

# Latino Leadership Academy founder selected as new school board member of the year

## Western Nevada College

Whether she is advising first-generation college students to better their lives through higher education or serving as a trustee for K-12 students in the Carson City School



Lupe Ramirez

District, there are two common denominators in Lupe Ramirez's education roles: The Western Nevada College Latino Leadership Academy founder and adviser will definitely make a difference and, without a doubt, she will stand out.

Last month, the Nevada Association of School Boards selected Ramirez as the 2020 New School Board Member of the Year.

"Mrs. Ramirez joined the Carson City School Board with the understanding that her voice alone would not instigate change but to become a part of the governance team to guide the district," said NASB Executive Director Debb Oliver. "Her dedication to the students of the district in this role was exemplified by her commitment to training and preparation for each meeting. She passionately advocates for the importance of education and culture within the Hispanic community, which ultimately has a positive effect on the school community. This is a well-deserved honor for Mrs. Ramirez."

The award acknowledges the dedicated service of Nevada's newest

school trustees.

"Words cannot express my gratitude for this prestigious recognition. I am humbly honored to have the opportunity to be part of the CCSB and to continue learning from a group of knowledgeable and respectful individuals who are focused on the best interests of all students in the school district," Ramirez said. "I am also very fortunate to have the opportunity to continue working with Superintendent Richard Stokes and his staff in a different capacity. They have been very supportive and receptive with the initiative presented by the Board of introducing an agenda item bilingually in English and Spanish to include all parents in the district to participate in critical discussions affecting everyone."

There were many reasons why Ramirez was selected as the New School Board Member of the Year: her dedication to public education and Carson City School District, attendance for trainings and school board meetings. She was also applauded for serving on the Student Attendance Review Board, being a member of Partnership Carson City and passionately advocating for the importance of education and culture within the Hispanic community and within the school community.

The CCSD's glowing report on Ramirez also went on to say that Ramirez is an important liaison and role model to the Latino students and community. With her assistance, Carson City School District held its first bilingual board meeting. An

agenda item included a presentation of the English Learner program that was given in Spanish and then translated into English. Additionally, Mrs. Ramirez — on her own initiative — coordinated for the school board meeting on school reopening to be translated into Spanish in real time. She ensured that Spanish-speaking families knew about and provided feedback regarding school reopening."

The NASB award is the latest in a string of honors for Ramirez.

In 2018, WNC's Latino Outreach coordinator was selected as the Nevada ACT College and Career Readiness Postsecondary Champion, which celebrates individuals who make a positive impact on their communities through their efforts to advance college and career readiness. Two years earlier, WNC selected Ramirez as the Administrative Faculty of the Year Award winner.

"These accomplishments would not have been possible without the leadership and mentorship of my previous supervisor, John Kinkella," Ramirez said.

Ramirez knew very early in life that she wanted to pursue a career in education and help students.

"Being around educated individuals in my professional roles, it's a dream come true," she said. "Since I was in grade school in Mexico, my teachers were my role models. I always dreamed of being like them when I grew up. Even though I do not have the teaching credentials, I am working with students in a

different capacity to empower them through their educational journey.

"One of the things that inspires me in both roles, as a WNC program coordinator and as a Carson City School District trustee, are the students. I see a potential in every student! All they need, in my opinion, is someone who believes in them and who is willing to help them navigate the educational system. Whenever I see our former students working in their profession, it gives me an abundance of gratification for the work done at all levels of education. I feel truly blessed to be part of both worlds."

All it took for Ramirez to pursue the school board seat was completion of a bachelor's degree and someone who believed in her ability to make a difference. She received encouragement from a community leader because of what she had accomplished with WNC's Latino Cohort (now the LLA). She also wanted an opportunity to help more students facing barriers preventing them from pursuing their educational dreams.

"The idea of making a greater impact to approximately 45 percent of the student population in the district seemed like the right thing to do," Ramirez said. "However, I gave it some serious thought due to the level of responsibility involved in this role so I met with a couple of individuals who I consider as my mentors, seeking their guidance. At this point, I felt the courage to go file my application and hoped for the best. After the elections closed, I was visiting my

home village in Mexico when I was informed I had won unopposed. All I could think of was, 'This truly is part of my journey!'"

Ramirez was tasked with improving WNC's college graduation rate for the area's Latino population in 2010, leading to the creation of the Latino Cohort (now the Latino Leadership Academy). The academy eases students' transition from high school to college by helping them make this a full-time commitment as well as helping them overcome cultural obstacles. Additionally, the academy provides them with a structured two-year academic plan and helps them access financial aid to make this possible. If the students need remedial English and math classes, students are able to take those courses during the summer. Whatever need may arise, the academy is there for them. The students take classes together and they receive many levels of support beyond their professors. The support team consists of the program coordinator, an academic counselor, cohort coaches (former students from the academy) and their current academy classmates. The graduation rate of the students in the academy is above the college's overall graduation rate.

"This could not be accomplished without the assistance of a committed team," Ramirez said.

For more information about the Latino Leadership Academy, go to [wnc.edu/latino-outreach/](http://wnc.edu/latino-outreach/) or email [lupe.ramirez@wnc.edu](mailto:lupe.ramirez@wnc.edu).



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