

SAN DIEGO ELEMENTARY TEACHERS PITCH-IN FOR 12 YEAR-OLD CONTEST WINNER GO TO SACRAMENTO

Josefina Vega incoming 7th Grader at Montgomery Middle School wins \$2,500 grand prize scholarship

On August 6th Josefina Vega speaks to crowd of 500 on Capitol steps and meets with California Secretary of Education David Long and Chair of the Assembly Education Committee Gene Mullin.



Twelve year-old Josefina Vega won a \$2500 grand prize college scholarship for her essay submitted to the “Save Me a Spot in College” Contest sponsored by the Campaign for College Opportunity. The Contest awarded scholarships to 200 middle and high school students around the state. 12,000 students entered this year.

When her Finney Elementary School teachers heard that she had won, they began passing around a hat to raise money for her to go to Sacramento and join education and policy leaders urging lawmakers to pass SB 890 Early Commitment to College, a bill that would teach students early about how to go to college and how to pay for it.

“Everything that has happened has touched the hearts of our entire district – everybody is rallying behind her. People are reaching into their wallets. We want her to feel like her college experience has already started. We really want to see her succeed.” says her 6th grade teacher Edrick Macalaguim who teaches at Finney Elementary School in San Diego’s Chula Vista Elementary School District. Made more inspiring is the fact that Ms. Vega no longer attends Finney Elementary – this year she begins classes at Montgomery Middle School in San Diego’s Sweetwater Union High School District.

Macalaguim knows first-hand how important it is for students as young as Josefina Vega to learn about college. Many in his class like Ms. Vega would be the first in their families to go to college and most come from low-income backgrounds. Every year he has his sixth graders write away to colleges and universities to get information so that they learn how to reach out to those schools. And every year for the past three years he has had his students enter the “Save Me a Spot in College” Contest.

Josefina Vega and her classmates need all the support they can get to make it to college. California is facing an ‘education crisis’ warn education and policy leaders around the state, including the Campaign for College Opportunity. While a study last month pointed to the state’s extremely high dropout rate of one in four students, another recent study has pointed to the low rate – less than 43% – of high school graduates going directly into college, making California 48th in the nation.

Josefina’s mom also named Josefina, is a childcare worker and has been a volunteer with Finney Elementary School for the past 12 years – her older daughters, Karina and Melissa, attend Montgomery High School. Josefina’s father Humberto is an auto mechanic for the United States Postal Service. Both parents are bursting with pride about Josefina’s accomplishment. As her mom says, “I know that each of my daughters can be someone important someday.”

Josefina will read her essay at the southern California reception for contest winners in Long Beach this Friday, August 1st and will attend the Sacramento Event on August 6th where she will have the opportunity to take a tour of the Capitol and to meet with state legislators.

The “Save Me a Spot in College” Scholarship Contest is made possible in part because of the generosity of funders such as the College Access Foundation of California and the McConnell Foundation.