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## What Emery Park's Sandra and Tony Morales and daughter Jazmin Can Teach All of Us

*Working together, Principal Jeremy Infranca, SGV Special Education Teacher of the Year, Karina Martinez and Sandra, Tony and Jazmin Morales help foster a culture of connection and inspire others*

Walk past the ancient leafy tree shading the brick-and-stone sidewalk marquee inviting you to Friday Family Movie Night, go up stone steps polished by age and enter the world of Emery Park Elementary, where you find the staff, students and parents as welcoming as its historic-designation charm.

Principal Jeremy Infranca greets a visitor with a hug and agrees, "Emery Park does feel more like a big, bonded, closely knit family." The visitor thinks that Mr. Infranca definitely has something to do with that family feeling. Karina Martinez, honored the night before by the AUSD Board of Education for being the one chosen, out of 14 school districts, to win the 2018 San Gabriel Valley Special Education Teacher of the Year, joins the conversation. Ms Martinez, surrounded by the cheering Emery Park family at yesterday's Board meeting celebration, both echoes and embodies Mr. Infranca's comments when she says, "We really do have a beautiful group of staff, students and supporters here at Emery Park."

Asked to more fully explain how the culture of connection and encouragement flourishes at the school, Mr. Infranca and Ms Martinez look at each other for a knowing moment, and almost in unison, say, "The Morales family."

For years, Sandra and Tony Morales, and their now-fifth grade daughter, Jazmin, have been quietly finding ways to give, donate, volunteer, or problem-solve where they saw a need. One example Mr. Infranca shares is when Mr. Morales appeared at the school recently during a record heat wave with two enormous industrial fans, saying he "didn't want the kids to get too hot during assemblies." Asked later about his family's generosity, Mr. Morales will say, "It's primarily my wife and Jazmin who are doing so much. They have such big hearts. I'm blessed."

Daughter Jazmin, who as a five-year-old told her mom she had to “go feed the hungry people” and has been looking for ways to help ever since, has lately been spending her Emery Park lunch hours, and sometimes her recess time, reading to Ms. Martinez’s special education kindergarten students or helping them with math. “The kindergartners light up when they see Jazmin, they all want to sit next to her,” Ms. Martinez says. “Jazmin talked about the kindergartners so much that now her friends, Jennifer and Vicky, volunteer with her. The kids are in heaven.”

Wife, mother, Scout leader and PTA parent, Sandra Morales arrived in the U. S. from Guatemala as a nine-year-old, and remembers what it was like to need help when you don’t know the language or the culture, have very few resources and other kids are mean to you. “I like to champion the underdog and Jazmin feels that even more. We have a drive to help whenever we can.”



Studies show that kindness is contagious. A spirit of contribution is catching. We know that connection, empathy and trust are the building blocks of a school culture that fosters learning.

What stands out in the conversations with Principal Infranca, award-winning teacher Ms. Martinez, parents Sandra and Tony Morales and fifth grade daughter Jazmin, is that each of them thinks is the others who are really doing something important for the school yet all of them are constantly scanning for who needs help and thinking of ways to provide whatever they can to help and encourage students, staff and parents.

Emery Park, it seems, is in the best possible hands.

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PHOTO CAPTION:

LEFT TO RIGHT, EMERY PARK PRINCIPAL JEREMY INFRANCA, KARINA MARTINEZ, SGV SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER OF THE YEAR, 5TH GRADE STUDENT JAZMIN MORALES, HER MOTHER, SANDRA MORALES AND FATHER, TONY MORALES, EACH CONTRIBUTE TO CULTURE OF CONNECTION AND EMPATHY AT THE SCHOOL.