

Interview with Maria Fernandez by JC Arada

- Maria Fernandez works in the Migrant Worker Program

**What do you feel as a major wall facing Hispanic student?**

Probably the difference here and the schools in Mexico, as it is already hard enough for them to come here. I don't know how to explain it... but it is just different

**So would you say that it is a language barrier?**

It is that barrier and even a cultural divide

**How do you feel about the Hillsboro Outreach Program and its achievements?**

I believe it's a good thing as we are slowly seeing the need to have more agencies to help out Hispanic kids because our population is increasing. I think so should the services we provide.

**How has social and or economic structures hindered the education of the Hispanic community?**

I honestly don't know how to answer that one, let me get back to you on that.

**What do you feel about the graduation gap, and what do you feel is the best way to solve it?**

I believe we have to educate the parents first. Because they will help their kids, right now, the parents don't know how the system works. They don't know how to help their kids, as so then their kids tend to fall through the cracks and so this is why we get this gap.

**Do you feel that the Hillsboro School District has neglected or discriminated against the Hispanics?**

I don't think that they had discriminated against the Hispanics. I don't believe that they have neglected them... well maybe... slowly I believe we are improving by providing more services to them. In some ways I don't believe its neglect, but a funding issue, but new programs are helping the Hispanics kids.

**What do you feel is the emphasis of Education within the Hispanic community?**

The have [emphasized] ... but at the same time they have other obstacles. Most of our kids have to work eventually, some have come here by themselves but they continue to go to school and value education because they know it's the only way out of the agriculture cycle. Because that's what their parents are doing, and it's what they are going to end up doing. So I think at one point, Parents do emphasize education. But at the same time it is hard because of the family needs. If their economical situation is great

then the parents do push their kids to go to school. Otherwise they have to help to contribute to the family, and education happens to the second thing in their minds because they have to provide the basic necessities. So it really depends on their economical situation. But most parents don't know how to help their kids.

**Do you feel that the Hillsboro School District can do more to emphasize education?**

Definitely, that brings to the thing. I believe we need to have more programs for parents, we need to bring the parent in and educate them about our system, tell them how our system works. Like I said, It's completely different from the Mexican education system so I think we need to bring our parents over so often and kind of go over the system and the services we provide that's available to them and the services for their kids too, because if you just tell the kids or the kids just know about them, it doesn't mean that they are going to follow up. We need the parents on top of their kids education too and check up on them but if they don't know how it works, they can't do that. So I think we need more programs to help out parents.

**What programs do you feel help Hispanics the most?**

I think not only because I work for the Migrant Worker Program, but I believe our migrant worker program is one of the best things that could have happened to the school districts, just because our program provides them for summer school. Not only do those kids that are in family classes or those that started late, it keeps them on track as far as language, they can keep learning English through the summer so they don't lose it, and get them going for credits for graduation. So I believe that's the best thing that could have happened to the school district or the state as well.

**How has the new "Office of Hispanic Outreach" affected our program here at CHS?**

Well I think the Hispanic Outreach Program is a good start, I really do think that we could have more services if we have a bigger staff and right now it's being handled by two staff members. And they are doing a lot with their parents and I think that's a good thing but they are also limited due to the staffing. I believe there is more things we could do for our families but it's a really good start. By far, I think we still need more services, offices, or staff, I don't know how we can help out people, I don't know... how we have such a huge population and only have two people working there.

**What are your perceptions of the CHS staff's attitudes towards improving Hispanic achievement?**

I think there is some people all for it and very supportive. And I know there is some people and view it as if you come to his country, you need to learn the language and this and that and it's kind of sad because I think these kids need all the support that they can get and some staff members view it as you need to be ready to go, and if you don't know the culture, you "need to get with it". I think there's good and bad here, I can't say... I wish I can that's it "A" o-kay but... there is more that needs to be improved

**Is your position or work supported by the administration?**

I believe so... because if there is something wrong, I believe I can always go to my administrators and talk about stuff that needs work for our kids, or for our families.

**Can you please describe what you do here at Century?**

My job is to help kids and families when they come to enroll, I tell them what they need. Help the with all the requirements, help them fill out paper work, connect them with programs and resources out the community. Because most of our families need food, clothes, I also run a closed clawset here for our kids. I also work for the Migrant Program which provides accident insurance and register them for summer school, keep track of their attendance. And advocate for the kids, and families that are in our program.

**How do we try to make a stronger connection with parents, mentors perhaps?**

I think that would be a great idea, mentors definitely. It would be good if there were more Hispanic mentors, I know there is a lot of mentors out there, but it's really hard to find Hispanic mentors, because a lot of them don't feel they can become mentors just because they didn't have the education and the ones that have been educated and don't know about the opportunities. So I think there is a way to connect kids with even college students or somebody or that can work with the kid and the family. In our culture, family is very important, if we can get the family to be kinda on the same wave, then you can pretty much help that kid achieve anything.

**Did you enroll in the Hillsboro School District when you were a teenager?**

Yes, I actually went to Glencoe and Hillhi. My Junior year, and my family was migrant, my mom though recently... the reason we ended up moving here was that my mom found a job in a nursery and she didn't drive and so she needed to live within the distance where she can walk or take the bus and so that's why I ended up moving several times because it depended where my mom was working. My family was migrant so it feels good to give back and I have a special relationship with my kids [here at Century] because I can tell them I have been there, my family picked berries, I have been there in the fields, and all of that and I have a lot in common with my kids and that's what makes this job unique because I can tell them from experience.

**Do you feel any change from when you started high school to now?**

Highschool... no... I don't really remember highschool... about a lot of thing being changed. But from the time that I started school, in elementary, I totally see a big change because I remember starting at Cornelius Elementary and they put me with the Special Ed kids because I didn't speak any English. And so from that time, which is a long time ago, from that time to now, definitely, there has been a lot of improvements. Of course they have not been fast, but slowly they have been improving but there is still a lot more we can do, especially with the Hispanic drop out rate is incredible.

### **Do you feel there is discrimination in the campus?**

I think there is, in some schools it's more obvious than others but I know there is always discrimination in one way or another. Back then of course it was worse, and there were less of us, I mean Hispanics. Now, I believe there is still is. You see some fights, and I believe those fights originate from some sort of discrimination. I think discrimination will always exist, I don't think we can ever get rid of it because you can't just change people's minds on how they view certain races.

### **How do you feel the change in the Hillsboro School District from the 1970's to now on how they view and reach out to the Hispanic community?**

I don't know cuz I was born in the 70's, I can tell you how much it changed. All I know is that there has been a lot of changes. When I started school in the 80's, they didn't have ESL, bi-lingual staff, or documents in both Spanish and English, all of that stuff, as before they didn't have that before. Now I sit and talk to my mom about that and I ask her how she would tell me "she would find somebody that could read in English so that I would know what they are talking about." And that's how people would read mail in English. Now Spanish letters, Spanish newsletters, and that's part of my job is to translate documents for our families. So yeah, I think we have come a long way, but we still have a lot more ahead of us. And we still need to expand all the programs.

### **Can you please tell me more about your life as a Hispanic in the Hillsboro School District?**

It was kind of hard because of the cultural difference and I wasn't used to a lot of things. And I really didn't have all the support that I needed, other than my parents support and in the schools, there weren't a lot of role models that were Hispanic that could relate with me. So I think at some point, I struggled a lot with school. It was really hard, some things I did understand, some others I didn't, but I didn't feel like I could go to somebody that I could talk to about it. I didn't feel connected with the school. It was hard and I didn't get involved very much, I didn't trust people very much, I struggled and my grades weren't all that great. I will admit that, again, it's due to lack of support, and I didn't have help from anybody. My parents couldn't help me because they didn't know English, and they didn't really get an education in Mexico. So I was on my own. Earlier I think back then that I don't think very many people were supporting Hispanics. I think that there were more Hispanics when I went to high school than middle school, or elementary, but still not enough to make a difference. So we sorta kept to ourselves. We had our own little group and that was it. We kinda just stuck together, we didn't get involved or anything and we were all struggle with school.

### **Earlier you talked about your brothers and sisters, In what way did you help them in what they were struggling in?**

Since I was the oldest in the family, I don't think my brothers or sisters struggled that much in school. Because once I picked up the language then I could help them in their

homework. So even though they weren't getting the support in schools, they were getting it from me. I would sit there and help them with their homework and I would advise them and try to keep them on track and I learned how to understand how the educational system works. I went to their conferences and I did everything for my mom to try to help her understand how things worked out. So I don't think my brothers or sisters struggled as much as I did, because they had my support, and I understood how it worked out. So if they didn't get it from school, it was okay because I could help them out. So they tend to do better than I did.

**Is there everything more that you want to add about how you grew up in the Hillsboro School District?**

My parents were migrant workers and they followed the crops and the work wherever it was, and we did a lot of moving and it was hard, as it was hard to start new schools all the time, and again, I didn't speak English very well. And I think that another reason why I didn't feel connected to the schools as it was hard to grow up, also **the economical thing**, we were very poor, and it was very hard to fit in when you don't look like anybody else. Today is better as you have agencies that can help with clothes and all of that stuff. And I believe that what all the kids want to do is to fit in and blend in and it's hard if you don't look like everybody else or speak the same language. As they do, times have changed a lot.

**Is there discrimination with the Hispanic community against newcomers?**

Definitely, I am slowly starting to see that, because **the kids that have are trying to forget that they are Hispanic**. There's a struggle and there is a fight between the newcomers and the kids that has already been here. I think that they are more stable, I think that they are embarrassed and that they are labeled in one big pot so I feel these kids think they need to do something to keep that [from happening] because they newcomers maybe they look like us or talk like us, and this and that, and they don't want to be labeled in the same category as they do. I have seen that as a problem in other schools. There has been fights between our own Hispanics going at it with each other, the ones that are stable against the newcomers. I believe it's because they are embarrassed

**Thank you for your time**

You're welcome