

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

Latino Center of the Midlands



George I. Sánchez Memorial Award

WHEN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS INTENTIONALLY AND THOUGHTFULLY PARTNER WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS, the impact on students is overwhelmingly positive. The Latino Center of the Midlands is one of those organizations. Founded initially as the Chicano Awareness Center (CAC), the Latino Center of the Midlands was organized in 1971 to address concerns about the education of Chicano youth, which was a great need in Omaha, Nebraska. The CAC was a small community center offering classes for youth and adults in Mexican art, Mexican music, folkloric dance, Spanish, and English.

As described by Nebraska State Senator Tony Vargas, “The Center has worked to build a stronger, more engaged Latino community in Omaha by providing holistic educational opportunities to ensure all Latinos are able to achieve their fullest potential, both individually and in the community. Omahans of Hispanic/Latinx descent make up over 13% of the city’s total population, and as the son of Peruvian immigrants and a first-generation student, I know how vital it is to have a resource such as the Latino Center of the Midlands, where people of all ages and backgrounds feel welcomed, supported, and involved.”

Recently celebrating its 50th year in Omaha, the Latino Center of the Midlands serves the community through three main programs – Workforce Education and Innovation, Pathways to Success, and Family and Community Well-Being. Pathways to Success is a support system for struggling students addressing chronic truancy among middle and high school students in seven Omaha-area schools. It includes one-on-one mentoring, group leadership development activities, and family support. The Center can pivot to address the community’s needs as they arise.

Latino Center of the Midlands Executive Director Albert Varas describes the power and impact of the organization in the community: “Because of our 50-plus year history, people know to come to the Latino Center of the Midlands. We get a lot of walk-ins. We convene large groups of people there on a regular basis because of the wide array of classes we offer. We are still making an impact on parent engagement and basic adult education. We work with parents having a difficult time getting their kids to attend school on a regular basis.”

Dr. George I. Sánchez, former president of the New Mexico Education Association (1935-36), led the charge to promote equitable educational opportunities for Latinx students in public schools. As a community organization deeply embedded in the communities and schools of Omaha, the Latino Center of the Midlands continues the work of Dr. Sánchez’s legacy.