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Delia Pompa, Vice President **National Council of La Raza**

By Robert H. Leos-Photos by Marlene Hawthorne Thomas



A ccording to its website, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) is the largest national Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. Founded in 1968, NCLR is headquartered in the Raul Yzaguirre Building in Washington, D.C., named in honor of the organization's former president and CEO.

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NCLR has sub-offices in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, Sacramento, San Antonio, and San Juan, Puerto Rico, and a network of over 300 affiliates across the country. Education is a major focus of NCLR efforts along with assets/investments, civil rights/immigration, employment and economic status, and health. As Vice President, Education, [Delia Pompa](#), a native of San Antonio, Texas, plays a leadership role in ensuring the success of the organization's initiatives.

Ms. Pompa began her career in education as a kindergarten teacher in the Edgewood Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas. On the path to her current position with NCLR, she taught at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas, served as Director of Bilingual Education with the Houston Independent School District, and gained state and federal administrative experience as Assistant Commissioner for Program Development at the Texas Education Agency and Director of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs. In addition to her public service, Ms. Pompa also served as Director of Education for the Children's Defense Fund and Director of the National Association for Bilingual Education in Washington, D.C. She joined the National Council of La Raza as Vice President in 2005. In this issue of [The Report](#), Delia Pompa describes the goals of NCLR and her role within the organization. [rhl](#).

ROBERT LEOS: *The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) has been in existence for almost 40 years. What is the mission of the organization and what are some of its major objectives?*

DELIA POMPA: The National Council of La Raza is the largest civil rights organization that represents Hispanic Americans in the country. Our mission is to improve the lives of Hispanic Americans. We accomplish this through policy work and program services. NCLR is structured to enable policy and program services to inform each other's work within the organization. In other words, the program services work informs the policy work and the national policy work informs the program services work. You have a duality, a back-and-forth, give-and-take, where we learn from the community, lead in the community, and also develop leaders in the community.

ROBERT LEOS: *In addition to NCLR's national headquarters, the organization has offices throughout the country and Puerto Rico, and many-community-based affiliates providing a variety of services. How does the work of the NCLR affiliates tie into your broader goals of serving the Hispanic community?*

DELIA POMPA: NCLR has almost 300 affiliates in communities throughout the United States. Much of NCLR's work benefits the affiliates and much of our work is with NCLR's affiliates throughout the country. However, NCLR represents *all* Hispanics. In education, much of our work is tied directly to the affiliates who are engaged in education. This includes charter schools, school districts that are in the network, community-based organizations—a wide range of entities. Our program work is directly tied to our affiliates and our network.

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ROBERT LEOS: *What was NCLR's rationale for establishing and supporting charter schools?*

DELIA POMPA: Many people questioned our involvement in charter schools when we first began. The way we view it is that we are not doing it for ideological reasons. We are doing it for very pragmatic reasons. Some of our affiliates developed charter schools because they felt that what school districts in their communities were offering was not working. When we became involved in charter schools, it was to support those affiliates that had already started the work. In addition, we realized that we could create educational models that the larger educational systems could use. Our approach is that charter schools can serve as an incubator system, a way to develop models that can be applied in a larger system. If you look at some of our charter schools, they are already part of larger school districts. We feel that we are having an impact on those districts.

ROBERT LEOS: *As Vice President of NCLR, you direct the educational initiatives of the organization. What is the primary focus of your work in education and how does it fit into the overall goals of the organization?*

DELIA POMPA: Before I joined NCLR, the organization had been through a strategic planning process. In education, we were doing what we considered a "womb to tomb" approach. We were working in infant care to adult education, the entire spectrum of education. The impact that an organization can have is limited when you are so spread out. Through the strategic planning process, we developed a focus

in two areas, what I call the "bookend approach." We work in preschool education and in high school education. We chose the areas where there are the biggest gaps for Hispanics in terms of access and quality of service. Preschool education and high school are also the two areas where we felt we could have the greatest impact. For example, if you can start very young with the children, you are going to have an impact throughout their whole school career. In high school, you are also going to have a huge impact because many high schools have been left behind. In addition, if you are going to improve college attendance rates and workforce quality, you have to have an impact in high school. Consequently, we focus our work in education on the "bookends," preschool and high school.

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The work we do in education is very tied into our policy work. There is integration between the different units at NCLR because the lives of our constituents are integrated. When a person goes to a community-based organization, they often get health services and advice about family literacy, a whole range of things. NCLR has to operate in that way also.

ROBERT LEOS: *The ALMA Awards, sponsored by NCLR and presented on national television, seem to be receiving quite a bit of attention from a mainstream American audience in addition to Hispanic viewers.*

DELIA POMPA: The ALMA Awards is a way to honor Hispanic members of the entertainment community. The ads during the program recognize the contributions of the Hispanic community and raise them to a higher profile. The program gives NCLR a forum for the issues. The mainstream entertainment industry has begun to recognize the power of the Hispanic audience. We are very pleased with the results of the ALMA Awards.



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Visit <http://www.nclr.org> for Information on NCLR’s:

**Mission; Affiliates; Special Events; Corporate Sponsors;
Publications and Resources; The ALMA Awards**

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