

Hayward's Champion of Education

It's time for a pop quiz! Can you name the five middle schools in Hayward? If you answered Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Bret Harte, Winton and Anthony W. Ochoa, then you are correct! The first three names are certainly recognizable, but who is Anthony W. Ochoa and why was a school named after him?

Mr. Ochoa served as an educator and public school advocate for more than three and a half decades. Over the course of his career, he worked as a teacher, principal and as an elected school board official. He was a man truly devoted to public education. Mr. Ochoa spent almost his entire career serving the parents and students of Hayward.

Interestingly, Mr. Ochoa was born hundreds of miles away from Hayward in Guadalajara, Mexico in 1922 while his parents were visiting relatives. Baby Anthony spent the first six weeks or so of his life in Mexico until his parents returned with him to San Francisco's Mission District, where they were living at the time.

From a young age, Anthony realized the importance of education. At a time when education was not always as emphasized as it is in today's world, he attended college with the goal of becoming a professional educator. After receiving advanced degrees in teaching and administration from the University of California, Berkeley, Mr. Ochoa dove into the teaching profession with a commitment he sustained throughout his career.

He began teaching at Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco. Eventually, Mr. Ochoa moved his family from Oakland to San Lorenzo. Shortly thereafter, they relocated to Hayward when he began teaching at Hayward Union High School in 1958. Mr. Ochoa firmly believed that teachers should live in the same community that they served. He taught Ancient Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, and English, all of which he could read, write, and speak. He later became Dean of Boys at Hayward Union High.



Dean Ochoa at Hayward Union High School, from The Agrarian 1965 yearbook

The level of commitment Anthony Ochoa showed during his career in Hayward is truly remarkable. Mr. Ochoa served Hayward's schools in every capacity. He was elected to the Hayward School Board in 1979 when he was fifty-six years old. As a member of his family explained in a newspaper quote at the time, he was "the area's first Mexican American school board member in about a century." In 1971, he was hired as the first and only department chair of Mexican American Studies at California State University,

Hayward. He spent 17 years teaching at the university, and ended his career there as a professor of teacher education.

Mr. Ochoa was a man who was always working. His daughter Maria (also an educator), described how her father would come home with large binders filled with items on the school board's agenda. He would pore over the information, learning it line by line. His family would quiz him and would be amazed by his ability to remember everything. This example is emblematic of his devotion to Hayward's school system.



Dean Ochoa with the Hayward High mascot, pictured in The Agrarian 1964 yearbook

Not surprisingly, Mr. Ochoa made sure to stress the importance of education to his own family. The Ochoa family spent their free time reading and learning. The family only owned a portable 13-inch television, which was kept in a closet until homework was done. Instead of watching television every night, the family would spend their time together.

His daughter Maria recalled how on Halloween her father read Edgar Allen Poe's short story "The Tell-Tale Heart" with a flashlight under his chin for that spooky effect. She also described a man who loved to barbeque. Sometimes he sent his children across the street from their house on Hesperian to a farm (now the site of Chabot College) to "borrow" some tomatoes.

In 1988 Mr. Ochoa was serving a third term on the Hayward school board, this time as its president. However, that year Mr. Ochoa's health would take a turn for the worse. In March 1988 Hayward's champion of education died. He suffered from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a devastating lung disease.

In keeping with his Mexican cultural heritage, which openly acknowledges that all life concludes with death, and knowing how short his time was, Anthony Ochoa wrote down what he wanted included in his obituary. Being as humble as he was, Mr. Ochoa did not brag about his accomplishments. In fact, his daughter Maria recalled that it was not until after her father's death that his family learned just how much he had done for Hayward and its schools.

It is no surprise that the Hayward Unified School District decided to rename one of its five middle schools for him. In 1990, two years after Mr. Ochoa died, Rancho Arroyo Middle School was renamed Anthony W. Ochoa Middle School. It was a great honor to his family, especially as all four of his children had attended Rancho Arroyo.



Rancho Arroyo Middle School before renaming

According to the *Daily Review*, the dedication was attended by family, friends and 430 seventh and eighth graders. Each student wrote a letter to Mr. Ochoa and each was placed in a time capsule and buried. Mr. Ochoa himself is buried at Mt. Eden Cemetery, almost directly across the street from the school named for him.

So now it's time for one more quiz. Who was one of Hayward's most dedicated, most passionate, most driven champion of public education? If you answered Anthony W. Ochoa, you are correct.

Special thanks to Maria Ochoa for providing insight into the incredible life of her father.