

*Status Report — June 2006*

## ¡Aquí aprendemos español!

After nearly a year of planning and fundraising, it has finally come to pass: "Here, we learn Spanish!" Thanks to all who have supported this initiative with their time, enthusiasm and financial contributions, we achieved our initial goal of raising \$40,000 to begin Spanish language instruction at Burns Park! Señora Eileen Orta-Alfonso was excited to start working with our children in late March 2006, and she is not the only one to be excited.

## Did you know....

...that Burns Park Elementary has the 3rd largest Spanish-speaking student population (in an elementary school) in the district? This kind of program often benefits these children in many ways, leading to improved academic achievement in other areas.

...that many other elementary schools in our district have long-standing parent-funded enrichment?

...that our program was originally offered as a pilot for the district with the vision of foreign language education during the school day becoming a reality for all AAPS elementary students?

The survey we circulated last year indicated that Burns Park parents were very interested in bringing Spanish language instruction to our school. Our principal, Kathy Morhous, and the Burns Park teachers gave crucial support to this effort. After a huge fundraising push, and extensive talks with AAPS, we were able to move forward with hiring a language instructor and beginning the program this spring.

We were fortunate to find an excellent candidate in our very midst (see feature below). Sra. Alfonso was already working with ESL students here, and was eager for the chance to introduce Spanish-language lessons to the school. Our program is modeled after an existing program at Pittsfield Elementary, and Sra. Alfonso worked with the language teacher there to develop her curriculum.

At the moment, first- and second-grade students are receiving three or four twenty-minute lessons a week, and the

response has been great. Children have been talking excitedly about the lessons at home, and even those who rarely talk about their school day have begun to spontaneously drop Spanish phrases into conversation!

Upper grades currently receive one session a week, and each year one more grade will be added to the full schedule. The lessons are integrated into the regular classroom curriculum and are not designed to take time away from other key subjects or special classes like art or music. As a bonus, many teachers have been excited by the opportunity to learn Spanish themselves.

Our program has attracted attention elsewhere as well: two other Ann Arbor elementary schools have expressed interest in developing similar programs. Since our original hope was that the Burns Park program would be a pilot for a district-wide initiative, this is great news. 🐼

## Meet Señora Orta-Alfonso

Eileen Orta-Alfonso is a familiar face at Burns Park: before becoming our Spanish language instructor, she served as ESL tutor and noon-hour supervisor. Sra. Alfonso began her teaching career eleven years ago in Puerto Rico, where she taught mathematics and was department head at a private school. Since moving to Saline five years ago, Sra. Alfonso has taught Spanish at a number of private elementary schools in the Ann Arbor area.

A native speaker of Spanish, Sra. Alfonso already had relationships with many of the students she is now seeing in the classroom. In conversations with parents, she is especially enthusiastic about implementing a language curriculum which immediately encourages kids to use their Spanish in everyday situations, and which is linked to the broader classroom curriculum. Sra. Alfonso is also pleased that she can now enlist our school's many native Spanish speaking students as helpers, encouraging their classmates to keep using the words they have been learning. 🐼



