



PRESS RELEASE – ORANGE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

For immediate release

Information: Superintendent's Office (714) 628-4487



Guest Speaker Brings History to Life at Villa Park High School

Orange, CA – December 7, 2016 – Villa Park High School hosted “Education, the Key to Success” to inspire close to 300 students from Villa Park High School and Cerro Villa Middle School to pursue their educational dreams.

The event also educated students about the struggles and obstacles faced by students in the past. Guest speaker Gonzalo Mendez Jr. spoke of his early experience with segregation which led to the landmark case filed by his father in 1944: Mendez v. Westminster. The Mendez case established a precedent for the desegregation of schools and provided a clear legal pathway for the plaintiffs’ attorneys in the 1954 case Brown v. Board of Education, ultimately leading to the desegregation of schools nationwide.

“It was a distinct honor and privilege to have Mr. Mendez speak at Villa Park High School to our students and community,” stated Villa Park High School Principal Ken Miller, Ed. D. “The Mendez family demonstrated incredible courage in overcoming overt discrimination. We are all infinitely indebted to his family as their courage forever impacted our nation for the better.”

A U.S.-born student, Mendez Jr. was only seven years old when he was denied enrollment at an all-white school in Westminster due to his racial background. He was assigned to an “All-Mexican” school where the facilities lacked the resources that the other schools possessed. His father, Gonzalo Mendez Sr., decided to get involved and fought for the desegregation of schools in Orange County. After three years in court, it was ruled that Mexican-American students should have equal enrollment and equal opportunities in education as their white counterparts. This was the first huge step on the journey to desegregate all California schools.

The event was hosted by the World Languages Department at Villa Park High School on Monday, December 5, 2016, after months of planning. Originally intended as a visit from Mendez Jr. to Brenda Ochoa’s AP Spanish Language Class, it was extended to offer more students the opportunity to participate. It was a fantastic success and a spectacular homecoming for Mendez Jr. as his four daughters attended both Cerro Villa Middle School and Villa Park High School.

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The Orange Unified School District educates approximately 30,000 students in the Cities of Orange, Villa Park, Anaheim, Garden Grove, Santa Ana and county areas. The school district, founded in 1953, encompasses 108 square miles. The District office is located at 1401 N. Handy Street, Orange, California.