

Coral Way Elementary School Bilingual Program
Amy Simpson, March 13, 2008
44 minutes 40 seconds
Interviewed by Richard Ruiz
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Ruiz: This is an interview at Coral Way School, and I'd like to ask you to just say your name into the record right now.

Simpson: Amy Simpson.

Ruiz: It is March 13, 2008, it's about a little after one o'clock in the afternoon, and we're in one of the classrooms at Coral Way. So if you could just tell me, as we start, what your role is here, how long you've been here, and so on, and then we'll ask some more questions.

Simpson: I came here in the fall of 1990. I've been here for approximately seventeen years, and I'm the assistant principal. I came as the only assistant principal in 1990, when we had approximately 900 students. We were pre-K through fifth grade at that time. As we've grown, more assistant principals have come on. We now have five. So I was the initial one, and I've been lucky enough to have the opportunity to stay at Coral Way all these years, which is very unique.

Ruiz: How do the different assistant principals define their specific roles? What's different about the five?

Simpson: The assistant principals are given to the school based on the school's population. Once you have over 1,200 students, about 1,210, you are allocated another assistant principal. So those are the two assistant principals that take care of the running

of the school, the curriculum, the discipline, the day-to-day operations. We have a third assistant principal that oversees the upper academy, since we moved into the K-8 environment, so he oversees sixth through eighth grade. We have a community school, which we began several years ago, so we have one assistant principal that oversees **that** component of the school. And our final one, our kindergarten, was moved off campus—our pre-K and kindergarten—because of space. So they are housed on the campus of Shenandoah Middle School. So we have a fifth assistant principal that oversees that location.

Ruiz: And so how do you see your particular role here at Coral Way?

Simpson: My role at Coral Way has always been curriculum. That is my strength. I work with discipline, I work with the integration of technology into the classroom. I also work with inclusion models for the exceptional student education, because I have a degree in those areas—I have four degrees. So I've worked extensively with the teachers in those components, but my main focus is on integration of thematic instruction, critical thinking skills, innovative strategies into the curriculum, working with the teachers to develop a curriculum that spirals from one grade to the next, that complements languages, because we don't repeat curriculum, we spiral curriculum as we moved from English to Spanish, Spanish to English, and we spiral as we move from one grade to the next, all the way from pre-K through eighth grade.

Ruiz: So one of the things that I've heard, at least, about some of the early model, is that there was quite a bit of repetition between the languages. That is, a lot of the material that would be taught in one language would be repeated in the second language, and so

on. That is something that's been changed, right? That doesn't really happen as much anymore?

Simpson: In 1995, around that time, we began looking at curriculum. Mrs. Vega came in, in 1991, and we started at that time. It was a very traditional approach, both in the English component and the Spanish component. And we began looking at innovative strategies. We brought in the usage of novels in both languages. And at that time, it was very difficult to get materials in the Spanish language. English language, the materials were more available. Spanish, we had to buy a lot of our materials from Spain. We had to wait quite a while to get materials in. Because what we wanted to do with novels is not use translations, we wanted to use original literature. What we started doing at that time is developing themes. We did what's called in this day, curriculum mapping. And we did it back in the nineties. Where we had basically a literary team, which would be volunteers from each grade level for each language, and we sat down at a large table, and we started looking at what each grade would be teaching—not only what the grade would be teaching, but what they would be teaching, what the English component would teach, and what the Spanish component would teach. Because we don't have time to repeat curriculum. There's not enough time in the school day with everything that we need to do. So what we did is we designed a curriculum moving from kindergarten all the way up, that would spiral, would build so that we weren't repeating, say, solar system in second, third, and fourth. You would take a component, and that would be taught in second; you'd build on it in third; you'd build on it in fourth; and we would move back and forth between the languages. So it might be Spanish in second, English in third, Spanish in fourth, we would move back and forth. So we had to take a look at the

curriculum, and we had to take a look at the languages, and what we could get materials in. When I first came here, the teachers were developing a lot of the materials in Spanish, because the materials were not available, except for the very traditional language books, grammar books. When we started looking at thematic instruction, because that is how you can allocate more time to an area, we started looking at the usage of novels, and then pulling the vocabulary from the novels, the grammar from the novels, the science and the social studies complementing. That would be how we could allocate more time, concentrate in more areas, and be able to build curriculum, so that we could spiral.

Ruiz: What kind of professional development for the teachers is needed for that kind of....

Simpson: There was so much professional development at this school that you thought you were in college. We taught them, first off, how you do curriculum mapping. We integrated core knowledge curriculum. We trained in vocabulary development. That was a very weak area. It has traditionally been a weak area for our school. It's very difficult, going either way, whether you're going from English to Spanish, Spanish to English, using context clues. We also worked on innovative techniques in math. We integrated calculators into the program. We integrated mental math into to the program. In the areas of science and social studies, we had to do a lot of training, because at the elementary level most teachers don't feel comfortable teaching hands-on science. So if you're doing integration with novels, and you are doing labs tied into your theme, you have to feel comfortable. We also did a lot of training on critical thinking skills. We brought in CRIS [phonetic] strategies, reciprocal teaching techniques, which that was an interesting step, because that is where the teachers take a step back, and they have

students start teaching in the classroom. They empower the students to take the role of the teacher in the classroom, while they're focusing on critical thinking skills. So teachers that left Coral Way and maybe moved on to other either jobs or other schools, would call us and thank us because they were so well prepared when they left here, to take on any task. Because basically we were moving away from the very traditional approach to an innovative approach, and that you need to feel comfortable with.

Ruiz: What about the knowledge base of the teachers in something like second language acquisition or bilingualism and things of that sort?

Simpson: We did training. We did a lot of training on second language—again, going in both directions, because in our population you have children that are learning English, and you have children that are learning Spanish, and you have children that come in speaking a dialect of Chinese, and they're learning both at the same time. We had children from Bulgaria that were learning both English and Spanish at the same time. Our traditional approach has been an inclusion approach at kinder and first grade. That means we don't pull the children out, because we feel the best way to learn a language is to live the language. Like, you go to a country, you live there, you're going to acquire your language at a much more rapid pace than not living there. So our kinder and first has always been in the classroom, and that's where we had to train our teachers extensively on second language strategies. In second on up, for children that were just coming into the school, we would have a teacher that would pull those students until she felt that they were ready to go back into the classroom. And again, the teachers, that was only for the language arts component, so again, for the content area, the teachers needed to be proficient in second language strategies. So we had it going both ways. And on top

of that, we're focusing on critical thinking skills, because we feel that high expectations is the way to go. If you feel that your students can reach the stars, they'll reach the stars. If you feel they can't, they won't. So we have always pushed our students, whether it's a language issue, or a learning issue, we have always pushed our students, and we've used a multitude of strategies. We use a lot of hands-on instruction, and a lot of multi-sensory instruction in the classroom, so that students can understand through whatever their strength in learning is.

Ruiz: Do you use consultants, researchers, or anybody from outside of Coral Way?

Simpson: We use experts from outside, and we use experts from inside, because we have a lot of teachers here that were college professors in their own country, so they came in and they trained staff. I have my specialist's degree in technology, I trained staff in technology. I brought in consultants from outside when we were introducing new kinds of technology in the classroom, because sometimes teachers feel more comfortable, rather than an administrator teaching them something, an outside consultant. What I found works the best is when you bring someone in, whether it's from inside or an expert from outside, that there's the original initial training, and then you bring that person back to go into the classrooms and to work with the teachers on a one-on-one, on an ongoing process. Because otherwise, you might train, when people leave their environment, if they don't feel comfortable doing it, it's going to stop there. But if you continue to provide that support.... So what we would do is we would train, then we would have that person—let's say for our core strategies—we would cover our teachers and they would come in and see the person in the classroom, demonstrating how the strategies were done. That would be Session 2. Session 3 is when the person would come back, the teachers

are implementing the strategies in the classroom, and that person then goes from classroom to classroom to classroom to answer whatever questions or provide support, however that person needed it. And we would do that through the year. So that's how we actually build the strengths and have teachers become more comfortable implementing the strategies.

Ruiz: Sometimes it's also important to have particular kinds of capabilities in teachers when they get here. And I guess I'm interested in the way in which Coral Way looks at potential hires—that is, teachers who you're looking at hiring, what their capabilities should be, what their characteristics might be, and so on.

Simpson: We're very lucky that we work with the universities, and work with **all** the universities, to bring interns into the school. So we train possible teachers for this school.

Ruiz: Student teachers?

Simpson: Student teachers, right. And then we have the opportunity to pick from the best. That's the **first** thing we do. And we work with **all** the local universities. We also work with the universities for field experience. So it's not just the teacher's last year, it's from their very first year. And when they come in the classroom, they tell me they're here to observe, and I tell them, "Nobody comes to Coral Way to observe. Everybody comes to Coral Way to **work**. So you can observe your first session, but from there you're going to start learning from the teachers how to teach. The third thing that we do is we hire back a lot of our own students. Students at Coral Way are very special, they understand our mission, they understand our vision, and they are very committed to our program. We have about ten teachers here that were Coral Way students. And they had the choice of any school to apply to. Some of them waited, took temporary jobs, so they

could get back to Coral Way, because this school—I don't know if you felt it when you came in here, but it's more than just a school, it's a family. So when you come in, there's a spiritual feeling here, and it's a sense of unity. Most of the teachers here have their children here. I have my son here. He was here in pre-K. He was a language delay child, so at the age of three he had **no** language. The doctors and the speech therapist told me, "He cannot learn Spanish. You have to take him out, he can only learn one language." I took him out, I put him in a half-day speech and language program until he started getting one language. Then he stayed in another school in a V.E. [phonetic] program—he' ADHD. I brought him back here in second grade. When his English was strong enough that I felt he could handle a second language—still with the therapist telling me, "Don't start him on a second language." Well now he speaks English, he speaks Spanish—and it's with a lot of support, but he is speaking on his own. The other day he was playing tennis, and somebody walked up and asked him where he was from. He spoke fluently in Spanish and told them that he was from Cuba—he's not from Cuba—and so they started talking to his coach, and his coach told him, "No, he's not from Cuba." He speaks English, and he's learning to speak Spanish. And he's learning Hebrew. So for the child that they said, "Only one language," now he has **three** languages because the feeling here is the more languages, the better, and you **never give up**. You keep trying strategy after strategy, and every teacher that has had him, he's not easy, but they have still looked for a way. He's a child that needed visual with the auditory, and that's the strategy that they use. So that's what we do, we look for the strategies that are going to help a child become successful, and we embed those strategies into the curriculum.

Ruiz: One of the things that **may** be different now—you can tell me if it is—between the early program and now, is that when children would come into the program, they would be classified as one thing or another: English speakers would be put in the English group; or the Spanish group.

Simpson: We don't do that anymore.

Ruiz: I've asked quite a number of people on what basis they did that, and I've gotten lots of different answers. So that's not really what happens anymore, is that right?

Simpson: No. That may have been many, many, many years ago ...

Ruiz: Initially.

Simpson: ... when the program was initially started, because they had a different population at that time, because they had a huge—this was traditionally a Jewish neighborhood. I lived right on the border, so my cousins came to this school. And it was pretty much a monolingual Jewish community—Jewish and Greek. However, you had the influx of the children coming in from Cuba. So then you had two populations, really, that could not communicate with one another, and that is how the philosophy came up, of the dual language setting, to be able to open up the doors so that children could communicate with one another, and teachers could provide instruction in both languages. Today the population of the community is very different. When I first began here, we had, I would say, out of eight kinder classes, five of them were children that were just learning English. I don't have that anymore. **Maybe** I have almost two classes—almost. And I can only start with the very low populations, and as the year progresses—like this is the time of the year we receive a lot of children from Argentina, from Venezuela. So the population has changed. Also you have many more preschools now where children

begin school at an earlier age. When I first began here, children were not going to preschool. They were entering school in kindergarten, so again it was a different level of experience.

Our philosophy is also very different here in that children are learning from one another. And the strategies that we're implementing are being embedded into the curriculum. So you're not doing certain strategies for one child, and certain strategies for another. We're embedding **all** of the strategies into the curriculum, because in one classroom, you could have a child learning English, you could have a child learning Spanish, you could have a child that has a learning disability, you have a child that has a receptive language disability. So you have many strategies that need to be utilized for comprehension. So the only thing that we do at this time is when we look at our kindergarten, because by law, any child that's learning English, that is an ESL Level 1 or Level 2, those we group together, because that is something that we must do by law. That is federal law, that you have a self-contained program for those students. And we, again, use a lot of second language strategies. But what we're teaching them is no different than what we're teaching in our regular kindergarten class. We're just using more visuals, more strategies, more repetition, for there to be comprehension. And the students move very, very quickly as they acquire a second language.

Ruiz: So are there classrooms where there is an English-speaking teacher and a Spanish-speaking teacher? Or does every teacher teach in both languages? How is that arranged?

Simpson: Every student has two teachers. Every student has two classes. So if a child begins with their English-component teacher, that homeroom is being taught by the English-component teacher. Language arts, which is approximately two hours a day, and

content—that's either science or social studies—will be taught by that English component teacher. Midday.... And by the way, the partner has his or her own homeroom. That is the Spanish component. So that group has an hour of Spanish language arts, forty-five minutes of Spanish content, either science or social studies. When English is doing science, Spanish is doing social studies. And forty-five minutes to an hour of math. The math is one-third Spanish, two-thirds English. So it's forty-five minutes, it's fifteen minutes Spanish, thirty minutes English. And they don't go back and forth, it's not Spanglish. So the teacher might introduce a concept and teach vocabulary in English, and then reinforce it in Spanish, or maybe do word problems in Spanish, and then go into a concept in English.

Midday, the students, the homerooms switch, and then the teachers repeat what they did in the morning with their second classroom. Was it that way when you were here? (no audible response) Yes.

Ruiz: By the way, is that curriculum model graphically represented somewhere, so that maybe we can take a look at it?

Simpson: They have a brochure that they can give you.

Ruiz: That would be great, we'd like that. One of the things that we also know about the early program, is that because there were hardly any materials, that a lot of that material was translated. They had their English text, and they translated into Spanish. I can't imagine that happens anymore—or at least most of the curriculum materials are ...

Simpson: ... in the language, yes. When I first came here, the teachers had a lot of materials that they had written themselves. Mrs. Vega and myself, our goal was to get materials in their hands, because we didn't want them spending so much time **designing**

curriculum, we wanted them spending time **teaching** curriculum. So that's where we put most of our energy. We started purchasing Big Books in Spanish, to get them into the kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. Poetry, original poetry in Spanish. So we started emphasizing the Spanish component heavily, and the English component, what we started doing is moving away from just the traditional text, to again, a more thematic approach. So what would happen in kinder and first grade is they would be doing the same theme, but expanding. Certain activities would be done in the English component, and other activities would be done in the Spanish component. Example: if they were studying plants, the vocabulary needed to be reinforced in both languages. But they're not going to do the same activity. So they might be growing seeds, growing plants from seeds in one language; and they might be experimenting in the other language on the type of water they use—whether it's clean water, polluted water. And that's where the planning came in. The essence of the difference between what occurred when the program began—I think they were writing the program from moment to moment—to where we are now is that we have extensive planning now. And the planning is done throughout the entire school, because each grade gets together every year, they look at what the curriculum map is at the end of the year, and they modify it for the following year. Each grade has representatives. We have a literacy team, and they get together and they look at what the whole plan is for the school, so that we continue spiraling. We see where our students' needs are at the end of the year, and we might make some modifications to the curriculum. And then we look at the novels that we want to use. Like right now we're implementing novels in second grade because we started that last year, because I realized—we realized, the teachers—that when our students went into

third grade, they didn't know how to use novels. We use novels very differently. We use them as consumables. So they are writing in their novels. They're underlining, they're looking for adjectives. They're looking for major concepts. We write our tests so that they go back into the novels, and they find answers. They're underlining. So we're using a lot of reading comprehension strategies. So again, you don't do that with more of the traditional approach. That's much more an innovative approach.

Also what we do is we team the grades together. So first grade will meet [with] second grade at the end of the year, to articulate. Second grade will tell first grade, "The students need to work on these skills. They were weak in these skills when they came to us." So then first grade knows what they need to modify in their curriculum. So we do that articulation with every team. First grade talks to kinder. I think what's important is professional discussions, and that's what goes on here. You'll see teachers in the hallway talking all the time. They meet at grade levels twice a week. Once the entire grade level meets the second time, they meet by languages. So when they meet together, they're planning out the week for the following week. Then they meet as languages to get into the fine tuning of how they're going to develop the lesson plans, because we have to complement. That's probably the hardest aspect of any teacher walking into this school, that has been from a traditional school where they go into their classroom, they sit in their classroom and they do their own thing. You cannot do your own thing here: you're part of a team, and if you walk into a classroom at a specific grade, everybody is going to be working on the same theme and on the same skills. They may implement them differently, because we're all very different, we all have different strengths. However,

they're going to be working very cohesively, and there's a lot of brainstorming that goes on at the grade-level meetings.

We attend the grade-level meetings, both myself and Miss Vasquez, so that we know what's going on. We provide support, we provide materials. We're always open to communication. Teachers will see us at any time and tell us there's an area of need. So then we'll start looking for materials to fill that area need. They'll tell us something worked, so we know "keep it, expand on it." Last year we implemented a change in our writing program, we trained our fourth-grade teachers, we went outside the school, trained them. They came back and they went into the classrooms of all the other teachers in the school, from first grade on up to seventh grade, and they trained the teachers while they were doing demonstration lessons in the classroom. When I talk about an open environment, you have to have that in order to feel comfortable to step back, let someone else come in my classroom, and then I'm going to implement what they're doing. But if you look at this school, like I said, it's more like a teaching college. And I think people come here, open to that realm, that they want to get involved in what is happening here. So that's the difference between the Coral Way of today, and the Coral Way of the past, because I think there you had a group of teachers that were just.... They were implementing a new program, they had **no** materials to implement this program, so they were designing as they were going, and they were trying to go day by day by day, not having long-term goals. Whereas here, we have our long-term goals, we have our short-term goals, and we have all the mapping from one grade to the next to help us get there. So we have the luxury of the planning. They were the pioneers. So they were out there, westward expansion, moving day by day.

Ruiz: My sense is that another aspect that's very different is the role of technology. This is your area, obviously. I imagine—yeah, I was looking at that—I imagine that not just since 1963, but even in the time that you've been here, the technology has changed quite a lot.

Simpson: Oh! my goodness!

Ruiz: What is the role of technology in the program, and again, how do the teachers get that professional development, to be able to use it?

Simpson: Training, training, training. When we first started, we had Apple computers here. It was a Title I school, so we had a lab—that's all we had, the Apple computers with the little TV monitors on top. We have since moved into—well, technology has moved, has flown, to the point where our students, as part of their lab, they don't do just the drill and practice of the FCAT Explorer and River Deep, all of our students know how to do PowerPoint presentations. Middle school, that's part of their projects. My son has a project due, they have to teach a lesson plan on a chapter in the book, and he and his buddy got together and they did a PowerPoint presentation on viewing cells, live cells. Now, how can you do that with just a book? You can't. You have to use the Internet, you have to pull from sites, bring it in. So what has technology done? It's opened up the door. It's opened up the door to bring what is in the world out there, to the fingertips of our students. We want our students to get involved with NASA. We want our students to get involved with scientists that are in Europe. The only way we can do that is through technology. So technology for our students has become a very comfortable realm. For our teachers, many of them are comfortable. Some of them are still in the learning phase, because we get new teachers every year, and we have to train

them. The best thing that has happened to our teachers is that now they have to do their attendance online. They don't send a little card anymore to the office, like when you were here. They have to do their grade book online. I implemented that one. That was a **real** eye-opener. And you have to keep up. So what's great now is that parents can go online and access their children's grades. They know every day, they're not calling us to find out how their students are doing—they go online and they find out. So I think technology not only has opened up the world to the classroom environment, but it has opened up communication. Because if you have a question about your child that's in my class, all you have to do is e-mail me, and I'm going to e-mail you back. So there's total communication. It's created, I think, a level of comfort, and also it's let teachers stand back again, because I think our students sometimes are more tech-knowledgeable than some of our staff, and they again, take a role as an educator in the classroom—which is what our purpose is. We're training our children to become the citizens that are going to be running our country in the future, so they need leadership, they need communication, they need critical thinking skills. And by us stepping back and being a guide and a support, we're giving them the opportunity to do that. That's the other purpose of Coral Way, is to prepare our students for their future when they leave here, that they can walk out of our environment, and walk into the world, and be successful in the world—whatever the language is. And my son will tell you, the more languages, the more jobs. That's the bottom line. Because otherwise, you keep yourself in a box. The more you know—and to me, technology is another language.

Ruiz: And instructional delivery is also—smart boards and all that kind of thing is also something that people are....

Simpson: Very, very important. We have had to write grants to get smart boards.

Ruiz: They're expensive.

Simpson: They're very expensive. We've written many technology grants. We're very excited, when they build the next two buildings that they're building on our site, they're going to be building them **with** a projector built into the ceiling, and smart boards on the walls. So little by little, we keep moving in the right direction. We have teachers that all their notes are on PowerPoint, which is wonderful, because when a student is absent, [the teacher] e-mails the student the materials that were presented during the day. But that level of comfort—when we first began, technology was all drill and practice. And now technology is looked at a different way. It is a research tool. We look for innovative techniques and innovative tools to increase communication within the classroom environment.

Ruiz: Will this eventually be a WiFi environment, totally WiFi?

Simpson: Well, it is.

Ruiz: It is?! Oh! The school is?

Simpson: Yes.

Ruiz: I didn't know that. Good, I'm glad.

Simpson: Oh yes. We were one of the first schools to do that. We did it with a grant that we wrote. And then as the district moved into it, we were also the first elementary school to implement the grade book on line. We take chances here. I think we're risk-takers, which Coral Way has always been, because to begin the dual language program, they had to be a risk-taker.

Ruiz: Incredibly, our time is almost up, but let me ask you a question as a parent—that is, **you** as a parent—since you have a son here: Has the kind of interactions you have at home, whether it has to do with two languages, or the kinds of things you talk about, whatever, have those things changed over time as your son has been in the program? Do you sense any kind of change in the way in which you and your family interact?

Simpson: Well, he feels more comfortable at home now, and in the community, speaking Spanish, which he never did before. For me it's great, because when we go to a restaurant, he orders for me. When I have a problem situation, he handles it for me, because I know Spanish, but my grammar is horrible. I studied Spanish in school, but I studied conversational Spanish. So like I said, if you don't use it, you lose it. What I've seen different in Colin—and Colin is now in seventh grade—so we're at the end of seventh grade—versus when he was here at three, and when he came back in second grade—is his level of independence. Which for me has always been the main issue for him—his ability to socialize and his level of independence. I am extremely happy with our upper academy. Whatever the course is—and he has phenomenal teachers across the board—in the Spanish component they tie-in the language with the concepts that they're teaching, so it's very concrete, which is what he needs. So he's feeling successful because he's making connections. In the English component, they're working on real-world problems—which again, it's more than your traditional approach of opening your book and reading the chapters and taking tests. His last assignment was—again, they worked in a cooperative group that he was going to be running for president. One person had to write the speech, and the other person had to do a PowerPoint presentation on him, and he had to do his own poster, because there weren't enough students in the group.

Again, what are we doing? We're teaching students how to be leaders, how to communicate. Because you can't write the speech, and you can't do a PowerPoint presentation unless you **interview** your candidate. So through a concrete fashion we're teaching students steps to be successful in the real world. And those are the conversations that we have more of—about taking on responsibility. And that's what I see at our school, whether it's being done in English or in Spanish, it's being done in both languages. It's moving beyond what the norm is, to be above the norm. That when you come to Coral Way, you are a very special person, and that you have a purpose in this world. And when you leave here, you need to make a difference.

Ruiz: One last question—or last **kind** of question, I guess, both in terms of your role as a parent, and administrator here—I guess I'm interested in the role that the community plays in the school, and whether that has changed over time, in your time here.

Simpson: It has, actually. When I first began, the PTA was a very small entity. We would have parent workshops and very few people would attend. We began having workshops at McDonald's, going out in the community. We'd bring a [dentist? Min. 40:05] in to talk about important issues. We would bring people in the fields that the community was interested in, to our school, to get parents involved. And we did a lot of workshops on strategies for critical thinking that you can implement at home: how you can help your child with homework, etc. The community has changed dramatically. We have a very involved community now. We have parents that are always here at the school, that volunteer their time, that are important members of our ESAC [phonetic], that are involved in the decision-making powers of the school. And they'll give us suggestions and make a difference in the school. So I've seen that change, because

before you had parents that said, “You know how to run the school, you run the school.” Now it’s become more of a hand-in-hand, “let’s do this together,” which is great.

Many of the teachers here live in the community, which I think is wonderful, because then there is a unity. We had a Nike marathon, where our students and our parents, we wanted them involved. They were going to run a 5K, and we would get funds for our track team, based on the amount of people. We were the fourth-highest school. We had 137 parents and students run on a Sunday morning, a 5K. Parents, students, teachers, administrators. So we moved from not very much involvement, to quite a bit of involvement. I think many years ago it would have been hard to get people out on a beautiful Sunday morning to run a 5K. And that’s the difference here.

We have a huge band program, which we just implemented several years ago when we opened up the upper academy. And we have a lot of parents that are now involved in that, because we can only get so many instruments from the school system, so what we’ve been doing is raising funds and buying our instruments off e-Bay, because we needed to open two more bands, because we have so many students interested.

So when you have an activity that pulls people in, parents are involved. They want to be involved because their kids are involved. So I think that’s the difference, that we now have different areas that the community is interested in. So the more areas that you have.... We have a chess program for students and their parents. One thing that we haven’t started yet, but that we want to do, is a scrapbooking class for parents and their students to come together, to scrapbook together. So we keep looking for new ways to bring the community in, because the school is not an entity by itself. The school is the heart of the community. It’s open from 6:30 in the morning until 10:00 at night. We

have English classes going on, we have karate classes going on, we have soccer on the back field. And a lot of the families **do things together**. A lot of the children go over to Shenandoah Park and to Byron Park, and they play tennis together. We have an event that we just posted, University of Miami is having a Youth Day, and we're going to try to pull as many of our students over. We have our track team going. Our band played in front of the Publics off Rickle [phonetic] during the holidays. So what we try to do is bring the community into our school, but also take our students **out** to the community. Because again, we tell them that they are important members of our community. Not only do you receive, but you need to give back. And so that's something that's very, very important in the mission of the school.

Ruiz: That's great. Unfortunately, our time is up, and we have a lot more to talk about, but maybe we can have that conversation some other time. Thank you very much.

Simpson: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]