

## **FamiliaFirst at Shawnee Mission North Assists Spanish-Speaking Families**

Shawnee Mission North senior Anyel Medina who came to Shawnee Mission in 2015 from Cuba, plans to attend Fort Hays State University to study nursing. But, she recently shared that when she arrived at Shawnee Mission North two years ago, she was unaware she needed to take the ACT exam.

Thanks to the help of Pedro Miller, SM North guidance counselor, and a community of support at Shawnee Mission North, Medina was able to prepare and successfully take the exam.

Medina joined several guests to serve on a panel to share her success story and support other students who could use similar advice at a gathering of FamiliaFirst.

FamiliaFirst is a gathering of family members at Shawnee Mission North that started two years ago. Led by Miller, the group holds meetings spoken in Spanish several times a year, tackling a variety of topics with the goals of increasing accessibility, removing barriers, and building relationships.

At the March meeting, the focus was on college and career preparation and success.

Medina and Esteban Alvarez spoke about their high school experiences emphasizing the importance of being prepared for the ACT college admissions exam and the availability of scholarships for college tuition.

Alvarez, a junior, who arrived in Shawnee Mission from Colombia in 2018, enjoys volunteering in the Antioch public library. He said he appreciates Christine Peterson, Latino Services Outreach Librarian, who welcomed him to volunteer alongside her a few months ago and is fluent in Spanish. Because of her positive influence, he said he is considering a career as a librarian.

Celia Ruiz who serves as a Bilingual Community Outreach Specialist for United Health Care and Randy Lopez with Wyandotte Health Foundation also served on the panel as community members. Ruiz spoke about how being bilingual is a strength, and about how seeking certification and more training within any given field helps to open as many doors as possible.

Lopez thanked the many teachers and staff members who attended the all-Spanish speaking event, even when they could not understand the discussion because their primary language is English. The staff members were available to answer questions, with help from a translator and show their support for the students and families. When a parent asked about the best form of communication to use with a concern about a student and their studies, the teachers suggested email as that method can be more easily translated than a phone call.

“It’s important that the parents and students know we are here to support them,” Amie Schick, a math teacher who attended said

Several panelists spoke about the importance of parent involvement within student's educational experience.

During the Question and Answer portion of the event, a parent of a SM North graduate shared, with tears, her journey of arriving from Mexico with her child. At the time, she did not speak any English and had many questions about how to help her child be successful as a student. Now, with the support of the SM North high school and community, her student is completing her first year at Fort Hays University as a Kansas Scholars Program recipient.