



Fontana Unified School District

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 1, 2026

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Fontana Elementary School Receives National Recognition for Preserving O'Day Short Family's Legacy

FONTANA - O'Day Short Elementary School and Fontana Unified student Cyrus Moss were honored by the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) on May 28 with its Community Remembrance Award, marking a milestone in the school community's effort to preserve and share the legacy of the O'Day Short family.

EJI Senior Attorney Jennifer Taylor presented the award during a recognition assembly, where she addressed students and staff, recognized Moss for his role in leading the school renaming effort, and donated books to the school library. The Community Remembrance Award recognizes efforts to memorialize a community's history in support of developing a more just future.

"When we heard of the efforts being made to acknowledge and talk about this history, even though it is often hard to have those kinds of conversations, we thought it was important to recognize everyone here for making that happen," Taylor said. "Having this history become a public part of our narrative helps people become aware of it earlier, understand how it happened, and think about how to prevent something like this from happening again."

The event centered on the legacy of the O'Day Short family, who purchased and built a home on a five-acre lot at Randall and Pepper avenues in Fontana at a time when African Americans were forbidden from living south of Baseline Avenue. The family received threats of violence before their house was set ablaze on Dec. 16, 1945. All four members of the family died from injuries sustained in the fire, which was later determined to be caused by arson.

O'Day Short Elementary held its official renaming ceremony at the beginning of the 2024-25 school year, marking the transition from Randall Pepper Elementary to a campus name honoring the O'Day Short family. Fontana Unified's Board of Education unanimously voted in September 2024 to rename the school after Moss, a former O'Day Short Elementary student, submitted a petition with 132 signatures in March 2024.

"This school will always be special, and it is amazing to see how much it means to our community," Moss said. "This is more than just a name change. It shows that when a community stands united, anything is possible. I am proud that I was able to help be a voice for their story and their legacy. To every student hearing this, I want you to know that you matter, no matter your race or skin color. You belong here, and your voice is powerful."

After the assembly, staff and members of the Short family viewed a teaser for an upcoming documentary on the O'Day Short family, which explores the family's move to Fontana, the events surrounding their deaths, and the city's history of racial inequity. The documentary will be submitted to film festivals beginning in June and featured during a VIP screening in Fontana in July.

"I do not take it lightly that I am the principal of O'Day Short Elementary, and we work every day to make our students and the O'Day Short family proud," Principal Michelle Avilla said. "I hope Cyrus' work continues to inspire our students and our community, because there is still a long way to go and a lot of work to be done. I hope this story continues to be told."

Fontana Unified Executive Director of Marketing and Communications Clarissa Trejo spearheaded the documentary effort, working with producers and editors, gathering information on the O'Day Short family, and helping ensure the story was told with care and accuracy.

"The O'Day Short family's story is part of Fontana's history, and we have a responsibility to tell it truthfully in a way that helps future generations understand why it matters," Trejo said. "This documentary was created to honor the family's legacy, preserve the work that led to the school's renaming, and give our students and community a lasting resource rooted in hope for a more just future."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

FUSD_EJI1: O'Day Short Elementary School and Fontana Unified student Cyrus Moss were honored by the Equal Justice Initiative with its Community Remembrance Award on May 28, recognizing their work to preserve and share the legacy of the O'Day Short family.

FUSD_EJI2: O'Day Short Elementary School students and staff gathered for a recognition assembly featuring the Equal Justice Initiative, a book donation to the school library, and the debut of a short documentary on the O'Day Short family's legacy.

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