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Edison Academy Students Honor Cesar Chavez by Assisting Children in Mexican Orphanages

Santa Monica, Calif. – More than 300 children and their families attended this year’s Noche de Cesar Chavez at Santa Monica-Malibu Unified’s Edison Language Academy, sharing stories about the school’s annual trip to bring supplies to Mexican orphanages and listening to a second-grade concert celebrating the Mexican-American labor activist’s legacy.

“As a vibrant and diverse school, Edison students truly embrace the history of California’s Latino-American advocates like Cesar Chavez and give back like he did,” Superintendent Sandra Lyon said. “We commend the school’s leadership and all those involved in honor Chavez’s legacy – on his birthday and throughout the year.”

The March 20 event was the Academy’s ninth annual recognition of Chavez, an important figure in the school’s focus on community. Chavez fought for farm worker rights, popularizing the motto, “Si Se Puede,” or “Yes, we can.” His birthday on March 31 is recognized as a state holiday in California.

“Our students study about Cesar Chavez as a leader and someone who struggled to better the lives of others,” said Lori Orum, principal of the Academy, a dual-language immersion school where students are taught in English and Spanish. “We teach about him as an important figure in California history and the history of the labor movement and as someone who brought about change through non-violence and organizing.”



At Edison, a massive portrait of Chavez hangs in the school’s cafeteria, painted by former fourth-graders and a school art teacher. (Photo of mural above.) The school takes Chavez’s mission to improve the lives of the poorest of the poor as more than a source of educational inspiration – it turns it into a call to action on several fronts.

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An annual service project also donates supplies for the Corazon de Vida Orphanages in Baja California. The school takes a busload of students and their families to spend a day with the children – reading, playing, doing arts and crafts, and sharing a meal.

In addition, younger Edison students celebrate Chavez’ legacy through song. This year, second-graders worked for six weeks with choral music teacher Jacqueline Fuentes to write a song about Chavez, which was included in a concert that featured songs drawn from the culture of Latin America.

Both efforts came together during Noche de Cesar Chavez, an evening of food and fellowship. The evening began with the concert and included a description of the service project, a slide show and a report from families about their experience visiting the orphanage.

Separately from the night program, older students at the school each year meet with former residents of those orphanages who are now attending college. The talks, conducted in Spanish, bring home the grinding poverty that is typical of orphanage life.

“It’s an amazing dialogue between students who grew up without families and basically owning nothing, and our students. Even though half of our families have low enough incomes that they qualify for the school lunch program, they seem rich compared with the students from Corazon,” Orum said.

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As a community of learners, the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District works together in a nurturing environment to help students be visionary, versatile thinkers; resourceful, life-long learners; effective, multilingual communicators and global citizens.