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**LOCAL AUTHOR DONATES FREE CURRICULUM TO SCHOOLS, TEACHERS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO EMPOWER TEENAGERS AND AT-RISK YOUTH TO MAKE BETTER CHOICES; PILOT PROGRAM IN CHICAGO'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS A SUCCESS**

*Robert Renteria and From the Barrio Foundation to offer free curriculum for the 2009-2010 school year; no-cost Book Drive tools also available to help those who are facing financial constraints.*

**AURORA, Ill. (June 18, 2008)** – After completing a successful pilot program this spring in the Chicago Public Schools using Robert Renteria's memoir, "[From the Barrio to the Board Room](#)," (2008, [Writers of the Round Table Press](#), with [Corey Blake](#)), this fall upwards of 3,000 Chicago city students will discover through the new curriculum that hard work, dedication and staying in school are the secrets to success, and that gang violence is not a lifestyle but a death style. The curriculum, developed by teachers, community leaders and advisors, is free to all schools, teachers, youth prisons, and organizations.

In addition, the From the Barrio Foundation will offer free support materials through the Barrio Book Drive, to assist those schools and organizations that would like to use the book with their kids but don't necessarily have the funds to do so.

In total, 200 students took part in the pilot programs at Roosevelt and Morton West High Schools in May. According to Guadalupe Perez, one of the teachers who used the book and curriculum in his class, his students related to Renteria's story simply because for most of them, it was their story, too.

"After having read Robert's book, a lot of them realized that at some point you do have to take responsibility for your actions and that there are choices that you have to make," said Perez. "I even got to see another side of my students through the curriculum that goes along with the book and the discussion questions we went through. You have these kids in your class for the entire school year and you think you know them but then you open up a whole different world that they are living through with something like this. I'm really grateful that we had the opportunity to read the book."

The curriculum includes chapter by chapter discussion questions that dig into the problems and dire situations that teenagers and at-risk youth face today. It provides teachers and leaders thought-provoking tools and exercises to engage kids in making the right choices and decisions in their volatile world. It is unique in that teachers and educators rarely receive free curriculum.

The curriculum took shape as a result of Clayton Muhammad, district spokesperson for East Aurora School District 131, figuratively suggesting that the donation of 1,000 copies of the From the Barrio book by a local charity last fall was like giving him a ready-made academic and life-skills curriculum. It was then that Renteria and Blake considered the potential life-changing tool the book and its message could become for so many kids if they created an actual curriculum.

Recent Roosevelt graduate Mirsad Ferizovic said being tempted by gangs and violence begins early and the book and curriculum can have a big impact if used with freshman and sophomore students.

“We need to have more books like this in school,” said Ferizovic. “All these books we read in school, it’s all picture perfect and little rainbows but when you get to realistic stuff like gangs and shootings, that’s the real world. It’s not all nice and shiny out there. Freshman and sophomore year I didn’t really care about whether I got in trouble or suspended. Then I started getting older and wanted to be the first in my family to graduate, the first to finish.”

“From the Barrio to the Board Room” is inspiring kids to do more around the house, try harder at school, question if they’re hanging out with the right crowds, believe in themselves, and reach for higher goals. It is also inspiring adults to open their own businesses, go back to school, and give back to others.

“The biggest complement that an author can get is when a teenager says, ‘Can I keep the book?’” said Roosevelt High School Principal Dr. Alejandra Alvarez.

From The Barrio Foundation also has created the Barrio Book Drive, a complete in-the-box fundraising program to help schools and organizations raise money so that educators can incorporate the book into their curriculum and programs.

“We supply them with everything they need to reach out to their community and raise funds for their organization,” said Blake. “Such a large number of schools, youth prisons and community programs want the book, but mention funding as an obstacle. Robert wanted to create a mechanism that would eliminate that obstacle through community involvement and support.”

Renteria added, “The curriculum is my gift, it’s a labor of love in hopes of helping to change the landscape for our youth across America. I’m throwing down the gauntlet so to speak. Let’s exchange the Barrio book for all the guns, knives, drugs, needles, booze, and even cigarettes that are out there touching and killing our youth. I believe we can make a difference, and I want us to do this together.”

Both Blake and Renteria feel a responsibility to craft a curriculum and program that will truly have an impact on kids’ lives.

“Through Robert demonstrating that he could air his dirty laundry, these kids are being given permission to tell their own stories,” said Blake. “I can actually see the healing process begin. We see that we have a real opportunity to make a difference.”

“From the Barrio to the Board Room” and Renteria’s personal story were featured on WGN (Adelante Chicago), Univision, *Hoy*, and Y-Talk Radio, and profiled in *La Raza* and *Hispanic Executive Quarterly*. U.S. Congressman Bill Foster, Aurora Mayor Thomas Weisner, Princeton University Professor Russ Nieli, and Chicago police officers are just a few of the many committed professionals who are supporting his dream to reach out, give back and pull people out. His mission is to put his story in the hands of at least one million teenagers and at-risk youth.

To learn more about [From The Barrio Foundation, the book and its curriculum](#) or to read more about Renteria’s story, please contact Renteria at 312.933.5619 or visit [www.fromthebarrio.com](http://www.fromthebarrio.com).

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