

***SYLVIA MENDEZ***  
*CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST*



Civil rights activist Sylvia Mendez is the oldest daughter of Gonzalo Mendez, a Mexican immigrant, and Felicitas Mendez, a Puerto Rican, who fought so she could have equal education. Her parents were plaintiffs in the landmark *Mendez v. Westminster School District* (1947) case that paved the way for *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and ended school segregation in California.

In 1943, students of Mexican descent were required to enroll in schools separate from white children. When Sylvia was in the third grade, she and her siblings were denied admission to the segregated school near their Westminster home. The Mendez family, along with four other Latino families, fought to integrate the school. Their 1947 victory led to the desegregation of public schools in California and became a precedent to the board decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Today, Sylvia continues the legacy left by her parents by fighting for quality education and by encouraging students to stay in school.

Miss Mendez, who still resides in Orange County, attended Cal Sate Los Angeles, earning a BS in Nursing. She then worked 33 years a nurse at the Los Angeles USC Medical Center, becoming Assistant Nursing Director of the Pediatric pavilion. Since Miss Mendez retired she has traveled to all 7 Continents and has been to over 60 countries.

Miss Mendez has received numerous awards and recognitions.

This year in May 2010, she was invited to the White House, where she was mentioned by President Obama in a proclamation honoring women.

Currently Sylvia and her family are among the participants in the story of “Courage. The Vision to End Segregation. The Guts to Fight For It”. This unique exhibition, which includes ‘Para Todos Los Ninos/For All the Children’ is at the Museum of Tolerance through August 2010.

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