

ABCs OF AMERICA



Teacher's aide Alejandra Gutierrez (left) and her students pose for a photo outside the school. From left: Alejandra Gutierrez, teacher; and students Juan Antonio, Juan Carlos, and Juan Manuel. Photo by Jeff VandenBerg for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.



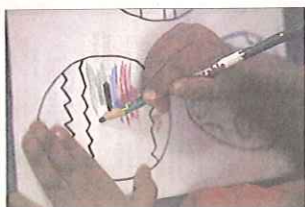
Teacher's assistant Alejandra Gomez teaches handwriting to students in English at Solidarity School, which prepares Hispanic children to enter first grade with competency in English. Photo by Jeff VandenBerg for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Teacher's aide Alejandra Gutierrez (left) and her students pose for a photo outside the school. From left: Alejandra Gutierrez, teacher; and students Juan Antonio, Juan Carlos, and Juan Manuel. Photo by Jeff VandenBerg for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.



Kindergarten teacher Elizabeth Sheridan gets a goodie hug and kiss from Francisco Rojas in a Solidarity School classroom. Photo by Jeff VandenBerg for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Log on to ajc.com/northside to see and hear a multimedia presentation on Solidarity School.



A student works on an art project for which he has received a grant by Solidarity School.

School gets Hispanic kids up to speed in English by first grade

It started with a handful of kindergarten students in a rented trailer in the South Springs parking lot of a run-down strip mall on Northwood Drive seven years ago.

Now it's a full-service community center and preschool.

Solidarity School, which shares its space with the Holy Spirit Catholic Center, now occupies the building's upper floors, says principal Edmundo Rodriguez.

The school serves the more than 1 million Hispanic population with the goal of keeping English education in three years. Then, leaders say, the children can enter first grade in public school as mainstream students.

"I am proud of what the teachers are doing at Solidarity School," said Jaime Arfuri, head of the school. "They are no longer tracked as 'English' speakers of other languages' students, and they are in the first grade."

But the school faces challenges. It has had to rely on private funds of education in the more accelerated and gifted tracks.

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— Jeff VandenBerg