

Maricela began her volunteer work at the Head Start Program in Paramount when her eldest of four children attended the program in 1987. She realized the lack of parent involvement in her community as she became increasingly involved. With this in mind, she participated in training to develop her leadership skills at the Parent's Leadership Institute Center for Language Minority Education and Research (CLMER) at CSU Long Beach—and so began her journey as a community worker. Maricela found she was limited by the language barrier and her limited education; she enrolled in adult school and graduated with a high school diploma as part of the Norwalk Adult School class of 2000. She chose to remain involved in her children's education by becoming a part of Paramount Unified School District's Parent Involvement Planning Committee (1996-2004), School Site Council (1999-2000), G.A.T.E Advisory Committee and Parent Advisory Committee ('03-'04 & '04-'05).

In 2005, Maricela brought to her community in Paramount to bring about the first annual ¡Despierta Mujer! Conference. The objective of the conference is to empower parents, especially women, to promote productive, meaningful, and responsible advancement in the Paramount community, along with civic, educational, and cultural engagement. Next year will mark the 17th year the Despierta Mujer! Conference has helped motivate women to identify their personal strengths and apply their talents to become productive participants in their community, in their children's education, and in their personal and professional development.

Maricela was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, and emigrated to the United States at 24 years old. Her passion in her work comes from a deep-rooted love for her community and a need to continuously improve it by promoting the value of education to community residents and bringing about vital programs to serve the community.