



MEDIA ADVISORY

Contact: Diana Gonzalez, Action Agenda Support
Palante@childrenfirstpa.org,

Pa'lante Initiative Mobilizes Hispanic Leaders to Drive Long-Term Change for Hispanic Kids

(March 3, 2026) – Children First, one of Pennsylvania's leading advocates for children and families, today announced a new multi-generational initiative uniting Hispanic stakeholders to address the unique needs of Philadelphia's Hispanic children and teens. Hispanic community members, advocates, and leaders are participating in this project after the release of Children First's report, *Pa'lante – Improving the Lives of Philadelphia's Hispanic Children*, the first ever analysis of Hispanic kids in the city.

Hispanic Philadelphians are the fastest growing demographic and a major cultural and economic force, with nearly 70,000 children. Overall, Hispanic families are moving out of poverty, sending their children to early learning programs in high numbers, and are spared from much of the city's gun violence. But the report's findings also reveal deep, persistent inequities.

While Hispanic parents work hard to care for their children, the child-serving health care and education institutions in Philadelphia are falling short. The *Pa'lante* report shows that a troubling 70% of Hispanic public school students are not on grade level in Math or English; 10% of Hispanic children are uninsured; and half of all Hispanic kids likely haven't seen a dentist in the last year.

"These numbers aren't surprising or new—but what *is* new is the determination to move from decades of inadequate systems and resources to decades of progress," said Nelida Sepulveda, co-author of the report. "The Pa'lante initiative taps into the lived experience of Hispanic community leaders to drive a process that results in a real, actionable plan for progress."

A Multi-Step Plan for Lasting Change

Children First is convening Hispanic leaders across Philadelphia to build a long-term, coordinated strategy to improve outcomes for Hispanic children and teens.

"Children First is proud to lead this effort in deep partnership with Hispanic leaders across the city, because no single organization can solve the complex challenges facing young Hispanic people," said Javier Suarez, President of the Children First Board of Directors. "Pa'lante is about bringing our strengths together—community leadership, data, and advocacy—to build the conditions our children need to thrive.

Building the Pa'lante Fellowship

The first step was to cultivate a dedicated network of Hispanic stakeholders to do the work of reaching out to community members, reviewing the *Pa'lante* report recommendations, prioritizing issues, and assessing community strengths and resource gaps. Already the Pa'lante Fellowship is up and running with 19 Fellows from across Philadelphia and its diverse Hispanic communities, each contributing their expertise, networks, and lived experience to drive systemic change. (See list of Fellows on final page.)

The Fellowship is also an opportunity to connect emerging leaders with mentors, expand their network, and learn from the experience of established leaders. Most of the Fellows come from the education or community nonprofit worlds, so the Fellowship will not only teach them about the public policy making process, but also how to elevate lived experiences to the policy level.

“I am honored to be selected as a Pa’lante Fellow and am eager to get the work started,” said Delitza Elena Hernandez Diaz, a Fellow who, outside of this work, focuses on translating complex research processes into accessible, plain-language information for families and communities. “I see Hispanic families every day who want the best for their children and the barriers that hold them back. It’s time to work together, align our goals, and make lasting change for children and our city.”

Listen and Learn

While the Pa’lante report offers specific policy recommendations, Fellows will elicit feedback on how to implement those recommendations. This stage is when Pa’lante Fellows will solicit feedback from all sectors of the Philadelphia Hispanic community – advocates, direct service providers, educators, political leaders, and families themselves.

Designing an Action Agenda

Having received feedback and lined up unified community support, the Fellows will work with Children First to develop a comprehensive policy roadmap for city, state, and school district leaders.

Community Mobilization and Sustained Advocacy

The Fellowship will engage families, youth, and community partners to push for change by organizing community forums, public testimony, media outreach, and continued research and analysis.

A Call to the Community

Hispanic leaders and community members across southeastern Pennsylvania are invited to join the Pa’lante effort and help shape the Action Agenda. “There is still opportunity for people to get involved,” added Suarez. “This is not a one-time project; this is an initiative that will keep building until we have foundational change that lifts opportunity for Hispanic children and teens.”

To get involved, contact palante@childrenfirstpa.org or visit <https://childrenfirstpa.org/palante/>.

Pa’lante Fellows

- Damaris Alvarado-Rodriguez – Executive Director, Children's Playhouse Early Learning Center / Latinos Educando Juntos
- Laura Beltran – Hispanic community advocate focused on child well-being
- Lina Cedeño – Bilingual Director of Teaching and Learning, ASPIRA Bilingual Cyber Charter School
- Joana Díaz – Director of Educational Technology, Esperanza Academy Charter School; Board of Directors, Vice Chair, Taller Puertorriqueño
- Delitza Elena Hernandez Diaz – Clinical Research Translator & Community Engagement Specialist
- Jonatan Lopez – President, SALUD (Students for Advancing Latinx Uplift and Development), a Temple University student group supporting Latinx students pursuing healthcare careers
- Oscar Lopez – Community Liaison, Philadelphia Mayor Cherrille L. Parker
- Reverend Adan A. Mairena – West Kensington Ministry at Norris Square and the Yeadon Presbyterian Church
- Wanda Pichardo – Victim Advocate at Victim Witness Services of South Philadelphia

- Laura Polo Pereira – Bilingual educator, psychologist, and case manager for children and youth in Philadelphia
- River Rangel – Senior Program Manager, Philadelphia Education Fund
- Samuel Rodriguez – Founder and Executive Director, Walls for Justice
- Sheila Rosado – Early Education Teacher
- Xiomara Santiago – Superintendent's Parent & Guardian Advisory Council Member
- Jennifer Sierra – Development Manager, Philadelphia Youth Basketball
- Adamary Sosa – Vice President of Education, Xiente
- Erik Soto – MBA Candidate
- Valeria Uribe – Student Editor and journalist, Temple University
- Celina Velez – Director of Student Development at Esperanza Academy, Elementary School Division

Children First is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that improves the lives of children in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties by developing initiatives and advocating for quality health care, child care, public education, and family stability. Learn more on Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, Threads, and YouTube @childrenfirstpa, and at www.childrenfirstpa.org.

###