

Remembering Jim Figueroa, Leader in Adult Education in Los Angeles Area

Posted on 04/09/2015

James A. Figueroa, a beloved and respected leader of adult school education in the Los Angeles Unified School District, [passed away](#) ♣ on March 28 at the age of 73.

Jim was born and raised in East Los Angeles and graduated from Cantwell High School in 1959. He attended East Los Angeles Community College and graduated from Los Angeles State College (now California State University-Los Angeles) in 1963 before beginning work as an elementary school teacher. He soon was recruited to become an adult school teacher, a decision that began his 30-plus year distinguished career as an advocate for adult education.

Jim's administrative career for [LAUSD](#) ♣ began as Assistant Principal at Evans Community Adult School, where he helped the school earn a worldwide reputation in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) for adults. He later became principal at Roosevelt Community Adult School, where he developed exemplary programs for adults. It was not long before he became Director of Operations for the Division of Adult and Career Education (DACE) and subsequently became Assistant Superintendent of DACE.

As Assistant Superintendent, he was responsible for 38 adult school and occupational and skills centers. He developed and expanded many impactful programs, including the Alternative Education and Work Center (AEWC) for the recovery of high school dropouts; the Amnesty program which helped many undocumented residents become legal residents and citizens of the U.S. He also developed a retraining program for the 2,600 General Motors Corporation employees who were laid off as a result of the Van Nuys plant's closing in 1992.

He developed the Distance Learning Program, which allowed students to study at home, meeting with teachers periodically to review their learning. He was instrumental in creating the Career Ladder Program where, in cooperation with Union Local 99, teacher assistants and educational aides were encouraged to continue their education to become teachers. He also helped create the Blythe St. Project, where members of the notorious Blythe Street Gang were encouraged to attend to learn basic skills as well as parenting skills.

Jim was very active in community affairs, serving as a staunch supporter of the PUENTE Learning Center (People United to Enrich the Neighborhood Through Education), a multi-generational educational program established in Boyle Heights where parents and children attended school together. He also served as a longtime member and supporter of the Kiwanis Club.

He served on a number of influential committees, including the Advisory Committee for the California State Department of Education; the California Task Force for Family Literacy; and the U.S. Department of Labor on ESL and Basic Education. He also served on the Supervisory Committee for the California Credit Union and more recently served as its Chairman of the Board.

Jim received many awards during his career, including the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Administrator of the Year (both locally and at the state level); Outstanding Administrator, Commission on Adult Basic Education's E. Manfred Evans Award; City Terrace Coordinating Council's The Ninos Heroes Award for Commitment to Excellence in Education; and the Distinguished Educator Award from California State University-Los Angeles.

