El Monte Union High School District
Community Committed to College and Career

PRESS RELEASE

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Student Ideas Take Center Stage at El Monte Union's 'Lights On Afterschool' Celebration

EL MONTE – At El Monte Union High School District, learning doesn't end when the last school bell rings. The District highlighted the impact of free after-school enrichment programs on Oct. 22, bringing students, families, and community partners together at Rosemead High School for a nationwide Lights On Afterschool celebration featuring hands-on activities, student-led initiatives, and resources available through the District's partnership with Learning Enrichment & Academic Resources Network (LEARN).

The event showcased LEARN's PREP Afterschool program, which provides free academic assistance and enrichment activities at all El Monte Union high schools. Designed to reflect student interests and campus needs, the program gives students opportunities to explore new interests, participate in clubs, strengthen academic skills, and develop leadership abilities beyond the school day. In the summer, rising juniors and seniors can take advantage of a three-day, two-night college and career leadership camp at a local college or university in Southern California.

"We believe in our core values of providing quality programming, fostering the belief that all children can learn, providing clearly specified benchmarks of success, providing a personalized and caring learning environment, and supporting rigorous and meaningful instruction with applicable connections to the real world," LEARN Chief Executive Officer Robert Arellanes said. "The students tell us what they want and are really what drives this program. It is not mandated – students come because they want to."

The Río Hondo Education Consortium, DBA LEARN, was founded in 2004 and has since expanded its reach to districts in El Monte, Whittier, Rosemead, Pico Rivera, La Mirada-Norwalk, and Pomona. Its programs offer academic assistance, enrichment activities, organized youth sports, student support services, and college and career readiness resources.

At El Monte Union, students help shape PREP offerings through campus-based Student Advisory Boards, which plan events and field trips while giving participants opportunities to practice teamwork, strengthen communication skills, and advocate for their peers. Each school tailors its activities to student interests and community needs, allowing clubs and other offerings to develop in response to student input.

At Rosemead High School, students can participate in baking, gardening, and esports clubs, as well as math tutoring. The program also offers Saturday enrichment activities and field trips, including video game tournaments and visits to colleges, the beach, and the Getty Museum.

The Oct. 22 celebration gave attendees an interactive look at these offerings through activity stations and demonstrations organized by Rosemead High LEARN Site Coordinator Ambar Gonzalez, a Class of 2016 graduate. Guests painted pumpkins, made slime, and visited a latte station where students served customized drinks featuring

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homemade syrups. Garden tours showcased produce grown by students, while a butterfly exhibit highlighted community partners and ways to help increase butterfly populations on campus.

The event also recognized Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, with an altar where attendees could display photos of loved ones who had died or leave personal messages. An information booth and program display highlighted LEARN's services, and visitors who completed activity stations could redeem their stamp cards for complimentary taco plates from local vendors.

Gonzalez said her work is driven by a desire to help students and families while creating an environment where young people can explore their interests and stay engaged.

"My motivation is to make my students' lives less difficult or routine and build on curiosity, learning, and engagement, and in turn make family life less challenging and more rewarding," Gonzalez said. "The mission of the Lights On Afterschool program is one I am privileged to partake in daily. Thank you to everyone who participated in today's showcase and for recognizing the importance of after-school programs."

Lights On Afterschool is a nationwide initiative organized by the Afterschool Alliance to recognize the role after-school programs play in students' lives and the broader community.

El Monte Union Superintendent Dr. Edward Zuniga said the District's partnership with LEARN expands the ways students can spend their time after school, offering access to engaging activities and opportunities to develop their own ideas.

"Back in the day, what we did after school was either join sports, band, or choir. The only other opportunity we had for outside activities was offered through a summer program," Zuniga said. "We are privileged to work with LEARN. Having our students be able to go to any of our campuses after school and have our LEARN leaders there to provide our students with safe and engaging activities or brainstorm ideas to create their own clubs is something we as a District are extremely grateful for."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

EMUHSD_LEARN LIGHTS ON_1: LEARN PREP Afterschool Program coordinators and student volunteers prepare hands-on activities for community members during the nationwide Lights On Afterschool event on Oct. 22 at Rosemead High School.

EMUHSD_LEARN LIGHTS ON_2: Students explore the Rosemead High School garden and learn more about the plants growing on campus during the Lights On Afterschool event on Oct. 22, hosted by LEARN to showcase its free academic assistance and enrichment activities.

EMUHSD_LEARN LIGHTS ON_3: El Monte Union students interact with butterflies inside a butterfly exhibit during the District's Lights On Afterschool event hosted by LEARN on Oct. 22 at Rosemead High School.

EMUHSD_LEARN LIGHTS ON_4: Families take part in Halloween-themed activities during the Lights On Afterschool event on Oct. 22 at Rosemead High School in partnership with LEARN.

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