



# SUCCESS STORIES

Your students could be speaking Spanish too!

## Florida District Expands Foreign Language Instruction

**P**inellas County is a densely populated county on the west coast of Florida that includes the city of St. Petersburg. The Pinellas County School District has a reputation as a progressive district that serves a total of over 110,000 students in grades PK-12. The district operates 80 elementary schools, 23 middle schools, and 16 high schools as well as special, alternative, and adult education services.

### Track Record with FLES

The Pinellas district began piloting an elementary foreign language instruction model back in 1986. Four schools adopted the pilot FLES model with two, full-time teachers who taught Spanish to all students in grades K to 5. The two FLES teachers had backgrounds in both foreign language and elementary education. Initially, the pilot followed a *single* group (one entire grade level) of children from K through fifth grade in each of the the four schools.

During the mid-period of the FLES pilot, the first study (1989) was launched to track a cohort of students who had been receiving Spanish instruction since kindergarten. The result: students who had studied Spanish scored significantly higher on the CTBS tests of English Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary. These findings helped establish

the credibility of elementary foreign language instruction with district personnel, families and schools.

"Parents want foreign language instruction for their children," states John Meros. "Though limited by budget constraints,

Pinellas County has continued to offer a Spanish FLES program in two magnet schools since 1991. All of the students in these schools receive daily Spanish instruction in grades K-5 from teachers experienced in both foreign language and elementary instruction."

### Florida Stresses Foreign Language

Increasingly, Florida is a state where English and Spanish are heard side by side in social and business contexts. The city of Miami has become a center of international commerce for both Latin America and North America. More and more, the ability to speak Spanish is viewed as an asset in the job market.

The Department of Education in Florida is asking school districts to develop plans, within five years, describing how they could feasibly offer **Foreign Language in Elementary Schools (FLES)** in grades K-5. The Pinellas County School District is developing models to provide this instruction to its students today.

"Where do you find the staff, funds and proper training to expand a Spanish program to over 80 elementary schools?" comments John Meros, a curriculum coordinator at Melrose Elementary in St. Petersburg. "It quickly becomes clear that distance learning and technology will be part of the solution."

Melrose Elementary, a magnet school focused on communication and mass media, has been implementing a technology-assisted FLES program which uses **Español para ti** as the curriculum. Using videoconference capabilities and **Español para ti**, Melrose has partnered with three other Pinellas County elementary schools to offer Spanish in those buildings as well. In addition, two other magnet schools with fully-staffed FLES programs also have videoconferencing capabilities, and are able to support and enrich the technology-assisted programs by sharing class projects, outcomes and performances.



## Expansion of the Scope and Form of FLES

In 1999, Melrose Elementary in St. Petersburg received a Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) grant and was transformed into a communication and mass media magnet school. The strands supporting this magnet curriculum are journalism, instructional technology, global studies, and foreign language. With the new grant, videoconferencing equipment linked Melrose with the two original magnet schools that offered the Spanish FLES programs.

Administrators in Pinellas County's World Languages department had realized that videoconferencing alone would not teach Spanish to the children. A scope and sequence was required to provide a backbone to the instruction. With this insight in mind, Melrose instituted ***Español para ti*** as a backbone scope and sequence, and utilized its two videoconferencing contacts with neighboring magnet schools in order to provide students with live interactivity.

In 2001, the videoconferencing network was widened to three additional elementary schools. ***Español para ti*** is used as the curriculum at Melrose and at the three linked schools that do not have Spanish teachers on staff. The three-year MSAP grant provides a foreign language curriculum coordinator in each school who oversees the

program's implementation, trains staff and students, and continually strives to bolster teacher morale and support for the program.

The technology-assisted programs were implemented in the following manner. Teachers at Melrose and at each of the linked schools partner up. During regular classroom time about three times a week, each teacher uses the videotapes in the ***Español para ti*** program. The videoconference brings the partnered teachers together on another day. On the fifth day, teacher-facilitators are free to use their Spanish time for follow-up activities suggested and provided in the ***Español para ti*** teacher's manual. Importantly, in videoconferencing sessions, the children interact and communicate about the structures and vocabulary they have in common from ***Español para ti***. "The common curriculum is essential to the success we have achieved," states Meros. "The interaction between the students is a big plus."

Meros notes other strengths in the ***Español para ti*** curriculum. "The first is a very sound pedagogy that takes into account the research on foreign language acquisition. The curriculum always spirals back to effectively review prior vocabulary and structures, and then progresses to increasingly broad vocabulary and more difficult structures. In order to learn a language, the children must work down the skills and openly treat certain structures. Simply listening to a

language, and having it 'wash over' the children will not enable learners to achieve enough, particularly in terms of target language production."

"Furthermore, ***Español para ti*** is laudable in its content integration with topics overlapping grade-level appropriate themes and subjects," continues Meros. "This is important to keeping the classroom teacher-facilitator's buy-in since s/he needs to know that the FLES curriculum also serves to help cover grade-level topics in such a crowded curriculum."

"The children are thrilled with their second language skills. We have found automatic and enthusiastic acceptance from them. To them, it's a secret code and a cool thing. The parents too, are just so pleased that their children are learning Spanish."

The model developed at Melrose and its partner schools has attracted attention in Pinellas County. More schools want to offer Spanish using ***Español para ti*** and videoconferencing. With the Florida state mandate of having a foreign language plan within the next five years, Pinellas is on its way to meeting this goal.

For additional information on SRA/McGraw-Hill's ***Español para ti*** program, please contact us toll-free at **1-888-SRA-4543** and visit our Web site at **[www.sra4kids.com](http://www.sra4kids.com)**.