

PENNY EDGERT, PHD

*Executive Director, Intersegmental Coordinating Committee
Principal Investigator, California GEAR UP*

Penny began her commitment to educational equity and social justice when she was involved with the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students (NSSFNS) in 1970. Subsequently, Penny became the evaluator for TRIO programs at Northern Illinois University, where she developed evaluation and proposal writing guides that were used nationally to enhance the knowledge and expertise of TRIO personnel.

Penny returned to California in 1979 to assume the position of Director of the San Diego County California Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP). In 1987, she became part of the staff of the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) as its Coordinator of Educational Equity and later as the Assistant Director for Academic Programs and Policy.

Penny assumed the position of Executive Director of the California Education Round Table Intersegmental Coordinating Committee (ICC) in 1999. In this position, she wrote the proposal for the California GEAR UP Program, for which she is now the Principal Investigator.

Penny has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in psychology and a Master of Arts Degree in sociology from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She earned her doctorate from the University of Chicago in Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistical Analysis.

MARIA ROCHA-RUIZ, MPA

Executive Director, Educational Partnership Center, University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC)

Maria Rocha-Ruiz grew up in Castroville, California, in a low-income, migrant, farm-working family. She was one of two Mexican American students from her high school who attended a four-year university upon graduation and was the first from her immediate and extended family to not only graduate from high school but also pursue a college education.

While in high school, neither counselors nor teachers spoke to Maria about going to college or saw that she had the potential to attend an institution of higher learning. Fortunately, she liked challenging herself and, as a result, stayed on track with her “a-g” courses. During the summer prior to her senior year, she participated in a program called “Yo Puedo,” a four-week residential program at UCSC through the Monterey County of Education (MCOE) Migrant Services, which changed her trajectory. Program staff spoke to her about college, and she met college students that came from a similar background as her own.

Maria attended UCSC and earned a BA in psychology. From that first year in college until present day, her passion and commitment have not wavered in ensuring students like herself are informed that they have the potential to pursue a postsecondary education, believe that they can achieve any goals that they set for themselves, and are resolute to never let others tell them otherwise. She has been a speaker at several functions delivering this message, including for her alma mater and the MCOE Migrant Services.

Maria has over 28 years’ experience working in P–20 settings designing, implementing, managing and evaluating programs that primarily serve low-income, underrepresented students. Her career in outreach began as an outreach coordinator at San Jose State University. Six months later, when the program moved to Cal State Monterey Bay, she was promoted to assistant director. After six years in that capacity, she served for seven years as coordinator of community services for the San Mateo-Foster City School District.

In 2006, she joined the UCSC [Educational Partnership Center](#) (EPC) as assistant director for Pajaro Valley GEAR UP. The following year, she was promoted to director of GEAR UP programs in Pajaro Valley and North and South Monterey Counties. In 2013, she took the reins as executive director of the EPC, where she oversees 10 academic access and preparation programs. Maria has been successful in acquiring over \$31.6 million in grant funding for the EPC for improving high school graduation and college enrollment and attainment rates for low-income and historically non-college-going families in Monterey, Santa Cruz and Santa Clara Counties. Maria earned a Master in Public Administration from the University of Southern California.

Maria’s background and experiences continue to drive her unwavering resolve and devotion to ensuring access and opportunities to postsecondary education are available to students from low-income and underrepresented backgrounds, so that they realize their aspirations of graduating from college.