



Heritage Voices: Programs



Claremont Elementary
4700 South Chesterfield Road
Arlington, VA 22206

Escuela Bolivia is a Saturday heritage language program with the goal of developing the Spanish and English language skills of both heritage Spanish speakers and nonnative speakers of Spanish, from PreK-12th grade and adults. Escuela Bolivia was established as a community heritage language program in 1998, when a group of Bolivian parents met with the Superintendent of Arlington Public Schools to meet the needs of Arlington's growing Latino population (primarily Bolivian students) and to address the achievement gap between Latinos and other students. Parents also felt that their children needed a boost and a stronger connection to their traditions and family values. Escuela Bolivia was also established so that students can be taught the language, culture and traditions of their parents and grandparents, and to provide a caring community that acknowledges and respects their cultural values and fosters initiative and leadership. Escuela Bolivia's mission is to provide and strengthen linguistic and cultural values and improve the academic achievement of its students (children, youth and adults), so that they may gain better opportunities to improve their lives and their communities.

Three aspects of Escuela Bolivia make it unique:

1. community building through involvement of the family
2. partnership with the school district
3. youth leadership development.

"What is really great about our program is that we involve the entire family in our programs," said Natasha Quiroga, Executive Director of Escuela Bolivia. "We bring the community together, and we improve cultural relations," continued Quiroga. "Thanks to the partnership we have with the school district, we have a central office and access to a school on the weekends, where we offer our program. We also work with teachers from other countries who want to get their teaching credentials. Escuela Bolivia responds to the needs of our youth and the needs of the families we work with by offering a youth development program and parent leadership and advocacy training."

Community Building

Escuela Bolivia seeks to promote and strengthen family involvement through community building. As Ms. Quiroga describes, “we achieve these goals through providing Latino families with a supportive environment, such as Latino Parent Training.” Escuela Bolivia offers training sessions that replicate two nationally recognized parent education programs, imparting skills and actions to improve children’s academic achievement. Training programs also seek to improve family communication skills and ensure that families have an understanding of public school requirements and advocacy strategies. Furthermore, parents are welcome into the Saturday school to learn English, Spanish, and computer literacy.

Partnerships

Partnerships help Escuela Bolivia carry out much of its work. For example, a partnership with Arlington Public Schools provides access to 13 classrooms every Saturday and an office during the week. This ensures that the Saturday School Enrichment Program can take place, since Escuela Bolivia does not have its own building. Escuela Bolivia also partners with other organizations, such as the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages <www.cal.org/heritage>, the Arlington Housing Corporation, and churches in Washington, DC, and Arlington, Virginia, where the Emerging Leaders Program takes place on Wednesdays and Saturdays during the summer.

Youth Leadership Development

Youth leadership training is offered through programs such as the Emerging Leaders Program. In this program, high school students are paired with young professional Latino mentors, and together they work on improving their oral and written communication skills. They also learn self-awareness and identify the pre-requisites for college preparation. In this leadership training, students also voice their expectations and take active steps to improve their lives.

Conclusion

While this spotlight focuses on the three areas described above, Escuela Bolivia offers a wealth of resources for students of all levels and ages, and teaching experience for international teachers. For example, international teachers are given the opportunity to gain quality teaching experience as they help students gain entry into colleges and increase their reading and oral performance in Spanish and English. At the same time, youth and adults achieve academic success and become role models in the community. Noteworthy achievements by graduates of the program make Escuela Bolivia a model community program. As a result, an Arlington-based Mongolian heritage program has modeled its programs after Escuela Bolivia.

To learn more about Escuela Bolivia, [read the program profile.](http://www.cal.org/heritage/profiles/programs/Escuela_Bolivia.html)
<http://www.cal.org/heritage/profiles/programs/Escuela_Bolivia.html>



visit us online at www.cal.org/heritage

The Heritage Voices Program Profile on Escuela Bolivia was prepared by Jacqueline López, Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages, Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Washington DC.