

# La Clase Mágica

A Collaboration between The University of Texas at Austin,  
The Austin Independent School District, and The City of Austin.



## About La Clase Mágica

Developed by University of California, San Diego Professor, Dr. Olga A. Vásquez, La Clase Mágica was first implemented in San Diego County, CA by way of a University - Community Partnership and is designed to serve students between the ages of 3 to 16, and their parents. La Clase Mágica is a well-structured, university-connected, technology-rich after-school program for English language learners that equips youth and their parents with the cultural and social capital that they need in order to meet and surpass Texas' educational standards by fostering biliteracy, a deep, principled learning of content, and college-going aspirations and orientations.

La Clase Mágica has continued serving approximately 300 students annually across its 6 sites over a span of 17 years. Findings on the success of LCM show that 90% of those students who participated for at least three years were enrolled, or had already completed a college degree. In the case of those students who served as Wizard Assistants (middle and high school students), 32% had plans to pursue graduate education. In the spirit of its commitment to engage families and community, all six La Clase Mágica sites are successfully run under the paid leadership of parents and community members.

***“ In practice, La Clase Mágica is an emergent and context-sensitive form of social action that pushes the limits of our understandings for creating and sustaining social institutions that serve a diverse society.”***

- Dr. Olga A. Vásquez

- Utilizes technology to foster biliteracy, and a deep, principled understanding of Reading and Math content in a technology rich learning environment.
- Builds upon the cultural and linguistic capital of emerging bilingual students to prepare them for the 21st Century.
- Promotes college-going aspirations by increasing knowledge and providing consistent peer interactions with university students.
- Builds a culture of learning and ability to communicate in any educational and professional setting.
- Promotes partnerships and maintains open lines of information between schools, students, parents and communities that will make parents and children better navigators of the schooling system.

### CONTACT US

Dr. Angela Valenzuela, Director  
Texas Center for Education Policy  
SZB 518J, D8000  
1 University Station  
Austin, TX 78712  
Phone: 512-471-7055



*A Nonpartisan Education Policy Research Center of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement*

## About TCEP

The Texas Center for Education Policy (TCEP) is a nonpartisan education policy research center of The Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at The University of Texas at Austin. Quite a number of individuals over the years have envisioned the development of a university-wide education policy center that would weigh in on policy debates and deliberations of the day on the basis of rigorous research. Since the spring of 2006, under the direction of nationally renowned Professor Angela Valenzuela, TCEP has begun to promote equity and excellence in public elementary, secondary and higher education through research, its sponsored policy seminars, education convenings, and its collaborations and programmatic activities.

Building on the University of Texas tradition of distinguished scholarship, the Texas Center for Education Policy is committed to research on equity and excellence in PK-16 education. The Center will promote interdisciplinary and collaborative research, analysis, and dissemination of information to impact the development of educational policy by bringing together university entities in partnership with local, state, national and international education communities.



***“ Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it.”***

- Hannah Arendt

The Texas Center for Education Policy seeks to address the following structural problems in the development of educational policies in Texas:

- First, the lack of connection among university scholars and researchers whose work, sometimes in similar or overlapping areas, is relevant to educational policy. For example, researchers who work in the area of education policy in the Lyndon Baines Johnson School of Public Affairs were disconnected from their Education Policy and Planning counterparts located in the Department of Educational Administration.
- Second, the lack of connection between the university community and the larger field of policymaking that includes a variety of stakeholder communities, as well as such bodies as our local and state school boards, state legislatures, and Congress. At best, the connection has been a haphazard one with relations forged among select faculty.
- Third, the lack of interconnectedness between the university community and the larger community of stakeholders in public education. These stakeholders include business and industries that will employ today's students in the future, and policymakers at the local, state, and national levels.

### CONTACT US

Dr. Angela Valenzuela, Director  
Texas Center for Education Policy  
SZB 518J, D8000  
1 University Station  
Austin, TX 78712  
Phone: 512-471-7055

# Hispanic Futures Conference

“Be Informed and Aware of your Resources and Power.”

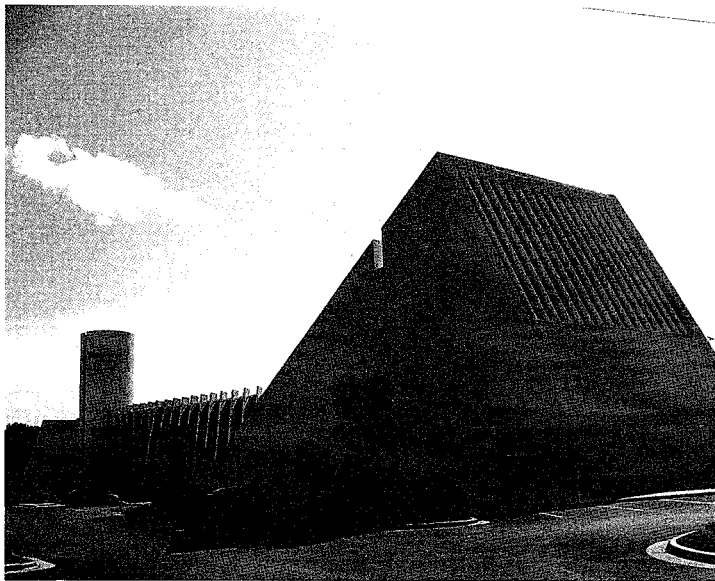
# NOV 09

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Sunday

November 9, 2008  
1:00-5:00 p.m.

Mexican American Cultural Center  
600 River Street



The Hispanic Futures Conference is a series of events, sponsored by the Austin Independent School District's Department of Diversity and Intercultural Relations, that seek to inform, prepare, excite, engage, and empower Hispanic youth and their families to navigate the schooling system and realize the magnitude of their opportunities.

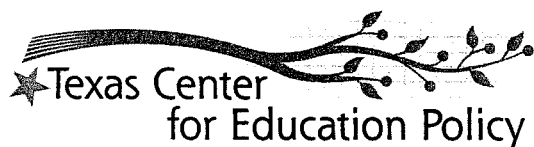
Our keynote speaker, Dr. Olga A. Vasquez has graciously accepted our request to speak about her nationally recognized Community-University collaborative program La Clase Mágica (LCM). LCM is a well-structured, technology-rich after-school program for English language learners that equips youth and their parents with the cultural and social capital that they need in order to meet and surpass educational standards by fostering biliteracy, a deep-principled learning of content, and college-going aspirations and orientations.

in collaboration with



The City of Austin is committed to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you require assistance for participation in our programs or use of our facilities please call 476-6222.

For more information about this and other DDIR events contact Leonor Cisneros at (512) 414-0884.



## The University of Texas at Austin – La Clase Mágica Pilot Program

**Principal Investigator, Dr. Angela Valenzuela**  
**Associate Vice President for University School Partnerships**

### Executive Summary

#### *Background and Statement of Need:*

The AISD's end to the 2007-08 academic year witnessed the closing of one high school, the struggle of one middle school to remain afloat, and a total of eleven elementary, middle and high schools complete the year labeled "academically unacceptable"; two more than the previous year (TEA, 2008a). Campus ratings recently released from the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2008a) also indicates that Hispanic students make up the majorities across all eleven academically unacceptable schools, and are not faring well under an environment of high-stakes testing and accountability. District leaders have highlighted the inequities in resources, levels of teacher training, and lack of effective programs that provide the kinds of supports necessary for low-performing students as key factors that impact these students' academic progress and outcomes (AISD, 2008).

According to the most recent U.S. Census Data, Hispanics make up 34 percent of Austin's total population, and account for 63 percent of the city's population growth over a span of ten years (cited in Robinson, 2006). It is projected that 70 percent of all Hispanics living in Austin will be school-aged, or under the age of 18, by the year 2011 (Robinson, 2006). As this growing majority of Hispanic youth enter and proceed through the public school system, the diverse needs of these students must be placed at the fore. Schools, and the greater Austin community cannot afford for students to continue experiencing the downward trends that school-level data show are occurring for many students (TEA, 2008b).

Statewide, research indicates that attrition rates for all Hispanic students have either "remained unchanged or have worsened since 1985-86" (IDRA, 2007). At the district level Hispanics currently account for over half (57%) of the AISD's total public school students (TEA, 2007a), and have an attrition rate of 46 percent (IDRA, 2008). The most recent summary report on statewide graduation and dropout rates for Hispanics in 2006 and 2007 shows increases in the number of high school dropouts (13.1% and 16.4% respectively), and decreases in graduation rates between the 2006 (71.7%) and 2007 (68.5%) academic years (TEA, 2008c, p. 56). According to district-level data Hispanic students in AISD schools have a graduation rate of 65.8 percent, and a dropout rate of 16.7 percent (TEA, 2008d, p. 98). Additionally, approximately one-fourth (25.4%, or 21,000) of the AISD's total student population are English Language Learners (ELL) classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP); many of whom are Hispanic (TEA, 2007b). In the case of LEP students, statewide graduation rates are

severely lower (39.3%), and dropout rates are considerably higher (34.6%) (TEA, 2008e, p. 57). While the actual percentages recorded by TEA are different from research at the state level (Valenzuela et al., 2007; McNeil et al., 2008) there is consistency in the conclusions drawn from both data reports that acknowledge the increased risks that Hispanic and ELL student's face in not completing high school. To dismiss the needs of these growing student subpopulations could result in a much larger dropout problem than Texas currently faces (Murdock, 1997).

Recently, the state has seen the most thorough legal decision concerning the civil rights of ELL students in Texas occur (MALDEF, 2008). This court ruling has placed national attention on the failure of the Texas districts and schools to adequately meet the educational needs of Hispanic and ELL students. This decision calls for the state of Texas to improve its approach in ensuring that districts and schools are providing quality education and effective language programs for ELLs, and that the monitoring of progress among its more than 140,000 English language learners (ELL) enrolled in middle and high schools is improved (MALDEF, 2008). Reports from this ruling discuss how the state has failed to ensure that the needs of ELL students are met on multiple fronts. Among those failings are: the lack of effective monitoring of secondary students enrolled in ESL programs, poor evaluation of such programs, low test scores and graduation rates, and high dropout rates (Alonzo, 2008). Court documents explain that secondary "LEP" students are "much more likely to drop out of high school and to be kept back or retained in class" than their white counterparts, and that these students are "much less likely to be afforded opportunities for advanced placement classes even though such classes could be offered" to these students (USA and LULAC GI-Forum v. Texas, 2008, p. 9).

As the state, the TEA and districts begin developing approaches for meeting the needs of Hispanic and ELL students, the Texas Center for Education Policy, in partnership with the Austin Independent School District's Department of Diversity and Intercultural Relations, The City of Austin, and the Mexican American Cultural Center has identified the academic progress and outcomes of English language learners, and parental engagement as two critical areas that it would like to invest research and resources in during the 2008-09 and 2009-2010 academic years. This investment will consist of the University of Texas at Austin replicating and implementing a pilot program for ELL students and their parents called La Clase Mágica.

Created by University of California, San Diego professor, Dr. Olga Vásquez, La Clase Mágica was first implemented in the predominantly Hispanic border town community of San Ysidro, California. Across its six sites LCM has continued serving approximately 300 students annually (see Vásquez, 2003). Findings on the success of LCM show that:

- 90 percent of those students who participated for at least three years were enrolled, or had already completed a college degree.
- In the case of those students who served as Wizard Assistants (middle and high school), 32 percent had plans to pursue graduate education.
- Interviews later conducted with 20 undergraduate mentors revealed how their exposure to LCM led to graduate studies where research interests surrounding education, ethnic studies, language and culture were pursued.
- Further, seven of those 20 undergraduates went on to become faculty members of colleges and universities in the U.S.
- In accordance to its commitment to engage families and community, all six sites are successfully directed under the paid leadership of parents and community members.

*Initiative Objectives and Priorities of La Clase Mágica:*

- Prepare all students to meet State Assessment Requirements by implementing a curriculum that fosters deep, principled understanding of Reading and Math content.
- Build upon the cultural and linguistic capital of emerging bilingual students.
- Promote college-going aspirations by increasing knowledge and improving attitudes toward higher education, and providing consistent peer interactions with university students.
- Build a culture of learning and ability to communicate in any educational and professional setting
- Promote partnerships and maintain open lines of information between schools, students, parents and communities.
- Promote parent and community engagement as integral parts of the education process that will make parents and children better navigators of the schooling system.
- Provide professional development opportunities through University courses tailored to with those teachers who wish to collaborate with UT-LCM

*Future Projections: Why La Clase Mágica is so crucial:*

As Austin continues to experience growth it is important to prepare its communities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Through the above outlined initiative, the UT-La Clase Mágica (UT-LCM) is able to acknowledge and bring to the fore those disparities that are impacting Austin's Hispanic community. UT-LCM provides best practices in helping to prepare students for state assessment by implementing a curriculum that centers on literacy and math skills, while simultaneously equipping students with important computer and navigational skills that will serve them well in both the current global job market and institutions of higher education.

By starting with elementary school students, UT-LCM allows its program to grow laterally by providing a curriculum that increases in rigor as students move on to subsequent levels, increasing their levels of biliteracy, reading, math and computer skills. This initiative further provides horizontal growth as it equally places value on engaging parents, families and community members as equal partners in the education process, and provides them with the necessary skills to take part in important decision-making practices. The program does this by providing access to computer training, bilingual University and Community staff who can answer important questions pertaining to school, as well as a community-centered space to meet with partnering AISD teachers and school staff.

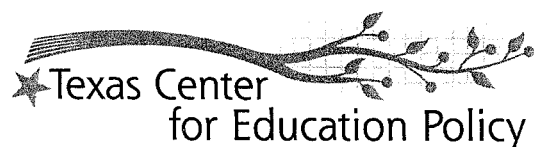
Now more than ever, opportunities for collaborative University partnerships between the Austin Independent School District, University of Texas at Austin, and the City of Austin, must be explored.

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## **The University of Texas at Austin – La Clase Mágica Pilot Program Proposal**

**Principal Investigator, Dr. Angela Valenzuela**

### **Executive Summary**

In 2007 Texas reported 15% of its overall students as being classified as limited English proficient (LEP).<sup>1</sup> According to district-level data Hispanic students in AISD schools have a graduation rate of 65.8 percent, and a dropout rate of 16.7 percent (TEA, 2008a, p. 98). Additionally, approximately one-fourth (25.4%, or 21,000) of the AISD's total student population are English Language Learners (ELL) classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP); many of whom are Hispanic (TEA, 2007a). In the case of LEP students, statewide graduation rates are severely lower (39.3%), and dropout rates are considerably higher (34.6%) (TEA, 2008a, p. 57). While the actual percentages recorded by TEA are different from research at the state level (Valenzuela et al., 2007; McNeil et al., 2008) there is consistency in the conclusions drawn from both data reports that acknowledge the increased risks that Hispanic and ELL student's face in not completing high school.

The research and evidence outlined within this program proposal illustrates the educational and technology needs of the greater ELL community and relevant best practices that have evolved as a consequence. Now more than ever, opportunities for collaborative

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<sup>1</sup> LEP numbers come from the Federal NCELA state level English learner enrollment website: <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/policy/states/reports/statedata/2004LEP/Texas-G.pdf>

partnerships between the Austin Independent School District, University of Texas at Austin, and the City of Austin, must be explored.

The University of Texas at Austin proposes to establish an after-school program called La Clase Mágica (UT-LCM) that focuses on the educational needs of English language learners for children in grades K through 6. UT-LCM draws from a rich body of research on programs that have involved deep connections between universities and public school children through after-school programs that provide them with much-needed, additional learning opportunities (see Vásquez, 2003; Cole, 1996; Cole & Brown 1997, and Gutiérrez et al. 1995, 1999, 2000). UT-LCM will be designed to serve English language learners' access to the institutional mores, predispositions, and school-based orientations and knowledge referred to as "cultural capital," together with developing resource-rich networks, or "social capital," in order to foster the academic success of children who are English language learners, including many who are recent immigrant youth and who are frequently marginal within their public schooling contexts (Valenzuela, 1999).

## **Introduction**

The following proposal calls for investment in a university-community partnership program between the University of Texas at Austin and the Mexican American Cultural Center called “The University of Texas Magic Classroom Pilot Program,” hereafter referred to simply as “UT-LCM.” UT-LCM is focused on the educational needs of English language learners (ELLs) for children in grades K through 6. The framework is based on research investigating the implementation and outcomes of university-school partnerships serving emerging biliterate and bilingual students with a primary focus on the celebrated work of Dr. Olga Vásquez, but also other pertinent research (e.g., Cole, 1996; Cole & Brown 1997, and Gutiérrez et al. 1995, 1999, 2000).

In 1989, Dr. Vásquez, associate professor at UC San Diego, developed a groundbreaking, technology-based curriculum to advance children’s cognitive development, computer skills, and literacy in English and Spanish. This model has successfully been used to establish numerous after-school program sites called La Clase Mágica. The primary goal of the proposed partnership is to establish the UT-LCM after-school program modeled after the long-standing and successful University of California model. UT-LCM connects the University of Texas at Austin faculty, graduate and undergraduate students to children attending Austin schools in parent- and technology-friendly educational spaces. UT-LCM draws from a rich body of research on partnership programs that have demonstrated equitable and sustained engagement between public, private and community groups, sharing a collective will to increase the number of biliterate and bicultural youth excelling academically at all levels of the educational pipeline.

Accordingly, UT-LCM will be designed to serve English language learners’ access to the institutional mores, predispositions, and school-based orientations and knowledge referred to as

“cultural capital,” together with developing resource-rich networks, or “social capital,” in order to foster the academic success of children who are otherwise referred to as “limited English proficient” (LEP) students in state policy<sup>2</sup>. Optimally, these kinds of strengths are cultivated in culturally-relevant, educational contexts where youth are provided with various forms of support, mentoring, and engaged learning opportunities that promote literacy in two languages, while at the same time developing the skills necessary for school success. Our theory of action is the following:

*A well-structured, university-connected, technology-rich space for English language learners equips youth and their parents with the cultural and social capital that they need in order to meet and surpass Texas’ educational standards by fostering biliteracy, a deep, principled learning of content, and college-going aspirations and orientations.*

Additional key features of this program are its validation of participants’ language and cultural backgrounds, intergenerational collaboration, and culturally-relevant parent engagement that provides them ready access to their child’s educational progress and needs. This is accomplished through regular access to bilingual staff that are qualified to comment on their child’s performance. With a premise of fostering deep relational connections with high levels of commitment to student learning (Gamoran, Secada, & Marrett, 2000; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000), LCM addresses the frequently hidden processes and information about schools (like curriculum tracking and college access) that will make participating parents and children better navigators of the schooling system. UT-LCM accomplishes this by building upon the natural curiosity and inventiveness of children, equipping them with the tools, the social and

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<sup>2</sup> Although the term “limited English proficient” is the official term used in state policy, it connotes a biased, deficiency perspective of English language learners, our preferred term. It accords narrow emphasis to that which they do not know (English) rather than what they do know, obscuring their talents, resources, and potential for learning.

cultural capital, that they need to be resourceful, creative students. In line with the commitment to engaging community, UT-LCM promotes thoughtful and respectful collaboration with others, together with parents who play a supportive role and in so doing, builds communities that can tackle the challenges that parents and children confront in schools.

## **Background**

The AISD's end to the 2007-08 academic year witnessed the closing of one high school, the struggle of one middle school to remain afloat, and a total of eleven elementary, middle and high schools complete the year labeled "academically unacceptable"; two more than the previous year (TEA, 2008c). Campus ratings recently released from the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2008c) also indicates that Hispanic students make up the majorities across all eleven academically unacceptable schools, and are not faring well under an environment of high-stakes testing and accountability. District leaders have highlighted the inequities in resources, levels of teacher training, and lack of effective programs that provide the kinds of supports necessary for low-performing students as key factors that impact these students' academic progress and outcomes (AISD, 2008).

According to the most recent U.S. Census Data, Hispanics make up 34 percent of Austin's total population, and account for 63 percent of the city's population growth over a span of ten years (cited in Robinson, 2006). It is projected that 70 percent of all Hispanics living in Austin will be school-aged, or under the age of 18, by the year 2011 (Robinson, 2006). As this growing majority of Hispanic youth enter and proceed through the public school system, the diverse needs of these students must be placed at the fore. Schools, and the greater Austin community cannot afford for students to continue experiencing the downward trends that school-level data show are occurring for many students (TEA, 2008d).

Statewide, research indicates that attrition rates for all Hispanic students have either “remained unchanged or have worsened since 1985-86” (IDRA, 2007). At the district level Hispanics currently account for over half (57%) of the AISD’s total public school students (TEA, 2007b), and have an attrition rate of 46 percent (IDRA, 2008). The most recent summary report on statewide graduation and dropout rates for Hispanics in 2006 and 2007 shows increases in the number of high school dropouts (13.1% and 16.4% respectively), and decreases in graduation rates between the 2006 (71.7%) and 2007 (68.5%) academic years (TEA, 2008c, p. 56). According to district-level data Hispanic students in AISD schools have a graduation rate of 65.8 percent, and a dropout rate of 16.7 percent (TEA, 2008d, p. 98). Additionally, approximately one-fourth (25.4%, or 21,000) of the AISD’s total student population are English Language Learners (ELL) classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP); many of whom are Hispanic (TEA, 2007b). In the case of LEP students, statewide graduation rates are severely lower (39.3%), and dropout rates are considerably higher (34.6%) (TEA, 2008a, p. 57). While the actual percentages recorded by TEA are different from research at the state level (Valenzuela et al., 2007; McNeil et al., 2008) there is consistency in the conclusions drawn from both data reports that acknowledge the increased risks that Hispanic and ELL student’s face in not completing high school. To dismiss the needs of these growing student subpopulations could result in a much larger dropout problem than Texas currently faces (Murdock, 1997).

By creating a bilingual and bicultural learning community that fosters biliteracy, the proposed university partnership will make strong attempts to simultaneously prepare ELL students for state assessments, while retaining and building upon the linguistic capital that Spanish-speaking students possess (Valenzuela, 1999; Gutiérrez, 2000). While academic competency is unquestionably an important goal for ELL students, so too is English and Spanish

language literacy. The benefits of bilingualism are not only rewarding at the individual level but also provide external benefits in today's growing global society (Lindholm-Leary, 2000; Krashen & McField, 2005; Vásquez, 2007); this is especially the case of the state of Texas whose future rests heavily on the economic standing of its growing ethnic majority (Murdock et al., 1997).

### **Prior Research that Informs the Proposed UT-LCM Pilot Program**

Drawing primarily from the work of Cole & Brown (1997), Gutiérrez et al. (1995; 1999), and especially Vásquez (2003; also see Vásquez 1993; 1994; 2004; 2006; 2007; 2008), this brief review demonstrates how ELL's language development and literacy can be achieved through students' uses of technology- and culturally-rich spaces in the presence of undergraduate mentors who together with parents, to create multiple possibilities for learning.

#### ***La Clase Mágica (The Magic Classroom)***

Innovated by Dr. Olga A. Vásquez (2003), La Clase Mágica (LCM) was developed to serve the bilingual and bicultural needs of children, youth, parents and communities. Through its six sites across California's San Diego county, LCM has served approximately 300 students each year, the majority of whom are Latino, and in the case of two sites, large percentages are also American Indian youth. LCM has successfully engaged communities in San Diego County for over 17 years (Vásquez, 2003). With the help of university, community and organizational partnerships, it has carried out its goal in handing ownership and decision making to the communities that they serve.

Using a technology-based curriculum, LCM is designed to engage children between the ages of 3 to 16, fostering active learning through positive adult peer interaction and collaborative activities (Vásquez, 2003; 2006). LCM "recognizes the children's background experiences as

intellectual tools for problem solving, negotiating tasks and meaning-making” (Vásquez, 2003, p. 37). Rather than viewing cultural and linguistic differences as barriers that result in schooling practices designed to subtract students cultures, languages, and community-based identities, LCM aims to create an “additive” learning community where participants’ backgrounds are affirmed and construed positively as integral to the learning process (Valenzuela, 1999).

A major component of LCM is the participation of undergraduate peers referred to as “amigas” (female friends) or “amigos (male friends).” Amigas/os contribute significantly to children’s “motivation, engagement, and visions of self” (Vásquez, 2008, p. 3). By guiding children—also referred to as “amiguitas” (young female friends) or “amiguitos” (young male friends) —through a series of computer-based activities designed to emphasize language, literacy, and problem-solving skills, friends further develop children’s’ zones of proximal development. “Amiguitas” and “amiguitos” make use of a 20-level maze referred to as El Laberinto Mágico (The Magical Maze) to enhance their reading, writing, and math skills. El Laberinto Mágico is developed using context-sensitive materials that amiguitas/os recognize and are able to construct meaning from as they journey through the process of learning and goal setting.

Amiguitas/os have the freedom to enter El Laberinto Mágico at different points and progress through the help of artifacts, strategies and the guidance of amigas/os. Each of the 20 rooms comprising El Laberinto Mágico also provides a layer of data that allow researchers and evaluators to assess the progress of amiguitas/os. LCM’s technology based approach provides the ability to produce a “developmental trajectory” of a student’s engagement in El Laberinto Mágico. Additionally, field notes and reflections documented daily by amigas/os allow LCM to produce rich profiles of its participants. This information further demonstrates the success of



LCM in “facilitating the transmission and acquisition of social and cultural capital” (Vásquez, 2003, p. 23; also see Vásquez, 2006).

In addition to navigating through El Laberinto Mágico, children communicate regularly with a magical entity named El Maga (The Wizard) via electronic written communication. These interactions with El Maga are done in both English and Spanish, privileging neither language, nor requiring amiguitas/os to respond in any specific manner. The idea rather is that amiguitas/os have exposure to both languages simultaneously allowing them to practice numerous academic skills such as reading, writing, and problem-solving. Communication with El Maga is also conducted through real-time chats, enabling amiguitas/os to explicate the tasks they are performing and difficulties they are experiencing. Once a student successfully completes El Laberinto Mágico, he or she advances to the position of wizard assistant. This position is meant to foster independence, self-reliance and self-confidence, and the ability to communicate in any educational and professional setting, all of which may cultivate a vision of higher education (Vásquez, 1994; 2003).

Through daily documented reflections and field notes by amigas/os, the LCM evaluation was able to provide qualitative accounts—including, in some cases, verbatim dialog of students’ daily experiences. As amigos/as documented their observations of identity formation and educational growth of amiguitas/os, their framing of situations further informed LCM staff. Under the leadership of Dr. Olga Vásquez, daily reflections were examined providing insight to the growth of amigas/os as a result of their experiences at LCM. Amigas/os expressed becoming informed on important issues of difference as they took part in the process of LCM’s mission in validating amiguitas/os’ bilingual-bicultural identities.

To learn more about the long-term affects of LCM on participants, a survey and phone interview was conducted with 46 former participants (amiguitas/os) who had completed at least three years in the program but who were now young adults. The responses showed that for many, their participation in LCM and the role of amigas/os, generated a strong influence on participants' interest to pursue higher education. The most common, influential factor that participants attributed to their academic success was the importance of working side-by-side with university students (amigas/os). Findings on the success of LCM show that 90% of the students who participated in LCM were enrolled or had already completed a college degree. In the case of those students who served as wizard assistants, 32% had plans to pursue graduate education (Vásquez, 2003). Additionally, interviews later conducted with 20 undergraduate mentors revealed how their exposure to LCM led to graduate studies where research interests surrounding education, ethnic studies, language and culture were pursued. Finally, seven of those twenty interviewees went on to become faculty members of colleges and universities in the United States, all referring to their experiences with LCM as influential in their career choices.

The underlying principal of LCM is its commitment to engaging families and the community. LCM carries out this mission through the work of university resources (students, faculty and researchers) with an end goal of turning ownership of the space over to the community. Research findings over a span of nearly 10 years show how the commitment of the community to LCM led to the sites being run through community member and organization partnerships. Participation of parents at LCM was highly valued and led to their placement in leadership roles subsequently leading to permanent salaried positions as directors in the program. The inclusion of parents as equal partners played a role in their successful engagement with LCM despite initial barriers, such as inexperience with the intricacies of the curriculum and

instruction of their children. This contrasts to research on school parental involvement where parents are commonly placed in subordinate roles with little or no decision making power (Fine, 1993; Shannon, 1996; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Olivos, 2006), but rather are assigned school-driven tasks as a means of helping their children be successful (López & Vázquez, 2001; Ramirez, 2003). LCM's success in engaging parents could serve as a model in informing policies and best practices surrounding parent involvement.

### **The Importance of University Partnerships**

The sustainability of LCM was in part achieved through the institutional efforts of the University of California's UC-Links program. University resources supported LCM through research, an undergraduate course, students, and the funding of all six LCM sites. Promotion by the University on the success of LCM through the dissemination of its evaluations and findings have also been key to its survival. In addition to university resources, LCM was able to expand through the help of community programs and non-profit organizational partnerships. Through the sharing of resources, LCM has continuously provided services to a growing number of students over the span of 17 years.

### ***The Fifth Dimension*<sup>3</sup>**

Developed through a partnership between the University of Miami and community organizations, The Fifth Dimension developed by Cole and Brown (1997) focused on building English literacy and second language acquisition. Rooted in cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), the Fifth Dimension literacy program focuses on four main goals to meet the needs of second language learners.

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<sup>3</sup> More on the Fifth Dimension can be found at: Source: <http://129.171.53.1/blantonw/5dClhse/theoretical.html>

The first goal employed by the Fifth Dimension is to create sustainable activity systems that aim to increase the understanding of the cultural mediation of mind and the process of cognitive and social development of second language learners (Cole & Nicolopoulou, 1991; Cole & Brown, 1997). This goal is met in part by providing context for second language learners to master knowledge and skills mediating changes in their everyday lives and practices. This context consists of providing undergraduates from across disciplines such as education, developmental psychology and communication the opportunities to connect theory to practice. Finally, the Fifth Dimension allows for a deeper understanding of how the social and individual create each other through reciprocal interaction.

A significant component of The Fifth Dimension's assessment and evaluation of participant learning is through field-notes and reflection, following the end of each session. Specifically, undergraduate mentors are required to observe and record information on student learning in the following areas: cultural systems, participant learning and social interaction<sup>4</sup>.

Forms of cultural systems are primarily made up of student characteristics such as prior social knowledge, or co-constructed knowledge that participants draw from to navigate through the curriculum. Undergraduate mentors are asked to indicate participants' usage of artifacts, such as maps, task cards and hints. Additionally, mentors document the many types of strategies or sharing of information by participants during the learning process. Participant learning, also referred to as cognitive change, are observed and noted as changes in reading, writing and computer literacy. Participant's actions and conversations are also tracked to indicate signs of growth in students' cognitive scaffolding or "zones of proximal development" (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Vásquez, 2003). ZPD refers to "the distance between two points of development

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<sup>4</sup> The Fifth Dimension's Field Note Evaluation can be found at:  
<http://129.171.53.1/blantonw/5dClhse/publications/tech/categories.html>

in which the learner accomplishes, in collaboration with a more expert assistant, what he or she eventually will be able to accomplish unassisted” (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Vásquez, 2003, p. 151). The final evaluation consists of the social interactions of participants with both the curriculum activities and their peers.

### *Las Redes (Networks)*

Stemming from the consortium established by Dr. Olga A. Vásquez, LCM and UCSD, the partnership between UCLA and the unincorporated city of Lennox, CA, intended to serve the education needs of 200 K-8<sup>th</sup> grade students. By coupling the theoretical framework and foundation developed by the University of Miami’s “The Fifth Dimension” with her own work surrounding English language learners, Gutiérrez et al. (1995; 1999; 2000) explains that through the program, *Las Redes* (Networks), university faculty made use of the linguistic repertoires of students as tools for helping them to create meaning during the process of learning.

Utilizing space in a local library, the goal of *Las Redes* partnership was to create a community of learners through students’ engagement in computer-based, math and literacy activities, e-mail messages and letter writing, along with digital storytelling. This learning community sought to mediate and assist learning by “utilizing the social, cultural, and linguistic resources of all its participants” (Gutiérrez et al., 2000, pp. 13-14). *Las Redes* draws from a cultural-historical perspective that regards difference and diversity as resources for learning and strives to use multiple tools to mediate learning, such as guided participation (Gutiérrez, 1995; Gutiérrez et al., 2000; Gutiérrez and Rogoff, 2003).

*Las Redes* students were “expected to be active participants in their own development by co-determining sub-goals of the presented problems and thus changing the nature of their

participation by reorganizing the learning context” (Stone and Gutiérrez, 1998, p, 14). By providing children access to university undergraduate mentors who provide multiple forms of assistance, students’ zones of proximal development are extended allowing them to learn new approaches, strategies and skills for learning (Gutiérrez et al. 1995; 1999; Gutiérrez and Rogoff, 2003).

Similar to LCM, undergraduate mentors were simultaneously enrolled in an intense practicum course through UCLA’s College of Education where they were grounded in the socio-historical theories within which both the Fifth Dimension and *Las Redes* were developed. This course allowed students—many of whom were on a career path to be teachers—to effectively link theory to practice (Gutiérrez et al. 1995, 1999, 2000; Stone and Gutiérrez, 1998). Weekly reflections on their interactions and observations of students not only allowed university mentors to recognize learning opportunities for themselves, but also provided a more contextual analysis of student growth far superior to the quantitative data on which schools increasingly rely.

With the guided participation of undergraduate mentors, the writing competencies of each student attending *Las Redes* were tracked as students advanced through each successive, increasingly difficult level, providing data on each student’s growth in math and literacy skills. Story Starters, an additional computer-mediated program implemented by *Las Redes* further focused on engaging students in peer learning by allowing one student to begin writing a story and another to complete it. This group activity was further found to foster both critical thinking and creative writing, while also constructing language literacy.

Taken together, this research agenda is one that has involved multiple research settings, scholars, and institutions, but which share a vision regarding the powerful mediating role of

culturally relevant, university-connected, technology-rich spaces where parents, children, and university undergraduate students create bonds that provide children with both a tangible and meaningful connection to both the mainstream curriculum and higher education.

### **UT-LCM Pilot Program Mission, Timeline, and Daily Operations**

*Mission.* Using university resources, it is the goal of the proposed partnership to develop a space where the principles of La Clase Mágica previously explicated are utilized to serve the growing population of English language learners in Austin, Texas. The mission of this partnership is to build supportive and reciprocal relationships with students, families, schools, and communities that will result in a long-term bilingual and bicultural space for learning where the contributions of all members are valued, resulting in greater classroom successes and access to higher education.

*Timeline.* The 2008-09 academic year will be dedicated to fundraising, developing an undergraduate course, outfitting the MACC site to assure that it is operational; bringing University of California San Diego faculty member, Dr. Olga A. Vásquez, to UT as a consultant and to consider her for a possible Visiting Professor hire; coordinating conversations with community and organization partners; and advertising the UT-LCM after-school program in the 2 East Austin partner schools.

The 2009-10 year will be our first year of operation, with the anticipated assistance of Dr. Olga A. Vásquez and a Postdoctoral student, who will develop and teach two separate intense 6-unit undergraduate practicum courses through the College of Education. Both Dr. Vásquez and Associate Vice President for School Partnerships, Dr. Angela Valenzuela, will work collectively and draw upon their respective research backgrounds surrounding education as it relates to

emerging bilingual students. As co-Principal Investigators, Dr. Vásquez and Dr. Valenzuela will oversee a staff of Graduate Research Assistants and Undergraduates to ensure an efficient running of the Program on a daily basis.

*Daily Operation of the LCM Pilot Program.* Utilizing a computer-filled space in Austin's Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC), the UT-LCM partnership will function as an after-school program serving elementary students between the ages of 5 to 12. Students from George I. Sanchez, and Zavala elementary schools will partner with UT-LCM in this effort. The schools will have access and transportation to the UT-LCM site on Monday through Thursday from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., and every other Saturday provided by the MACC. Both partner schools are located in East Austin, and all are within walking distance from the MACC site. Demographic data for both partner schools show an average of 45% of overall students being categorized as limited English proficient (LEP). This figure accounts for nearly 500 English language learner students and prospective UT-LCM participants.<sup>5</sup>

The initial pilot of the UT-LCM will begin by creating an undergraduate practicum course through the College of Education that will later be taught by Dr. Olga A. Vásquez. This course will ideally be cross-listed to include the College of Liberal Arts and the Center for Mexican American Studies. This course will be an intense, 6-unit practicum course that will include weekly lectures as well as require students to participate at the UT-LCM site for five hours each week. In addition, undergraduates will be taught ethnographic techniques, as well as fundamental socio-historical learning theories as they apply to LCM and guided by university faculty in their quest to tie theory to practice.

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<sup>5</sup> Information on school demographics can be found on the Texas Education Agency website: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2007/campus.srch.html>



The opening of the UT-LCM site will consist of the undergraduate team creating digital folders for each of the children participating. By utilizing technology, the UT-LCM site is able to generate portfolios of children that will subsequently be attached to the progress they make in the Program. The children's first visit to UT-LCM will involve a diagnostic pre-test that provides useful information in understanding the reading, writing and computer knowledge of all incoming participants. Similar to the preceding LCM model, this initial information will be used as a comparison to measure growth and provide an evolving "developmental trajectory" throughout the duration of the child's participation (Vásquez, 2003).

Following the pre-test, students will be provided materials to navigate El Laberinto Mágico (The Magical Maze), such as maps and task cards, before getting introduced to the inner workings of UT-LCM. Students will be introduced to undergraduate peers with whom they will work alongside.

Similar to the original LCM, children will be encouraged to explore El Laberinto Mágico at their own pace. Normal "folder" days will utilize technology to promote and foster English and Spanish literacy, as well as computer skills, while at the same time tracking each student's actions and progress (Vásquez, 2003). Active participation in the maze and a constant stream of communication with the character of El Maga (The Wizard) will provide both computer-generated and ethnographic data on how students engage with one another in developing innovative forms of learning. LCM sessions held every other Saturday will serve as "play days" where students' interaction will not be recorded in their respective portfolios (folders). On these days, students will be able to play games or surf the internet under the supervision of an adult. Undergraduates will not be present on those days.

## Specific Goals

*Technical Computer Skills Development.* In addition to LCM's focus on promoting biliteracy and biculturalism, a complimentary goal is to provide them with useful technical skills that will enhance students' educational opportunities, as well as prepare them for state assessments at the fifth grade level. The combination of academic and technical knowledge will allow students to become eligible, and better prepared for higher education. Findings on the educational aspirations of prior LCM members showed that some students pursued degrees and careers in technology because of their accessibility to it while at LCM (Vásquez, 2004). Whether pursuing a degree in technology is a goal or not, the computer knowledge and skills children will acquire will serve them well throughout their lives in and out of school. As students progress through the 20 levels of El Laberinto Mágico they will have opportunities to innovate new games that those following them will enjoy.

*Incorporating families and community.* To ensure that the goals of UT-LCM are consistently informed by the goals of families and communities, conversations with stakeholders will be coordinated in part by the help of a paid bilingual Community Support Specialist. This community liaison will coordinate meetings and help in gathering initial survey data on family's and community resident's backgrounds, and needs during the planning year, as well as follow-up data on the knowledge and general impressions of UT-LCM during the implementation year. UT-LCM will also build upon the intimate knowledge of the community liaison to advise in the development of La Gran Dimensión (The Grand Dimension), a component for adults. The goal of La Gran Dimensión is to provide accessibility to computers and training that may help families become more informed and better navigators of public institutions, such as schools.

*Incorporating school teachers.* By providing a space for teacher development through symbolic interaction, where teachers have access to students and parents in a less formal, but equally educational, learning environment, UT-LCM provides a meeting place to build respecting relationships. Informed by the work of Gutierrez et al. (1995), UT-LCM can serve as a neutral “third space” capable of mediating the oppositional “counterscripts” (pp. 2-3) that develop in response to traditional teacher roles that disregard students’ knowledge or that devalues their community-based identities. Because UT-LCM fosters ways of learning that are unique to them, students excelling at UT-LCM may experience difficulties in their schooling. Collaborating with teachers, then, is a UT-LCM objective—even partnering with them, if possible, to create joint report cards that provide schools, parents and teachers a more broad portrayal of student progress.

Other possibilities that we might envision with respect to public school teachers is becoming a resource, in time, on learning how to teach ELLs specific aspects of the curriculum, with a range of teaching strategies, and perhaps contributing to an understanding of the kinds of assessments that yield valid information of students knowledge and skills in relation to the state curriculum.

*Maintaining open lines of communication between school staff, teachers, students and parents.* Indeed, a continuous stream of communication between students and adults is a pivotal factor in the long-term success of UT-LCM. Up-to-date digital files with in-depth information on pertinent school staff will facilitate this goal. To further ensure that the UT-LCM site sets itself on a path to replicate the success of its predecessor, we have also considered the accessibility of the MACC to the communities and families it seeks to partner with. While research centered on parents of English language learners show transportation as being a

common barrier taking part in traditional forms of parental involvement, the UT-LCM partnership will make special efforts to reduce this obstacle (Carreón et al., 2005; Olivos, 2006; Zarate, 2007; Arias et al., 2008).

The longer-range vision of this partnership consists of providing services to a greater number of students across higher age groups, while developing community organization and business partnerships that will support both the sustainability and growth of LCM and making parent and family engagement accessible. In addition, the proposed partnership will in time seek to expand UT-LCM to provide the following programs for the respective age groups: Mi Clase Mágica (My Magic Classroom) for students 3 - 5 year-olds, The Wizards Club for students 12 to 18 year-olds, and finally, La Gran Dimensión (The Great Dimension), which provides bilingual adults with an opportunity to use information technology to better navigate mainstream institutions.

Similar to LCM sites in California, the sustainability of the UT- LCM Partnership will rely on the institutional efforts of the University of Texas to provide support through research, on-site participation, and funding for the operation of UT-LCM. UT will also be relied upon to promote the success and research findings of UT-LCM.

### **Organizational Structure**

Our ability at the University of Texas to maintain productive collaborations with the Austin community at multiple levels with various kinds of community relationships requires that we assume an over-arching lead as coordinators of this effort. At this point in our development, we see a possible collaboration with four primary partners and several secondary partners.

University-based partners are positioned to benefit from streams of data that can be analyzed and published as UT-LCM is developed and operated.

### **Primary Partnerships**

*Texas Center for Education Policy (TCEP) in the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (UT Austin)*

Building on TCEP's mission to bring together university entities in partnership with local, state, national and international education communities, TCEP is uniquely poised to be a bridging organization between primary and secondary partners within the university and across our larger community. Within UT-LCM, TCEP will be the overseeing organization, in charge of the communication and collaboration between partners. This position will require the hiring or reallocation of a TCEP representative, whose primary purpose is to facilitate the communication between partners and ensure that the vision and goals of UT-LCM are met. In addition, TCEP will be responsible for research on the program's effectiveness and assessing the possibility of its replication through local or statewide policy efforts. Just as importantly, TCEP will be responsible for collaborating with partners in the planning and the expansion of UT-LCM, promoting the visibility and standing that it deserves.

*Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC) of the City of Austin*

The MACC will partner with UT-LCM as the official site of the after-school program serving Central East Austin students. The MACC provides an empowered cultural space within which Mexican American culture is esteemed and celebrated. In addition to providing a community-based link, the MACC has ample room for the amount of technology needed to operate UT-LCM. The MACC will provide UT-LCM with two computer labs to accommodate

between 40-60 students, Monday through Thursday, and one lab for Saturday sessions. The MACC will also provide technical support by sharing its already staffed IT professional to ensure UT-LCM computers run smoothly.

The MACC will be to provide facilities for “Teacher Development” meetings as an in-kind contribution. These meetings will provide teachers with insight to students’ progress outside of the traditional power structure of grades and classroom compliance. One goal of this collaboration is to jointly create student report cards that will give both schools and parents a more candid picture of student progress and growth. In addition, these meetings will also serve to empower teachers and parents by providing opportunities to establish reciprocal relationships via a neutral and shared space, while developing teaching and learning strategies to better meet the needs of students.

Based on the past and lasting success of California’s LCM, it is our hope that the MACC will be seen as a safe and inviting space by LCM parents, and that the community may benefit from the future components, such as the Wizard Club and La Gran Dimensión that this partnership seeks to progressively add.

*College of Education (UT Austin) and the College of Liberal Arts (UT Austin)*

The proposed undergraduate course designed for UT-LCM will initially consist of the hiring of Dr. Olga A. Vásquez. Bringing 18-plus years of nationally acclaimed success in the community-university partnerships, Dr. Vásquez will educate students on issues of gender, technology and language and culture as they affect learning and development and consequently, educational inequality. In addition to being enrolled in an intense 6-unit course, students are required to participate as peer mentors at UT-LCM for a minimum of 5 hours each week. By

providing hands-on experience, university students will improve conceptual and practical knowledge of course content. University student participation will provide an added layer of student evaluation by requiring them to keep detailed field notes following each site visit. The collection and analysis of field notes will play a large role in evaluating the effectiveness of the program, and the training of future undergraduate mentors.

Field-notes and reflections will be reviewed weekly by Dr. Vásquez, the Postdoctoral Fellow, and the assigned Graduate Research Assistant and incorporated in the overall program evaluation. Similar to research findings by both Vásquez (2003; 2006) and Gutiérrez (1999; 2000), critical learning opportunities for undergraduates can be captured as they experience putting theory into practice. These interactions will further benefit the greater community as undergraduates' experience with UT-LCM may inform their future roles as practitioners, and for many may find themselves teaching in public schools.

#### *Austin Independent School District*

Collaboration with the Austin Independent School District (AISD) will be pivotal to the planning, growth and success of UT-LCM. The AISD will partner with UT-LCM at two separate levels: the school level and district level, the latter through the Department of Diversity and Intercultural Relations.

At the school level, teachers and administrators will help to determine which elementary students will be invited/ selected to participate in the pilot program as well as those programs UT-LCM will progressively add. Schools will also work with UT-LCM to determine useful methods of incorporating teachers. By providing the financial support that would allow teachers to attend teacher-parent –student meetings, bilingual parents will have valuable and flexible

access to teachers, providing a rich evaluation of student performance in and out of school. Austin teachers and schools will gain in this effort as it provides opportunities to fulfill its commitment to involve bilingual parents and the community in the process of school.

Through a partnership with the Department of Diversity and Intercultural Relations, under the leadership of Dr. Margarita Decierdo, AISD will assist in providing financial support for a Research Associates and a Community Support Specialist. AISD's investment during the planning year will also consist of travel support to the six LCM sites serving San Diego communities to provide hands-on training and exposure to the daily workings of the Program.

Finally, a UT-LCM partnership with the AISD's Department of Diversity and Intercultural Relations will consist of providing in-kind transportation for students participating in the after-school program.

*Institute for Community, University and School Partnerships (ICUSP) of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (UT Austin)*

Given ICUSP's successful connections and programs within the Austin Independent School District as evidenced through COBRA and Young Knights, and its stated mission of connecting "university-based intellectual, infrastructural, and programmatic resources to schools and communities in order to promote the academic achievement and well-being of all children in the state of Texas", ICUSP can be the practitioner within our collaboration. This position would require ICUSP's commitment of a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) to support UT-LCM staff in order to ensure the smooth day-to-day operations of the program. In addition to assisting staff, the ICUSP GRA will assist in program evaluation of students' activity records and interactions with students and mentors alongside Dr. Vásquez.



## Overview

By implementing LCM and ensuring the participation of the partners listed above, we can enter into a collaboration that provides mutual benefits. AISD benefits from the expertise provided by UT entities and the close attention paid to ELL students, both of which are largely lacking within the district. At the district level the AISD's Department of Diversity and Intercultural Relations benefits through research and community partnerships that help to develop solutions on how to build the capacity of families and communities to be advocates of and for their children. At the school level, teachers can interact with students outside of the classroom and forge deeper relationships with students, where they may also see the successes that students may not be able to display within traditional schoolwork. UT will benefit from the experience provided for graduate students through research and development opportunities while undergraduate students will benefit from the practicum course that connects them to youth who despite their increasing presence, face special difficulties and hurdles in our schools. Furthermore, ICUSP and TCEP will benefit from the data and success that emerges from UT-LCM's operations. Finally, the MACC benefits by fulfilling its commitment to serve the Austin community, and conceivably as well, by fostering a deeper interest in the arts among a community segment that is frequently peripheral to such matters.

The emergence of this powerful and community-based partnership consisting of the University of Texas at Austin, the Austin Independent School District, the Mexican American Cultural Center and the East Austin Community, brings collective expertise to areas of academic scholarship, and leadership, cultural insight and understanding, community needs and resources, and K-12 education and assessment. The UT-LCM University-School Partnership seeks definitive student-centered results, and the possibility of sharing the educational program and

lessons learned with communities across the state of Texas. Finally, state and local policy could be developed to incentivize this kind of university-school partnership with public institutions of higher education and communities across the state.

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