

Creating an Impact in Many Fields

By David Villarino Gonzalez



As we strive to develop a replacement workforce to continue supporting California's economy, the Farmworkers Institute of Education & Leadership Development ([FIELD](#)) is committed to uplifting the economic prospects of our underserved populations in poor, minority communities. Whether it is developing skills to fight devastating wildfires, combating the negative effects of climate change, or fostering the use of clean energy, FIELD is making a difference in the quality of life for all Californians. FIELD helps individuals and families overcome educational and societal barriers by equipping them to participate productively in the California economy.

FIELD's mission is to promote economic and social prosperity in underserved communities throughout California by providing educational, occupational and life skills. Founded by Civil rights leader Cesar E. Chavez in 1978, our non-profit organization offers a continuum of education and training programs across California that lead to employee-owned social enterprises, lower unemployment, and greater individual self-sufficiency.

The Purpose of FIELD is to empower the underserved to be self-sufficient. We are committed to strengthening our rural communities through our Core Values of Integrity, Innovation, and Opportunity which are reflected throughout the entire FIELD organization.

For the past four decades, FIELD has served over 90,000 adult learners in its 22 campuses. FIELD's state-funded and fully accredited charter school system known as [EPIC de Cesar Chavez High School](#) has advanced the careers of 1,000 diploma-deficient adults to earn their high school diplomas. During the COVID-19 pandemic, FIELD reduced the digital divide which had previously acted as a barrier for so many of our underserved Californians. Not only did FIELD provide technology, coupled with training and tutoring on devices and various educational platforms, we also confronted California's broadband challenges by offering every student a hotspot to ensure they could continue their studies. FIELD's EPIC charter high school students are performing above state averages in Math, English, and other core subjects. Attendance is high; there were no suspensions.

Whether it is programs like our [Cesar Chavez Environmental Corps](#) (CCEC) or our seven Career Technical Education ([CTE](#)) pathways, FIELD is having a significant impact in preparing a high-skilled replacement workforce to deal with some of the state's most pressing problems.

For example:

- The Cesar Chavez Environmental Corps (CCEC) puts participants, known as Corps members, in paid positions working for both public agencies and private entities through service agreements as front-line workers to reduce waste, improve the state's parks and public open space, as well as assisting in wildfire abatement.
- Students at FIELD are supporting "Green California" by first being educated in FIELD's Solar Technology Curriculum and then becoming certified to install clean energy solar panels.
- In FIELD's Early Childhood Education programs, students help expand access to quality childcare for low-income workers and their families while empowering those who want to go into that field as a career pathway.

Clearly, FIELD is having a positive impact on tens of thousands of farmworkers, immigrants and other essential workers across California, spanning the last ten years. But FIELD is also enabling school success for children.

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close and essential workers to assist their children with their schoolwork, many adults were not prepared. Studies show that recent immigrants have an average of a 6th grade level of education from their home countries, and 27% are illiterate in their own language. As such, most are academically and technologically unable to support their children's education. FIELD helps to solve that problem. As they achieve literacy, master critical thinking to problem solve, communicate, and apply new technologies, parents are empowered to succeed in academics and occupational skills and join their children in learning so entire households become more effective learners. Embedding the value of education into families will help promote economic self-sufficiency through higher education, healthcare, retirement, and entrepreneurship. This will lead to the formation of generational wealth while strengthening rural communities in their journey to enjoy full citizenship.

FIELD deeply appreciates the support of our donors, partners, and government leaders who understand that FIELD yields a high return on investment. FIELD is having a tremendous impact on the lives and aspirations of Latinos, African Americans, and underserved people in rural communities in every corner of California. Together, we are making a positive difference in the health and economic vitality of our state. Si Se Puede! Yes, We Can!

David Villarino Gonzalez is the President and CEO of the Farmworkers Institute of Education & Leadership Development (FIELD), President of the EPIC Board of Trustees, the grandson of Juan de Dios Gonzalez the farmworker organizer of the first successful desegregation lawsuit, and son-in-law of Cesar E. Chávez.

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