

Cultures, curriculum blend at Rosemount Center offers bilingual education to children from low-income families

By Meg Bryant

On a recent day at the Rosemount Center in Northwest Washington, D.C., five preschoolers chatter animatedly as lunch is served. A teacher interrupts the 4-year-olds in Spanish to impart some basics on good table manners as she places plates of chickpeas, rice and steamed squash before each youngster. The children listen, respond, then quickly resume their conversation in English. Nearby, an English-speaking teacher observes the scene.

Moving easily from English to Spanish and back again is nothing unusual at the Rosemount Center, a 32-year-old child development center located in the District's Mount Pleasant neighborhood. Bilingual education begins with infants and toddlers and continues through the preschool years. What makes the program unique is the population it serves: 90 percent of enrollee families are at or below the federal poverty line and 77 percent are immigrants. Entering the center, one is

immediately struck by the colorful displays of children's artwork just inside the front doors. An archway overlooking the reception area proudly proclaims "The Rosemount Center" in bright pink and blue letters, while an array of book covers grace the lobby's walls. The lobby also serves as the school's lending library, evident in the crowded bookrack that stands just to the right of the reception desk. On it are reading materials of all sorts, a ready testament to Rosemount's strong emphasis on literacy.

Moving through the halls of the center, one sees lively name plaques adorning the classroom doors - penguins, chickadees, and bumblebees, to name a few - and notices that each room has clearly designated areas for manipulative skills, dramatic play and reading. All in English and Spanish.

Housed in a large mission-style building atop a hill overlooking Rock Creek Park and the National Zoo, Rosemount serves about 130 center-based children and another 160 at home. The center-based pro-

gram focuses on early childhood skills, using a 50-50 bilingual curriculum, and serves a number of youngsters with special needs, social or emotional problems and developmental delays. Families with more serious social service needs are enrolled in the home-based program, which employs the same curriculum, but allows staff members to also work with parents "to teach them how to be better parents and how to teach their children," explained Dr. Marsha Boveja, programs director.

Parents in both programs receive information about dental hygiene, immunizations, physical exams and health insurance, and are encouraged to participate in monthly parent-staff meetings where they are included in management decisions affecting the center. In addition to preschool teachers and teach-

ing assistants, the school has an assessments coordinator, bilingual speech therapist, social workers and a doctor on staff. Because a majority of the children come from homes where parents are struggling to make ends meet-Federal guidelines put the poverty level at \$15,500 for a family of three.

Rosemount provides each child with breakfast, lunch and an afternoon snack. All meals are prepared at the center, and teachers eat with the children to instill an appreciation of family-style dining.

Among the other services in Rosemount's program are vision, hearing, and lead screenings, mental health services and bilingual speech therapy.

The children also benefit from partnerships with other schools, including Beauvoir, Sidwell Friends and the Potomac

School, that bring visiting Rosemount's classrooms to read and interact with them. In addition, Beauvoir provides several scholarships each summer to Rosemount teachers interested in attending one of its various training workshops.

Diversity is a hallmark of Rosemount, where a listing of nationalities reads like a mini-United Nations: El Salvador, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Peru, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Vietnam, China, India and Pakistan. Roughly two-thirds of enrollees are Latino and 22 percent are African-American.

Boveja said the emphasis is on acculturation in a community where Latinos now are the sec-

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mainly Spanish-speaking, with some play and reading. All in English and Spanish. Housed in a large mission-style building atop a hill overlooking Rock Creek Park and the National Zoo, Rosemount serves about 130 center-based children and another 160 at home. The center-based pro-

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The Rosemount Center in Northwest Washington, D.C., offers a bilingual education to 130 children at the center and a further 160 in home-based programs.

Photo by Wang Bryant