



SAVES



Miami-Dade County Public Schools

English Center Instructor Named to National Advisory Committee

Dr. Gema Santos has been named to a working group advising the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) on elements of the redesign of the U.S. naturalization exam. Dr. Santos is a Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) educator who has worked tirelessly to promote awareness of our SAVES Program.



Her educational background suits Dr. Santos' selection to this panel. She has earned a Bachelor, a Masters, a Juris Doctorate and a Doctorate in Education. Most importantly though is Dr. Santos' experience with this test. Since 1992, Dr. Gema Santos has taught citizenship classes in M-DCPS. She was also responsible for writing a curriculum for this program. For over 17 years, this energetic and motivating educator has helped thousands of students prepare for the naturalization exam.

The current naturalization exam has been in use since 1992. It consists of 100 questions on U.S. history and government, an oral interview, a short reading and a short writing portion. USCIS plans on implementing the new test in January of 2007.

Dr. Santos will provide assistance in creating a test that has appropriate vocabulary, establish guidelines for determining oral proficiency, and establish guidelines for item writing. She will also help in establishing a list of sample speaking, reading, and writing items. This panel of 12 experts is scheduled to meet in Washington, DC from April 10 -12, 2006.

According to Dr. Santos, of all the regions in the U.S., the South Florida area has the highest rate of failure on the naturalization exam. She attributes this high failure rate to the low number of individuals who enroll in citizenship classes. While the USCIS application for citizenship cost exceeds \$300.00, these classes offered by M-DCPS are free of charge. "Not only do the students learn about the naturalization exam and improve their level of English from the class, but they will learn about issues that will affect and serve meaning to their lives as American citizens". She teaches her classes at The English Center, and on-line for those who cannot attend during school hours.

The SAVES program congratulates Dr. Gema Santos for her effort, her dedication to all her students, and for her upcoming assistance in creating a naturalization exam that will be fair to all those individuals in search of the American dream.



Dr. Santos and her class at work

Prepared with funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through the Florida Department of Children and Families, Office of Refugee Services.

If you know anyone else who would like to receive future newsletters, please send your request to Jtravieso1@dadeschools.net.