

Who Was Wallace R. Davis?

Based on Los Angeles Times article by Mimi Koh published November 16, 1994

Wallace R. Davis (1934–1994) was a respected attorney, civil rights advocate, educator, veteran, and community leader whose life and work made a lasting difference in Santa Ana, Orange County, and beyond. As the namesake of Wallace R. Davis Elementary School, he is remembered as someone who believed deeply in fairness, opportunity, education, and service to others.

Early Life and Education

Born and raised in Santa Ana, Wallace R. Davis was raised by his grandparents, Candida and Leandro Serrano. From a young age, he learned the importance of hard work, perseverance, and giving back to his community. During his school years, he worked in the fields of Orange County, picking fruits and vegetables during the summer. Later, while attending California State University, Long Beach, he worked as a janitor for the Garden Grove Unified School District. He earned his bachelor's degree in political science and went on to receive his law degree from UCLA School of Law in 1963.

A Life of Service Dedicated to Fairness and Education

Wallace R. Davis dedicated his life to helping others, especially students and families who had been treated unfairly. One of his most important accomplishments came in 1968, when he challenged the Santa Ana Unified School District over the placement of disproportionate numbers of Latino students into programs for the intellectually disabled. His work on this important case, which was argued before the California Supreme Court, helped bring about fairer and more culturally appropriate testing practices for students. Because of his efforts, many children were given a better chance to learn, grow, and succeed.

Davis believed strongly in the power of education and worked to open doors for future generations. In 1970, after learning there was only one Latino medical student at University of California, Irvine, he helped create Los Padrinos and Las Madrinas, an organization that encouraged and supported minority students in higher education. He wanted young people to see that college, professional careers, and leadership opportunities were within reach.

A Community Leader

Throughout his life, Wallace R. Davis served in many leadership roles that reflected his commitment to justice and community service. He was active in the Mexican American Political Association, the Legal Aid Society of Orange County, and the Mexican American Bar Association of Orange County, which he helped found. He also lectured on politics and civil rights at University of California, Irvine and California State University, Long Beach, sharing his knowledge and encouraging others to become leaders and advocates in their own communities.

In addition to being an attorney and activist, Davis was also an Army veteran, a basketball player, a mentor, and a family man. Those who knew him described him as honorable, compassionate, hardworking, and deeply committed to lifting others up. He believed that success should not only be personal, but something used to create opportunity for others.

A Legacy of Success for Davis Elementary Students

At Wallace R. Davis Elementary School, we are proud to carry forward the name and legacy of a man who stood up for what was right and believed in the potential of every child. His life reminds us of the importance of being principled, courageous, thoughtful, balanced and caring.. As students, staff, and families, we honor Wallace R. Davis by striving to build a school community where all students are valued, supported, and inspired to succeed.