

An NHEC Environmental Education Program

“The High School Environmental Career Awareness Program”

One of NHEC’s core missions is to help build the next generation of Latino/minority environmental leaders and professionals, and NHEC runs several programs that fulfill this goal.

Of course, one way we do this is by working with youth. **And one of NHEC’s newest youth initiatives is our “High School Environmental Career Awareness Program”.** This effort is designed to educate, engage, and inspire Latino and minority high school teens to learn about a wide range of environmental and natural resource issues and fields, and to pursue careers in these disciplines.

Towards this, NHEC has identified a number of high schools across the country with large minority student populations **and** whose curriculum is focused primarily on the environment, or schools who have significant environmental programs or tracks within their regular academic coursework.

In the coming months, under our High School Environmental Career Awareness Program, NHEC will be working with and helping these schools in a number of ways, including holding “Career Days” or “College Days”, so that students can learn about the many environmental career and university options available to them. In this way, NHEC will be opening the doors of opportunity for youth and our community, and building that next generation of environmentally trained and active leaders.

NHEC strongly believes in the concept of “role models”, and we incorporate this into all our youth programs, including our new high school initiative. Role models are working Latino/minority environmental professionals, from every discipline (many are NHEC members) who volunteer their

technical knowledge, life experiences, and heritage to help teach and mentor the students. Through the role models, students have their “own” to learn from, be inspired by, to emulate, and who have a story of success to tell. **The result is that the message to students is not only clear, but believable: “I made it in this field, and so can you”.**

We believe role models are vital, since they directly address the “believability gap” that exists for minority students in most mainstream environmental education programs aimed at our community. Today, these mainstream programs, while well intentioned, fail in one key area—showcasing minority environmental professionals, and the fact that people of color actually **do** environmental work. The truth is: **how can minority students ever truly believe they can pursue an environmental career if they almost never see faces that look like them?** By having “our own teach our own”, role models can help students overcome this believability barrier.

NHEC kicked off our High School Environmental Career Awareness Program on March 20th, 2006, by holding the first-ever “Student Career Day”, with the Environmental Charter High School (ECHS), in Lawndale, CA. Located in Los Angeles, ECHS’s student population is heavily minority, including 60% Latino. Founded in 2000 as a free public charter school, ECHS offers an innovative, preparatory curriculum that encompasses the environment, enabling students to gain the knowledge/skills to become life-long stewards of the environment and their community.

The first ECHS–NHEC Career Day was a great success. Through NHEC, over 45 role models volunteered and participated, there were 20 informational and recruiting exhibit booths, and over 200 students attended. At the full-day event, students learned from and interacted with the role models during the Opening Session, classroom workshops, and the Exhibit Area. Most of the role models were from environmental and natural resource fields, and offered information on their careers and how to work for them. Role models also offered tips on interviewing, resume writing, finding internships/scholarships, and more. And, Congresswoman Hilda Solis attended, gave the keynote speech, and inspired the students.

NHEC supports the mission of ECHS because it's our mission too. We salute the fine students, parents, and hard-working teachers of ECHS, and look forward to continuing our efforts with them in the coming months, including holding “College Day”. We urge you to support ECHS as well.

America’s environmental challenges will require a new generation of leaders and professionals, and that generation will be minority. Through our High School Environmental Career Awareness Program, we seek to train and inspire this emerging generation in cities across the country. The following pages show the ECHS–NHEC Career Day. After viewing it, **we hope you will support our efforts, and join us in our work.**



Over 200 students wait excitedly at the Opening Session for the start of the first-ever ECHS–NHEC Student Career Day!



Joanna Paul, Principal of ECHS, speaks at the Opening Session, and welcomes students, parents, teachers, and role models to the ECHS-NHEC Career Day.



An ECHS student "ricked things off" with an environmental rap song he composed.



Congresswoman Hilda Solis (D-CA) addresses attendees. Cong. Solis's remarks on the need for people of color, and especially students, to be active in caring for our environment was inspiring.



Roger Rivera, NHEC President, speaks at the Opening Session, gives NHEC's welcome, and discusses NHEC's Environmental Career Awareness program



Students crowd the Exhibit Area to talk with the exhibitors and role models, and pick up materials on a range of environmental issues, organizations, and agencies such as the Nature Conservancy (shown).



California State Parks was an exhibitor. Richard Rojas, District Superintendent (shown) also served as a role model and discussed state parks.



Cathie Chavez, Hazardous Substances Scientist, CA Dept. of Toxic Substances Control, was a role model. Here, she demonstrates use of a "hazmat" suit and equipment to students.



Some of the 20 exhibitors present were federal agencies, doing outreach to the community and talking with students about their missions and programs, as well as internships, scholarships, career information, and actual jobs. Here, the U.S. Forest Service does this, and talks about forests in CA.



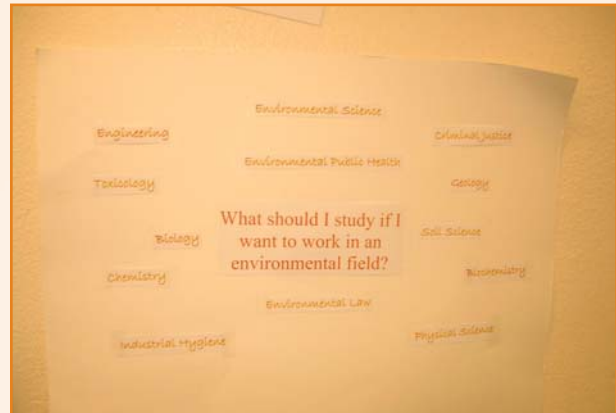
The National Park Service was an exhibitor, and talked to students about employment, educational, and volunteer opportunities at their parks in CA. Shown are role models Marina Briones-Dirk, John Tizler, and Antonio Solorio, with NPS



Waste Management, Inc. was an exhibitor. Here, Isabel Rios, Public Sector Services Manager, and Cynthia Vant Hul, Recycling Compliance Manager, talk to students about remediation, recycling, waste reduction and careers. Both served as role models.



The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation was an exhibitor. Shown here are role models Richard Sandoval, Civil Engineer and Tamara LaFramboise, Environmental Specialist.



Role models in classroom workshops covered a number of environmental topics with students. Here—"What should I study if I want to work in an environmental field?"



Role model Cathie Chavez, CA Dept. of Toxic Substance Control, discusses environmental hazards in one of the classroom workshops, and demonstrates use of a hazmat suit and equipment.



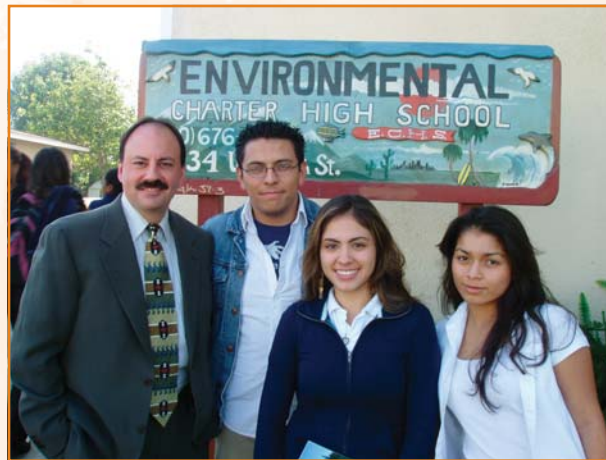
Role models Sam Vasquez, Park Ranger at Yosemite National Park, and Richard Sandoval, Civil Engineer, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, talk with students about their jobs, and ways to follow in their footsteps.



Many of the 45 role models who participated in Career Day gave presentations to students in their classrooms, and discussed their own careers, including what they do, how they do it, how they got there, and how students can do these jobs too.



Some of NHEC's staff also served as role models, including Oscar Gonzales, NHEC CA State Director, (second from right) and Juan Rodriguez, NHEC Programs Coordinator, (far right).



Through our cutting-edge "High School Environmental Career Awareness Program", NHEC will continue to work with ECHS and similar schools across the country, and by using role models and other methods, to help build the next generation of minority environmental leaders and professionals.