

Chavez leadership conference Saturday
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By: Ansel Oliver, The Press-Tribune

When Rene Aguilera was given a day off work from his state job several years ago, he thought he should do something to honor the reason for the one-day vacation.

The state holiday honoring Cesar Chavez, who founded what is today the United Farm Workers, and whom many consider a civil rights leader, was a chance for Aguilera to promote Hispanic education and opportunity.

On Saturday, about 1,000 kids from sixth to 12th grade will travel from all over Northern and Central California to attend the seventh annual celebration of education sponsored by the Hispanic Empowerment Association of Roseville, of which Aguilera serves as president.

"This year we're focusing on parental involvement," he said of the Cesar Chavez Youth Leadership Conference and Celebration slated for 8 a.m. Saturday at Sierra College in Rocklin.

The goal is to promote advancement and expose Hispanics and kids of other cultures to career opportunities. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell will deliver the keynote address at noon, focusing on how parents can be more involved with their child's education, Aguilera said.

"Oftentimes the kids are not hearing they should go to college from someone who looks like them," he said.

Hispanic enrollment in college has increased since the late 1970s, but still lags behind national enrollment rates of high school graduates, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Event organizers say and education focus starts at home.

"It's a beautiful time to spend with your children," said Lourdes Vaquero, who, like last year, will teach a parenting workshop, one of 40 workshop options at Saturday's event.

"Active parents are involved," said Vaquero, a former television news scriptwriter who has worked at Roseville's Family Resource Center. "The kids need quality time with their parents every single day."

Workshops will range from highlighting careers in nursing, engineering and poetry to drug and gang prevention awareness.

An entire room will be dedicated to parents wanting to learn their rights within their child's education. Sacramento State University Counsel Edmundo Aguilar will teach a workshop highlighting parents' rights. One example is if parents work for an employer with more than 100 employees, they can take a day off to go observe at their child's school.

"It's my opinion a lot of minority parents are not given a handbook of parents' rights by the high school or middle school," Aguilera said. "If they are, it might not be in their language."

This year, many kids will ride buses to the convention from as far as Kings Beach in North Tahoe, Monterey and Coalinga.

"The magic word 'free' helps," Aguilera said.

The convention is free with free parking and food. All HEAR events are alcohol and tobacco free.

"People go to good things, doesn't matter if they're all minority or Caucasian," Aguilera said.

"The conference is for everybody."

CELEBRATE

What: Cesar Chavez Youth Leadership Conference and Celebration

When: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday

Where: Sierra College Cafeteria, 5000 Rocklin Road, Rocklin

Information: 532-5998 or www.hear2000.org