



# PARAMOUNT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

ENSURE LEARNING AND SUCCESS FOR EACH STUDENT BY PROVIDING A QUALITY EDUCATION

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## PRESS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## Mokler Elementary Students Share Stories, Traditional Dance for Hispanic Heritage Month

**Paramount, CA** – Mokler Elementary School students celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month on Oct. 6 by sharing stories and pictures of prominent Latino men and women while a dozen young performers, dressed in the traditional colors of Mexico, danced the *ballet folklórico* to a packed auditorium of students, parents and teachers.

“Hispanic Heritage Month is an opportunity for parents and students to learn about people of Hispanic descent,” Mokler Principal Linh Roberts said. “The more we learn about others, the more we learn about ourselves.”

Close to 100 Mokler students worked together with their families to research pivotal figures of Hispanic origin and create biographical sketches on cardboard to highlight their accomplishments.

The bios revealed a varied cross-section of Hispanic heritage: labor leaders Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta; athletes Cristiano Ronaldo and Oscar De La Hoya; artists Rosario Dawson and Celia Cruz; even a local chiropractor, Dr. Paul Helzer of Bellflower. Helzer also serves as president of the Bellflower Unified School District Board of Education.

Mokler fifth-grader Christian Cortez shared the story of human rights activist Cesar Chavez.

“He gave many farmers the freedom to work, getting them better pay and working conditions,” Cortez said. “Cesar Chavez is not just a hero, but a teacher to me. He taught me to stand up for whatever I think is wrong.”

Third-grader Kaylie Gonzalez profiled astronaut Ellen Ochoa, the first Hispanic woman in space. Donovan Martinez gave a portrait of Mexican Revolution leaders Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. Cassandra Cortez provided a glimpse of the life of East Los Angeles educator Jaime Escalante.

- MORE -

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Paramount Unified Superintendent Dr. Ruth Pérez was invited to share her story. Pérez, a native Puerto Rican, told of growing up as an English language learner in New York, and her frequent outings to the public library where she would immerse herself in books, then return home to read to her mother. Pérez's love for books inspired her to pursue degrees in higher education. She received her doctorate from Nova Southeastern University.

"I am proud to be a Latina," Pérez said. "We can help our children by encouraging them to read. If students read, they will learn. I would encourage parents to have your children read to you for 20 minutes per day and ask them to retell stories they read to you in the native language. Parents do not have to necessarily read in English to help their children become strong readers."

After the presentations and demonstration of *folklórico* dance, parents and students noshed on Mexican pastries, then visited a classroom where all of the Hispanic Heritage projects were displayed.

The Hispanic Heritage celebration was the first of three scheduled student/parent collaborations of multi-cultural awareness at Mokler. One day devoted to African heritage will be held on February 23<sup>rd</sup> and one devoted to Asian/Pacific American heritage will be held on May 25<sup>th</sup>.

"This is a wonderful way to get parents involved with their children's education and brings a closer connection between school and home," Mokler third-grade teacher Lori Stahl said.

### PHOTO CAPTIONS:

**102016\_PARAMOUNT\_HERITAGE1:** Dressed in the traditional colors of Mexico, Mokler Elementary School students wait to perform the ballet folklórico for parents, teachers and students during Mokler's Hispanic Heritage Month celebration on Oct. 6.

**102016\_PARAMOUNT\_HERITAGE2:** Mokler Elementary School students display research projects they created for their Hispanic Heritage Month celebration on Oct. 6 with Mokler Principal Linh Roberts and Paramount Unified School District Superintendent Dr. Ruth Pérez. The students worked with their families to research pivotal figures of Hispanic descent, then create a biography based on their lives.

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