

Embracing Our Identity

Sofia Molina

Hispanic Heritage Month

The majority of our school's student body is made up of a common ethnicity: Hispanics and Latinos. Hundreds of us come from a natal country in Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean or descended from family who were born there. Logically, the Hispanic community constitutes a significant majority of our city's population. It is much more than an ethnicity – it is our *identity*.

That is why the month of September 15 to October 15 carries a revelrous spirit that manifests the pride of our heritage. Flags outside, music with upbeat rhythms, dancing, and partying are all ways to honor our culture. Each year, the Spanish Honor Society directs a Hispanic Heritage event to honor our identities in a colorful festivity that highlights the importance of acknowledging our roots and proudly embracing them within us. Mrs. Dominguez organizes the events with her officers: Co-Presidents Adriana Camacho and me, and Vice President Maria Bautista.



The invitation is extended to more than just the students; we invite everyone, from their family members and friends to school staff and faculty, so everyone can be part of our celebration.

Honoring Our Culture

We decorate the tables with colors of our flags, surrounding the cafeteria with student projects that highlight their own culture and traditions, and we place centerpieces on the tables, each representing a country with different symbols and aspects of their heritage: Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, etc. The music we play is as diverse as we are, ranging from traditional salsa to merengue to reggaeton – and even dembow. We always aim to have an ambience that reflects everyone's customs and practices.



Our Celebrations

This year, our guest speakers, TedX speaker and author Claudio Josuel Alejo, Dr. Melissa Baralt who is a professor in Montclair, and tech professional Francis Regalado told their story. They expressed how despite being a minority in our nation, they've been able to grow into successful people, thriving and attaining their dreams because of who they are. We also showcased dances from our respective countries to express our deep appreciation for our heritage and foster a meaningful connection to our shared culture. It is also an engaging experience as we invite the students to the floor to practice some of the steps and movements of the dances. Then we eat: the most exciting part of the event. Hispanics have a variety of food that embodies home and comfort to each of us, which is why we always include multicultural plates. We have empanadas, conchis, yuca, pollo asado, lechon, arroz blanco, and ensaladas. Each bite transfers the love of a dish from our countries to the participants' pallets.

This festivity is very special to us because it demonstrates our connection to our culture, which encourages us to be proud of our entity everyday. Each year, we aim to craft a more joyful and resonant experience, so it can serve as a touchstone of who we are. With that said, I hope to see you there next year!

