



PUENTE Case Study

How PUENTE Learning Center implemented SAT® preparation into its youth programming to build bridges to higher education for area high-schoolers.



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Executive summary

PUENTE Learning Center tackled the important task of assisting lower-income Los Angeles-area high school students in increasing their SAT scores and broadening their college opportunities by partnering with Kaplan Test Prep to offer an SAT preparatory curriculum, raising student scores significantly and helping them continue their path toward higher education.

Meet PUENTE

People United to Enrich the Neighborhood Through Education (PUENTE) Learning Center, located in East Los Angeles, provides tuition-free educational opportunities for youth and adults PUENTE, which also means “bridge” in Spanish, assists lower-income Los Angeles-area high school students to increase SAT scores, broaden college opportunities, learn about admissions, and be fully aware of financial aid options. One of the main goals of the program is to help raise SAT scores for students in underserved areas in order to qualify for admission to competitive University of California and Cal State schools. Operating since 1985 in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, PUENTE’s SAT preparation program seeks to address disparities in access to higher education for the student constituents it serves.

Demographics:
State: California
Founded: 1985
Enrollment: 3,600
Grades Served:
Children, Youth,
Adults

Serving the underserved students of East Los Angeles

The resources provided by the PUENTE Learning Center are vital to the areas of East and South Los Angeles. PUENTE's constituents are principally Spanish-speaking immigrant families and the working poor. Nearly all East Los Angeles residents are Latino, and enrollment at the PUENTE Boyle Heights (East Los Angeles) campus is 95% Latino. In East Los Angeles, 53% of residents have incomes below the federal poverty guidelines (\$23,050 for a family of four). In Boyle Heights, fewer than 10% of adults over 25 have earned a Bachelor degree, one of the lowest rates in the city of Los Angeles. Approximately 85% of SAT Preparation program participants at PUENTE will be the first in their family to go to college.

PUENTE's service area in Boyle Heights includes high schools whose students earn an SAT composite score in the 10th percentile, putting their chances of getting accepted to college at great risk. More than that, math proficiency in the Los Angeles Unified School District, and in Boyle Heights specifically, poses an additional layer of challenges. By 11th grade, right before students would sit for their SAT, LAUSD students show only a 12% proficiency in math at grade level. In the Boyle Heights neighborhood, that number is just 1%.

Mission-oriented

Learning in one of the most under-served neighborhoods in LA, Boyle Heights students often lack awareness and the resources necessary to gain acceptance into California's state university system, even though some of these campuses are within driving distance of their home. PUENTE sought to tackle this challenge by bringing college readiness resources and awareness to the Boyle Heights community with a goal to not only educate students on their options but also help them become eligible for admission. A key part of improving students'

eligibility was identified: They needed to see an improvement in students' SAT scores.

Solving PUENTE's immediate and long-term goals

- Raise students' SAT scores for eligibility for admission to competitive University of California schools and private post-secondary academic institutions
- Promote a more comprehensive understanding of the college admissions process
- Promote creative strategies for funding a college education
- Promote understanding of an effective personal essay
- Promote the importance of academic and life goal setting
- Disseminate information about the college experience

PUENTE and Kaplan — a partnership for progress

Over more than 20 years, Kaplan program administrators have built a true relationship with PUENTE and the community it serves. PUENTE administrators have built and modified their scheduling to allow for Kaplan's programming length and requirements and as Kaplan prep programs have shifted, for example with the revision of the SAT in 2016, PUENTE continued to make adjustments.

"Our partnership with Kaplan over the last 20 years has been a successful team effort in service to the community of Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles. Top-notch instructors provide quality instruction to deserving students who otherwise wouldn't be able to afford it. It goes a long way toward leveling the playing field of college acceptance rates. The families are so grateful for the class

sessions from Kaplan and the financial aid workshops and campus visits PUENTE provides. Each year, 90% of the students report getting into the university or college of their choice due to their participation in our program.”

- Michele Wolfe, Senior Director of Education, PUENTE Learning Center

“Kaplan's partnership with PUENTE Learning Center has spanned over 20 years. We are so honored to support the mission of PUENTE Learning Center in providing college prep resources to hardworking families from East Los Angeles. Many of the student's we work with are first in their family to attend college. Thanks to their community outreach efforts, the staff at PUENTE Learning Center works tirelessly to ensure a well organized program, that not only brings Kaplan's SAT prep to students but also supports community engagement. Every year, they start the program with a parent orientation night and it's always, standing room only! Thru our partnership, we have seen tremendous improvements in student scores, which has enabled many student's to become UC and Cal State eligible. We look forward to running the program every year.” - Poonum Sidhu, Director, Kaplan Partner Solutions

“Teaching Kaplan SAT and ACT courses at the PUENTE Learning Center in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles has been a meaningful, gratifying experience. I'm currently working with my fifth group of Puente students, a diverse, enthusiastic bunch that keeps me on my toes and reminds me why I've chosen test prep instruction as a career. I enjoy meeting the widely-varying needs of a large group of motivated, bright, and eager young people; with the help of the amazing administration and staff at the Puente Center, I feel I am able to make a true difference in the lives of these students and improve their prospects.”

- Joe Ferruzzo, veteran teacher, Kaplan Test Prep

Challenges and opportunities

Implementing Kaplan's prep programs at PUENTE isn't without its challenges. Just like many similar programs, student buy-in and commitment can be a challenge. To address this, PUENTE put together a host of systems in place to keep students engaged, including a mandatory parent orientation, competitive application process, and student contract expressing commitment to the program. All these are key elements in the program's ongoing success.

Kaplan's solution in action

Choosing to partner with Kaplan for SAT preparation, PUENTE was able to rapidly implement a trusted, vetted curriculum developed by psychometricians, learning scientists, and teachers. PUENTE students committed to a three-month SAT course which included 22.5 hours of class instruction by Kaplan-trained teachers, four SAT practice exams, PUENTE provided classrooms, program coordination and technical support, and additional test proctors. Classes include the following:

- Assessment of strengths and weaknesses through four full-length diagnostic exams (including an initial pre-test), enabling students to practice their skills under timed conditions.
- Personalized study plans and extensive home study materials including, math and critical reasoning workbooks, additional practice tests and on-line access to homework assignments.
- Instruction in concepts, test-taking skills and strategies for enhanced mastery of the SAT.
- Instruction in mastering vocabulary, sentence corrections, critical reading, math problems and quantitative comparisons.
- Extensive tracking, analysis, and performance feedback.
- Strategies to overcome test-anxiety and manage allocated test time

efficiently, making the test day experience more familiar and less intimidating.

- Instructor-led small group sessions.

In addition to the Kaplan SAT prep materials, PUENTE facilitated informative sessions on strategies to obtain financial aid and scholarships to parents, as well as college tours for program participants and their parents/guardians of a Los Angeles area university or college.

This is what success looks like

“This program not only prepared me for the SAT but improved my chances of getting into the college of my choice. Being able to go to a good university will enable me to have a more secure and successful career and future.”

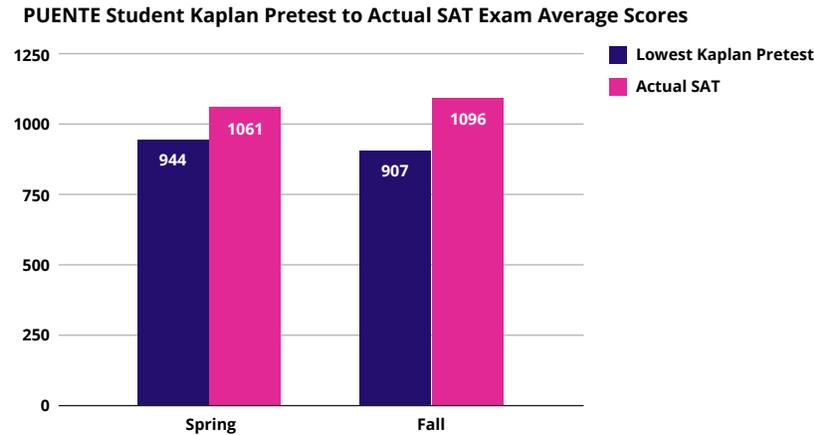
- Kaplan program participant

Since the partnership began in 1998, the Kaplan/PUENTE SAT Initiative has seen an increase in participation, with growing demand from students and schools leading to the creation of additional student cohorts. In 2017-2018, PUENTE served 157 students in both fall and spring semesters, growing steadily over time. Just 10 years ago, enrollment totaled 47 students, with each year operating at capacity, with many more requests for seats.

Historically, throughout the program’s existence, 98% of students who have participated enrolled in post-secondary education; 90% matriculate to four-year colleges, the balance attending community colleges or technical schools. Approximately 85% are the first in their family to attend college. Past program participants have attended universities including Harvard, Yale, Columbia, USC, UCLA, Duke, and Stanford.

Since most program participants are the first in their families to go to college, the program provides family members with a sense of the tremendous value a

college education offers their children. Each year in the program, as family members are moved to take action concerning the transition from high school to college, and student participants excel in the test preparation, the depth of the program impact is evident.



In 2017-2018, PUENTE served 157 students in both the fall and spring semesters. Of these students, 49 took two Kaplan pretests and had an actual SAT score reported back to Kaplan to compare. Students, on average, increased their SAT score from their lowest Kaplan practice test to their actual SAT; on average, Spring 2018 students went from 944 to 1061 and Fall 2017 students went from 907 to 1096.

In 2017, 90% of the participants raised their SAT scores by over 100 points; 65% raised their scores by over 200 points; 20% raised their scores by over 300 points; 10% raised their scores by over 350 points; and two students achieved over 450 point increases. Combined scores were on average 379 points higher than those of students at the high schools surrounding PUENTE.

“The opportunity to go to college is very important to me and my family. My parents struggle financially, but the consistent message has always been that I will be able to do better. This story is common with my classmates too. There is definitely a sense of promise for my future because my family knows an education is the key to the make the promise true. Since I was very little I only heard my parents speak about the importance

of school, and the need for me to do well and achieve. I never knew a time when I didn't want to do well in school. Deep inside I knew it was important and that my life would be better because of my investment in my school work. Now that college is my next step, I am very excited and nervous. I know that it is the step that I must take, and I am grateful that the Kaplan/PUENTE SAT Preparation program is part of my community. Thank you to all who make this program available to all of us. I feel it is a helping hand extended for us to take hold of." - *Kaplan program participant, Andrea Deras*

The future is bright

Although PUENTE has met its goals of raising SAT scores for students in the underserved areas in order to qualify for admission to competitive University of California, Cal State, and private schools, PUENTE still seeks to grow its programming. There are several reasons for this, boding well for the program and the promising students it serves. There is an increased demand from PUENTE's partner schools in the area for SAT prep. In addition to this, the program's positive impact on SAT scores and access to higher education fits in nicely with other Los Angeles-area initiatives such as Promesa Boyle Heights and Go East LA. Even better, student satisfaction with the curriculum, classroom instruction, and Kaplan's study materials has facilitated engaging students in the process of learning.