

California Safe Schools Celebrates 22nd Anniversary and Earth Day

LOS ANGELES, Calif., April 27, 2020 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – March 30, 2020 marked the 22nd anniversary of California Safe Schools (CSS) a celebrated children's environmental health and justice coalition founded by Robina Suwol in 1998 after grade school students, including Robina's two sons, were sprayed with the herbicide Princep, as they headed to class.



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A school gardener in a hazardous materials suit, employed by LA Unified School District, unaware students were present, sprayed the herbicide creating a cloud of pesticide mist students were forced to walk through to reach their classrooms. Several parents who had dropped off their children at the school were alarmed to witness this event. Robina's youngest son, Nicholas, whose asthma had been under control, experienced a severe asthma attack after the incident.

Robina and CSS sprung into action, contacting the school district, experts in the area, teachers and other parents – leading the effort to ensure incidents like this would not happen again. And, one year to the date Nicholas became ill, CSS and LAUSD enacted the most stringent pesticide policy in the nation for schools. The policy was the first in the United States to embrace the

Precautionary Principle and Parents Right to Know regarding pesticides in schools.

The success of the policy led to California legislation, The Healthy Schools Act 2000, and AB 405 spearheaded by Suwol and CSS, which prevents experimental pesticides whose health effects are unknown from being used in all K-12 California schools. As a result, 6 million students, hundreds of thousands of teachers and school employees are protected. For 22 years LA Unified has not used Roundup, or any herbicides, on the grounds of any schools in a district spanning 28 cities, 703 square miles and 1000 sites.

“While celebrating together has been temporarily postponed, honoring our 2020 heroes cannot be delayed. We thank each of them for their enormous and selfless contributions. They make our world a much safer and better place,” said Robina Suwol, [California Safe Schools](#), executive director.

Honorees :

HUMANITARIAN AWARD

Monsignor John Moretta

John Moretta was born in Los Angeles on July 12, 1941. He entered St. John’s Seminary, Camarillo, in 1960. After completing Philosophy and Theology studies, he was ordained on April 27, 1968. He has served in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles as a parish priest in five parishes. He is at presently the pastor of Resurrection Church in Boyle Heights. This May he will have served there for thirty-five years. Throughout his ministry he has worked with the Latino community and has been on several advisory boards of the Archdiocese. He was invested as a Domestic Prelate to His Holiness with the title of Monsignor on February 2, 1992.

He has been an advocate for the empowerment of people. Whether it is in educating people to speak English, preparing for citizenship, organizing the Mothers of East Los Angeles, establishing a first-time homeowners center, the Boyle Heights Resident Homeowners Association, Neighborhood Watch Groups, sitting on advisory boards of high schools, member of the Guadalupe Procession Committee, Dean of Deanery 9, serves on the Priests Council and Personnel Board for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and also for the Police Department.

Most recently he helped fight the battle to close down Exide Technologies after many years of releasing lead into the environment. Monsignor Moretta has a great love for the people he serves and is always looking for ways to improve the community.

HEALTH HERO

Evelyn Cortez-Davis, P.E., BCEE

Evelyn Cortez-Davis is the Assistant Director of Water Operations t the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, the largest municipal utility in the

nation. She has over 25 years of engineering experience in water quality, water conservation, pipeline design and construction, environmental compliance, recycled water, water rights, groundwater remediation, and groundwater planning. She currently leads the team that safely treats, stores and conveys water for the 4 million people in the City of Los Angeles.

In previous roles, she oversaw projects to clean up contaminated groundwater throughout the City, to capture more stormwater, increase conservation, and expand the use of recycled water and groundwater. She represented the City of Los Angeles on the Colorado River Board of California and the Board of Directors of the National Water Research Institute.

She is a graduate of UCLA, a registered Civil Engineer in the state of California, and is a Board Certified Environmental Engineer. Ms. Cortez-Davis is also the author of the book December Sky- Beyond My Undocumented Life relating her family's story as first-generation immigrants from El Salvador and their path to U.S. citizenship

LEADERSHIP AWARD

Christian Arana

Christian strongly believes in the promise of America, and that begins first with California's estimated 15 million Latinos. As the Policy Director at Latino Community Foundation, Christian leads the foundation's efforts to advance policy solutions that will improve the lives and political power of California's Latinos.

Christian served as the Senior Governance Specialist at the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) in Washington, D.C. During his tenure, he worked with the nation's top political, corporate, and nonprofit leaders to develop the next generation of Latino leaders in policy. He also managed CHCI's transition towards the use of impact metrics and led two successful strategic planning sessions with CHCI's leadership. Prior to CHCI, Christian worked at the Aspen Institute for the College Excellence Program. He helped administer the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence Competition honoring the top performing community colleges in the nation. Dedicated to the advancement of Latino communities, Christian began his career as an AmeriCorps member where he served as a college counselor at Cristo Rey New York High School in East Harlem, New York.

Christian received a Master's Degree in Public Policy from UC Berkeley and holds a Bachelor's Degree from Georgetown University in International Politics. In his free time, Christian enjoys cooking, watching Dodgers baseball, and traveling.

IMPACT AWARD

Stellaluna Lopez-Ramirez is a sophomore at Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School in Boyle Heights. She is an honor roll student, a sophomore class representative, and a leader in academic performance. She is also a member of the junior varsity girls basketball team, and led the league with sixteen

points per game this season. When not at school, she works with Youth Orchestra Los Angeles playing violin and mentoring elementary and middle school students in music and leadership, or runs free tutoring sessions with her peers. Additionally, through Youth Orchestra Los Angeles, she has performed at major venues such as Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Aspen Music Festival, and the Hollywood Bowl. After high school, she plans to double major in a STEM field and a humanity.

Health & Safety Champion Award

Los Angeles Unified School District

Honoring the management and staff of the Los Angeles Unified School District for 22 years of embracing the Precautionary Principle and Right to Know while successfully implementing the most stringent pesticide policy in the nation for schools , including their phenomenal efforts to serve more than 10 million meals to students, and quickly employing virtual academic programs during this challenging pandemic.

Learn more about California Safe Schools at: <http://www.calisafe.org/>

SPONSORS:

Sponsors for the CSS Anniversary: South Coast Air Quality Management District, Metropolitan Water District, California Air Resources Board, California Department of Pesticide Regulation, Los Angeles Department of Water & Power, Earthjustice, Republic Services, Natural Resource Defense Counsel, Galpin Ford, & Libertyhill.

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