

## Latino/Diversity Day Draws 550 Students from Area High Schools to Stockton

Students See Campus Life, Learn About Opportunities

***For Immediate Release; with photos on [Flickr](#)***

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**Galloway, NJ** - Latino and other minority students from high schools in Atlantic, Cumberland, Camden and Union counties on Thursday were told to support each other in the quest for a college degree, during Latino Visitation and Diversity Day at Stockton University.

"We are not bound by the limitations that are put onto us by others, or more importantly, by ourselves," 2010 Stockton graduate Elvin Martinez told the 550 students. "If, and only if, we help one another, will our communities grow and all of us succeed."

Teneya Sanders, of Cherry Hill, a senior at LEAP Academy, said her sights are set on law school because she wants to be a district attorney. Her strengths are talking, reading and writing.

Kelvin Taveras, of Camden, a senior at LEAP Academy, said, "I envision myself in a detective field working in homicide."

He's thinking about criminal justice programs, but also wants to pursue his musical passion as a singer who plays bass and guitar. "I would like to perform on a stage one day," he said.

Martinez, who is special assistant at the Division of Family and Community Engagement for the Camden City Public School District, spoke to students and the faculty and staff who accompanied them from Atlantic City High School, the Stockton Champions of Youth program at the Boys & Girls Club in Atlantic City, Egg Harbor Township, Oakcrest and Absegami high

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schools, Vineland High School, Camden Academy Charter School, the LEAP Academy in Camden, Upward Bound from Camden, Pennsauken High School and Plainfield High School.

He told them that his mother lost their home in Pennsauken and they ended up living in “the hoods of hoods,” the Northgate One apartments in Camden. “I remember getting stuck in elevators, smelling urine in the stairwells and even waiting for the cops to unlock the elevators due to the murders that occurred in the building.”

“I was the student that did not try hard enough but just passed with B’s and C’s,” he said. “I was the student who had potential but did not strive to reach it. Until that day that I attended he Latino Visitation Day at Stockton., After hearing the speakers and visiting the school, I started to think: ‘why not me? why couldn’t I go to college?’ ”

Heather Medina, assistant director of Admissions, organized the event, which has been running since 1987, and growing each year. Students who attended would not have to pay a fee to apply to Stockton, she said.

“Stockton is a close-knit community - very much a family atmosphere, which is something that the Latin community embraces,” she said. “They can see themselves here.”

Zachiely Cruz, of Camden, a senior at LEAP Academy, said that Stockton is her top choice school. She is used to a city lifestyle, but is so excited about college and feels as though she can adapt to the Stockton environment.

Cruz grew up in Puerto Rico and moved to New Jersey at age 5 because her mother wanted her children to have better educational opportunities.

“Growing up I didn’t really have the support I needed because my dad wasn’t around, so I found a passion in making other people feel better and encouraging other people to do better,” she explained.

Her dream is to study higher education, psychology and family therapy because she wants to help others. “If I could describe myself in one word, it would be self-motivated,” she said.

“I want to work with the age group 13-19 because I feel like those are the teenage years where you are finding yourself and you don’t have anybody to help you out. Since I grew up in that lifestyle where I didn’t have anybody, I want to be that person who can be there for somebody else,” she said.

This fall, 11.3 percent of Stockton’s 8,674 students identify as Hispanic/Latino. Many Latino students in southern New Jersey would be the first in their families to go to college, which is why Stockton emphasizes the resources and support they can expect.

“You can make a difference here,” Stockton Interim President Harvey Kesselman told the students.

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“One of the things we are deeply committed to here at Stockton is community engagement.” He urged them to get involved in projects in their home communities now, a rewarding experience that also would help them stand out when applying to colleges and fit in at Stockton.

Jessica Grullon, of Galloway, attended Latino Visitation Day in 2005 as a senior at Egg Harbor Township High School at the encouragement of Yamilei Socorro, who was her teacher, advisor in the Hispanic American Club and later a mentor.

Grullon has since graduated from Stockton with a Communications degree in 2009, earned a master’s degree from Drexel University and currently works as a graduate enrollment counselor and events coordinator in Stockton’s School of Graduate and Continuing Studies.

Grullon gave a special presentation to attendees remembering and honoring the life of Yamilei Socorro, who recently passed away from cancer at just 34 years old. Socorro’s students and colleagues were sitting in front of Grullon as she spoke. “I told the students to continue her legacy by furthering their education beyond high school, setting an example to their peers and the generation that follows, and most importantly, to constantly encourage one another to strive for greatness,” said Grullon.

The 2015 event would have been Socorro’s 10th visit with her students. She was an Atlantic City High School graduate, a Rowan alumna, a graduate of Stockton’s Bilingual/Bicultural endorsement program and taught at Egg Harbor Township High School for 13 years.

Jeannie Romano, of Sea Isle, a junior Business major, was one of the Stockton student volunteers who led a tour for the high school students to see the campus. She shared her experiences and tips with the visitors, who may be students at Stockton one day.

The day also included information on how to apply, financial aid and academic resources, along with a taste of Latino food and music.

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