

## **LOW-INCOME PARENTS GET PC SKILLS WIRED.(News)**

From: Daily News (Los Angeles, CA) Date: June 10, 1998

**Daily News** Byline: Yvette Cabrera Daily News Staff Writer

At San Fernando Middle School, the students in Marco Torres' computer class show up an hour early, wouldn't dare miss class and are clamoring to brave the heat to take his summer course.

These aren't your average students. They are parents taking advantage of a bilingual computer course that today will graduate the first group of 40 parents from that school.

Geared toward low-income families with little or no computer knowledge, the course was created two years ago to give parents the tools to help their children learn. So far, 300 parents at other schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District's San Fernando cluster have graduated from the program.

This spring, the course was offered for the first time to parents at San Fernando Middle school.

"I think that parents are realizing the importance of technology and they want to make sure that their kids have more options," said Torres, an education technology consultant who teaches the weekly course with seventh- and eighth-grade teacher Juan Aguilera.

It's a course tailored to the community's needs, said Torres. When it came to organizing her daughter's elaborate debutante party, one parent used the course to organize her budget and design the invitations.

Others learned how to use the computer to find a used car, search for an apartment, find scholarships for their children, locate online translators and pay bills.

With commercial computer courses running from \$300 to \$900 per person, parents are quick to realize what a bargain the free course is, said Torres. The course is paid for by Title I money, federal funding that aims to improve reading, math and parent involvement at schools with high numbers of low-income families.

Eventually the school hopes to buy laptop computers to lend to parents, said Salvador Aragon, Title I coordinator for the San Fernando cluster.

"In our community, not everybody has access to computers, not like other areas where it's normal to have a computer," said Aragon. "For a lot parents, it's the first time they're actually learning to deal with a computer."

The enthusiasm is apparent once the parents pick up the skills, said Aguilera. In a prior course, a pair of parents joined together and bought one computer to be shared between two families.

"I thought this was astonishing that they were to take the computer back and forth from one house to another," said Aguilera, whose courses are generally packed.

“We have a room full of people really wanting to learn and helping out each other as well,” said Aguilera.

People come from all around “because they like the pace, they like the way we work,” said Torres, a teacher at San Fernando High School.

Though other schools may offer computer classes with the help of translators, Torres believes his is the only one taught bilingually by the teachers.

Roberto Rincon of San Fernando had never touched a computer keyboard in his life, but he knew computers would be the key to his children's future. That's why he signed up when his daughter's school began offering the classes.

“I've always thought learning how to use a computer was necessary, but I never had the opportunity to use them,” Rincon, a tire-shop driver, said in Spanish.

Now, Rincon knows the basics of how to use a computer and hopes someday to buy one for his children.

“I know it helps me as much as it helps them,” said Rincon. “And now I know that in the future that I can help my children.”

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