HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS LED LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE FORUM FOR BOARD DISTRICT 5 IN SOUTH GATE

The event featured a resource fair followed by a candidate forum.

Los Angeles, CA – Local high school youth participating in United Way of Greater Los Angeles’ Young Civic Leaders Program (YCLP) today led and moderated a Student-Led Candidate Forum for Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Board District 5 at South Gate High School. Before the forum, students attended a College Readiness Resource Fair on the high school quad where they had a chance to enter a raffle to win a $1,000 scholarship.

Organized and co-hosted by United Way of Greater Los Angeles and the Alliance for A Better Community, the candidate forum provided an opportunity for students to hear directly from candidates hoping to represent them on the Board of Education about how they plan to address many of the challenges students face today.

“During the forum we asked candidates how they’d represent the diverse communities across the board district, and support an LGBTQ curriculum, English Learners, and special education and homeless youth – issues that are important to our communities,” said Julie Castillo, a senior at NAVA Prep Academy and member of United Way’s Young Civic Leaders Program. “We also asked them how they will ensure that there is a focus on college preparation as early as freshman year in high school, increase the number of college counselors and more,” she added.

Since 2015, YCLP participants have led and moderated United Way of Greater Los Angeles’ candidate forums for school board elections. The forums offer local voters, especially students, an opportunity to address a wide range of education-related issues affecting their school communities.

“This student-led candidate forum is one of the many ways that United Way of Greater Los Angeles gives voice to our youth to improve their schools and communities,” said Elise Buik, president and CEO of United Way of Greater Los Angeles. “Together with our partners we provide capacity building to students and their families so that they can join in the education conversation,

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feel empowered, and make thoughtful decisions that will impact the wellbeing of their schools and communities,” she added.

Forum organizers also hoped to increase voter engagement and participation in the March 5th runoff election, particularly in the southeast cities where according to data from the California Department of Education, Latino students make up 97 percent of the student population, 91 percent of students are low income, and more than 26 percent are English Learners. Historically, candidates are elected by less than 9 percent of registered voters in the district. There are 312,434 registered voters in Board District 5. Board District 5 spans the northeast communities of Echo Park, Eagle Rock, Highland Park, Los Feliz and Silver Lake, parts of El Sereno, and the southeast cities of Bell, Cudahy, Huntington Park, Maywood, South Gate and Vernon.

“We are proud to be part of an effort that puts students and their concerns at the forefront of the conversation with candidates vying to represent them on the school board,” said Vanessa Aramayo, executive director of the Alliance for A Better Community, one of the nonprofits co-hosting the event. “In Board District 5, where 90 percent of students are Latino, one in four students is an English Learner, and more than 2,000 youth are homeless, it is students’ voices that must be lifted to ensure their next representative understands their needs,” added Aramayo.

LAUSD has a total of seven board members who oversee an $8 billion annual budget for more than half a million students in 785 schools. The decisions made by school board members have a direct impact on L.A. Unified students – the majority of whom live in low-resource neighborhoods and attend various school models. Less than half of the district’s students complete the high school A-G coursework graduation requirement, and only 50 percent qualify for acceptance to a California four-year university. For many students living in high-need areas such as the southeast cities, access to a high-quality education is key to breaking the cycle of poverty.

For more information
For more about the LAUSD Candidate Forums, and/or to schedule an interview please contact Evelyn G. Alemán at (818) 881-7976 office, (818) 943-2481 cell, or evelyn@mipr.net. Information will also be found via social media: Twitter @launitedway, Facebook @launitedway, Instagram @launitedway, Twitter @afabc_la, Facebook @afabcla, Instagram @afabc_la #LAUSDBD5