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## Mission children walk for college

*Sandra Gonzalez, Jun 12, 2008*



A young student shows off a sign with his career of choice during the beginning of the march from 16th and Mission to Dolores Park. Photo Mabel Jiménez Hernández

On Friday, May 30, 150 students from St. John's Educational Thresholds Center gathered at the 16th/Mission BART station in San Francisco to make a pledge to go to college in what they called the "Mission Children Walk for College."

Only 20 percent of Latinos and 31 percent of African Americans are enrolled in college in comparison to Anglos and Asians, who are 41 and 60 percent, respectively.

Jeff Feinman, executive director at St. John's Education Thresholds Center planned the event. He said that one important factor in inspiring youth to attend college is peer pressure especially when other friends are planning to attend college.

For this reason, St. John's created the "I'm Going to College" pledge which allowed youth to walk through the neighborhood with their peers to express their intention to the community.

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**26th Annual Encuentro del Canto Popular Concert**  
**Friday & Saturday Dec. 7 & 8, 2007**

**Fri. Dec. 7**

**Marcelo Puig (Argentina)**  
**Fuga (Bay Area/Tijuana)**  
**Alfonso Maya (Mexico)**

**Sat. Dec. 8**

**Mauro Correa (Brazil)**  
**Aluna (Colombia)**  
**Marina Lavalle (Peru)**

**Brava Theater Center**  
**2781 24th Street**  
**San Francisco**

**\$16 general**  
**\$12 student/senior**

## Association

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Children and parents gathered to walk throughout the Mission District making their way to Dolores Park. Each student wore a white t-shirt that read: "I am going to college" while holding posters and yelling, "I am going to college."

When they arrived at Dolores Park children gathered in small groups that were named after different universities in the country.

As the staff prepared the "graduation wall," each child prepared their pledge card along with one reason why they plan to attend college.

Once the wall was set up three students from each group went to the microphone to announce their reasons for wanting to go to college.

As the young people read, teachers and staff applauded as they heard the students' plans to become doctors, scientists, teachers, and professional soccer players.

Ario Salazar is the program director of St. John's Educational Thresholds Center, located in Marshall Elementary School. Salazar said youth who live in the Mission District are exposed to violence and poverty every day which can discourage them from thinking they could ever go to college. He said they lack role modeling to motivate them.

"We are trying to change that. We want to be that 'college connect' for these kids. We are trying to motivate and prepare them for college in order to succeed because 'research' is saying that even if we make it to college, we drop out and we want to change that," said Salazar.

St. John's Education Thresholds Center helps prepare parents and students for college and offers workshops about financial aid and the college process.

"The goal of this march was to trigger a paradigm shift in the community so that college becomes the expectation, rather than the exception for low-income families of color," Feinman said.

Feinman said he was pleased with the event, calling it a "huge success." He added that the students took it seriously and that "kids believe in themselves."

Although this was the first march, Feinman said they will continue to do this every year. He said he is looking forward to even more participation from other schools next year.

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