

The Salinas Californian

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SPOTLIGHT

North county parents receive diplomas

Ceremony honors 26 for completing workshop

By SUNITA VIJAYAN
The Salinas Californian

CASTROVILLE — In a role reversal not seen every day, some children Monday night got a chance to see their parents graduate.

Some 26 parents of North Monterey County Middle School students were each presented with diplomas in a ceremony at the school at 10301 Seymour St.

The event was the culmination of the Parent Institute, an 8-week workshop designed to educate and provide motivational tools for parents to encourage



SUNITA VIJAYAN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Representatives of GEAR UP from the University of California, Santa Cruz Educational Partnership Center, including volunteer Esmeralda Montenegro, a news anchor with Univision, hand out diplomas Monday to the graduates of Parent Institute at North Monterey County Middle School.

their offspring to complete high school and pursue a college degree. Part of a six-year, \$9.4 million grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education in 2005, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for

TO GET INVOLVED

Anyone interested in finding out more about the Parent Institute workshop facilitated by the Educational Partnership Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, may call 458-1747 or visit www.epc.ucsc.edu.

Undergraduate Programs — GEAR UP — is one of many programs facilitated by the University of California, Santa Cruz, Educational Partnership Center.

"We realized we needed to work with parents early on ... They're an important factor in whether kids go on to college," Carrol Moran, the center's executive director, said at the ceremony. "We're trying to make sure parents have the information they need to be the best advocate for their kids."

David Burke, one of the speakers at the event and principal of the middle school, said his dozen years of experience in the education field have led him to agree with Moran.

Esmeralda Montenegro, parent involvement coordinator for the workshop and news anchor for Univision television channel 67 KSMS in Salinas, said the workshop, which began Sept. 10 and ended Monday, was organized so that special topics, including poetry, nutrition, requirements to apply for college and gang prevention, could be discussed.

Out of the 26 parents, Montenegro said, 11 have been selected to participate in leadership training at the end of this year to enable them to empower other parents and ensure the program

endures in the coming years. Lupe Gonzalez of Prunedale, a mother of three, said she became involved in the program through her 13-year-old son, Leo Martinez, an eighth-grader at the middle school.

Gonzalez, a patient care technician at Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz, said her participation in the program motivated her to pursue a nursing degree.

In September, she enrolled in classes at Cabrillo College in Aptos, she said.

"Everything they have supplied us with has been very informative," said Gonzalez. "My goal is to pass it on to other parents who are not aware of it and let them know how important college is ... It changed my life."

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