

January 13, 2010

Olá, Families of Dove Creek High School Spanish students! Feliz Año Nuevo. (Happy New Year.)

As we enter our second semester at DCHS, I thought I would do what I should have done last semester – contact you!

We have started a highly innovative program in Dove Creek, which is designed to open many doors for students in Dove Creek and all over the world. Your young adult is part of that initiative.

Students who live in isolated or rural areas of the world often do not have access to expert instruction in many fields. They cannot draw from a variety of teachers in their environment as easily as schools in large urban areas can. Offering schools the option of delivering classes through distance education provides students the opportunity to access the best instruction in all educational fields, delivered right at their door.

Distance education can be offered in many ways: video conferencing, web conferencing, online systems, phone conferencing, or a combination of those. That combination is called hybrid instruction, where students learn using a combination of those tools. Our Spanish classes use video conferencing and online instruction (web sites, blogging, email), with an occasional visit by me to the classroom.

Learning without daily face-to-face contact with the instructor requires a lot of adaptation. Students are forced to become much more independent in their learning. They are forced to manage their time more effectively. They are forced to become much more responsible for their outcomes, often using online resources to find the answers they need. They are forced to initiate communication with the instructor if they need assistance. In other words, they are forced to learn in different ways than they are used to learning. Face to face instruction still offers huge advantages. However, when that is not available, distance learning can offer very creative and valuable alternatives.

The pay-off for students who can adapt is that they become ideally prepared to become lifelong learners in a constantly changing world. In other words, they become independent learners who can acquire knowledge wherever they are in ways that best suit them. The pay-off for school districts is that they

can offer the best instruction in different fields when local teachers are not available.

My hope is that our Spanish students will lead the way in creating best practices for offering foreign language courses at a distance. If we become successful, and I definitely think we will be, our model can be replicated by schools all over the United States and the world. There is no reason, for example, that our classes at Dove Creek could not be shared with students in the Pacific islands or in isolated villages in Alaska. Think of how such classes would expand our horizons! I happen to live in Pleasant View, but I teach online classes to people all over the world who really appreciate the option of learning without having to travel to urban areas to get instruction.

What we are doing has not been tried before in this region. I have been designing the curriculum every step of the way, watching to see how students respond to different assignments, how they conduct themselves in the lab, and how they communicate with each other and with me online and through email. We are learning together and adapting instruction as we go along. I am as much a student in this process as an instructor, alert to what your young adult is telling me. I am loving every step of the way and want to thank you for the support you've provided to date. I have found our students to be willing and open to the changes they have encountered. They are learning, and they are getting better and better at it!

Please feel free to contact me anytime with ideas or concerns. I am definitely listening!

Gratefully and sincerely,

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