Cultural Diversity Forum

Cultural Diversity Through the Fine Arts

Introduction

Almost thirteen years ago the community and CCISD collaborated to create a barrio school with a fine arts focus, which was extended to include other languages and technology. The staff was hand selected by the first Academy principal, Dick Peltz, and I was fortunate to have been a part of the Academy for ten years. Within two weeks after the Academy opened its doors, I was presenting a proposal to the then Dean of Fine Arts, Steven Bennett, to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month -- highlighting contests, displays, announcements, plus a Gala Assembly featuring mariachis, singing, and dancing. I mention this so you will know that any and every time I am involved in creating an event, there will be music, dancing and some form of visual art. I truly believe that the fine arts and, of course, other languages are extremely effective vehicles in promoting and preserving cultural diversity.

It is fortunate that CCISD is in the process of revitalizing the fine arts program because research demonstrates that fine arts and languages other than English raise scores, and in some cases, keep students in school and, of course, promote cultural diversity.

We are going to begin the fine arts presentation with examples of everything I have just mentioned. I have produced celebrations of Hispanic Heritage Month every year of my tenure with CCISD. In the most recent one, my students and I created an assembly for Kaffie Middle School entitled Profiles in Perfection, which featured 5 Hispanics who

The National Diversity Education Program, a multiyear joint project of the Japanese American National Museum (www.janm.org) and the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy (www.ncdemocracy.org) is generously supported by Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

impacted the world community. Today, we are able to recreate part of the program for you because of two exceptional young artists who happen to be products of CCISD. The first is Rosalia Chapa, an alumnus of Wynn Seale Academy and Miller High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, and who began her dancing career right here on this very stage. She was a twirler, then Darla Reid, the dance instructor at the time, saw a tape of her twirling at UIL, and said she has to dance, and she did. Rosalia loved learning to dance because, as she would say, it is like twirling without the baton. The rest is history; she danced on this stage every year for ten years, and many, many more stages. She fell in love with folklorico at Miller High School, and has not stopped since. She has become an internationally recognized dancer, choreographer, and teacher. She and her students create award-winning performances wherever they go. The important part of that story is two-fold. First, she began her dance training at two schools whose focus was fine arts. This means that what you will see here today from her and her students was initiated by her public school education. Of course, you must realize that she has continued to study with professional folklorico and flamenco dancers every year since, but she began right here on this stage. Secondly, the dance genre she chose to strengthen and promote is directly related to her culture and background. This can be said about the second young person you will see recreating Profiles in Perfection, Josh Garza. He similarly began his training as a guitarist with CCISD, and also chose an art form, which related to his background and culture. He, like Rosalia, challenged himself with UIL and other contests, winning many awards for his talents as a musician. He has not stopped perfecting his gift, as he is presently a music major at Del Mar. As you can see here today, he is always willing

The National Diversity Education Program, a multiyear joint project of the Japanese American National Museum (www.janm.org) and the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy (www.ncdemocracy.org) is generously supported by Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

to share his gift and talents with the community. I am now going to turn the program over to two of my Spanish students, Ellen Cordova and Donny Berthelot and to Rosalia Chapa and Josh Garza. I know you will enjoy the combination of talent on this stage and appreciate how representative it is of cultural diversity.

The National Diversity Education Program, a multiyear joint project of the Japanese American National Museum (www.janm.org) and the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy (www.ncdemocracy.org) is generously supported by Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.