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## Students rally for change

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"I have a dream!"

-Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Si se puede!"

-Cesar Chavez

"Yes we can!"

-President Barack Obama

John Muir Middle School's third annual peace rally kicked off with students cheering the catchphrase of three great leaders.

Linking the legacies of King, Chavez and Obama was a key theme of "Season of Service, Period of Peace." The 10-week campaign began on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - when San Leandro High students had "a day on, not off" - and concluded with the rally on March 31, a holiday commemorating Chavez's birthday.

Anthony Chavez, 23-year-old grandson of the late farm labor activist, gave the keynote address.

"We are each the keepers of my grandfather's legacy every time we affirm 'Si se puede! Yes we can!'" he asserted. "The greatest way to honor him is not with a corner street sign or an official holiday, but by having the courage to work for change."

The collaborative project of the Alameda County Office of Education and the San Leandro Unified School District was led by San Leandro High School students in order to draw attention to social justice issues and principles of non-violence.

The middle school students made origami peace cranes and paper chain links, signed a peace pledge, and invited Wilson Elementary school students to join them in the peace rally. "We may not achieve peace," said middle school student Elisha Feliciano, "but we are all connected by our desire for peace."

"What kind of legacy will you leave?" asked Board of Education Trustee Carmen Sullivan, speaking about the choices each person makes and the power of non-violent action. "What kind of legacy will you leave your enemies?"

Pointing to the delicate chain of peace cranes fluttering the breeze, she added, "Like the paper cranes linked together, you must hold tight and stick together. Your peace pledges are the bonds, and you are the cranes."

After the morning's rally, students unveiled a peace quilt they made with assistance from English teacher Casey Wilson. This was followed by remarks from 10 participating student groups and Academy of Multi-Media students who created projects to raise awareness of child and domestic abuse, neglect, and lost friends. They also highlighted the work of peace activists and embarked on a 50-day rolling fast inspired by Chavez's fast to draw attention to farm workers' struggles.

"The fast made me realize how much violence is in our community and how it affects everyone. I learned that I can teach people to create peace," said student leader Jasmine Lesure.

"It is critical that our schools provide opportunities for students to address what matters to them," noted Alameda County Schools Superintendent Sheila Jordan. "This project has strengthened the connections between classroom and community...and is a powerful example of the resources we have in our youth and the potential for students to make positive change for all."

"Our students' courage and commitment to peace is inspiring," said Superintendent Christine Lim, adding that the rally presentations were especially moving to her after attending a recent memorial service for four slain Oakland police officers. "I am proud of how they are raising awareness and promoting peace in our schools and community. Si se puede! Yes we can!"