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LATINO ISSUES FORUM

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12th and N St, Huron, CA 93234 (see map on page 3)

PARENTS TO SCHOOL DISTRICT: FIX OUR SCHOOLS!

Huron, Ca –Harmful contaminants and dirty particles in the drinking fountain water. Ceiling panels falling on students during math class. An English Learner struggling because she is taught by a teacher that lacks training to help students like her.

These are a few of the stories that will be described at today's press conference held by a newly-formed group of concerned parents *Padres Unidos, Mejores Escuelas* (United Parents, Better Schools or "PUME") in the San Joaquin Valley. The parents joined together to raise awareness and demand prompt action on problems that deny education necessities to children in the Coalinga-Huron Unified School District.

These parents are not just talking about the problems. They are exercising their legal rights through the complaint process established in the *Williams v. California* educational equity case to ensure their complaints are promptly investigated. They will submit over 50 formal complaints that the district is required to address within 30 working days.

"I try to pack a healthy lunch and plenty of water for my daughter each morning because I don't want her to drink from the fountains," says Graciela Cruz, the mother of a kindergartener attending Huron Elementary School. "The school's water is yellowish, dirty and sometimes has orange and brown flakes. But on hot days I know she gets thirsty and has to drink from it anyway."

Recent tests conducted on the water show that the school's pipes are making the situation worse. "Huron's water already does not meet all of the legal standards but now we have proof from an EPA-certified lab that the water quality gets worse as it travels through the pipes at the

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elementary school,” says Stephanie Camoroda from Latino Issues Forum, a non-profit public policy and advocacy institute working in the Central Valley on environmental health and education issues. “This is especially harmful to children whose bodies are developing and are therefore more vulnerable to these types of contamination.”

Vanessa Ramirez is the caregiver for her younger sister, a 7th grade middle school student. “My sister came home one day and looked really scared. When I asked her what happened, she said a ceiling tile fell and hit a girl sitting next to her. She was shaken up and didn’t want to go back to school for almost a week. Kids shouldn’t have to be afraid that the ceiling in their classroom is going to fall down on them.”

Zulema Ortiz is an expectant mother who attended Coalinga High School last year. She got up every morning at 6am for an hour-long trip to school. “I worked hard and did everything I could,” she says. “But my teachers weren’t prepared to teach someone like me, who is learning English.”

PUME parents are using the process for complaints established in *Williams v. California*, a historic settlement agreement intended to improve schools (see www.decentsschools.org). *Williams* acknowledged for the first time the State’s obligation to provide students in all of California’s public schools a minimum level of educational necessities: qualified teachers, clean, safe, and functional school facilities, and adequate textbooks. It also established new standards, new accountability mechanisms and \$1 billion in funding to ensure those minimums reach students.

“These are precisely the type of problems that the Williams complaint process is designed to address,” says Guillermo Mayer from Public Advocates, a nonprofit civil rights law firm and co-lead counsel in the *Williams* lawsuit. “It is working in other school districts throughout the state, and we’re encouraged to see Huron and Coalinga parents using it to improve their schools.”

PUME parents vow to keep up the pressure until all their issues are addressed. “We have to protect our children,” says Mrs. Cruz. “We have to make sure the school district fixes these problems and delivers basic educational resources to our children. Their futures depend on it.”

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**Huron Elementary School
12th St at N St Huron, CA 93234**

