

# Learning Spanish via the Internet

**Madison City Schools, Madison, Alabama**

## **Discovery Middle School**

**Principal:** Mrs. Sharon Willis

## **Liberty Middle School**

**Principal:** Mrs. Sally Bruer

### **Spanish Teacher:**

Mrs. Debbie Moore

Grade Level: 9

Number of Students: 250

Classes Taught: Six-Periods/Daily



According to Mrs. Sally Bruer, Principal of Liberty Middle School, Spanish classes would not be available to the students at Discovery Middle School without the distance learning technology made available through E-rate and the Toyota Distance Learning Program. A certified teacher was not available to teach the classes when school opened. Therefore, in the spirit of cooperation, Mrs. Bruer and Mrs. Sharon Willis, Principal of Discovery Middle School, approached Mrs. Debbie Moore, the newly hired Spanish teacher for Liberty Middle School. They discussed ways to take advantage of the technology available at both schools and ways to provide Spanish classes to both sets of students via the Internet. Mrs. Bruer found Mrs. Moore eager to participate and ready for the challenge.

## ***Potential Obstacles to Implementing Distance Learning Classes***



Mrs. Bruer indicated that potential obstacles to implementing distance learning classes via the Internet were 1) teacher familiarity with video conferencing lab equipment and use, 2) transporting six classes of students (250+ students) from the classroom to labs and/or access to the video conference labs on a daily basis in a timely manner, 3) cooperation & compromise between the schools/sites, since bell & class schedules were not the same, 4) face time with both sets of students, 5) preparation of materials that utilize distance

learning capabilities and classroom management, 6) maintaining STI records for two sets of students, and 7) administration, parental, and student agreement to class participation rules and regulations.

When asked what the biggest obstacle was to implementing a successful distance learning class, Mrs. Moore said "...basically, it is adjusting to dealing with two classrooms and making sure that each class is getting the attention that it needs in order to succeed in the foreign language."

### ***Familiarity with the Distance Learning Environment***

Although unknown to Mrs. Bruer when she first approached Mrs. Moore about teaching the classes, Mrs. Moore, while a student at Auburn University, had the opportunity to work for a professor who used distance-learning equipment in her class. Mrs. Moore said that having been introduced to the equipment before coming to Madison City Schools was definitely a blessing and very helpful. Being familiar with the equipment, Mrs. Moore was comfortable having the distance learning equipment moved to the Spanish classrooms, which had Internet access at each site, so there was no need to transport students to a lab, saving valuable instructional time.



### ***The Spirit of Cooperation***

Mrs. Willis offered to adjust the bell schedules at Discovery to match Liberty's bell schedule, since Liberty was providing the teacher. This in turn added to the length of the Liberty school day in order to accommodate the courses offered on a block schedule. Since the two schools are only a few miles apart, Mrs. Moore spends three days a week at Liberty and two days a week at Discovery, allowing each set of students some real face time. An aide currently manages the room at the remote site. Prior to implementing the distance learning classes, Mrs. Bruer met with parents and students to explain the class, the proposed instructional method, and the rules and regulations. Parents and students were required to sign a form agreeing to zero tolerance for disruptive behavior at each site.

## ***Preparing to Teach Distance Learning Classes***

Preparation of instructional class materials for the successful utilization of distance learning capabilities is essential. Mrs. Moore has emphasized the importance of having functional visuals for just about all aspects of the class. She cited “For example, it is important for me to have ‘overheads’ for the document camera that are large enough to be seen at the other school on the TV screen.” Mrs. Moore has had to adapt “little things” such as homework procedures, testing procedures, and seating arrangements to keep students within the view of the cameras and monitors. Since it is not practical to collect homework everyday for 250+ students, she collects all homework for a specified time frame on test day. When students take a test, they know to look at the current homework sheet and turn in all homework assignments for that time frame. This homework sheet is posted at both schools so students have full access to the information. When Mrs. Moore grades the homework, she selects activities to be graded for completeness and others to be graded for accuracy. Students do not know which ones will be graded, and consequently, they are accountable for all assignments.

Mrs. Moore has also had to adjust to the fact that due to the current audio system, she has to be stationary behind the workstation. Therefore, in order to deal with classroom management, she must mute the microphone, change the screen to the document camera where an assignment is posted, and then promptly deal with the current situation.



Mrs. Bruer and Mrs. Moore have agreed to allow Liberty Middle School’s distance learning activities to be featured throughout the school year. Updates will be provided on how the course develops i.e. success stories and lessons learned, in order to assist other teachers that want to take advantage of distance learning technological opportunities available in their schools.

**Nuts & Bolts - If you're interested in starting a similar project in your school, [click here](#) for more information on how to create it!**

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