



**Our Mission:** Bilingual Education for Central America ("BECA") exists to promote cultural exchange and provide affordable bilingual education. In our volunteer-driven bilingual school model, Central American students learn from dedicated volunteer teachers, and those volunteers learn from the community in which they are immersed. Providing educational access and empowerment to the most financially disadvantaged members of a community is a defining characteristic of our program; it should come as no surprise that "beca" means scholarship in Spanish.

**Our Model:** BECA currently provides a high-quality, bilingual (English-Spanish) education to 220 disadvantaged students at our partner school, San Jeronimo Bilingual School ("SJBS"), in Cofradía, Honduras. For the 2009-2010 school year, we have recruited and intensively trained 14 service-minded, native English-speaking volunteers from the United States. These volunteers will serve as full-time classroom teachers at SJBS. Since they are volunteers who receive no salary (and whose basic living expenses and training costs are covered by BECA), SJBS is able to charge a tiny fraction of the tuition of comparable bilingual schools in the region – enabling our students to receive an education that would otherwise be accessible to only very wealthy Hondurans. BECA also administers a need-based scholarship program that provides scholarships for 35% of SJBS's most disadvantaged students – meaning the school is truly accessible to ALL students in the community.

In addition to our Summer Institute – a six-week training program designed to ensure our volunteers' ability to succeed in the classroom and in the community – we invest tremendous energy each day to support our BECA teachers who build relationships with their students and their families. This reciprocal exchange represents a critical component of our volunteers' successful immersion and their students' social and academic success.

**Our Community Partner:** BECA purposefully does not own and operate SJBS. Instead, we collaborate with the Association of Parents Pro-Education ("Association") a Honduran NGO of democratically-elected parents. The Association is responsible for hiring Honduran teachers, managing school finances, reporting to the Ministry of Education, and assisting BECA in support of the foreign teachers. Together, our organizations make decisions about what is best for our students and the broader community. Our equal-footing partnership with the Association results in close, long-lasting relationships between BECA teachers and community members.

**Our Supplemental Programs:** We also facilitate a number of additional programs, including:

- *A merit-based scholarship program* for SJBS graduates that empowers our most financially disadvantaged students to continue their education at nearby bilingual high schools;
- *Escuela de Padres:* A "school for parents" that provides bi-weekly classes on topics such as personal health, family budgeting, and supporting a child's education;
- *Summer Camp:* A six-week program designed to prevent language and learning losses over the summer and to provide our students with a safe, recreational activity;
- *Libros Y Familias:* a family-oriented literacy program that introduces our students' parents to techniques they can use in the home to encourage a love of reading; and
- *Social Tourism Program:* short visits which introduce U.S. college students and other groups to our Honduran community and some of the development challenges Hondurans are grappling with.

To fund all of this and more, BECA's entire program budget for 2009-2010 is \$53,055.

**Why Honduras and Why Bilingual Education?** Despite Honduras' success in increasing school net enrollment rates, the educational system still faces major challenges. Graduation rates have not increased along with enrollment rates, and only 35% of those Hondurans who complete primary school continue to the secondary level. Enrollment numbers at colleges and universities are much lower still. An eighteen-year-old Honduran has, on average, completed only 6.2 years of schooling.

It is no surprise that in recent years, more Hondurans have chosen private education for their children. Currently, more than 25% of all primary schools in major urban areas of Honduras are privately-run for-profit schools, the majority of which purport to offer bilingual education. Conversations with Hondurans reveal that this public to private exodus is attributable to the failure of the Honduran public education system.

The demand for bilingual education is directly tied to a significant rise in English-speaker tourism and an increasingly open trade relationship between Honduras and its largest trading partner, the United States. Tremendous growth in both of these sectors over the past few years has increased demand for English language skills in the Honduran labor force. A quick scan of local job advertisements reveals that English language fluency equates with much greater economic opportunity – an opportunity that has been widely recognized by Hondurans; hence, the interest in private bilingual education. However, with few regulations governing bilingual schools in Honduras, the quality of instruction can be poor.

Some Honduran private schools charge little by U.S. standards, yet in a nation where the GDP per capita is just under \$3,000, even an annual expenditure of \$300 for education represents a significant proportion of many families' total household income. Our work in Honduras since 2001 provides us with ample cause for concern about the quality of education not only in public schools (which suffer from prolonged teacher strikes each year) but also at many of these for-profit bilingual schools. Through our efforts, we aim to set the bar higher. We seek to empower more Honduran communities to collaborate with us and provide high-quality, bilingual education that is truly accessible to all Hondurans through the creation of more nonprofit bilingual schools.

Through our efforts, we are providing students with the means to break down the invisible economic barrier that separates the "haves" from the "have nots" in the region. From the beginning, we anticipated that our students would be better equipped to complete high school and college, thereby providing them with access to greater personal and professional opportunities than they would have otherwise been afforded. After honing our program's model over the past five years, we have begun to see that vision take shape. Out of SJBS's first eleven graduates in 2007, eight students have already graduated from bilingual high schools in or around San Pedro Sula and one student has received a full scholarship at a prestigious US boarding school where he is beginning his junior year. This represents an exceptional success rate – especially when compared with high school enrollment rates in Honduras and given the limited financial resources of our devoted community partners.

**Our Future:** We are proud of all that our volunteers and our students have accomplished, but we are by no means content to stop learning and growing. In the past year alone, we began the process of creating a more socially, academically, and culturally relevant curriculum; further enhanced our Summer Institute training for new teachers; started transitioning from one-year to two-year teacher commitments; and hired our first Executive Director. Over time, we aim to carefully expand into other disadvantaged communities in Honduras and throughout Central America.

**Questions? Comments? Donations?**

**BECA 418 East 84<sup>th</sup> Street, #5, New York, NY 10028**

Laurence Birdsey, Executive Director: [lbirdsey@becaschools.org](mailto:lbirdsey@becaschools.org)

Jaime Koppel, Founder/Chairperson: [jkoppel@becaschools.org](mailto:jkoppel@becaschools.org)

501(c)(3) Non-Profit Tax-ID #: 52-2374444