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California Association for Bilingual Education Honors Baldwin Park Unified Student

Sierra Vista High School junior will be recognized at the group's annual gathering in March

BALDWIN PARK – Baldwin Park Unified high school junior Diana Aguilar will be honored for her vision of the value of bilingualism by the California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE) at the group's annual convention, set for March 28-31 in Sacramento.

Aguilar, who attends Sierra Vista High School, won the CABE student writing contest's high school category, earning a \$1,000 prize.

CABE champions bilingual education and educational equity by promoting priorities, initiatives and services to dramatically increase California's capacity to create culturally diverse and competent learning environments, especially for English learners.

"We are immensely proud of Diana for her eloquent celebration of bilingualism," Superintendent Dr. Froilan N. Mendoza said. "This award speaks volumes about the culture of learning and discovery that our teachers and staff foster."

Aguilar is an English language learner who has been in the U.S. for less than three years. Though she is still learning English, she is taking Advanced Placement courses in English, environmental science and U.S. history. She is also a cheerleader at Sierra Vista.

The essay asked students to answer the question: "How does being bilingual/multilingual make dreams come true?"

Her response explores powerful issues of loss, fear and compassion as she recounts in a poetic voice her realization of the strength of words and the trauma of leaving her parents when she immigrated to the U.S.

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“Bilingual people know how to communicate. We know how to respect and honor the words and ideas of others. Even though we don’t speak the same language, we have common goals,” she wrote. “We want to take our parents out of poverty and teach our children to win battles using the strength and power of words.”

Aguilar’s essay describes communication skills as a superpower because words allow us to connect with each other.

“Life has seen something in me, something special that has allowed me to speak the language of wisdom and love in order to suffocate the fear that oppresses my community,” her essay concludes. “I will be able to restore its life with harmony and peace. This is how being bilingual can make dreams come true.”

Sierra Vista teacher Charlene E. Fried praised Aguilar for her tenacity of spirit.

“She never gives up on anything. She tried out for cheer last year and was not selected. This did not deter her; she tried out again this year and was selected,” Fried said. “She entered the CABE essay writing contest last year and did not win. This did not deter her; she entered again this year and won. She is an amazing person and a true role model for others.”

Aguilar said she came to the U.S. to pursue her career dreams. She hopes to attend UCLA, UC Berkeley, UC Davis or Stanford en route to becoming a pediatric neurosurgeon.

She said she was stunned to learn she won the high school prize.

“I started screaming, and I started crying and laughing,” she said. “I was really happy. It was a really nice moment. I never believed I could win something really big.”

Aguilar will read excerpts from her essay during CABE’s Student Writing Contest Dinner Banquet on Friday, March 30. Her award includes four tickets to the banquet, transportation to the Sacramento convention and one-night accommodations.

As a special aspect of the award, her mother and father will travel from Mexico to attend the event – their first visit together in more than a year.

PHOTOS

BPUSD_CABE_1: Sierra Vista High School junior Diana Aguilar is being honored for winning the California Association for Bilingual Education’s annual high school essay contest.