



**Remarks by
Sylvia Mendez
Latino Leader Luncheon Series
Eagle Leadership Award**

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Sylvia Mendez: *Buenas tardes.* Good afternoon. Thank you so much for this honor, Mickey. Thank you so much. I am so honored to be amongst so many accomplished Latino leaders, and to be here with my hero, Dolores Huerta. I am so appreciative and so honored to be here.

I need to let you know that I was a nurse here in LA County for 33 years, and I love our community here in Los Angeles. When my mother was very sick, I retired from being a nursing director here at the county hospital to take care of her. I remember we would be there talking. She said, "Sylvia, nadien sabe de este caso [Nobody knows about this case] how Latinos have always been fighting since the 1930 in the Lemon Grove incident. They don't know what we have always wanted for our children - education, the best. We want equality for

everybody." It was that day that I said, "Mother, I'm a nurse. I can't go out there and start talking about Mendez versus Westminster. I know how to say open your mouth, I'm going to give you a pill, or turn around I'm going to give you a shot." She said, "No, Sylvia. Alguien tiene que decir este story [Someone has to say this story]. This is history. This is history of the United States, how California became the first state to be integrated. You have to go. Somebody has to go and tell the story."

It was that day that I promised my mother that I would go and start talking about Mendez versus Westminster. I have been talking about Mendez versus Westminster for over 25 years. In fact, last night, I just came back from Kentucky where I spoke to migrant educators about Mendez versus Westminster, and I will continue as long as I am able to walk to go and tell the story about these brave Latinos - Guzman, Palomino, Estrada, Ramirez, and my parents - that stood up against the establishment at the time we thought you couldn't and did, and they won the case. And, yes, I am so proud to be here among all of you Latino leaders, and thank you so much for this wonderful honor.

Right now, I will continue my goal to let everybody know about Mendez versus Westminster, but also to talk to students across the nation about the important part that education will

play in their lives, to give them a very comfortable life. And as I will continue doing all of this, I also want to tell you that right now I'm working so hard to get a monument made for my father, a memorial in Westminster's case, in Westminster where they did not want to accept the knowledge that it was there. That we were turned away from that horrible school at that time, and now they have given me some land that if I have enough money I can have a memorial and a statue for my mother and father, and that's why I go around the country speaking about this wonderful case aside from talking to all the students.

I am invited all over the country to speak to students, and my goal is to make sure that they're aware about that we're all equal and we all deserve the same quality of justice in the United States. Because I'll never forget when I went to that school, and this boy came up said, "Ugh, you're a Mexican. You don't belong here. What are you doing here?" I started crying. I couldn't believe what was going on. I went home and I said, "Mama, I'm not going back to that school. They don't want me there." And she said, "Sylvia, que no sabes lo que estabamos peliando [*Don't you know what we were fighting for*]?" "Yes. So I could get to that beautiful school with the monkey bars and the swing." She said, "No, Sylvia. That's not what we were fighting for. We were fighting because under God,

we're all equal and we all deserve the same equal education,
the same equality and social justice in this wonderful country
of ours." Thank you so much for this wonderful honor. Thank
you so much.