

Out-of-School Time Stories

BOOST Grantee Spotlight: Los Niños Primero

Growth, belonging, gratitude, and a sense of community, these are the feelings that are evoked in the staff and families alike when they think of Los Niños Primero. Since 2001, the program has provided educational support for 5,300 children, young adults and their families in Sandy Springs, Roswell and Hapeville, Georgia. **The program takes a whole child and multi-generational approach to empower underserved Latino students and their families from early childhood to college through holistic academic, leadership, and community programs.** The program has focused its Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) grant on expanding programming for youth and families and reducing barriers, including transportation and program costs, to ensure access for more children.

The community served by Los Niños Primero constitutes a high concentration of immigrant families primarily from South and Central America and the Caribbean Islands. The program prides itself on its multi-generational approach and being responsive to community needs. While academic services are provided to children aged 3 – 9 and extracurricular opportunities are provided to youth aged 9 – 12, children age 13 through young adulthood can volunteer and gain work experience. Parents and families can engage in a leadership program that provides them with money management skills and are connected to employment opportunities and resources in the community.



Youth Served:
484 annually



Ages Served:
K-12th grade

Counties Served:
Barrow, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Walton

Programming Offered:
Afterschool and Summer

BOOST Grant Purpose:
Expand access,
Reduce barriers, and
Increase quality

OST Government Funding Sources:
BOOST grant and
Learning Loss grant

Website:
www.losninosprimerousa.org



Infusing Academics

Los Niños Primero is committed to the academic acceleration of their students and to providing linkages to the school day. **The program partners with schools to determine local needs, hires Georgia-certified multilingual teachers, and uses Georgia standards to provide age-appropriate instruction to students and build upon the skills they learn in school.** “We make sure we have a well-rounded approach to learning skills and demonstrating them,” shared Jeannie Adams-Peña Myers, Director of Academics and Outreach. Students can apply concepts they learn through project-based learning activities provided in partnership with organizations such as the Chattahoochee Natural Center, Alliance Theatre, and the Center for Puppetry Arts. As Maritza Morelli, the Executive Director notes, “when kids can apply concepts in the real world – for example write a play by using language arts skills, they see the utility in learning those skills.”



Expanding Horizons

Los Niños Primero provides students with opportunities to broaden their horizons through various enrichment activities. BOOST funds have allowed them to expand their music, drama, ballroom dance, public speaking, and volunteer and leadership programs. A new partnership was made possible with Meta Music, which allows students to learn an instrument of their own choosing in a studio environment and make music. **The program has also been able to expand its volunteer base to 140 youth by adding new internship roles.** In addition, Los Niños Primero also supports the well-being of students and families by providing mental health supports including therapy with a bilingual and bicultural therapist.



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*– Maritza Morelli,
Executive Director*

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Reducing Barriers

Program costs and a lack of reliable transportation are the top two barriers to enrollment in out-of-school programs in Georgia. Los Niños Primero has removed these barriers by **offering a majority of their programs for free and providing free transportation to families by using BOOST funds to cover 48% of transportation costs.** In fact, student enrollment this year was a record high of 448 students. Ashley Lewman, Development Director at Los Niños Primero, shared that “transportation is a major hurdle for many of our families. They don’t own a car, so to have that transportation provided roundtrip to our summer program and Saturday school was really significant in encouraging greater participation this year.”

Supporting Families

With BOOST funds leveraged to expand programming and reduce barriers, Los Niños Primero was able to use other grants to support families through rent, medical, and utility assistance along with food assistance in partnership with other organizations. According to Myers,

“there is a spirit of collaboration here, which is very impactful. There is a desire to always come together and collaborate for our families, our community, and our Greater Atlanta Latino community.”

A prime example of the multi-generational nature of the program as well as the critical and adaptable role it plays in the community can be found in the experience of one family that found themselves at the brink of homelessness in the summer. Los Niños Primero was not only able to continue serving all four children in the program and provide free transportation, but they were also able to offer rental assistance and help the mother secure employment.

Morelli shared, **“This has been a joyful journey and a labor of love. The most rewarding thing to see has been how families have progressed and grown.”**





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Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) is a competitive grant program administered by the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) and operated in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). BOOST offers \$85 million via three-year grants, renewed annually, with funding made available through the American Rescue Plan. The grants program is aimed at promoting evidence-based practices and whole child supports in afterschool and summer learning programs. BOOST is designed to expand access, reduce barriers to enrollment, and increase programmatic quality to improve outcomes for students and families throughout the state. GSAN provides recommendations for grant awards based on rigorous application criteria and offers technical assistance and training to grantees to ensure successful implementation. All grants are approved by GaDOE, ensuring alignment with statewide priorities and goals.