

# South Jackson Elementary School



## *Welcoming Attitudes*

By Mrs. Waters's Third Grade Class  
May 5, 2004



### *Charrettes:*

A charrette is a type of portfolio used to document progress toward meeting a community need. The term charrette was first used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by architect students at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. When a cart, or charrette, was pushed between the drafting tables students tossed their assignments onto the cart whether they were complete or not. Now, charrettes are used to demonstrate democratic learning strategies as a guide for other professionals.

South Jackson Elementary School is a rural school that serves several small communities but does not have one central community. Our school population consists of many low-income families. In fact, 58% of the students qualify to receive free or reduced lunches. Many parents did not graduate from high school and work for minimum wages with limited resources to better their lives.

The majority of the students in the school are white, but the number of Spanish speaking students has grown over the last few years. In fact, the number of students receiving ESOL services has increased from 4 to 27 over the last year alone. Thirty-two students at the school have at least one parent who speaks Spanish as their native language. Of these, there are communication problems in at least twenty of these cases.

A survey, written in Spanish, of the Hispanic community revealed that many of these parents agree that there are communication problems between the school and the home. Only one family responded that there are never any communication problems. This is because the parents in this family speak English fluently. Of the ten other responses, four families admitted to always having communication problems while six families responded that communication is sometimes a problem.

**Problem #1:** Our school community is very transient. Students move in and out of the school frequently. Due to this, there are many students coming into our school with no knowledge of the school atmosphere or rules. They may feel left out or lost in the crowd until they learn more about the school.

**Problem #2:** The lack of communication affects how welcome Spanish-speaking parents and students feel in our school. As a school that strives to make everyone feel welcome and included in school activities, this is one vital group that is being left out.

This project was near and dear to my class because of our diverse make-up for SJES. At the current moment, I have 17 students. Of these, 12 are white, 2 are African-American, 2 are Hispanic, and 1 is Asian-American. Three of my students speak another language in the home. I cannot communicate adequately with two families because their parents do not speak English. The students were eager to participate in the project in order to help students and parents feel more welcome in the school.

**Goal #1:** We wanted to help new students learn about our school in order to make them feel welcome.

**Goal #2:** We wanted to extend the project to help make Spanish-speaking students feel welcome.

**Goal #3:** We wanted to improve communication between the school and Spanish-speaking parents to make them feel welcome and enable them to help their children succeed in school.

# How can we make new students feel welcome in our school?

New students might feel:

afraid	small	mad
scared	left out	nervous
freaks out	shy	embarrassed

We want our new students to feel comfortable in our school. Our class decided to make a new student book that will teach new students about our school so they may be less nervous. We also decided to translate the book into Spanish so new students who speak Spanish will feel welcome even though they may be scared.

- We brainstormed what should be included in our new student books. We decided that we should have: school rules, lunchroom manners, advice, procedures, teacher pictures, map, description of specials, and a description of special activities and days.
- We drew pictures and decided that we would put an eagle on the cover of the book because the eagle is our mascot. We voted that Irvinn would draw the picture because he is a good artist.

- We went to the computer lab and learned how to type in Print Shop. We typed up the information we wanted to share with our new students.
- Some of us learned to take pictures with the digital camera. We took pictures of teachers for the book.
- We will soon finish editing our book. Then we will print it out and put it together.



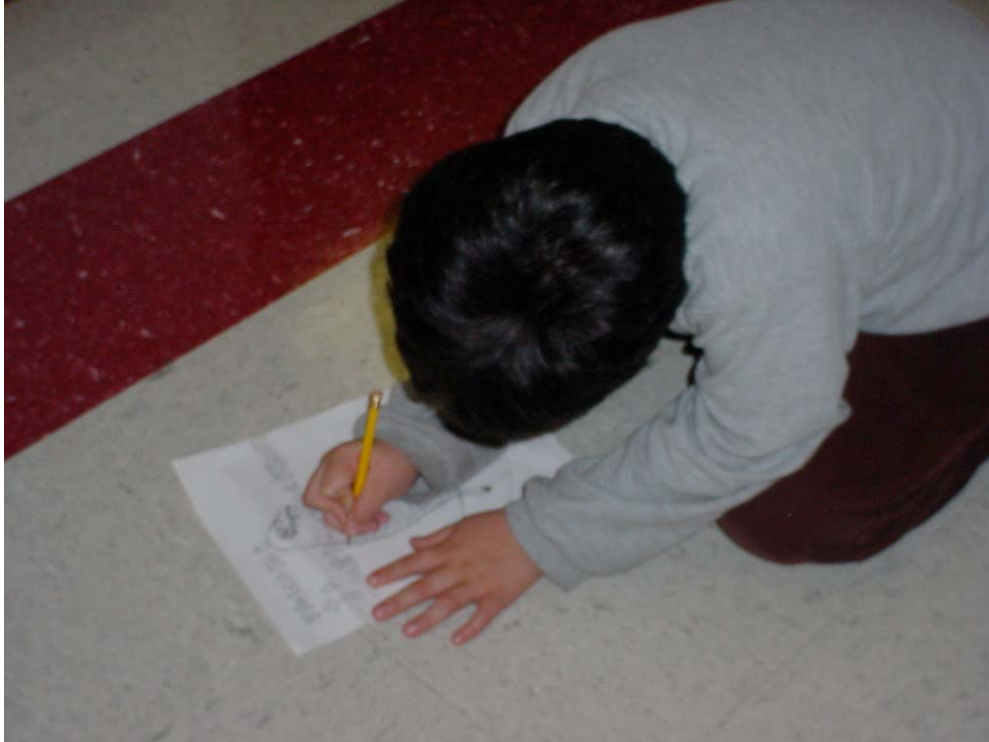
# How can we help Spanish-speaking parents and students feel welcome in our school?

People who speak another language might feel:

fritnd	weard
unknown	freaked out
feared	doen't understand
a little scared	left out
inbarst	strage
lonley	dumb
uncomfortable	feel weard

Mrs. Waters decided to make a book of papers in Spanish for the teachers to use. This will help Spanish-speaking parents understand what is going on at school so they can help their children at home.

- We brainstormed lists of reasons parents need to communicate with teachers and reasons teachers need to communicate with parents.
- Mrs. Waters conducted a survey of teachers and Spanish-speaking parents to decide what kinds of translated papers we needed.
- Mrs. Waters used a website to translate papers into Spanish. Her friend Jennifer McClung checked the papers to be sure they were translated correctly.
- Mrs. Waters put the papers into a notebook at SJES so teachers can use the papers to improve communication.



## What have we learned while working on this project?

- ✓ To not be afraid
- ✓ For teachers to understand different languages
- ✓ To be brave when your a new kid
- ✓ Not to be mean to a new kid
- ✓ To be nice to new students
- ✓ How people fell (feel)
- ✓ Be good to pepol (people)
- ✓ Be respectful
- ✓ To respect our classmates
- ✓ Not to yell at them
- ✓ How to use a digatl camra (digital camera)
- ✓ People don't allows countaye right! (People don't always communicate right!)
- ✓ Make new friends
- ✓ Show them around
- ✓ To write a paragraph about a topic
- ✓ To publish writing in Print Shop
- ✓ To work cooperatively with a partner





### *Successes:*

- ❖ The students were all very excited about the project. We have a very transient school population so most of them had been the new student at one point. They were surprised when they thought about how it must feel to speak another language and not know what is going on. They felt empathy for those students who do not know English. They came up with the idea of the new student handbook on their own. This made the project even more special to them.
- ❖ The students worked hard on the project. They did not complain about writing and asked for very little help.

## *Obstacles:*

- ❖ The biggest challenge was keeping all the students busy. Some groups worked faster than others did. When they finished they wanted another assignment, but I didn't always have another assignment to give. If you are going to work with kids in a situation like this, I would recommend having something they can do while they wait on you.
- ❖ This particular project did not integrate many subjects so I had to be careful not to take time away from class material. The students did write in this project, so most of the work was done during computer lab or writing time.

