



East Oakland School of the Arts (EOSA) is a small public high school dedicated to creating an environment that supports the academic and artistic potential of each student.

EOSA Graduate Committed to Community at Cal

2008 East Oakland School of the Arts graduate Valencia Newton is a Renaissance woman, setting her own agenda and goals for personal achievement. EOSA's 2008 Salutatorian, Valencia became an Incentive Awards Program scholar and is currently in her junior year at the University of California at Berkeley.

At Berkeley, Valencia is majoring in Social Welfare because she plans to contribute to her community after graduating. "I am interested in the field of counseling and I want to work with families and children in urban areas where I will be able to identify with the things that folks are going through," explains Valencia. "There are not enough people working in the system of social welfare who actually have experienced the other side of things, but I have been through many of these same issues so I want to use my experiences as well as my education to benefit my community."

Upon arriving at Cal, Valencia encountered some culture shock. "There were no other Black students and I felt isolated." But in her sophomore year she discovered the Black Recruitment and Retention Center (BRRC), where she became the Outreach Coordinator. "Because of that culture shock I experienced I was ready to dedicate myself to the organization and work to give more African American students in the Bay Area access to opportunities like Cal," she says.

Valencia's work with the BRRC is right in line with her community service-based career plans. "At EOSA I was one of those students who was able to advocate for myself and I was motivated and there were many people there to support me," she reflects. "I want to give that support to others as well."

She would love to help others have opportunities like those she had at EOSA, where as a member of the school's dance program she performed across the Bay Area and earned a spot in the National Dance Honor Society. Valencia also joined *Sistas Wit Style*, a Caribbean Dance Company, traveling with the group to perform all over the country and even in Trinidad and Tobago. One goal of *Sistas Wit Style* is to serve the community through dance and drums.

Her dedication to Oakland is clear in all she does, frequently dropping by EOSA to check in with her brother, now a senior, and to chat with Principal Matin Abdel-Qawi. "I am proud of my community and I love my community even though it gets a bad rap," says Valencia. "I like where I come from and I hope to make improvements. I look forward to being a community member as an adult."

— Interview and story by Assistant Principal Aryn Bowman

Dia de los Muertos Altars Bring EOSA Community Together



For Dia de los Muertos this fall, EOSA students wanted to give the day's message and meaning a wider reach. Teacher Fatima Ghatala says two students approached her wanting to plan something for Dia de los Muertos on the EOSA campus.

"We brainstormed ideas, including something where all of EOSA's students could not only learn about Dia de los Muertos, but witness and contribute to an altar," Ghatala recalls. "They wanted something on campus that acknowledged something important to them and their community. I knew Mr. Herrera had a Dia de los Muertos project in one of his classes, so I approached him and we decided to extend their project into a school-wide event." After Teacher Carlos Herrera's class members completed their altars, they were all displayed together in the main hallway where students, families, and visitors would see them, every day.

"Dia de los Muertos is important because it's a day when you get to honor someone who passed away who was special to you," reflects 10th-grader Yazmin, whose altar honored her grandfather. "You do something special, make an altar just for them. It's a way to show respect, and the project was really important to me."

10th-grader Teresa created an altar for her father. "It made me remember all the good times I had with him," she says. "It reminds me that he's still here in spirit and always in my heart."

Not only were the altars available to see in the hall, but the kids also took them to other classes for presentations. Ghatala says the experience was remarkable. "My class was at full attention," she recalls. "They had intimate conversations with [Herrera's students] when they passed their altars around. There was a feeling of respect and understanding and recognition."



Both Yazmin and Teresa valued the opportunity to present their altars for other classes, and have them displayed in the hallway. "Presenting to other classes was a unique experience," recalls Teresa. "The other students were really attentive and asked questions and respected what we had done because they know what it's like to lose someone."

"It was great to go and tell them about our culture and let other people know about Dia de los Muertos," agrees Yazmin. "They didn't know so much about the tradition before, but once they saw the altars and heard our presentations, they got a better idea."

"It was really sad but I liked how they were talking about people they love," reflects 12th-grader Jameela. "I was really into it, and their presentations made me want to make an altar too. I really like these kinds of projects, because you're expressing yourself in a different way: through art and also through words. It really gave me a connection with these kids, a real vibe."

"We've seen a lot of inquisitiveness on the part of other students who didn't do the project," agrees Herrera. "Kids checking out the altars and saying, 'Who did this one? This is incredible!' A project so personal in nature, it really created a circle of trust within the classroom. As a new teacher at EOSA, getting to that place of trust and respect in your classroom, it's incredible."

The altars were first set up on November 1st and are still there in mid-December – perfectly intact. In a bustling hallway of teenagers rushing around between classes, you might expect a little wear and tear. "But every little part is still there, nothing's been touched," says Ghatala. "From freshmen to seniors, everyone has respected this and understood the bigger meaning of what it is."

Next year, says Herrera, "We hope to do something even more students can participate in. Grieving is a difficult part of life in East Oakland, and having a way to express loss is really powerful for kids and gives them a voice in the school."

East Oakland School of the Arts

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As we build bonds within our school through projects like this above, we want to share that spirit with the wider community as well.

Call 510-879-3010 ext 498 to set up a tour.

If you cannot come to campus, you can also support us through a tax-deductible donation. State cuts continue to chip away at our budget, leaving many key programs at risk.

Visit www.oaklandschoolsfoundation.org (designating "EOSA") to give, or send a check to: "OSF/EOSA," P.O. Box 20238, Oakland CA 94620. **THANK YOU!**



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