



## Leticia Roig Roblanca Academy Hialeah, FL

Leticia Roig was being told to repeat third grade, and her failure just didn't compute. So her mother took Leticia to a small private school with a large Hispanic enrollment and a no-nonsense principal. The assessment was quick and direct: Leticia didn't comprehend English.

"How can you pass the FCAT if you don't understand the language?" asks Alina Santos, principal at Roblanca Academy in Hialeah. "I see some of these kids being labeled with special academic problems, but all they need is to learn the language." How Leticia was able to survive in a public school program for foreign language speakers for four years without learning English was confounding to Santos, but there was no time for looking back. The lessons began immediately last summer, as Roblanca instructors worked one-on-one with Leticia for four weeks before the regular school year began. They immersed her in English, helped her role play situations she encounters with other students in school and begin to absorb and embellish upon written stories. They worked on basic grammar and sentence structure. And Santos told Leticia's parents: No Spanish television or radio at home, only English.

By the time regular classes began, Leticia was a different, confident, fourth-grade student.

"The change I have seen in her is enormous," says Oneida Vazquez, her mother, through an interpreter. "She is so much happier. She was so afraid to be around other children because she didn't want them to know she couldn't understand them. Now she's doing all the activities at school, and she loves her classes."

In August, Leticia began her second year at Roblanca, made possible through a Step Up For Students scholarship for low-income families. The principal, Ms. Santos, says Leticia is "doing awesome" in her academic classes, including language arts and reading, two of the subjects she had been failing. She scored well on the Terra Nova norm-referenced test last spring, without the aid of a bilingual dictionary. She also has been exposed to the stories of Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty and other children's classics.

For Leticia, school now also includes participation in plays and talent events and fashion shows. She likes music and dance and basketball. "They treat us with such respect," Leticia says. "The school just seems a lot better. There are fewer students, and it is easier to concentrate."

Her mother Oneida says she is grateful for the Step Up scholarship, which she heard about from a friend. "I was watching my daughter fail and I was trying to get a tutor and it just wasn't working," Oneida says. "We could never have afforded this without the scholarship."

### About Roblanca Academy

Roblanca Academy is located at 1174 W. 70th Place in Hialeah and was founded in 1982. It serves roughly 120 students in preK-8, of which 22 are on the Step Up Scholarship for the 2008-2009 school year. The school emphasizes pride in the community and service and responsibility to others, and principal Santos describes the atmosphere as "like a big extended family." About 80 percent of the students are Hispanic, and the school administers the Terra Nova Achievement Test each spring to gauge the learning gains of students. The annual tuition and fees are \$3,900.