

Lucio Participates In Choose to Include Rally

Austin, TX – Senator Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville), joined the students of Veterans Memorial Early College High School in Brownsville to speak on the importance of inclusion.

'Choose to Include': Veterans Memorial rallies for compassion*

Students at Veterans Memorial Early College High School were the first in the Brownsville Independent School District to take the Inclusion Pledge during a Choose to Include rally Wednesday afternoon in the school gymnasium.

Two organizations for students with special needs, Down by the Border and Special Olympics, provided the impetus for the rally. The event's high point came when representatives of all student groups at Veterans Memorial locked arms across the gym floor in solidarity "to symbolize our inclusive and unified community."

Then everyone recited the Inclusion Pledge:

"As a member of the Veterans Memorial family, I pledge to look for the lonely, the isolated, the left out, the challenged, and the bullied. I pledge to overcome the fear of difference and replace it with the power of inclusion. I choose to include."

State Reps. Alex Dominguez and Eddie Lucio III, and state Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr. spoke at the event. The three urged a more inclusive community.

"Inclusion makes this city better and makes this community better," Dominguez said.

Sen. Lucio said the event singled out Veterans Memorial as "the most compassionate high school in the state of Texas." He urged everyone to work together to make the school a more welcoming place.

"Instead of excluding those who are different, let us work together to celebrate what we all have in common," he said. He also urged those in the crowd to "reflect on ways we have excluded others."

Mario Castillo, a student who walked with difficulty but expressed himself well, addressed the crowd saying, "I'm just so happy to be part of this wonderful family." Later he performed with the Veterans Memorial Estudiantina Centinela.

As the event concluded, Robert Wagner, a member of the tennis team, called the rally a beautiful moment.

“We got to acknowledge everyone here at the school and the key roles everyone in this community has to play,” he said.

Sergio Zarate, an advocate for special needs students, co-founder of Down By the Border and a Veterans Memorial Charger parent, said the whole point of the event was to encourage everyone to come together.

“This school is already doing what we ask. We’re just asking that they step it up a notch,” he said.

BISD Superintendent René Gutierrez said similar Choose to Include rallies are in the works at other BISD high schools.

* Long, Gary. "'Choose to Include': Veterans Memorial rallies for compassion." *The Brownsville Herald*. 25 September 2019. https://www.brownsvilleherald.com/news/local/choose-to-include-veterans-memorial-rallies-for-compassion/article_8fdb1baa-e012-11e9-96a0-e372e7d9202b.html