

Dickson Learning Community

*Doris Dickson Elementary School
Chino, California*

English and computer classes for parents helped administrators at Doris Dickson Elementary bridge the gap between home and school, and overcome some of the school's language challenges. The Dickson Learning Community classes helped 25 Spanish-speaking mothers learn English and pick up some computer skills, both of which helped them advocate more successfully for their children.

Nearly 22 percent of students at the school are English Language Learners, and a sizable numbers of parents speak little or no English. Despite these conditions, Dickson set a school improvement goal to increase all students' English language skills by one grade level each year.

The English classes for parents tied into this goal. They grew out of another parent involvement program at Dickson—the Family Stories class. When that program ended, parents told the Title I resource teacher that they wanted to spend more time together to learn English and to practice their computer skills.

The teacher found a time and a place for the new classes. Originally, it was not clear that the school had enough computers for the parents, but after corralling a few retired laptops, she was able to accommodate the parents. She asked the students who had attended Family Stories to advertise the new classes to other interested parents. Administrators promoted the class in a bilingual flier sent home with students. They also announced the program at a well-attended open house.

Between 15 and 25 parents attended the Friday morning sessions to work on their English and technology skills. Each session began with a 45-minute lesson on English grammar or vocabulary, followed by 30 minutes to practice speaking English (no Spanish allowed). Classes usually ended with a short computer demonstration, teaching mothers about important educational web sites, or how

to use e-mail. Volunteers provided child care for each session so that the parents could focus on their work.

By the end of the school year, teachers and parents had become thoroughly enmeshed in the learning experience. Many parents were so enthusiastic that they asked for weekly vocabulary tests. The principal noted that the parents in the class seemed to feel more comfortable at the school.

The resource teacher donated her time to make the classes happen. She and others plan to continue the classes and hope to attract more parents to the Friday morning group.

*Carol Sullivan
Assistant Principal
(909) 591-2653
carol_sullivan@chino.k12.ca.us*