



Latino students from 4J and UO unite around image of hero Cesar Chavez.

## Cesar Chavez School

Will 4J listen to Latinos?

When the Eugene District 4J School Board meets Feb. 18 it will hear recommendations from the school renaming committee as to which monikers to place on the marquees of two newly built 4J schools that will open next September. The board will also hear from many local citizens who want a say in naming the new elementary school to be built next to Patterson Elementary, which will be fed by students currently at Patterson and Westmoreland.

The name those citizens want to see emblazoned over the doorway is that of Cesar Chavez, a Mexican-American hero who liberated farmworkers by bringing them recognition and rights, and founded the United Farm Workers Union.

Members of the local Latino community hope that other members of the community will also show up and lend their support to what they call "a moment" in a long-awaited quest for recognition. The meeting will begin at 7 pm Feb. 18 at 200 N. Monroe St.

"Part of the motivation of some of us is to see a reflection of our community in Eugene," says LCC Diversity Coordinator Jim Garcia, a member of a community advocacy group working for the advancement of Latino issues, including the school naming option.

"The Latino community has always been here but our sense is that we've been made invisible by those who can make us visible," he says.

Latinos are the largest minority population in the U.S., in Oregon, and in Lane County, and people of Spanish descent have been in this geographic area since the 1500s.

"Cesar Chavez was not a foreigner, but a Mexican American who fought for this country and for issues others didn't want to fight for," says Garcia.

Latino students in 4J have also geared up to advocate for representation in the district.

Last week, members of GANAS, a Latino student group at Jefferson Middle School, met with members of UO Latino group MECHA to discuss what such a name would mean for them.

"He was a great leader," said Elizabeth Sampedro. "He brought recognition to the farm workers, who worked for so little pay."

That sentiment is echoed by many students, most of whom have had or continue to have farm workers in their families.

UO student Abel Diaz-Diaz adds, "Strawberries, blueberries, cucumbers — so many of the foods we eat come from farm workers, and not just Latinos, but African Americans, Chinese, and whites; Chavez helped all of them."

"There is no other recognition for Latino

leaders, and we want some recognition for the work we do," says eighth-grader Xochitl Soto.

The students add that it is difficult for them to find representations of themselves in the local community. When UO student Evelia Zazueta came to Eugene, she says, "I didn't see someone like me in the community, I didn't hear anything like me."

**'Part of the motivation...is to see a reflection of our community in Eugene.'**

- Jim Garcia, LCC Diversity Coordinator

The GANAS and MECHA students add that for younger children, seeing themselves represented in a school would have a huge impact. "It would make them so proud and they would tell others," says Alma Reyes-Guillen, who intends to address the 4J School Board on Wednesday. "They could tell stories of Cesar Chavez and be a part of it. I would be proud to be in that school."

"Chavez is a good role model because he was a leader," says Garcia. "He was a person who chose to change the conditions of people who were not being treated very well in a non-violent way. He was able to receive support from people all over the world for his cause."

Because the Latino community has grown so much in Oregon and in Lane County in recent years, Garcia adds it's "a good time to see this reflection."

And that growth, he says, is "the basis for our expression at this point. It's been bubbling up for a long time. Whether people are going to listen to us or not is not our concern anymore. We're just keeping it on the front burner all the time."

And keeping it positive is important for the young ones.

"When my step-brother and step-sister came to Eugene, they asked me, 'Why are there no names of Latinos anywhere? Do they not like us?'" said GANAS student Rayven Laury.

The students unanimously felt that recognition and representation is of the utmost importance as of now, and the name of leader and hero Cesar Chavez is the one to begin with.

"You look at his legacy," says Garcia. "The kids are able to see what he was trying to do and what he did. We have schools with names of people who have owned other people and who have killed other people and those are two things we are proud Cesar Chavez never engaged in."

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