



Press Release

For Immediate Release:
January 27, 2015

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Bell Gardens Elementary School Students Help Draft State Legislation Fifth Graders Advocate to Include Mexican Repatriation Act In California School Textbooks

MONTEBELLO, Calif. – For anyone who has ever said to themselves “There ought to be a law!” -- meet Leslie Hiatt’s fifth-graders from Bell Garden Elementary. They responded to California State Assemblymember Cristina Garcia’s District-wide contest to introduce new state legislation by advocating for the inclusion of the Great Depression-era Mexican Repatriation Act into student textbooks and studies. As a winner of the contest, Hiatt and her students will travel to Sacramento to lobby for the bill.

“We are extremely proud of our students and their opportunity to meet state lawmakers and participate in the legislative process,” said Montebello Unified Board President Edgar Cisneros. “We have become accustomed to hard work and preparation being the standard in our District and we commend Ms. Hiatt and her class for what they have achieved.”

The Montebello Unified students are among the first winners announced in the “There Ought To Be A Law” contest initiated by Assemblymember Garcia, D-Bell Gardens, who represents the 58th District and is also a product of Montebello Unified herself.

Garcia recently visited Hiatt’s classroom and described to students a recent trip to Mexico and Central America where she learned more of the plight of unaccompanied migrant children coming to America. In the past year, Hiatt’s students had been exploring similar current issues related to undocumented children. After her visit, Garcia encouraged the students to submit an entry to the “There Ought To Be A Law” contest.

Garcia was pleasantly surprised by the students' thorough research, despite the paucity of information concerning Mexican repatriation, and marveled at their presentation on the topic, which included skits, poems, PowerPoint presentations and book about the Repatriation Act. All of this made quite an impression on Garcia, who has now introduced the legislation to include the history as Assembly Bill 146.

“These students are the most prepared people that have lobbied me on a bill,” said Garcia. “I can’t wait to see them in action in Sacramento.”

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The Mexican Repatriation Act, authorized by President Herbert Hoover, called for the unconstitutional deportation of over 1 million U.S. citizens and lawful residents of Mexican descent in California in the 1920s.

“It is greatly rewarding to see such ambition and creativity yield such a positive result,” said Superintendent of Schools Cleve Pell. “It is another example of the depth of our alumni as well as the potential our students have to succeed and exemplify progress and growth.”

“What a special experience Assemblywoman Garcia has created for our students to think creatively and collaboratively,” said Superintendent of Education Susanna Contreras Smith. “We are proud of the courage and the tenacity these students have demonstrated to develop a law that would impact future generations of students.”

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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.