Overview of Los Dichos Program

Goals of Los Dichos

- 1) Increase the number of developmental assets in all children and adults.
- 2) Increase the number of caring adults that students interact with at school to enable them to feel increased levels of support and value.
- 3) Use literacy opportunities to share Latino culture, language, and traditions with elementary school children.
- 4) Increase the involvement of parents who are primarily Spanish speakers and enable them to become parent leaders at their children's school site and within the community.
- 5) Increase student achievement, self-esteem, and bonding to school, particularly for those that are learning English as a second language.

Program Description

Los Dichos is a literature-based program, with the story selections coming from cultures of Latino origin. They are works of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Volunteers are trained in the developmental asset model and to read books illustrating valuable lessons including cultural pride, respect, healthy decision making, goal setting, self-esteem, and friendship. Literature has long been used by adults to open up engaging conversations with children, and the Los Dichos program is no exception. The specific books chosen for the program reflect the goals of the program, as well as the results of the local Search Institute survey, *Me and My World*.

Volunteers come to the classroom once a month for approximately 45 minutes to share the book of the month, have a short discussion, and do a hands-on activity with the students that reinforces the lesson. All books are bilingual, so the parent can read in Spanish and the classroom teacher in English, ensuring all students have a thorough understanding of the story. There is also a scripted lesson in both Spanish and English for the parent and teacher, who are seen as a team as they approach this work together every month.

Los Dichos is a school-based program that began during the 2004-05 school year when four Spanish-speaking mothers stepped forward to "pilot" an idea about honoring and acknowledging the language, traditions, and culture of the Latino community. They were the first – Las Primeras – mothers who did not speak a word of English but dared to move forward an idea that they could positively contribute to their children's educational growth.

Additionally, there is a large body of research noting the importance of parent involvement in school. Yet, for parents who do not speak English, school involvement does not seem possible. Los Dichos was created with those parents in mind – with the intent of giving them the opportunity to have an authentic, meaningful volunteer experience that could make a difference in the lives of children – without seeing language as a barrier.

The idea for this program began to grow under the development of Asset #41 – *Positive Cultural Identity*. Project Cornerstone believes there is a need to acknowledge language traditions and culture as a strategy to help close the achievement gap. If students feel their culture is both honored and respected at school, they are more likely to pay attention in class, do their homework, and work cooperatively with their classmates. Project Cornerstone's Los Dichos program addresses these needs while promoting asset development among all students, parents, and teachers.