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## **Baldwin Park Unified Students Cited for Excellence in Bilingual Education**

**BALDWIN PARK** – The power of language to build bridges and unite diverse cultures inspired two Sierra Vista High School English Language Development (ELD) students, freshman Melina Estrada and sophomore Zihua Yu, to pen eloquent essays encapsulating their dreams and struggles as they pursue a bilingual education.

Estrada and Yu's essays have been recognized for their excellence, winning first place among high school students in the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) and the California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE) student essay contests, respectively. Both Estrada and Yu received cash prizes and certificates.

"This is a huge opportunity and makes me realize I can do so much in my life," Estrada said. "We must go for our dreams and we must always believe in ourselves and others. We must always be proud to be bilingual and be proud of our roots, our cultures and traditions. We have so much to give to this country, just because of who we are."

Estrada's essay focused on the sudden passing of her father in December 2020 and her determination to live up to her father's high expectations by advocating for civil rights and equity in her community. One of Estrada's goals is becoming the bilingual mayor of Baldwin Park.

"I want to fight for justice," Estrada said. "This city is mine and it is yours. Together, we can build a strong, welcoming community, where everyone feels safe, comfortable and part of one giant family."

Estrada presented her essay in English and Spanish at the NABE Conference in April.

Yu's essay described how bilingual education has deepened his understanding of other cultures, and the joy he experiences when he participates in distance learning with his ELD classmates. For Yu, being bilingual increases his ability to communicate with and learn from others – practices that will allow people to love, protect and honor each other.

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“We have to really break down the plastic distance learning screen that has tried to divide and protect us,” Yu said. “Instead, we need to spread bilingualism to the entire community, and throughout the world, to promote peace, trust and love. Let us do this by becoming the bilingual bridges that will unite us.”

Yu presented his essay in English and Mandarin at the CABE Conference, held in March.

“I feel very excited to win. I did not think I could ever be the winner of this competition,” Yu said. “I am proud to represent my school and my District. I want to thank my ELD and English teacher Ms. Fried, as well as Ms. Rivas and Ms. Chacon. I want to thank my principal, Mr. Pratt, and everyone else at our school. I would also like to thank my parents and family for supporting me.”

NABE and CABE are nonprofit organizations that advocate for equity in education and excellence for bilingual/multilingual programs at national and state levels.

“I am so proud of Zihua and Melina. It’s a great honor to win in both the state and national levels,” Sierra Vista English and ELD teacher Charlene Fried said. “I love creative writing, and I urge my students to tell their stories. This has been an extremely challenging year and I think it inspired my students to reach a little further, and to believe in the power of their own stories as a way to promote understanding and unity among people; it is our stories that shape our cultures.”

## **PHOTOS**

**SVHS\_Estrada:** Sierra Vista High School freshman Melina Estrada was recognized for excellence in bilingual education, winning first place among high school students in the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) student essay contest.

**SVHS\_Yu:** Sierra Vista High School sophomore Zihua Yu was recognized for excellence in bilingual education, winning first place among high school students in the California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE) student essay contest.

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