

## 10,000 join mayor for cleanup around 16 of city schools

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More than 10,000 youths, parents and community volunteers joined Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa on Saturday in a citywide cleanup effort in and around 16 high and middle schools.

At North Hollywood High School, more than 400 teens and 400 other volunteers from San Fernando Valley community groups painted benches, removed graffiti, swept sidewalks, planted trees and picked up trash on the campus and in the surrounding neighborhood as part of the City-Wide Day of Service With Our Youth.

"If we're going to turn around our schools, we've got to make them community centers," said Villaraigosa, who planted a tree at North Hollywood High and helped teens paint murals.

"And this is a way to show that we really care about our young people. People do care, and they want to make a difference."

Teens said they hoped the event would forge closer ties between the school and the surrounding neighborhoods, and create a positive impression of a school of which they are proud.

"It's a good school; we have really good teachers and we can learn a lot here," said Claudia Estrada, 17, as she swept the front sidewalk. "I want my school to look better, and I want to help the community."

Jill Banks Barad, president of the Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Council, who was at the cleanup with Pacoima Neighborhood Council president Edwin Ramirez, said the event sent a strong message to youth that adults care about them.

"What are we saying to kids when we let them go to school in an environment that is in disrepair?" Barad said. "Anything we can do to make it a better place, we should do."

Villaraigosa encouraged similar cleanup days when he was a city councilman for the 14th District, but this was the first time the effort was citywide, said Los Angeles City Council member Wendy Greuel.

"It reminds people we are one city, and gives people hope that it is our city and we can do something to make it better," Greuel said. "We've got to try to tell people they can be part of the solution."

Councilman Tom LaBonge agreed. "I would encourage people to get out and explore Los Angeles," LaBonge said. "Explore their communities, get involved in their libraries, their schools and their communities - the places that they own - and try to help."

North Hollywood High Principal Randy Delling said the cleanup day will bring "a multitude of benefits" to the school and neighborhood.

"It's people coming together, and that's the only way we have any possibility of forming a community," Delling said. "Any time you have a community, you're going to have much better human beings."

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