

Interview Transcript: Dawn Montgomery

By: Evin McHill

The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of the Washington County Museum, and Century High School. The interviewee is: Ms. Dawn Montgomery. The interviewer is: Evin McHill. The interview took place on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2004, at 2:00 pm.

Evin (E)- So what has been your involvement with the Hispanic population?

Dawn (D)- Well I started in the district nine years ago in Evergreen Middle School where the minority population was really small at that time. When Century High school opened in 97', the population had grown quite a bit, and Century was due to have a pretty good-size minority, Hispanic, population, and I spoke Spanish. So they asked me if I would move over here as Asst. Principle and from that day on I have used my Spanish and been involved in programs to improve educational opportunities for kids in the district.

E- Would you explain the main programs and their provisions that HSD has created to respond to the needs of the Hispanic community in the last thirty years?

D- Well obviously I can only speak to a few, you know, over the last few years. I would say the changes have been huge. I think, because you're speaking of lots of people that'll tell you a lot of things that I know only from peripherally. I think what I would do is talk to you specifically about what I have been involved because my involvement really started the second year - I think it was 1998- when Lewis and Clark offered a program called, Hispanic Youth in Oregon. It was a year-long program where education administrators from around the state- there were about 15-20 of us (5 from Hillsboro)- where we looked at how students were doing all over the state, and different programs. We went to (McClearan?) and we went to Hood River and looked at schools that were totally integrated bilingual schools. We looked at Out Reach programs around the state. We just got a really broad perspective, and then ended up spending two weeks in Waupaca, Mexico, looking at programs, and that's a lot of people. You know, what's the school-system work like there. Not only the school-system but also the programs for families: the social systems. After that, we came back and worked a lot with administrators in the district. And in services, we did slide presentations about working Hispanic kids. After that, when the uh- what's that plan called?

E- The Strategic Plan.

D- The Strategic Plan, thank you Evin. I was invited to be in that group, so that's what we really developed more detailed plans about what we were going to do with Hispanic kids. You know, you guys have seen those documents and it has a lot of details, and a lot of that's happened and it's been really exciting. So yeah I have been involved the last nine years...

E- Okay... What is your history with these issues? (Needs of Hispanic Students)

D- Like I mentioned when we opened Century, the Hispanic population was really little. We've been as high as 35% in the school; it's down now to about 20% but it's been quite a bit higher. So bringing, you know, it's been hiring staff that are bilingual, growing the ESL program, Jag TV- Hispanic News- has happened since we opened Century, after school tutoring programs, and Hispanic Clubs that have tried to get the community involved in the school.

E- Speaking of programs, how does our ESL program differ from other schools in HSD?

D- Well this year it's smaller actually. Over the last few years, we have had the largest program in the district. So it's changed in that way, with Liberty opening the boundaries have changed and we've lost a few Hispanic students. I think that if Century is where the tutoring program, we provide bussing for students, we've had educational classes for parents to learn English, and grants, from Lewis and Clark to train teachers as ESL instructors. We train teachers in sheltered English strategies to help students in regular content areas, or ESL students that are just learning English to be successful in those regular classes. So it differs in that we've had expanded instruction for teachers, and services to kids and parents.

Describe program

E- What are some problems the district has faced in providing for the needs for Hispanic students?

D- I think it's two issues: one is an education piece for staff and administrators, and for that matter, for the public and for our anonymous Hispanic students and families so that they understand the needs for our Hispanic youth and our students that come in and don't speak English; how we need to support them. I think that is a huge piece, is the education piece. The second thing is ...

E- Would money be an issue?

D- ...is definitely a matter of having funding to have support services at school. And to have teachers that are bilingual and multi-cultural is really hard and important. A big area, of me, I believe, is to grow our own. That we have such wonderful programs that helps students get to college, and then come back and give to the community. And that is growing and changing too, you know, we've really promoted our Hispanic students to go to college. Pacific and PSU have a program we use that helps Hispanic youth get into to college. PCC has some things that they do too. As a school district, helping those students do that so they come back and become teachers here is very helpful and important.

E- In your opinion, how successful has the HSD's ESL and Migrant School programs been?

D- I think they've been top in the state. I think Hillsboro's really known as taking on the growth that we've had, and making a difference with kids. It's really difficult to see, but we will start to see progress in test scores, that's been an issue, and I'm sure your data will show that our Hispanic students don't do as well as everybody else on tests. They're learning the language that makes some sense, but we're starting to make some progress.

E- What do you think could be done to improve them?

D- Well we have to make good continued efforts as I said to get our Hispanic kids going to college, working with parents and families to help them understand how they can help their kids to be successful I school, as well as to have that expectation that they finish school, that they go to school on a regular basis, and that they go to college.

E- How successful are we working with Hispanic parents?

D- Improving. I am comparing it to when we first started trying to get parents here for activities and for meetings. We would have a terrible turn out. And parent/ teacher conferences for example, but that's improved. We make lots of personal phone calls, our staff does, to invite them, bring in speakers, have food, babysitting, and all those things have helped kind of... educate our community with the learning in school. Traditionally, families aren't used to having that kind of involvement at schools. So, teaching them how that is important, and how it makes a difference to their kids, has been a huge part of it.

E-Which schools have had the most progress and success with these programs?

D- In the HSD?

E- Yes.

D- Boy, I am probably not the best person to answer that. District Personal would probably be able to answer that better than I would...

E- How about, in comparison, how does Century, how do they differ in results?

D- Well if we're talking test scores only, I think the programs are similar, results are similar. We have lots of work to do in helping these kids be successful at school. But our number of graduates have increased a lot over the last few years so we are graduating more of our Hispanic students and that's incredible!

E- Speaking of scores, I am going to ask you for some data later but, what is a Hispanic student's average score on a statewide and CIM test?

D- You know what? I don't think I have that data, but I have all of these documents here.

E- Okay I will get those later.

D- Okay let's do that, because, you know, I mean I have a couple things here...

E- That information is pretty vital to our project.

D- Those are math scores from 98'. Let's just look at some examples:

( Displays Math State Wide scores; White vs. Hispanic)

D- The average mathematics score was 232, and the Hispanic at state-wide level was 224, district 233 in an average for all students and for Hispanics was 220. So that was a huge gap, and that's pretty typical of what we see. Frankly, I don't think it has increased a lot, uhm, some since 98'. We're talking six years... it's improved.

D- And here is something, it only takes you from 93-98 but look at the dropout data...

E- I think we have that-

D- Yeah, you might. Look at the percentage of Hispanic dropouts. It's actually, well, it decreased and then it went back up again way higher in the 90's.

E- In regards to the drop out students, I know at Glencoe, after every student drops out, some one tracks them down and contacts them. Do we do that?

D- We do, we have a drop out prevention team, that includes our counselors, VP's, and our registrar. They contact kids when they drop out, and keep them involved and get them involved in other programs if they don't want to come back to Century. It's been fairly successful, our dropout rates decreased a lot, in the last 5 years.

E- How much of a priority is ESL, money wise, due to budget cuts?

D- In part we get some federal funding for our ESL program, so that helps to support some of our program. Which is a really good thing, because it doesn't affect our budget. So we haven't seen any drop in our resources for ESL programs. But let me give you some examples in ways that it does get affected: Let's take the drop out committee: We're down to three counselors for 1500 students this year and two VP's. It would be impossible to do that kind of tracking, like we have done in the past. You know, tracking attendance: attendance tends to be one of the biggest issues for our minority population particularly. Because we don't have the personnel to track them and to chase after those kids, and get them in here, and deal with those attendance issues. Even though our ESL budget isn't affected, it's affected by other things around it. More kids in class. Teachers less time to deal with individuals, when they struggle.

E- And how do you feel that affects our dropout rates/ suspensions/ expulsions?

D- The budget ?

E- Just not having the personnel around?

D- Oh, big time! We'll see, this year is where we have taken the most cuts, but I could just see from this semester, is the first time we had felt the effects of the decrease as much as we have had. You know, you're just buggin' along, having to plan for next year, but trying to deal with all of the discipline issues and attendance issues that come up, plus plan for a new year.

E- Jag Read... are there going to be special plans for the ESL students?

D- We've talked about that, and we haven't actually made a decision as to whether mix the groups. We're going to mix the groups by grade level. And my sense is ... I am not sure if we want to pull and ESL group specially. Although, having that extra reading time for those kids is huge, and a really important thing. So, if we could gather special materials for our ESL kids to pull them separately- even though we might change that after they've been in school a couple of years and they're ready to move out of ESL, it might be great to have them separate.

E- Is there anything that you want to tell me that I haven't asked about yet?

D- The Strategic Plan, that had a big impact I think on the district in the terms of bringing the Hispanic community in to talk with us about what the needs were. I think the office for Hispanic youth for example, came after that. Oh another program that I didn't mention, I think, is important, is a program called "Understanding Racism." We're trying to get as many administrators and teachers involved in this. With the belief that we understand our own racist or racial backgrounds, and our feelings and our attitudes about race, because it's something that is really hard for people to address and talk about. It's a course that really brings up issues for people to address race, in this community it is really important as we've seen some surveys that come out where community members see an influx of Hispanic population is a negative thing for Hillsboro. Where I would argue that if we really understood its influence and understood our race issues that people would be more open

E- How effective do you think this course is ?

D- Well it just started this last spring, is when I took it. Some administrators took it before and now it has expanded to doing a student program as well.

E- Thank you.