

Berkeley Unified School District Board of Education
RESOLUTION NO. 19-002
Honoring Sylvia Mendez and Celebrating the Sylvia Mendez School Community

WHEREAS, the Berkeley Unified School District Board approved the name “Sylvia Mendez Elementary School” on May 23, 2018, as the culmination of an intensive community engagement process which included the consideration of 118 potential new names submitted from across the community; and

WHEREAS, the students, staff and families of the school dedicated considerable time, effort and thought to the process of choosing a new name, including classroom activities and home/school discussions, with the Superintendent’s Naming Advisory Committee gathering and carefully considering the input before making a final recommendation; and

WHEREAS, in 2017 Berkeley’s Chavez-Huerta Commemorative Committee sponsored a student essay contest based on the story of Sylvia Mendez, and suggested readings that also inspired the school community, including “Separate is Never Equal” by Duncan Tonatuih, “Sylvia and Aki” by Winifred Conkling, and “Mendez v. Westminster” by Philippa Strum; and

WHEREAS, it has been important to rediscover and celebrate the story of Sylvia Mendez, who was a little girl at the center of a 1947 landmark California school desegregation case, Mendez v. Westminster School District, which laid the groundwork for the national desegregation decision in Brown v. Board of Education seven years later; and

WHEREAS, even after the rulings in Mendez v. Westminster School District and Brown v. Board of Education, the demographics of many public schools continued to reflect the discriminatory practices that lead to unequal housing and educational opportunities; and

WHEREAS, exactly fifty years ago, the Berkeley Unified School District instituted a city-wide bussing program to voluntarily desegregate our schools, and continues its efforts in a model strategy based on a school assignment system that strives to provide equality of access and opportunity to all Berkeley students, and includes a program at Sylvia Mendez School that fosters bilingual and biliterate, multicultural individuals who continually learn, grow and contribute to their community; and

WHEREAS the name Sylvia Mendez Elementary School is a particularly inspiring and appropriate choice for the school and for our district, reflecting enduring core values of equality and justice, recognizing multilingual and Latinx heritage; celebrating strong women, and emphasizing the right to a high-quality public education,

WHEREAS, Sylvia Mendez has dedicated her time after her retirement as a Pediatric Nursing Director to encouraging young people to stay in school, educating students about Mendez v. Westminster, and carrying on the work of her parents, Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez, who taught her “that we are all individuals; that we are all human beings; that we are all connected together; and that we all have the same rights, the same freedom”,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Berkeley Unified School District and its Board of Education hereby honor the work of Sylvia Mendez and her family, and join the school community in celebrating the renaming of Sylvia Mendez Elementary School on Friday, September 14, 2018, with Sylvia Mendez and her sister Sandra Duran as honored guests.

APPROVED AND ADOPTED this 12th day of September 2018 by the Board of Education.

Beatriz Leyva-Cutler, Clerk
School Board