

MARIA ANTOINIETA CASILLAS

Maria A. Casillas is President of Families in Schools, an organization created by the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP) to strengthen the relationship between families, schools and communities. Her affiliation with the Annenberg Challenge began in 1995 when Ms. Casillas was named President of LAAMP, an organization established to accelerate school reform activities in Los Angeles County schools and to manage the 53 million dollar, five year grant. From October 2001 to June 2002 she served as the Executive Director of the Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative (BHLC), a community based school reform effort supported by the Annenberg Foundation, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and the Los Angeles Alliance for Student Achievement. This initiative merged with FIS in July 2002 and focuses on mobilizing the entire community to support families and schools. Ms. Casillas has also collaborated closely with the California State University system in the creation of a special teacher development initiatives aimed at improving teacher quality by nurturing partnerships between universities and public schools

In addition to the many years in service to education in California, Ms. Casillas spent time in Texas and in Guadalajara, Mexico, as a teacher and administrator. As Executive Director of Region XIX Educational Service Center, she worked closely with the Texas Education Agency, providing support to El Paso area schools and districts. She had a 20-year career as an educator with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Among her many assignments with LAUSD, she was a teacher, and an elementary school principal. She was a regional superintendent for four years and the assistant superintendent in charge of LEARN, the adopted school reform plan.

In addition to her K-12 experiences, Ms. Casillas has taught teacher and administrator preparation courses the CSU campuses at CSULA and CSULB. She has been the principal host for two public service television programs for KCBS in Los Angeles: *Juntos*, a bilingual community affairs program, and *LA KID*, a children's public affairs show. She has been a keynote speaker in numerous educational conferences in California and Texas.

Ms. Casillas serves on various non-profit boards, among them, The Alliance for a Better Community (ABC), and Communities Organized to Advance Learning (CORAL), an Irvine Foundation Initiative. She has leadership roles in educational initiatives in California through participation in various State Department of Education Task Force Reports and advisory councils. She has served on the Commission for Children Youth and their Families for the City of Los Angeles.

A native of El Paso, Texas, she is the youngest of 11 children and has two sons and a grandson. She attended both Catholic and public schools, and graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), with a major in Spanish and a minor in History. She received her master's degree in Urban Education from California State University, Los Angeles. Throughout her career she has received various awards recognizing her dedication to all students, and her contributions as a role model to the educational community.

Ms. Casillas believes that the promise of our nation will be fully realized when every student is provided the necessary opportunities to achieve academic success, when their families are respected as valuable partners in the learning process, and when communities uncompromisingly protect and nurture their children.