

# CHARTER LEADERS OF COLOR **MATTER.**

## Bridget Carvajal

Executive Director

Valiente College Preparatory



I grew up attending small, private religious schools in the Los Angeles County. In tenth grade, my school was closing, and the cost of private school was straining my family's finances. So I transferred to public school in the city of Huntington Park, about a 5-minute drive from where I now lead Valiente College Preparatory.

There are two aspects of my private school experience that I am committed to bringing to Valiente: a close-knit school community and a school culture of giving back. I remember how impactful it was for me growing up to feel the support of a loving community and to do things with my classmates and family members to help others. We would adopt a family for the holidays, deliver meals to senior citizens on Thanksgiving, and donate clothes to families in Mexico.

I studied Child Development at California State University, Long Beach, and began my career at Valiente as a math teacher.

### **CONNECTION THROUGH GIVING**

Valiente College Preparatory opened in 2015. We grew by one grade level each year until 2018, when we became a two-site school because we ran out of space for our growing student population.

Our students at Valiente come from challenging circumstances. Gangs and other forms of violence are a reality in our neighborhood. On average, 90% of the students we receive in the fifth grade are performing at least one year below grade level. At Valiente, we work hard to provide an environment of safety and empathy.

Students and parents express that they love Valiente because of the feeling of family here at school. A member of the leadership team greets students every morning and teachers lead after-school clubs. We also offer opportunities for students to strengthen their community. We invite students and their families to come together for park clean-ups, beach clean-ups, canned food drives around Thanksgiving, and toy drives around Christmas. Annually, students raise money for the American Cancer Society and every class also decides on a collaborative charity project. This spirit of empathy and giving helps to build a supportive learning environment at school.

Our school culture creates the conditions for learning and improvement for all students. For instance, our special education (SPED) students saw significant increases on the 2019 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, with 20% of our SPED students meeting or exceeding standards in Math, vs 9% at the district level.

# UNDERSTANDING THROUGH EXPERIENCE

We have so many children of color in the United States, who come to school with concerns about safety and other pressures that interfere with the peace of mind that all students deserve. Because my background reflects the experiences of many of my students, I have top-of-mind some of the challenges that students may face at home, and I understand where they are coming from. I can advocate with and for them. I can also anticipate some of my students' needs and have a heightened level of sensitivity to areas where they may need tailored support. I especially feel this with respect to my ELL students. When I started school, I spoke Spanish and almost no English. I remember what it felt like to learn English in this context.

I also think that because of my identity, I am more approachable for students in trouble or in need. Our students come to me and communicate when they need assistance. As a single mom, many of our parents can also relate to me and feel comfortable communicating with me about sensitive topics that influence their children's wellbeing.

I am passionate about teaching in the community where I grew up. I believe that my cultural identity—paired with my childhood experiences of South Gate, private school, and public school—allows me to empathize with my students while creating opportunities for them to make a positive difference within their community. I am so grateful to be a part of giving back.

## Valiente College Preparatory

"A place where students want to learn and feel like they belong to a family."

Location	Southgate, CA
Year Opened	2015
Student enrollment	192
Grades served	5-8
Website	<a href="http://www.valientecollegeprep.org">www.valientecollegeprep.org</a>

### Student Demographics

Black/African-American	12%
Hispanic/Latino	98%



Homeless Youth	1%
FARL	85%
Students with Disabilities	24%
ESL Students	66%



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