WHITTIER UNION
HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence... NEWS RELEASE

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Santa Fe High Students Learn About Advocacy During Women of Walkout Panel Discussion

WHITTIER – Santa Fe High School students received an opportunity to experience living history and learn about a tumultuous time in Los Angeles education history during a panel discussion in early November led by the Women of the Walkout, three women who participated in the East L.A. Walkouts, a student-led protest in March 1968 that saw nearly 20,000 Mexican-American students at several Eastside high schools walk out of their classrooms in unity.

The panel discussion, led by Rachael Ochoa Cervera, Paula Crisostomo, and Victoria Castro, shed light on a pivotal moment in the quest for equity in education in the mid-1960s, when Latino students and teachers presented a list of demands to the Los Angeles Unified Board of Education, asking for sweeping changes. When the district failed to respond to the demands, students from Lincoln, Garfield, Wilson, Belmont, and Roosevelt high schools staged a weeklong protest.

"Santa Fe students represent the next generation of leaders and activists. It's important for them to know that the seeds of modern-day advocacy were planted by high school students much like themselves, who fought for what they believed in," Santa Fe ethnic studies teacher Alicia Gabuardi said. "The torch for standing up to injustice has been passed."

Gabuardi met the women in 2024 while attending professional development training at the Sal Castro Academy for Urban Teacher Leaders, sponsored by Cal State University, Los Angeles. After hearing them speak, Gabuardi invited Cervera, Crisostomo, and Castro to speak to her ethnic studies students.

This year, the appearance expanded into a panel discussion and Q&A held in the Santa Fe gym, with several hundred Santa Fe ethnic studies students in attendance.

Cervera, Crisostomo, and Castro discussed their roles in the walkout, how they organized community meetings, established connections, and spread word of the movement. Crisostomo's role in the protests was depicted in the movie, "Walkout," a 2006 film directed by Edward James Olmos.

"This was a powerful discussion for our students, who left with an understanding of how much these women paved the way for future advocacy," Gabuardi said. "One lesson they learned is that standing up for one's rights can often be a lonely pursuit, but if they believe in themselves and their movement, they can create change."

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Gabuardi prepped her students for the discussion by screening "Walkout" and a PBS documentary, "Latino Americans: the 500-Year Legacy That Shaped a Nation." Then the students examined the original demands made by the East L.A. students and compared them with current school policy across Southern California to see how much it has changed.

"I wanted our students to realize how these women impacted educational opportunities and how the Women of the Walkout made it possible for them to have access to college readiness programs, Advanced Placement classes, and ethnic studies curriculum," Gabuardi said.

For Santa Fe High senior Ariel Tejada, the panel discussion was a revelation, and she found that the women's stories resonated with her.

"If there is one thing I could say about the panel, it would be that it was really inspiring," Tejada said. "I am often discouraged by the injustice I see in our society. Talking to the Women of the Walkout gave me a lot of hope that we can strive for a better future."

The Women of the Walkout panel discussion had an impact well beyond Gabuardi's classroom, inspiring many students in the audience to participate in the Q&A, eager to learn more about the historic event that helped open the door for more cultural representation in schools, as well as introduce a college-going culture to Latinos across L.A. County.

After the discussion, Gabuardi's students wrote thank you notes to the women.

"It was an honor for Santa Fe High to host the Women of the Walkout and provide our students with an opportunity to receive a firsthand account of such a significant moment in education," Santa Fe principal Craig Campbell said. "The Women of the Walkout represent hope, optimism, and pride, and we greatly appreciate them taking the time to talk to our students about their legacies."

PHOTO CAPTIONS

WUHSD_WOW1: Santa Fe High School students experienced living history during a panel discussion led by the Women of the Walkout, who participated in the East L.A. Walkouts, a student-led protest in 1968 that proved to be a pivotal moment in the quest for equity in education. From left to right: Paula Crisostomo, Victoria Castro, and Rachael Ochoa Cervera.

WUHSD_WOW2: A Santa Fe High School student participates in a Q&A during a panel discussion led by the Women of the Walkout, who shared their experiences as high school students advocating for equity in education when they supported their classmates in the East L.A. Walkouts, an event that saw nearly 20,000 Mexican-American students at several Eastside high schools walk out of their classrooms in unity.

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