

Chapel Talk
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When Karen and Aliay asked me to present this talk during Hispanic Heritage month, I was thrilled because when I was a student here back in 1985, we didn't celebrate or even acknowledge the significance of this month. "The observation started in 1968 as Hispanic Heritage Week under President Lyndon Johnson and was expanded by President Ronald Reagan in 1988 to cover a 30-day period starting on September 15 and ending on October 15. It was enacted into law on August 17, 1988." (<https://www.hispanicheritagemoth.gov>)

Today, I realize how important it is to have this month celebrated because it gives us pause in understanding the Hispanics and Latinos within our own community back home and at St. Andrew's School. I remember vividly spending time with a close friend I had made here at St. Andrew's. Her name was Luisa Flaim, who spoke Spanish and Chinese fluently, but only attended St. Andrew's for one year due to her dad's profession; then she went abroad to complete her high school education. We would spend hours conversing in the target language and having a ton of fun. I felt super comfortable, at ease and right at home at St. Andrew's School because the next time I would be speaking that much Spanish would have been during my long breaks with my friends and family in Puerto Rico. As an adolescent, I was primarily focused on feeling complete and would gravitate to any opportunity I was given to speak in Spanish, eat Spanish food or simply joke around in the target language.

Coming back to St. Andrew's School as a faculty member, coach, advisor, dorm and faculty parent, dean and much more, has been just as much fun because I have been living vicariously through my daughters, Elisa and Alani, as well as through my students who are heritage speakers or who speak the language fluently and are even better today than I ever was. I always love sharing stories with my daughters and current students. Back in the day, students would ask me, "Why do you take Spanish if you already speak Puertorican?; so, I would respond with a similar question, "Why do you take English class if you speak American or United States?" We would always joke around about the informal or the broken Spanish that is sometimes used back home and then explain how it should really be expressed.

For example, "Pues mira, tú sabes que no hay parking y estoy tarde porque no pude encontrar parqueo para parquiarne y después pasó una troca y casi me tiró al otro lado de la grama." These linguistic words do not exist in the formal Spanish Language and we sometimes refer to them as Spanglish-the correct Spanish would be: "El estacionamiento" is the correct word for parking. "Estacionarse" is the correct word to park oneself, "Camión" is the correct word for truck and "Césped" is the correct word for grass, not Grama. I'm so thrilled that today we have this heritage month established now because many of my students are now knowledgeable of the

importance of not only being bilingual, but also have a better understanding of topics on immigration, cultural differences and a strong appreciation for the arts.

It is also so much fun to coach our student athletes using the target language. You will sometimes hear me out on the field or in the Basketball court say, “¡Si se puede!” Or yelling out numbers of who they should be marking, face guarding or even where to place the ball.

In addition, it's my daily goal that I walk down the hall or anywhere on this campus to salute you with ¡Hola! - Hi! Or ¡Feliz miércoles! - Happy Wednesday! I never want any of you to feel incomplete nor any sense of divide. I want you to feel 100% comfortable here, I want you to feel safe and most importantly, I want you to understand that many of us come from different backgrounds or cultures, but we want to share it all with you. A huge shout out to my little friend Robert Torrey who will not finish greeting me unless I sing to him in Spanish. If I switch to an English song, he immediately pauses and asks for me to sing again the one in Spanish, which truly makes my day.

You see, languages are much needed in order to continue to globalize our world today, to understand differences and to expand your understanding of the true meaning of human rights. You all are the future and we believe in you to make not only the St. Andrew's school community better, but our own communities back home even better with the great education you are receiving from this magical, great school. I have great appreciation for this month as an adult now, and I'm so grateful to watch all schools and institutions celebrate it fully and with all their hearts and love.

There is already a ton of pressure on Hispanics and Latinos to assimilate in this country, so make time to lend an empathetic ear to hear their stories. No race or culture should ever be forgotten, so please take time to read Latinx authors; dive into issues that affect the community; find out what Casa Latina is all about; enjoy the food that sometimes SAGE or others prepare to get a real feel for their culture; dance to salsa, merengue or Reggaeton; listen and speak with your peers, adults, faculty here, and friends and families back home about why this month should never be pushed aside. As my students will always hear me say daily, we all may have some differences, but we all have one thing in common – we all have the same soul. So, for the next few days after you have had a good taste of the meaning of this month, please make time for reflection on living in a world-renowned community with world-renowned resources. God bless St. Andrew's School!