



**LEAP Social
Enterprise, Inc.**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

04

A Note from the Director

06

PROMOTING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE & INNOVATION

What Differentiates LEAP Schools From All Public Schools: We Promote Academic Excellence in Students and Faculty

10

GROWTH & EXPANSION STRATEGY

Transforming Puerto Rico's Communities Through the Expansion of LEAP Schools

14

EARLY COLLEGE SUCCESS THROUGH UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

Preparing LEAP Graduates for College and Career Readiness with University Partnerships

18

BUILDING SOCIAL AND ASSET CAPITAL

Building Social and Asset Capital to Expand the LEAP School Model

26

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT HUB

Parent Ambassadors Lead the Way

30

LEADERSHIP TEAM & THE BOARD

The LEAP Social Enterprise Team's Crucial Role in Puerto Rico

34

FUNDRAISING GALA

Transforming Public Education in Puerto Rico through Equity, Choice, and Innovation





A Note from the Director

Four years ago, LEAP Social Enterprise committed to investing the time and resources needed to adopt the LEAP school model in Puerto Rico. Today, this idea, which was merely a dream at the time, is a reality. LEAP community schools are both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated model focuses on academics, social and emotional health, community development, and community engagement, which leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. LEAP schools offer a personalized curriculum that emphasizes real-world learning and community problem-solving. Our model schools are centers of the community and are open to everyone — all day, every day, evenings and weekends.

Using public schools as hubs for learning, our LEAP schools bring together many partners to offer a range of support and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities. Partners work to achieve these results: Children are ready to enter and attend school consistently; students engage actively in learning and their community; families take an increasing role with their children's education; schools collaborate with families and

communities; students succeed academically; students are healthy — physically, socially, and emotionally; students live and learn in a safe, supportive and stable environment, and communities become desirable places to live.

Most people think of schools today as serving a single purpose: a binary, analog system of delivery — teachers teach, and students learn. LEAP schools are more akin to smart devices. Our schools and communities connect, collaborate and create. Children and families have an array of support from community partners right at their school. Communities and schools leverage their shared physical and human assets to help kids succeed.

The seeds for the LEAP Social Enterprise were really planted back in 1997, the year that the first LEAP Academy opened in Camden, New Jersey.

Over the past two decades, we have prioritized strengthening the pipelines that support children from infancy through college and career. The fast success of LEAP in Puerto Rico validates how highly families and students thrive within our model.

EQUITY

After a successful first opening with LEAP STEAM + E in San Juan, our model has expanded into two additional communities. Carolina has three campuses, and Bayamón has one campus open. The five schools operating in Puerto Rico serve well over 2,000 students. As we look to the future, we are actively working on four additional campuses in Isabela, Mayagüez, and Cupey Rio Piedras, significantly expanding our impact and the number of children and families served.

With each new school that opens, a new cohort of students is empowered through equal access to learning. Students who transfer to LEAP schools gain unmatched benefits, including access to the highest-quality teachers and administrative staff, research evidence-based academic model that has proven success with graduation rates, early college access (for those in 10th to 12th grade), extended day and extended year instruction, and much more.

Choice

For years, parents on the Island have been dissatisfied with what is happening in traditional public schools but may not have had another option. Now, parents have a choice to send their children to schools where their children come first, and teaching and learning are a priority.

As we enter the beginning stages of opening each LEAP school within a community, we can see the excitement in the families and community members for the opportunities we bring their children.

The ability to quickly mobilize local assets – such as community members' time, effort and talents - has been a testament to the desire and need for school choice in these communities. Instead of education being a challenge or a barrier, LEAP provides educational opportunities and choices for what academic excellence looks like.

Innovation

As we expand LEAP schools, each has a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) focus. For example, one Carolina campus focuses on arts and engages students' creativity and computer science and coding skills. Another campus focuses on sports science; the third specializes in medical science. The STEAM focus is an innovative way to build the expectation for college and career readiness into the curriculum from an early age.

Each school also provides an integrated curriculum, where students benefit from project-based learning and access to fabrication labs, where they can apply skills through hands-on learning and experimentation.

LOOKING AHEAD

This year, we will proudly hand the first high school diplomas to the initial graduating class of LEAP STEAM + E Academy in San Juan, the first LEAP school on the Island. We will toast the success, then return the next day with sleeves rolled up to continue our efforts. As we look towards the future and open 10 additional schools across the Island, we will continue prioritizing academic excellence and community development through the LEAP school model. Our goal of lifting children and families from poverty and setting them on a pathway to prosperity and academic success remains unchanged.

Today, more than ever, I believe that equal access to quality education can transform the lives of children living in urban and vulnerable environments. Together, with our local and national partners, we can create a brighter future, one community at a time.



Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago

Rutgers Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor
Director, Rutgers-Camden Community Leadership Center

PROMOTING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION

What Differentiates LEAP Schools From All Public Schools: *We Promote Academic Excellence in Students and Faculty*

The LEAP Social Enterprise model is used in all our schools in San Juan, Carolina, and Bayamon, where LEAP's flagship schools in Puerto Rico are located. They focus on much more than an eight-hour school day by implementing innovative programs that provide children with supportive community environments and equipping them with the academic, social and emotional tools needed to thrive both now and in the future.

Similarly, faculty members at the school are empowered to achieve their short-term goals and long-term professional development plans, ensuring that they are happy, thriving and looking toward the future.



INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

LEAP Schools incorporates many programs to prepare students and families for college and their careers, such as the following:

- **Extended school day and school year** ensure that students take advantage of every opportunity to learn and prepare. School opens at 7 a.m. and serves students until 6 p.m. every day.
- **Small classroom sizes**, which don't exceed 20 students per classroom, ensure that students receive individualized attention and that instructional routines are organized.
- **An integrated curriculum** that capitalizes on project-based learning and access to a Fabrication Lab so that students can apply skills and learn by inventing and experimenting.
- **Each student receives a computer** for use at school and home, supporting virtual learning opportunities.
- **LEAP STEAM + E students participate in the Early College Program** beginning in Grade 10 to ensure that they earn dual college credits and graduate ahead of their peers as they begin their college careers. The students will attend classes at Sagrado Corazon University.
- **The school focuses on building solid and positive relationships with parents and community members.** Families gain opportunities for learning through access to social and emotional services and job readiness training.
- **Programs to support social and emotional development** for students are available.
- **On-site food and nutrition program** that serves breakfast and lunch every day.

LEAP Schools also incorporate many programs to recruit faculty and ensure they are supported, such as the following:

- **The school prioritizes access to quality teachers and staff.** Teachers at LEAP schools are valued and supported. Moreover, they are compensated with the highest salary for teachers in Puerto Rico, making twice as much as other public school teachers on the Island. This level of pay equity is supplemented by opportunities for professional development.
- The school sees that continuous assessments and evaluations are in place to ensure high levels of accountability for all.
- Faculty are provided continual opportunities for professional development in each school, ensuring that teachers have the skills they need to succeed.
- Teachers are participants in the pay-for-performance program





LEAP STEAM + E'S FIRST GRADUATING CLASS EMBARKS ON RUTGERS UNIVERSITY JOURNEY

As with LEAP Academy in New Jersey, LEAP STEAM + E exemplifies the mission of college preparedness and readiness through its pipeline to Rutgers University-Camden.

LEAP STEAM + E, the inaugural LEAP school in Puerto Rico, will celebrate its first graduating cohort of twelfth graders this spring. Ten seniors from the San Juan school have been accepted into Rutgers University-Camden and remain committed to continuing their education at the institution this fall.

The students will benefit from the Rutgers Alfredo & Gloria Bonilla-Santiago Endowed Scholarship Fund, which financially supports students qualified to attend Rutgers if they maintain a grade point average of 3.5 or higher and have an attendance record of fewer than four absences annually.

Over 300 students from LEAP Academy remain in the Rutgers Alfredo & Gloria Bonilla-Santiago Scholars Program, with 62 new students joining the program this year—reflecting its attractiveness and relevance, as well as the student's commitment to academic excellence.

The LEAP model ensures that all its students enrolling at Rutgers University-Camden do so with pre-approved college credits as part of the Early College Program. Four students will major in psychology, two will study medicine, and the remaining four will pursue nursing, veterinary science, architecture and mechanical engineering.

These students and their families visited Rutgers-Camden this March to learn more about campus life, meet faculty and staff and learn from LEAP Academy alumni currently attending Rutgers-Camden.

LEAP STEAM + E STUDENTS CELEBRATED FOR STORYTELLING PROJECT

Student achievement is celebrated in every grade. In May 2024, a high school team from LEAP STEAM + E earned top honors for their creative storytelling skills. Their video, *Climate Change Drought*, won the Best Storytelling Award at the Climate Innovation Challenge (CIC) Showcase hosted by Climate Advocates Voces Unidas (CAVU). The competition highlights innovative climate resilience projects in the form of student-produced short films.

The winning video stood out for its engaging production and impactful message, as it offered practical solutions for Puerto Rican communities facing dry seasons. The students outlined actionable steps such as recycling water, fixing leaks, planting drought-resistant grass, conserving water in daily activities and harvesting rainwater.



TEACHERS RECEIVE REGULAR OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

The global pandemic took a toll on public schools in Puerto Rico, leading to an exodus of educators due to low pay, poor work-life balance, deteriorating school conditions and a lack of respect in the workplace. Recognizing that teacher satisfaction was essential for both strong starts and long-term success, LEAP Social Enterprise prioritized teacher well-being when expanding the LEAP schools to Puerto Rico. A key component of this expansion involves continual opportunities for professional development in each school, ensuring that teachers have the skills they need to succeed.

Professional workshops are available throughout the academic year, including sessions in emerging and growing areas. One session, “Using AI Instruments in the Classroom,” equipped educators with the skills to integrate AI effectively into their teacher practices, overviewing technologies, practical applications and

ethical considerations. In addition to serving as a lecture on AI, the training provided teachers with hands-on activities and real-world examples to translate learning into action.

Other educational workshops and professional development opportunities addressed areas of improvement for students and provided ways for teachers to achieve student goals by applying various strategies. The teachers’ feedback on these workshops was overwhelmingly positive.

Additionally, the teachers work with the administration to develop and implement professional development plans, which help identify topics that trainers will discuss during in-service training days. These plans are used throughout the year and are supplemented with short-term goals for teachers, ultimately providing a blueprint for success.

A MODEL FOR EXCELLENCE AND OPPORTUNITY

LEAP STEAM + E is more than a school, it is a transformative community resource for Puerto Rico students, families and educators. From student awards to college acceptances, LEAP STEAM + E sets a new standard for education in the state and is modeling the way for the active Carolina and Bayamon campuses as well as the additional campuses in Isabela, Mayaguez and Cupey Río Piedras that are on the horizon.



GROWTH & EXPANSION STRATEGY

Transforming Puerto Rico's Communities Through the Expansion of LEAP Schools

LEAP Social Enterprise is fulfilling its mission to produce a sustainable agenda for developing the communities and economies of Puerto Rico's most vulnerable regions. This work focuses on creating quality educational opportunities for children and families through the collaborative design, implementation and integration of education. At the heart of these efforts is a network of LEAP schools that collaborate with local stakeholders, community residents and families.



LEAP STEAM + E IN SAN JUAN

LEAP STEAM + E in San Juan, is LEAP's flagship school in Puerto Rico. The school has expanded grade by grade over the years and is now fully enrolled. This year marks the graduation of its inaugural 12th-grade class. Many of the academy's students have already received college admission offers, including placements at universities in Puerto Rico, New Jersey and beyond.

LEAP STEAM + E's first graduation marks a significant milestone in LEAP's educational mission and reinforces LEAP's commitment to supporting students from early education through high school completion and preparing them for college and careers.



LEAP STEAM + SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY OF BAYAMÓN

Opened in August 2024, LEAP STEAM + Science and Technology of Bayamón is one of the newest additions to the LEAP network. Following its successful adoption of the LEAP educational model, the school now serves approximately 300 students between 6th and 10th grade. In the upcoming academic year, the school will expand to include kindergarten through fifth grade as well as Grades 10 and 11. The Bayamón campus aims to offer a full educational pathway covering kindergarten through 12th grade.



STEAM + ARTS, STEAM + SPORTS SCIENCE AND STEAM + MEDICAL ARTS OF CAROLINA

The three Carolina campuses, which opened in August 2024, offer students a comprehensive educational experience from kindergarten through 12th grade. With their strong focus on STEAM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and the arts, these schools equip students with the skills needed for future innovation.

- **STEAM + Arts of Carolina (K-8):** This academy emphasizes STEAM plus arts and fosters its students' creativity and technical skills from an early age.
- **STEAM + Sports Science of Carolina (Grades 9-12):** This academy focuses on sports science. The school prepares students for careers in athletic performance, health or other related fields.
- **STEAM + Medical Arts of Carolina (Grades 9-12):** This campus specializes in medical science and provides a foundation for students interested in healthcare professions.

The LEAP campuses collaborate with the Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico and the University of Puerto Rico to implement early college programs that enhance academic opportunities for high school students. Formal testing and data collection for these programs are underway for the first time this year, and the community has exhibited enthusiasm for the programs.



New LEAP Schools: Expanding Horizons

In response to increasing demand and the success of the existing LEAP model, LEAP is opening three new specialized academies in August 2025:

LEAP STEAM + Agricultural Science of Mayagüez

The LEAP STEAM + Agricultural Sciences Academy will focus on innovation and sustainable practices. For the 2025–2026 academic year, the school will serve 600 students from kindergarten through 9th grade. Each year, the school will add 60 students until it reaches enrollment of 780 students.

LEAP STEAM + Marine of Isabela

The LEAP STEAM + Marine and Aerospace Science Academy will offer specialized programs that prepare students for careers in emerging scientific fields. From the 2025–2026 academic year onwards, the Isabela will add new grade levels composed of 60 students each year until it serves students from kindergarten to 12th grade. The campus will accommodate approximately 780 students once it begins to serve all grade levels.

LEAP STEAM + Technology of Cupey

The LEAP STEAM + Technology Academy of Cupey will open with an initial enrollment goal of 600 students in kindergarten through 9th grade for the 2025–2026 academic year. This campus will emphasize technology-driven learning to prepare students for the digital age.

Future Growth: 2026–2027 and Beyond

LEAP Social Enterprise has ambitious plans to continue expanding its educational footprint. The Isabela and Mayagüez academies are planning to grow by an additional 60 students in the 2026–2027 academic year to further increase their capacity to serve local communities.

Further expansions are also planned for the 2026–2027 academic year, including the launch of new kindergarten-through-ninth-grade academies in Hilo Alto, Ponce, Dorado and Giacco.

By creating innovative educational experiences and partnering with local communities, LEAP Social Enterprise not only transforms individual lives but also contributes to the long-term social and economic development of Puerto Rico.





LEAP STEAM + AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE OF MAYAGÜEZ



LEAP STEAM + TECHNOLOGY OF CUPEY



LEAP STEAM + MARINE OF ISABELA



EARLY COLLEGE SUCCESS THROUGH UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

Preparing LEAP Graduates for College and Career Readiness with University Partnerships

For 30 years, LEAP Academy University Charter School in Camden, New Jersey, has modeled the cradle-to-college path and set a model for LEAP STEAM + E and future LEAP schools in Puerto Rico.

Through university partners in Puerto Rico, New Jersey and beyond, a new cohort of first-generation students will gain access to college and the opportunities that often come to those who graduate with advanced degrees.



EARLY COLLEGE ACCESS, COLLEGE READINESS AND CAREER READINESS

The Early College Program is an essential tenet of LEAP schools. It provides all twelfth graders with an entire year's worth of college courses provided by university partners. This strategy prepares first-generation students for college by increasing the number of college credits earned in high school while also exposing students to the workload and experiences needed to thrive in college environments. These courses are jointly taught by university professors and high school teachers.

LEAP provides students with additional college readiness support through college access centers located on campus. This support includes enrichment programs, seminars and clinics that address study skills, writing skills, public speaking and time management.

In addition, exposure to different career pathways and lessons on what it takes to succeed in these fields are provided to boost career readiness. Students embark on visits to and tours of different industry settings in which they are given opportunities to find and work alongside mentors. Finally, career pathways are included in the school curriculum to show students various avenues for successful careers after college.

Currently, LEAP schools are the only K-12 institutions offering early college access in Puerto Rico. University partners include University of Sagrado Corazón, Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico, the University of Puerto Rico, and the Ana G. Méndez University Systems.



In the past year, an impressive number of students have gained from early college access:

- 60 students at LEAP STEAM + E Academy of San Juan
- 50 students at LEAP STEAM + Science and Technology of Bayamón
- 59 students at LEAP STEAM + Medical Science Academy of Carolina
- 59 Students at LEAP STEAM + Sport Science Academy of Carolina

BUILDING ON THE SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP WITH RUTGERS-CAMDEN



Through its Community Leadership Center (CLC), Rutgers is pursuing an intentional strategy to recruit LEAP students from Camden and Puerto Rico in alignment with its university-wide mission to ensure that first-generation students are present on all of its campuses.

Support opportunities, such as the Alfredo and Gloria Bonilla-Santiago Scholarship, allow students to gain additional financial support beyond federal funding.

New programs targeting children and educators in Puerto Rico have been implemented this past year through the leading efforts of Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, CEO of LEAP Social Enterprise and founder of LEAP STEAM + E Academy in San Juan, as well as John Griffin, dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers-Camden.

Ten twelfth graders from LEAP STEAM + E Academy in San Juan will join the Rutgers-Camden student body this fall. Each of these students is equipped with dual enrollment experiences and college credits. The students and their families visited the Rutgers-Camden campus this spring and were greeted with warm welcomes from LEAP Academy and Rutgers-Camden students, faculty and alumni.

“The early college program has helped me a lot to become a better leader and better teammate,” shares Carolina Valeté, a current LEAP STEAM + E student and incoming student to Rutgers-Camden. “Thanks to the faculty who have taught our dual enrollment classes, we are very prepared for the college experience.”



PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITY IN PUERTO RICO

LEAP's partnerships with higher education institutions on the island, such as the University of Sagrado Corazón, Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico, the University of Puerto Rico, and the Ana G. Méndez University Systems, have opened additional doorways for students to attend college. Students from LEAP schools have confirmed enrollment at the University of Puerto Rico, the University of Sagrado Corazón, Ana G. Méndez University, and NUC University.

“LEAP schools have been able to successfully grow university partnerships quickly to meet the growing alliance of schools across the island,” “Our partnerships on the Island, as well as with other impressive institutions in New Jersey and beyond, allow our students to reach their full potential.”

Denise Amaral, Coordinator of Early College for LEAP Social Enterprise.



TRANSFORMING STUDENTS' AND FAMILIES' PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

As LEAP schools strive towards educational excellence and the best future for their students and families, early college access, college and career readiness programming and university partnerships remain the cornerstones of success, as they help build a sturdy foundation for students—both in college and after graduation.

BUILDING SOCIAL AND ASSET CAPITAL

Building Social and Asset Capital to Expand the LEAP School Model

Developing a network of schools in Puerto Rico is only possible thanks to LEAP's strong partnerships with local and national governments, higher education institutions, public and private funders, businesses and the communities LEAP schools are expanding. Each of these entities is a crucial piece for launching schools at the level of excellence that children and families deserve and expect from LEAP.

Each partnership provides unique contributions that cannot be matched, whether they involve creating real-world experiences for students, providing access to college courses, donating physical space, funding nutritious school-day meals or providing the capital needed to employ teachers and administrative staff.







As the LEAP model has quickly been adopted—starting with LEAP STEAM + E in San Juan—by an additional four schools in Carolina and Bayamón (with more on the horizon), the ability to create a sustainable model for building social and asset capital has been the key to the enterprise’s success.

CONTINUED UTILIZATION OF FEDERAL FUNDS

In March 2024, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) awarded \$22 million to support LEAP Social Enterprise’s efforts for expansion and adoption in Puerto Rico. This award was in addition to an expansion grant received in 2023 and a Charter Developer grant received in 2021.

The additional grant funds build on the successful opening and operation of LEAP STEAM + E Academy of San Juan, which is in its third year of operations and currently serves 750 students. These added funds have made possible the expansion into Carolina, which now has three campuses, and Bayamón, which has one campus. Grant support is essential for creating and cultivating the human capital needed to employ the best teachers and school administrators available, as well as to provide system-wide improvements to technology, facilities development and management systems.

These grant funds will also contribute to the additional four campuses projected to open in Isabela, Mayagüez and Cupey Rio Piedras, dramatically expanding LEAP’s reach and the number of children served.



PARTNERS EXPAND EDUCATIONAL ACCESS, PROMOTE ECONOMIC MOBILITY AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES

The desire to expand educational opportunities to children and families on the Island, which ultimately promotes improved career options and stronger communities, is at the heart of LEAP Social Enterprise. The realization of five high-quality STEAM-focused schools has offered new and improved options for families who want to see their children succeed, go to college and ready themselves for a thriving career.

LEAP’s continued work to expand the school model to additional communities on the Island requires new partnerships to guarantee long-term viability, infrastructure development and program scalability. If you’re interested in helping LEAP serve as an engine for community and economic development, please visit <https://leapsocialenterprise.org/donate/>.



ASSET BUILDING ENABLES RAPID EXPANSION

When LEAP STEAM + E was launched in San Juan, the LEAP Social Enterprise team, which leaned on each community's capabilities, created a strategic plan to replicate its successful opening.

The strength of a community lies in its local assets, such as its skilled individuals, active organizations, cultural heritage and physical infrastructure. Leveraging these strengths in San Juan, Carolina, Bayamón, Isabela, Mayagüez and Cupey Rio Piedras allows each community to feel engaged and invested in the success of the schools, as they are participants in the process.

Additionally, all parties feel empowered for having their efforts address challenges in their local community. Educational access is no longer perceived as a barrier for community members, as LEAP schools provide communities with the ability to be seen as places of growth and empowerment for children.

Identifying and mobilizing the assets present within a community, such as its networks, talents and shared values, allows for unique approaches to fundraising and asset building. Through its proven model in LEAP STEAM + E, LEAP has tapped into the time and talents of parents and community members in San Juan, Bayamón and Carolina. This approach has also strengthened communities' ties by building stakeholder trust.



LEAP'S PARTNERS ON THE ISLAND AND BEYOND

The mayors of the municipalities in which additional schools are opened are among the first partners LEAP engages with during the process. These mayors have been critical for securing the physical resources and community support needed for the initiative. For example, the mayors of San Juan and Carolina provided the necessary building space for instructing and empowering students.

Higher-education partners, including the University of Sagrado Corazón, Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico, the University of Puerto Rico and the Ana G. Méndez University Systems, have provided human resources through their faculty members who engage students in LEAP's Early College Access Program.

Government partnerships with institutions such as the Department of Agriculture, which provides the funding needed for LEAP's food and nutrition program, have provided essential funding and resources to ensure that students have healthy and balanced breakfasts and lunches as part of their education experience.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH PROJECTS





Case Studies through Asset Mapping and Educational Disparities

Almedia J. Myers

Almedia J. Myers focused her case study on the harmonization of community assets to combat health disparities in Camden, New Jersey. The health study examined the following question: Is a systems approach being utilized in Camden to reduce or eliminate health disparities?

The student employed tactics such as focus group questionnaires with the Street Medicine Team at Cooper University Hospital and Camden Healthy Start Organization. The study also utilized community asset mapping with community walks in the Lanning Square neighborhood and along Atlantic Avenue in Camden.

The case study revealed the need to develop robust partnerships to support sustainable community efforts, the necessity of finding a path toward aligning goals to build a supportive ecosystem, and the importance of feedback and communication from the community when building a systems network.

Kathleen López

Kathleen López focused her case study on the intersections of energy, education, and health equity in Puerto Rico. The case study examined the following questions: How does inequitable access to electricity magnify vulnerabilities in health and educational systems? What is the potential of community-based interventions?

Through several forms of data collection, including focus groups, observation, and community mapping, students from Rutgers University in Camden investigated this important issue and observed the role that LEAP Social Enterprise charter schools play in addressing these issues using a holistic school-as-community approach.

The case study showed that inequitable access to electricity is deeply tied to environmental justice and disproportionately affects children in Puerto Rico and their well-being. However, it also reiterated that LEAP Social Enterprise's model demonstrates how a holistic, systems-based approach can mitigate these impacts by addressing the whole child while fostering resilience within the community.



Nwede Chiamaka Stellamaris

Nwede Chiamaka Stellamaris completed a case study exploring the impact of school closures in Puerto Rico, with a specific focus on San Juan. This case study followed the significant educational disruptions caused by the economic crisis and natural disasters in Puerto Rico, which resulted in the closure of hundreds of public schools.

The case study sought to answer the following questions: What are the primary factors that have led to the widespread closure of public schools in San Juan? What are the impacts of school closures on students, families, and communities? What strategies can be implemented to revitalize public education and strengthen its role as a pillar of community stability?

To answer these critical questions, the case study collected data through community engagement and observation, focus group discussions, and unstructured interviews.

The findings emphasized that school closures in San Juan (and by extension, Puerto Rico) had far-reaching impacts on students, teachers, and communities. The findings also revealed that families, schools, places of worship, government, law enforcement agents, courts, and lawmakers all have a crucial role to play in saving education to benefit the larger community, and that a holistic approach to education reform would safeguard the future of Puerto Rico's youth.

Oluwasegun Oluwole

Oluwasegun Oluwole completed a case study on how community-based organizations (CBOs) and schools act as community capitals and convert assets or resources within the communities into capitals to enhance community resilience against natural disasters in Puerto Rico. The case study answered the following questions: How do collective actions engender local responses to challenges associated with natural disasters? What efforts are made towards turning local resources into capital that reduces vulnerability and builds resilience? How does a school system and structure built under a social enterprise scheme serve as built capital to enhance community resilience?

The study focused on four organizations and institutions: Renance Parcelas Falu Inc., Un Nuevo Amanecer Inc., Taller Comunidad La Goyco, and LEAP Academy, San Juan. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, community walks, and content analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding.

The theme that emerged is that local efforts can inform policies and practices for disaster preparedness and equitable community development. Additionally, the case study highlighted the multipurpose role of schools in aiding the enhancement of community resilience.



“Visiting Puerto Rico as a student was a profoundly transformative experience. Parcelas Falú, showed me the power of organized communities and the impact of dedicated leaders in rebuilding and strengthening the social fabric.”

Benito Ortega Torres, Graduate Assistant CLC
Rutgers-Camden

Mnguashima Valentina Soomiyol

Mnguashima Valentina Soomiyol completed a case study that examined the intersection between gender, programs, and economic development in Puerto Rico. The study focused on women’s transformative role in overcoming systemic barriers such as wage disparities, domestic violence, and underrepresentation in leadership.

The case study aimed to answer the following questions: What are the systemic barriers faced by women in Puerto Rico in accessing leadership roles despite advancements in education and workforce participation? What is the broader community impact of LEAP Academy’s initiatives on gender equality in Puerto Rico? What are the long-term socio-economic effects of empowering women in Puerto Rico on the island’s development? How do social enterprises like LEAP Academy address issues of wage disparity, domestic violence, and leadership underrepresentation for women in Puerto Rico?

The case study employed two distinct methodologies: appreciative inquiry and community asset mapping. Focus group discussions with students and parents in LEAP Social Enterprises took place in the following neighborhoods of interest:

- LEAP STEAM + Entrepreneur (San Juan),
- LEAP STEAM + ARTS (Carolina)
- LEAP STEAM + Medical Sciences (Carolina)
- LEAP STEAM + Sports Sciences (Carolina)
- LEAP STEAM + Technology (Bayamón)

The findings highlighted the need for gender-sensitive programming and the scaling of holistic models like the LEAP Academy to address the interconnected challenges of gender inequality and economic development.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT HUB

Parent Ambassadors Lead the Way



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH EVENTS AND OFFERINGS

Jorge Luis Ayala, Chief of Community Engagement and External Affairs, spearheads LEAP's efforts to build strong connections with families and the broader community in existing LEAP school locations and prospective future sites.

Last spring, LEAP Social Enterprise, under the leadership of Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, CEO of LEAP Social Enterprise and founder of LEAP STEAM + E Academy in San Juan, organized an artistic event in San Juan featuring a free symphony concert offered by the founders of the International Chamber Orchestra of Puerto Rico, Emilio Colón and his wife, Cara Elise Colón.

"Our focus is to promote meaningful, impactful experiences for our students, their families, and the community," said Dr. Bonilla-Santiago. "This concert was a way to thank our communities but also an opportunity to introduce classical music to the neighborhood to expose them to another type of Puerto Rican contemporary music. Through the arts, we bring community together for all they have done to ensure that the seed we planted here a few years ago has flourished."

Other examples of engaging with parents and the community included a parents' committee led by Jorge Luis to decorate the Three Kings Day event for Christmas, where Dr. Bonilla-Santiago, along with the United States Marines and the Unforgettable Dreams Foundation, presented gifts to the children and families. Additionally, a partnership with the University of San Juan allowed students from kindergarten to 8th grade to perform live readings of the books they created at the campus theater.



PARENTS AND STUDENTS GRANTED LEARNERS' DRIVER'S LICENSES

For families in Sabana Llana, and in partnership with the office of Senator Juan Oscar Morales, LEAP offered the CESCO review and exam for obtaining a learner's permit. Eighty-two individuals participated, including 22 students from the Early College Program.

This partnered event will allow families and students to gain additional independence by taking steps to obtain a vehicle license.





PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT THROUGH THE INSTITUTE OF PARENT AMBASSADORS

The LEAP educational model empowers families to engage in their students' success and navigate their own paths through diverse programs. LEAP parents actively participate in their children's education, integrate into the school community, and work to shape their children's future positively, reflecting the school's mission and core values.

LEAP encourages parental involvement at both the school and community levels. One of LEAP's main initiatives, the IPE, encourages parents and guardians to take leadership roles, actively collaborate, and share responsibilities for their children's academic success and the school environment. This approach includes the following:

- Encouraging parents to identify their strengths and areas of improvement in active parenting, collaboration and leadership.
- Training parents to embrace leadership skills that are beneficial to their child's educational development and community environment.
- Preparing parents to think about future possibilities or expectations for themselves, as well as their child.

In 2024, 67 parents and guardians of children and young people from communities in Sabana Llana and its surroundings graduated from IPE.

The IPE is a six-week, 40-hour program based on a leadership and teamwork program model created by Dr. Bonilla-Santiago and incorporates modules with topics such as personal and community leadership, values, alliance schools, institutional influence, policy of influencing, lobbying, and negotiation. During these sessions, participants access tools such as the Myers Briggs self-assessment tool, the Thomas Kliman conflict resolution instrument, and the True Colors and Teamwork personality test. Before graduating from the IPE, participants must complete an assessment that covers topics such as team effectiveness, team impact, parliamentary meetings, and lobbying.

"LEAP has a vision of developing an identity in children and parents and involving the community as a whole," stated Harry Esteves Cabrera, father of a third-grade LEAP student and one of the IPE participants. "Our duty is to be present in the education of our children and to work together because school is a continuation of what we teach at home. I participated because my children's education is a priority."

At LEAP, the IPE program is set to gradually grow and be replicated for the next school opening in Isabela, Mayaguez and Cupey.

“Our commitment to education goes far beyond the classroom,” Our students and their families live in communities in need that we can and want to help through the most valuable tool we have, which is education. We want to strengthen the skills of parents and empower communities to collaborate and advocate for their children’s education and drive positive change for society.”

Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago.



A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY MODEL FOR ALL LEAP SCHOOLS

As LEAP Social Enterprise grows its educational impact across the Island, it remains committed to extending beyond the classroom—empowering families and strengthening communities through education programs, leadership training, and meaningful community initiatives. With parental engagement at its core, this model will continue to drive success and shape the future of LEAP schools.



LEADERSHIP TEAM & THE BOARD

The LEAP Social Enterprise Team's Crucial Role in Puerto Rico

The LEAP Social Enterprise team, under the leadership of Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, plays a key role in advancing educational initiatives in Puerto Rico.

The team tackles critical issues such as educational access, economic development and community empowerment. Through the guidance of Dr. Bonilla-Santiago, who has successfully implemented the LEAP school model in New Jersey, the team's efforts have created and continue to develop sustainable solutions to improve the quality of life for families living in Puerto Rico.

LEAP Social Enterprise's work is grounded in collaboration with parents and community, innovative educational models and a deep understanding of local needs, ensuring that each existing and future skill benefits the community.



MEET THE LEADERSHIP TEAM DRIVING LEAP'S MISSION FORWARD



Myra Trujillo, Chief Operations Officer at LEAP Social Enterprise, is responsible for overseeing the organization's day-to-day operations. Myra focuses on operational efficiency and program delivery. Her leadership is essential to maintaining high standards across all aspects of LEAP Social Enterprise's work, contributing significantly to its mission of empowering communities and fostering sustainable development.



Sheila Vélez Nieves, Chief Academic Officer, contributes her wealth of experience in educational leadership and community development to the team. Sheila provides guidance and oversight for the LEAP school's academic programs, working to ensure educational excellence and equity for all students on the Island.



Yusein Durakov, Chief Business Administrator, oversees financial planning, resource management and compliance. His strong background in business administration helps LEAP's operations run efficiently and aligns with its mission. Yusein is committed to enhancing organizational effectiveness and supporting LEAP's long-term sustainability through sound financial management and strategic planning.



Sandra Torres Clemente, Director of Development and Fundraising, oversees LEAP's fundraising efforts and secures the resources necessary to support initiatives on the Island. Sandra's background in strategic fundraising and development allows her to build relationships with donors, partners and other stakeholders to advance LEAP's mission. Her work ensures the financial sustainability of the organization and the continued success of its programs.



Jorge Luis Ayala, Chief of Community Engagement and External Affairs, is dedicated to advancing strong relationships between LEAP and its community partners. Jorge's role involves strategic outreach, collaboration and advocacy, ensuring that LEAP's initiatives are properly integrated into local communities and aligned with their needs. His work is critical in maintaining LEAP's reputation and building lasting partnerships that drive its mission forward.



Jerry Meléndez, Chief of Project Management, is responsible for overseeing the planning, execution and evaluation of LEAP's key projects. Jerry's extensive experience in managing complex projects ensures that LEAP's initiatives are delivered on time and within budget and that they achieve the desired outcomes. His project management leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring the success and impact of LEAP's work across communities.

MEET THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The LEAP Social Enterprise Board of Directors guides the enterprise's strategic direction and advances collaborations that connect LEAP's leadership expertise to real-world impact on the Island. The Board's collective experience in education, business, finance and community development ensures that LEAP's initiatives are sustainable and aligned with the needs of Puerto Rican communities.



Dr. Dennis Roman Roa, Board Chair of LEAP Social Enterprise, is the Dean of the Business School at Universidad del Sagrado Corazón in Puerto Rico. Dennis holds a Doctorate in Business Development and Management, a Juris Doctor, a Master of Business Administration, and a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering, and he possesses over 30 years of professional experience. His extensive background in education and management enables him to provide strong leadership, guiding LEAP toward continued success and sustainable development in Puerto Rico.



Luis Gautier, Vice Chair of LEAP Social Enterprise, serves as President of the Sila M. Calderón Foundation. With his over 25 years of experience in the media industry, higher education and community and economic development initiatives, Luis brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the board. He studied corporate social responsibility at the Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaíso and uses his strategic leadership to help advance LEAP's mission of fostering economic growth and educational opportunity in Puerto Rico.



Jozian Molina, Member of the Curriculum Committee of LEAP Social Enterprise, serves as the Chief of Innovation and Academic Affairs at LEAP Academy school in NJ. Jozian possesses a master's degree in public administration in Educational Leadership from Rutgers University and is committed to improving educational equity and excellence. Her experience in curriculum development and leadership is vital to LEAP's efforts to provide high-quality educational opportunities and support student success across Puerto Rico.

A VISION FOR LASTING CHANGE

Through the collective efforts of its leadership team and board of directors, LEAP Social Enterprise is making a lasting impact in Puerto Rico. By addressing critical social and economic challenges, promoting educational opportunities and building strong community partnerships, LEAP is paving the way for a brighter, more sustainable future for Puerto Rican families.





James Wilson, Chair of the Finance Committee of LEAP Social Enterprise, is a certified public accountant with over 20 years of experience in accounting. He holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Bloomsburg University and currently works at Mac Alpine Carll & Co. Jim is responsible for managing LEAP's financial operations, ensuring its fiscal health and providing strategic oversight to maintain the organization's financial sustainability and success.



Rafael Miranda, Director of the LEAP Academy Fabrication lab in NJ, brings years of innovation and fabrication lab experience to the board. His contributions are in the areas of digital learning, STEAM, and utilizing art as a means of engineering new ideas for student learning. He is himself an artist and an entrepreneur at heart.



Hector Nieves, Public Member of LEAP Social Enterprise, is a business entrepreneur with over 30 years of experience in real estate and maintenance. He owns several businesses in New Jersey and brings a wealth of knowledge in business development and management to the board. Hector's substantial experience supports LEAP's strategic initiatives, particularly in expanding its community-based programs and partnerships.



Josen Rossi, is Chairman of the Board at Aireko Construction, where he leads planning and business development across the U.S. East Coast and the Caribbean. He plays a key role in guiding the company's organic growth and acquisition strategy. In addition to his corporate leadership, Josen is deeply involved in nonprofit efforts in Puerto Rico, supporting innovation, sustainability, and public infrastructure development through governance and team-building expertise.

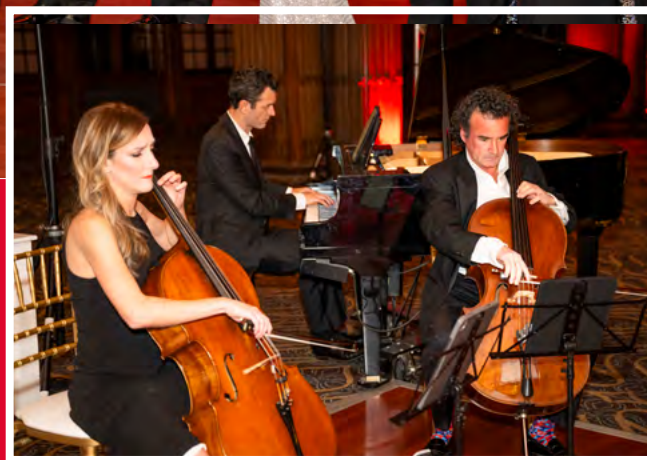


Sonia Gonzalez, is a Graphic Designer at the Community Leadership Center at Rutgers University, where she shapes the visual identity of the Center and its flagship initiative, the LEAP Academy. Her work spans digital, print, and event media, supporting both local efforts and international projects in Puerto Rico and Paraguay. She also contributes to the Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership, using design to amplify its impact in education and community development.



Jinely Quiles Santiago, serves as Co-Chair of the Parent Council Committee at LEAP Social Enterprise, where she plays a vital role in fostering meaningful parent engagement and development. She holds an Associate Degree in Criminal Justice from Colegio Universitario de San Juan and brings a background in public service supporting legislative operations at the Puerto Rico House of Representatives.

Celebrating Excellence in Education: The Rutgers Alfredo & Gloria Bonilla-Santiago Annual Scholarship Fundraising Gala



Rising Stars: Illuminating the Path to Success

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Friday, November 21, 2025

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Distinguished Leadership Award Recipient

NICHOLAS PROUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Nicholas Prouty is the founder and CEO of Putnam Bridge, a firm specializing in the acquisition and management of distressed landmark properties across the U.S. and internationally. With a career spanning multiple leadership roles in real estate investment, Mr. Prouty has served as General Partner at Hudson Cross Financial and advisor to various specialty real estate firms. His firm has been notably active in Puerto Rico, making two major nine-figure investments: the acquisition and revitalization of Ciudadela, a mixed-use development in Santurce, and Puerto del Rey, the Caribbean's largest marina. Mr. Prouty previously led acquisitions and restructuring for a hedge fund with over \$1 billion in assets, served as Managing Partner for a prominent family office, and began his finance career as a treasury analyst at Lazard Frères & Co. He is also the founder of the Habitat Support Foundation, a nonprofit providing loan guarantees to Habitat for Humanity. Mr. Prouty holds a B.A. in European History from the Claremont Colleges and resides in San Juan, Puerto Rico with his wife and two children.



