



Lynmara Colón

Principal, Mary Williams Elementary School
Prince William County Schools, Virginia

The stats:

- Years principal: 2

Education:

- B.A. of Social Work Tarleton State University
- M.A. of Education Curriculum and Instruction
Tarleton State University
- M.A. of Education, Administration and Supervision
Old Dominion University

Student body:

- 1,078 students—the largest elementary school in the county
- Grade span: K-5
- Languages spoken: Spanish, Urdu, Twi, Chinese, Japanese, German
- Socioeconomics: 40 percent receive free and reduced-price lunch
- Four self-contained programs, including students with emotional disabilities and autism

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Virginia Principal Connects With a Diverse Student Population

Lynmara Colón, who is originally from Puerto Rico, grew up in a family of educators. Her mother was a teacher, her grandmother was a school custodian, and her aunt was a principal. So continuing in education came naturally to her when she went to college. “I wanted to become a principal because I wanted to be a part of something greater,” says Colón. “My voice was heard in the classroom, but there was a hunger to do more. That’s the main reason why I wanted to be part of greater change and have a bigger platform to impact others.”

Colón now leads Mary Williams Elementary School in Prince William (Virginia) County, a position she has held since 2014. She refers to Mary Williams Elementary as “a little Disney world,” because she feels responsible for providing the children she serves that magical moment. “I make sure everyone is appreciated, no matter what.”

On cultural diversity:

We are very diverse—socioeconomics, languages, religions. Being bilingual helps me communicate with many of the families. It’s such a beautiful thing to do arrival and dismissal because you see kids from all over the world. When you go to our cafeteria and see the lunch boxes, everyone has something different to eat. And our kids are very accepting of others’ cultures. Our staff is diverse, too; that is very intentional. When I have people come to my team, they have to be culturally aware.

On her greatest challenge as a school leader:

The balance. A lot of kids come with baggage from broken homes, and you have to have systems in place to get them to the stage where they can learn. It’s not about test scores; it’s about the social-emotional side. Sometimes I have to take care of their story in order to help them learn. I call them my “pillow kids”—you take them to

bed, you’re constantly thinking, “how can I feed Johnny, how can I make sure he has everything he needs so he is then available to learn?”

On leveraging her social work background:

I use it every day, especially the listening. The skill I brought with me from being a school social worker is vulnerability and being able to say, “I don’t know, I made a mistake, show me how to do it better.”

On having fun:

I love reading, I read to stay connected with the kids and to grow professionally. I want to know what my kids are reading, whether it is graphic novels or anime, I read what they’re reading so I can make connections with them. I tell my students, “Readers are leaders—no one can take away the knowledge you get from a book.” 