



Legacy Award

Sonia Gutiérrez

In Education

Sonia Gutiérrez is President Emeritus & Founder of the Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School. She has spent over 43 years as a principal, counselor, advocate, and organizer to more than 70,000 adult immigrant students.

She began her career in the District of Columbia Public Schools in May 1972, as a counselor of the Program for English Instruction to Latin Americans (PEILA). In October 1972, she became the director of PEILA and transformed the small, under-funded English as a Second Language (ESL) program into a comprehensive adult education program. In 1974, the Office of Right-to-Read of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare designated it as one of the best literacy programs in the nation. As PEILA outgrew its facility, Ms. Gutiérrez commenced a two-year effort to secure a school building for the program. In 1978 she was successful in relocating the program to the old Gordon Junior High School in Georgetown; PEILA then merged with the old Americanization School with an initial enrollment of 800. In 1992, Ms. Gutiérrez requested that the City Council rename the school after Carlos Rosario, who founded PEILA. Subsequently, it grew to provide 4,500 students per year with crucial language, cultural, vocational and job skills with a waiting list of 2,000. The school became, and continues to be, a national model. Delegations from other states and even other nations frequently visit the school to review its operations and curriculum, seeking to replicate the program.

1996, the District of Columbia faced a financial crisis that brought about the elimination of all DC Public Schools adult education programs including the Carlos Rosario Adult Education Center. Ms. Gutiérrez vowed to rebuild the school for the benefit of her students and her community. From August 1996 to March 1997, Ms. Gutiérrez worked out of the basement of her home and raised \$100,000 from local foundations to reopen the school as the non-profit Carlos Rosario International Career Center. The new school opened its doors in April 1997 with Ms. Gutiérrez as executive director and founder. Recognizing the tremendous need for additional classes, Ms. Gutiérrez actively sought Public Charter School funding. She succeeded, and in 1998 the school became the first Adult Public Charter School in the nation. From 1997 to 2003, the school expanded from one small site to six different sites around the community. Today, with an additional brand new campus in Ward 5, the non-profit Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School provides more than 2,500 students with English as a Second Language, GED in Spanish and English, courses in different areas of technology, citizenship classes, culinary arts, nurse's aide, family literacy and Spanish classes. Ms. Gutiérrez has many accomplishments as a community organizer and leader and has received many awards for her work and commitment to her community.