

Transcript of the interview with Charlie Strom done by Evan Cross.

RC: Explain what you do at CHS.

CS: I'm a campus security monitor. And my basic job is to ensure the safety of the students and staff.

RC: What has been your involvement with the hispanic students in our district.

CS: Primarily my involvement with the Hispanic students has been within school, and outside of school it is very limited... only in terms of school activities such as basketball games, football games and what have you. But mostly my involvement has been within the school.

RC: Is this your first job working in the HSD?

CS: This is my first job working with the Hillsboro School District and in a school district environment. [Talks about previous other jobs]

RC: What is your perception of the challenges faced by the Hispanic Students at CHS.

CS: My perception is it is primarily language based. I encounter a lot of students that come here with an almost non-functioning ability to speak English. That makes my job and my partner's job difficult at times, identifying those students who have that limited speaking ability. And also we kind of make an assumption sometimes that students who we know have been here for a couple years should know some English, but we have observed that some students... they don't pick it up and some students progress, they can understand me, and I can understand me. So, it's one of the biggest challenges. Secondly, there is a cultural challenge.

RC: What exactly do you mean by a cultural challenge. What is the barrier there?

CS: I think the wall is authority... being able to cooperate with authority. I think a lot of students through picking up what their parents or what have you do, especially recent arrivals into the country, depending upon their legal status, one would be afraid of any law enforcement. And that goes with any authority figure.

RC: Do you think that the ESL programs are working with the Hispanic students and making progress?

CS: Well, my perception for the most part is that... see I only work with a limited number of students. We have a fairly substantial Hispanic population here at school. And a lot of those kids I don't see. They are the ones to actually integrate themselves into the school environment and learn through the ESL program. And a lot of the time I don't see their progress because I don't have any issues with them, involved in skipping or gang activity, you know. So, the ones that are self-learners or achievers I really don't see... so it's kind of hard to really give a good balance of how successful the ESL program is. The students that I do see, however, most of them still have the language barrier, because, it's difficult for them. They're in this pattern of, for lack of a better term,

misbehaviour, like skipping or whatever. I think that's not because it's what they want to do, it's because it's their defense mechanism of dealing with their learning abilities.

RC: Do you think that the district could do more about the specific students having trouble?

CS: Try to give them a little more personal attention. I see it, but sometimes it isn't enough. I believe perhaps many issues, I don't know the whole picture I admit, involves family situations I know some kids in the past have gone back down to Mexico for a few weeks and they are not with the program... or they go out and work for a while. There are an unlimited number of problems that these kids have to overcome. We have to overcome those problems and deal with it, but it will take a lot of manpower to give the support that the Hispanic community needs. I don't know how to deal with that, personally.

RC: As far as student to student confrontations, do you see any racial issues such as segregation?

CS: I don't think so much as there is trouble, but there is a self-segregated community. You see that the caucasian hispanic kids, asian kids, blacks, they all tend to gather around their own kind. You do get a blend of the groups, but not a total blend. That would be the ideal thing; that everyone gets along together, but especially for the Hispanic kids I believe there is a cultural identity that keeps them together. They are afraid to go out and reach out to other people and likewise the other students are also apprehensive because they do not understand the other culture. And so, until we can establish a good basis of cultural acceptance that everybody understands, this is the way everyone works, you have to be able to accept that this is the way certain people do things. Any educational process of the school perhaps needs to address more that... how to get kids to understand that they are different but not, they are human beings with different ideas and different ways of doing things. It's okay to be different, and it's okay to learn why they are different. I spent 20 years in the service, and we had many men and women of different ethnic backgrounds and we learned how to work and operate together. Of course it was more forceful, "you will cooperate with this person or else." If there was some way to do that type of approach to say that this is your classmate, don't look at them as being Hispanic or white, you are sharing a common cause here of getting an education, and a school should not be a place where you just go to and go home. It should be a place where you go and learn, be comfortable, make friends, establish relationships, become part of the community, and we have to find a way of making that work. Otherwise the students will just mill about endlessly in their own groups.

RC: So, do you think finding that common goal would be important to making these groups work together?

CS: I would think so. That would be the end goal, but there is half a dozen roads that go to that end goal. It's trying to find that common path that works. That has been the challenge, ever since school desegregation started. It's still a learning process, I don't think the education system has quite caught up with it yet.

RC: Have you seen any special treatment or harsher punishments for Hispanic groups etc.?

CS: I don't think so. My job is basically if a student is messing up... to bring them in. The administration deals with the student, or a counselor. I've seen, in my own perspective, that things are done fairly. It's not done on a racial basis, it is done on a case-by-case basis there's always special circumstances when we deal with disciplinary issues. You know a student can have a bad day, we all have bad days. I do. I try not to yell and scream at students but... let's say if you're not in a good home environment that effects your learning process. And regardless of what your background is, you bring it to school you can't set it aside, and we try to look at it as, ok we know you had some issues at home that are not conducive to good learning, let us help you. And often we see that kids should have gotten in more trouble than what the punishment was metted out but after understanding the situation what lead up to it, there is always a grey area, and that's what's important is dealing with the grey areas. So I think that the administration has done the best they can.

RC: It's a very subjective process, so.

CS: I mean if we did it black and white I don't think there would be more than 200 students at school (laughs).

RC: Does the school provide you with translating services when you need them?

CS: Yeah, the school has been very good about it. There has been a couple of times when I needed somebody to translate but no one was available, but the situation has never been critical. Sometimes it's hard to get a student's attention, but I know a few spanish words that say, you know, come with me, and we go around the school until I find someone who can speak spanish and get things taken care of. So it hasn't been a major problem. When I was in school 30 years ago, we were required to take Spanish. And me being a young dumb schmuck in the mid-west I asked why do I need to learn Spanish. And so I dropped out of the Spanish class. And it's one of the things that I kick myself in the butt for not following through with. And so here I am 30 years later in the midst of a good-sized Hispanic community and I don't know how to communicate with them.

RC: To what degree do you think that Hispanic students are taking their English lessons seriously? Are they making progress?

CS: I have seen, see I have been here for 3 or 4 years now, so I have been seeing students as freshmen and now are juniors or seniors, and the ones that have stuck with it where they didn't understand english very well can now carry on communications, not so much conversation, we can't talk about politics, we are not to that depth yet, but you know communicating effectively. I have seen a smaller percentage of that still struggling, but they are still here and they deserve credit. Some are not here any longer, lost in the system somewhere, we don't know where they are, and they are unsuccessful at the ESL classes.

RC: Do you see any realistic solution to those failing the ESL situation?

CS: Not being an educator, it's hard to make that call. I think I have one idea, that is to, as far as discipline, I don't think that Hispanic students totally understand what's involved with being in school. They understand they are supposed to go to class A class B class C, you know, but as far as

knowing the ins and outs as far as rules and interactions between students, the simple things like using the library may be difficult for them. A lot of times if we just work on the little things that might help a lot. I have travelled in a number of foreign places, although I got along fairly well. The littlest thing is like going to Japan and trying to figure out, do I tip, it's like that at school for them. Hispanic students might not understand that they cannot leave campus, and why they cannot. There might be an educational process where the students sit down and they learn, this is what school is all about and this is how we function, and if you are confused go ahead and ask. Find someone who can help. If they don't know the questions to ask though, we can't help them. We have books and you know, in spanish, but sometimes it takes someone to personally interpret it for you to understand the rules. Get rid of all these little pressures that confuse the student and maybe the student would be more apt to learn what he's here to learn.

RC: So some sort of introductory class would help?

CS: I think so, some sort of Highschool Introduction, and anything from simple things like getting a student ID card or Library card, and walk a student through it. Cause you can explain something to someone and unless you physically do it, they won't get it. It's like driving. Identify what could befuddle a student.

RC: Is there anything else you have to say on the subject?

CS: I like the Hispanic students here, they are fun, they really are. I've made some good inroads with the Hispanic students, and I've actually had some that didn't go too well. But overall I would say, especially the hispanics that are newly here, the first generation ones just from mexico are easier to work with than the second generations. They still speak spanish at home and still have their culture but know enough about american culture to get away with things. I have better luck with the new ones. I had a Hispanic kid come back last week that came back a few days ago, who graduated a year ago, to see how I was doing, and I thought that was nice. I asked how he was doing and everything, I thought I do make a difference sometimes and I feel like I'm doing my job and if I can reach one kid, I'm doing my job.

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Programs mentioned –

ESL – English Second Language program.