

**BERTA PEREZ, EVEN START PROGRAM STUDENT** Good evening to all of you. My name is Berta Perez, and I am a former student of the Even Start Program. When I came to the USA (about 12 years ago), I didn't know any English and worst of all I had little education. When I got pregnant with my daughter Kimberly, I found some information about free English classes at the Even Start Program. I enrolled in the English and computer classes, and I enrolled my daughter in early childhood education classes, hoping that I would have more opportunities to find a better job if I could speak this country's first language. I built up my self-esteem while I was coming to the English class because I was capable of communicating with others.

My expectation for a better life was getting bigger, and I decided to take GED classes in another school. Since I had a low-level education, I felt very fortunate to know enough English to start with my pre-GED classes and I was very thankful to the Even Start program because of the English I had learned. After two months going to pre-GED classes I was transferred to the GED level and it took me another seventh months before I took the real GED test. Finally, in 2000, I passed the GED test at UDC.

Hungry for success I started to take trainings in computer technology. I feel proud to tell you that I am now employed as a computer instructor and I am passing my hopes, my dreams and my knowledge to more than one hundred students per week. At present, I am taking an A-plus certification class, and I am very confident that I will pass the test.

I feel highly rewarded that all the knowledge I have acquired during this entire struggle has been useful for my daughter's education because now I am capable of helping with her schoolwork. I am also now more confident to discuss all issues relating to her education with her teachers. I am very proud to say that she is very sociable and one of best students in her classroom. She almost always gets straight A's. My experience at the Even Start program helped me to achieve important goals and is helping me to help my family. I think that an ESF charter School will help other families to move toward their own "American dreams."