

Top 7 School Name Choices - Summaries for School Community

March 2018

<p>Mendez Family</p> <p>(Gonzalo, Felicitas, Sylvia)</p>	<p>The Mendez family lived in Southern California about 70 years ago. Gonzalo, the father, was born in Mexico, and Felicitas, the mother, was born in Puerto Rico. They had three children, Sylvia, Gonzalo Jr. and Jerome. The family moved to a town called Westminster, and when they tried to send the children to a school called 17th Street Elementary, they were told that school was for "Whites only." The parents thought this wasn't fair, and so they brought together other families in their neighborhood and they worked with lawyers to fight the school district. This became a famous case called <i>Méndez vs Westminster</i>, and it led to the desegregation of all California schools in 1947. This became an important step toward desegregating schools for the entire United States in the 1954 Supreme Court Case called <i>Brown vs. the Board of Education</i>.</p> <p>Sylvia Mendez grew up to become a nurse. She is now 82 years old, and she still speaks publicly about civil rights and equality, and how important her parents were in fighting for their rights and rights of others. She came and spoke in Berkeley in 2017 when it was the 70th anniversary of the famous Mendez court case. There are now two schools near Los Angeles named for her parents. She was given the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011 by President Obama in recognition of her efforts to educate young people about the history of desegregation in our public schools.</p>
<p>Tape Family</p> <p>(Mary, Joseph, Mamie)</p>	<p>Mary and Joseph Tape were born in China about 160 years ago. They each came to California when they were children. They met in San Francisco, got married and eventually had four children. They tried to send their oldest girl, Mamie, to a school called Spring Valley School but the Principal said that she couldn't go to school because her family had come from China. The Tapes decided to fight; Mary Tape said, "didn't God make us all?" They went to court, and in their case, called <i>Tape v. Hurley</i>, the California Supreme Court agreed with them that racial discrimination in public education was against the California State Constitution. But then some people in power changed the law in California so there would be separate "Oriental" schools, and also made rules that people of Asian heritage could only own property in certain neighborhoods in San Francisco. So the Tapes decided to move to Berkeley which did not have these rules.</p> <p>In 1895, the Tapes bought a house on the 2100 block of Russell Street, only 3 years after LeConte Elementary School opened. They lived in Berkeley for the rest of their lives. Joseph was a businessman, and he and one son were volunteer firefighters in Berkeley. Mary was well known for her art and photography, and was also an expert at sending telegraph messages. The <i>Tape v. Hurley</i> decision was a important precedent in racial discrimination cases, before <i>Mendez v. Westminster</i> and <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i>, in the arc towards justice in school desegregation.</p>

Ruth Acty	<p>Ruth Acty was born and raised in Oakland, about 100 years ago. She always wanted to be a teacher from her earliest childhood. Her father had gone to college but had to work for the railroads because there were not many job opportunities for college-educated black men. She studied literature and music at San Francisco State University, and then studied theatre at UC Berkeley and Northwestern University. In 1943 she was asked to come to Berkeley to teach, as the first African American teacher in the Berkeley public schools.</p> <p>She was a pioneering educator in an era of pervasive racial discrimination and segregation. She taught elementary school at Longfellow and at Lincoln (now Malcolm X), middle school at Burbank Junior High (now West Campus), and also taught at the Adult School. She taught English, French, English literature, theater and dramatic arts, and English as a foreign language, and retired at age 80 after 50 years of teaching. When she died in 1998, Robert Haynes, senior curator for the African American Museum and Library in Oakland said "Miss Ruth Acty's significance in the history of the Bay Area is unparalleled. She was a pioneer in theater arts, working through the WPA. She represented the best in excellence, elegance, commitment, determination, perseverance, and persistence. She was a superior mentor and role model for planning and reaching goals, despite the odds." Her friend Barbara Cannon, former dean at Mills College said, "She opened the doors for both other African Americans and persons of color to teach in the Berkeley public schools"</p>
denise brown	<p>denise (she spelled her name in lower case) brown was born in North Oakland, the youngest of six children. After graduating from Oakland Tech, she attended San Jose State University and then San Francisco State, where she received a bachelor's degree in English. She and her husband and two children lived in the LeConte neighborhood. denise was a founder and actor at Berkeley Black Repertory Group Theater and drew on that experience to teach a PTA-sponsored after-school drama class at LeConte. Then Principal Barbara Penny-James encouraged her to become a teacher, so denise went back to school to get her credential, and Barbara hired her as a classroom teacher. denise continued to teach her after-school drama class, writing her own original plays and musicals for the children to perform. She added a summer program at LeConte. In addition to her teaching expertise and performance skills, denise had a gift for fostering understanding and empathy among children (and parents) of all races and backgrounds.</p> <p>After more than a decade at LeConte, denise accepted a vice principal position as the administrator of the humanities and performing arts small school, AHA, at Berkeley High. She was also the dean of discipline. denise was a beloved figure in the school as a whole, until her sudden and tragic death in 2007 at age 50 from a complication of surgery. A beautiful portrait of her by AHA students is on a wall at Berkeley High, and her photograph is also above the LeConte School auditorium in recognition of her contributions.</p>

<p>Dolores Huerta</p>	<p>Dolores Huerta was born in New Mexico, and came to Stockton, California with her mother and two brothers when she was a child. Her mother was a businesswoman who owned a hotel and restaurant and was very involved in the community and supportive of farm workers. Dolores went to college to become a teacher, but after a year of teaching she decided she wanted to do something to make life better for the hard-working, poor people in her community. She led voter registration drives and fought for economic justice for workers. She later met activist César Chávez, and together they founded an organization to fight for the rights of farm workers. She became the vice president of the United Farm Workers.</p> <p>She helped organize a 1965 strike of 5,000 grape workers, and she went on to organize workers, negotiate contracts, and advocate for safer working conditions, including the elimination of harmful pesticides. She also fought for unemployment and healthcare benefits for agricultural workers and was the driving force behind the nationwide grape boycotts that led to a successful union contract by 1970. She is now 87 years old. She received the Presidential Medal of Freedom for her work in 2012, has several schools named in her honor, and is recognized in Berkeley through the annual Chavez-Huerta celebration.</p>
<p>Arco Iris</p>	<p>“Escuela Arco Iris” was a name suggested by one of the fifth grade students last year. The name was an instant hit in the classroom. <i>Arco Iris</i> is Spanish for <i>Rainbow</i>, and it encapsulates the school community: vibrant, diverse, accepting, loving, and the name is fun!</p> <p>Rainbows are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A universal symbol of hope after hardship: the rays of sun coming through a storm. • A symbol of the diversity and coexistence of humanity, forming a bridge of all colors in the spectrum. • Light, prisms, water droplets, sun, physics, science, environment. • A symbol for the indigenous Inca people in Peru and Bolivia. • A symbol of pride used by the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. The Rainbow flag is flown in the Pride Parade. • A symbol of multi-cultural inclusivity. Rainbows appear as symbols in many religions.

<p>Ohlone [or other name honoring indigenous people of Berkeley]</p>	<p><i>Ohlone</i> is one of the names for the indigenous people who first lived in Berkeley. Along with <i>Chochenyo</i>, which is a name for some of the East Bay people, and also the name of the language they spoke, and the place and group names <i>Lisjan</i> and <i>Huichian</i>, this category of a school name would be chosen to honor the Native Americans who were the first peoples here.</p> <p>In order to use one of these indigenous names or words, we would want to have the approval and engagement of local indigenous people. We have begun outreach to Tribal representatives. There is interest in exploring the possibility of choosing a school name that would honor the people who have lived here for many thousands of years. However, since the name choice for our school has to be decided by the School Board in May, it could be that there isn't enough time to have enough of a discussion that leads to an agreement on an appropriate school name of this type. Hopefully this process at least opens the way to further dialogue with our school and with our district as a whole about the history and culture of native peoples and how they are represented in our schools.</p>
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