elementary School welcomed its inaugural 2nd grade class in 2019-20 and will continue to expand by one grade level each year. By 2022-23, the school will serve over 300 students in grades TK-5. As a note of impact, students attending the 10 public elementary schools closest to PUENTE demonstrate a 22.4% grade-level proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA) and 17.4% in Math. In comparison, 66% of PUENTE students demonstrate grade-level proficiency in ELA and 68% in Math.

**College and Career**

PUENTE’s College and Career Program is closing the opportunity gap for low-income youth of color. The College Board reported that median earnings of bachelor’s degree recipients who had no advanced degree and who were working full time were 67% higher than those with only a high school diploma.

College Access services for high-school students grew dramatically last year when we added on-site workshops at two service area partner schools, Mendez High School and Roybal Learning Center. The College and Career program now serves over 400 youth aged 14-24 as they succeed in high school, enroll in and graduate from college, and contribute meaningfully in their careers.
2,334 students and community members served

67% grade-level proficiency for Elementary School students, surpassing the outcomes from 10 other public schools in our service area

0.4 average grade-level-equivalent reading gain for 161 Summer Camp students

100% high school graduation rate in College and Career program

15% increase in adult student ESL completions, despite the challenges of COVID-19

75,000+ free student meals served
Sean’s Story

Many immigrant children want to make their parents proud by being the first in their family to go to college, including Sean, who is a student in the PUENTE College and Career Program. “My parents have sacrificed a lot for me to have a better life,” Sean shares. “I always try my best to not disappoint my parents and make them proud.”

As a high school student, Sean received college advisement from PUENTE through in-class workshops. When COVID-19 hit during Sean’s senior year, we counseled him on how to stay on track academically, even during distance learning. Through one-on-one case management, we helped him complete his FAFSA form and find financial aid. He also earned a PUENTE scholarship. Without this help, Sean shared that he would not have been able to pursue a four-year university.

“PUENTE Learning Center gives me hope that things will be all right, even in these times of great difficulty,” Sean says. “PUENTE has helped me succeed by providing learning and financial services that allow me to continue to excel.”

Sean is a talented young man with a bright future ahead of him. He is following his dreams and is on his way to completing his first year at Cal State LA. He is making his family proud as a first-generation college student.
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Thank you also to those donors who have chosen to remain anonymous.

This list recognizes those who contributed to PUENTE Learning Center between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020. Every effort has been made to ensure that the list is complete and accurate. If errors or omissions have occurred, please accept our apologies and call the Development Department at 323-780-5312 to report corrections. Thank you.
Financials

Operating revenue reached $3,616,526, its highest level in five years. Due to unrealized investment losses from market volatility during COVID-19, expenses exceeded income. PUENTE has leveraged investment gains from previous years, subsequent gains on investments, and cash reserves in order to maintain services through the pandemic and to support the elementary school’s expansion.

At PUENTE, we know our donors expect us to use our funds wisely, and we are committed to fulfilling that trust by maximizing the funds dedicated to educational programs and program support.
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