



Press Release

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Harvard Alumni Encourage MUSD Students to Apply to Elite Ivy League Universities

MONTEBELLO – Financial challenges won't stop Montebello Unified School District students from attending an elite Ivy League college. This was the main message to nearly 400 MUSD middle school Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) students and their parents during the Harvard Early College Awareness Program symposium held at Eastmont Intermediate School on Nov. 9.

"We want our students to recognize that there are no socio-economic barriers to high-quality education and inclusion at elite universities, if they plan and prepare," MUSD Board of Education President Edgar Cisneros said. "We strongly encourage our students who wish to be leaders in their schools and communities to consider applying to Ivy League colleges where financial need will not impede their chances of admission."

In 2004, Harvard University announced the Harvard Financial Aid Initiative (HFAI). Any student from a household that earns \$65,000 a year or less would receive free tuition, room and board, if they are accepted for admission. Following Harvard's lead, several other elite universities similarly amended their financial aid policies, including Yale, Princeton, Brown, Cornell, Columbia, Duke, Stanford and MIT.

Dr. Gus Frias, Harvard Latino Alumni Alliance co-founder and Harvard Club of Southern California board member led a distinguished panel that, along with a representative from the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, familiarized MUSD families with how to prepare, plan and pay for higher education.

"Many families don't realize that their children, who are studying diligently, with honor and distinction, can attend these colleges," said Frias, who graduated from Garfield High in East Los Angeles. "We feel wholly committed to recruiting the best and brightest from our communities to attend Harvard."

The Early College Program symposium also focused on leadership development, cautioning prospective students that a high grade point average alone won't guarantee acceptance into Ivy League schools, and that excellence in serving your school and community is often considered a prerequisite for admission.

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At the end of the symposium, Harvard alumni and civic leaders conducted a question and answer session for the attendees, which included MUSD School Board members, District representatives, intermediate school principals, AVID coordinators and Superintendent of Schools Susanna Contreras Smith.

“This is a very special day for our students to be able to see so many successful leaders from their own community dispense their wisdom and encouragement. Their message was clear – plan, prepare and do not hesitate to pursue the college of your dreams,” said Superintendent Contreras Smith. “We are greatly appreciative of Dr. Frias and his esteemed colleagues for taking the time to address our students.”

AVID is a global nonprofit organization dedicated to closing the achievement gap and preparing students for college and postsecondary opportunities. AVID students take elective classes to further develop their reading, writing and critical thinking academic skills, with emphasis on time management and goal-setting.

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Montebello Unified School District is a dynamic learning institution employing top-quality educators. It is the combined work of many that allows the District to continue educating more than 30,000 students every year using the 40 Developmental Assets at all of our school sites. It is through everyone’s efforts – students, parents, teachers, staff and administrators – that we are achieving the District’s number one goal of raising student achievement. Learn more online at www.montebello.k12.ca.us.