



## Elizabeth Public Schools Press Release

### **Duarte –Martí School No. 28 Earns First Place in NJ Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program**

**Elizabeth, N.J., March 7, 2019** – Juan Pablo Duarte – José Julián Martí School No. 28 has been selected as the first place winner of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program's Very Impressive Produce (VIP) Award sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

As the first place winner, School No. 28 will receive a plaque; a visit from New Jersey Department of Agriculture dignitaries; a choice of a salad bar, nutrition education resources, or Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program equipment such as a carts, food prep tables, or a steamer not to exceed \$1,500; and a Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program grant for school year 2019-2020.

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program provides the opportunity for school children to try new, healthier foods and increases their fruit and vegetable consumption, ultimately leading to lifelong dietary habits.

The program was initiated as a pilot in 2002 by the United States Department of Agriculture in four states and one Indian Tribal Organization. Legislation in 2004 made the program permanent and the federal Farm Bill, which became law in June 2008, expanded the fruit and vegetable program to all 50 states including New Jersey beginning in the 2008-2009 school year.

Schools are required to serve only fresh fruits and vegetables to students, which could only be served during the academic school day and not during the breakfast or lunch meal periods or during after school programs. The fruits and vegetables also had to be offered throughout the entire school year and as many times as possible during the school week.

Student volunteers at School No. 28 pick up the fresh fruits or vegetables on specified days and are responsible for bringing them to their class and distributing them to their classmates. Student activities related to fruit and vegetables include creating monthly taste testing graphs that illustrate their fruit and vegetable preferences, creating a monthly newsletter highlighting the fruit or vegetable of the month, creating a chart to indicate which foods are healthy and unhealthy from their plate, and researching healthy recipes and nutritional facts.

Teachers, referring to the contents of the student newsletter, provide lessons to their students and hold discussions that include how the highlighted fruit or vegetable tastes. Students learn the nutritional value fruits and vegetables provide while experiencing different foods across grade levels that allow them to reflect on the food they eat and take notes on ways they can improve their diet.

Qualifying schools for the program must have 50 percent or more of its students eligible for free or reduced price meals, attempt to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables, publicize the program to ensure all students have access to the produce offered, and partner with outside organizations to enhance nutrition education.

School No. 28 uses Facebook and Instagram to promote the fruit or vegetable of the month and recipes for the parents to try at home with their kids. Challenges are also posted on social media to encourage healthy eating. During Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings, parents are informed of the benefits of the program and of the fruit or vegetable of the month. During the Math Night, the PTO sponsors a tasting station for fruits and vegetables and graphs are made of students and parents' favorite fruit. School No. 28 families were also invited to the Farmer's Market at a neighboring Elizabeth school for an opportunity to enjoy free fresh foods, including vegetables, fruits, and other organic food items while promoting healthy eating.

The school also operates an urban garden through the Union County Kids Dig In Grant, sponsored by the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders and supported by Groundworks Elizabeth, that allows students to experience gardening and growing fresh fruits and vegetables. As part of the grant, the school donates 30% of its annual harvest for community donation and enrolls in Come Grow With Us!, a free countywide information and resource sharing network for community gardens.

The extensive fruit and vegetable related activities at School No. 28, and the award that was earned as a result of those activities, reflect Elizabeth Public Schools' dedication and commitment to students' health and well-being, allowing them achieve at high levels.

"As a district, we are committed to providing programs and instruction that promote physical wellness at all grade levels," stated Elizabeth Public Schools Superintendent Olga Hugelmeyer. "We are always seeking new and innovative ways to teach our students the value of living a healthy lifestyle and provide them healthier foods to guide them in that direction. School No. 28 receiving the first place award from the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program shows their dedication to the growth of their students and symbolizes our focus on the overall wellbeing of our students."

"Congratulations to the students and staff of School No. 28 for earning this outstanding award," said Elizabeth Board of Education President Stephanie Goncalves. "For our students to perform at their best in the classroom and out on the playing fields, their minds and bodies must also be at their best. Thanks to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, students at School No. 28 and our other participating schools have a greater opportunity to reach their potential through developing and maintaining healthy eating habits."

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