

Montebello Unified School District



Press Release

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MUSD Launches Inaugural Teen Court at Bell Gardens High School

MONTEBELLO – Teen Court is now in session for students at Bell Gardens High School in the Montebello Unified School District, which kicked-off the early intervention program on Monday, Sept. 15 at Bell Gardens City Hall. Students held a mock trial followed by participation in a real-life trial of one teenaged-peer.

"We are excited to start Teen Court at MUSD because it provides our students with the opportunity to garner hands-on experience with our judicial system in a constructive and informative way," said MUSD Board President David Vela. "Teen Court also opens the door for our students to pursue careers in the legal field, as they will have the opportunity to see what attorneys, judges, interpreters and bailiffs do on a day-to-day basis."

The Los Angeles County Teen Court, already successful in high schools across the region, is an effort spearheaded by Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia, who was in attendance at the kick-off. It provides an opportunity for juveniles to be questioned, judged and sentenced by a jury of their local peers, supervised by attorneys. The program seeks to prevent youngsters, who have engaged in criminal activity for the first time, from moving on to more serious crimes by allowing them the alternative to the juvenile court process.

"Bringing Teen Court to Montebello Unified, and specifically to my alma mater, Bell Gardens High, provides a level of civic engagement for our young adults that instills responsibility, legal knowledge and notions of justice in the long-term," said Assemblywoman Garcia. "The District, including administrators, staff and teachers, should truly be applauded for their effort in getting this program up and running so quickly, and I thank everyone involved tremendously."

Of the 30 students involved in the inaugural program at Bell Gardens High, including 10 police explorers, 12 were selected to sit on the jury on Monday. Other students participated as interpreters and bailiffs, and also held roles in the mock trial as defendant, parents of defendant and victims. Superior Court Judge David Wesley, who has been involved in the program since its inception, presided over both cases. The mock trial, which was based on a real case, involved a teenager engaged in a first-offense petty crime. The official trial involved a drug-related charge.

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"We are so thrilled to see Teen Court at Bell Gardens High because of the great opportunities it brings to our students," said Teen Court teacher William Renner, who has taught social studies for 20 years. "Students can truly see how our justice system works and how they fit in, as citizens and as potential members of the legal community."

Students at Bell Gardens meet once a week over the course of the academic year, as they go over the ins and outs of the court process, with Teen Court in session once a month involving real cases and defendants. They also learn more about juvenile and adult legal proceedings, study case law and learn about sentencing procedures. BGHS students receive elective credit for the course.

"This class, and clubs like it across our District, is innovative in its goal to expose students to legal procedure and careers early in their schooling," said Susanna Contreras Smith, Superintendent of Education. "We applaud our students for taking on such a responsibility to their community in Teen Court."

Photo Captions:

Teen Court1: Bell Gardens High School students act as mock defendant, defendants' parents and interpreter before Judge David Wesley (third from left), Judge Sergio Tapia (fourth from left), legal staff, and Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia (far right) during the inaugural Teen Court program kick-off event, which included a mock trial and a real life trial on Sept. 15 at Bell Gardens City Hall.

Teen Court2: Bell Gardens High School student jurors ask questions of the defendant during the inaugural Teen Court program kick-off event which included a mock trial and a real life trial on Sept. 15 at Bell Gardens City Hall.

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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.