

National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities **Teleseminar Transcript – December 8, 2005**



“Increasing School Holding Power for All Students”

Presenter: Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, executive director of the Intercultural Development Research Association

Part 3: Overview of Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

DR. MARIA “CUCA” ROBLEDO MONTECEL: A little bit about our Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. It has been around for 20 years. We celebrated 20 years last year. It’s a cross-age tutoring program. It’s quite simple. Older students become tutors of younger students. They do so during the day, and they do so for course credit. Usually, they walk over from the middle or the high school into the elementary school for one period a day and become tutors. What is the twist, here? The twist is that the students who do the tutoring are the so-called “at-risk” students. We think, however, that these students are not at risk, but that they are valuable, important, young people. And the fact that they are put as tutors of younger children has them understand and see, at a very gut level, their own importance.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program was identified as one of only two dropout prevention programs in the country that meet the very high standards of rigorous evaluation. This was in a study that Slavin and Fashola did at Johns Hopkins. The program maintains less than a two percent dropout rate. It has kept more than 23,000 students in schools, and it has impacted 416,000 children, families, and educators across the United States, in Brazil, and in England, which is also where the program is or has been implemented. The program results in high expectations and academic success. The small stipend that is paid to students helps families with finances, and there’s also, quite importantly, belonging and contribution that parents note. There is inclusion of students.

When we celebrated our 20th anniversary, I was very privileged to hear from one student. And I will end my first segment by sharing this story with you. We have a student, a young man now, by the name of Pablo López, who is now a police officer in the city of McAllen in south Texas. Pablo was a tutor in our Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program back when he was in middle school. And he talked to all of us about how the program had shifted how he saw himself, and what a difference the program had made in his life, and spoke about, as a police officer, when he thinks about his commitment to serve and protect others as a police officer. What he remembers from the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, and his role as a tutor of younger children, what it means to protect and to serve. It is that kind of opportunity that is providing students in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, and one of the reasons why the program affects, not only the students that are a part of it, but many times, the adults in the school who see so-called at-risk students in a new light, an important light.