

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 6, 2025

San Mateo County Students Participate in Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution



San Mateo County, CA — In honor of [Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution](#), the San Mateo County Office of Education and San Mateo County Superior Court Community Outreach Committee engaged more than 150 local students in learning about the civil rights leader Fred Korematsu and his fight for racial equity, social justice, and human rights for all.

Fred T. Korematsu, born in Oakland, California, on January 30, 1919, was a U.S. citizen of Japanese descent. After the Pearl Harbor attack during World War II, he was arrested for defying Civilian Exclusion Order No. 34, which mandated the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast. He and his family were incarcerated at the Tanforan “Assembly Center” in San Bruno before being transferred to an incarceration camp in Topaz, Utah. Korematsu appealed his conviction several times, up to the United States Supreme Court in 1944, but the conviction was consistently upheld. Decades later in 1983, new evidence of government misconduct led to Korematsu's conviction being overturned. He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1998 for his advocacy for justice and civil liberties and, in 2010, California established January 30 as Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution – the first statewide day named after an Asian American.

“Learning about history is crucial for preventing atrocities like the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II in the future,” shared Justice Danny Y. Chou from the state’s First District Court of Appeal, Division Five. “That is why these Korematsu Day events are so important and why I am so honored to be a part of them.”

To effectively teach San Mateo County students about Fred Korematsu's story, deepen their understanding of United States history and government, and engage them in conversations about civil liberties and rights, the County Office of Education and Court Community Outreach Committee invited fifth-grade students from the Jefferson Elementary School District and eleventh-grade students from Jefferson Union High School District's Oceana High School in Pacifica to the Hall of Justice on January 29th and February 5th, respectively, to witness a re-enactment of the 1944 *Korematsu v. U.S. Supreme Court* case. Students joined volunteers from the County Office of Education and the Court Community Outreach Committee in the re-enactment, bringing the historical case to life.

"Fred Korematsu's legacy teaches us the power of courage and advocacy," said Jefferson Elementary School District Superintendent Sandy Mikulik. "Through these events, we empower students to stand up for justice and champion civil rights. We are proud to partner with our community to ensure that the lessons of history continue to inspire future generations."

The fifth-grade students also heard from Yoshiko Kanazawa, a Japanese American formerly incarcerated during World War II, and were invited by San Mateo County Board of Supervisors President David Canepa to tour the Board of Supervisor Chambers, the County Executive's Office, and the Regional Operations Center to gain a deeper understanding of local government.

"This was an experience these students would never forget as they learned about our nation's past, the continuing struggle for civil liberties, and one Bay Area man, Fred Korematsu, who became a symbol for the fight against injustice and racism during the Japanese incarceration of World War II that has its roots at Tanforan Racetrack in San Bruno," shared San Mateo County Board of Supervisors President David Canepa. "They also got a glimpse into how San Mateo County operates today with a mission that all of our residents must experience just and fair inclusion and be able to reach their full potential."

On February 5th, the students from Oceana High School were given the unique opportunity to speak in small groups with judges and attorneys and receive an address from Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge Johnny C. Gogo, who discussed his 48-Star American Flag signing project. As an inspirational send-off, four judicial officers participated in a minority judges panel where they shared their unique personal journeys to the bench.

Jefferson Union High School District Superintendent Toni Presta shared, "Fred Korematsu's story is a powerful reminder that standing up against injustice is not just a historical lesson — it is a call to action for all generations. Our district is committed to fostering critical thinking and civic engagement in our students, empowering them to recognize inequities and advocate for justice. By participating in this event, our students gain firsthand insight into the impact of courage and perseverance in shaping a more just society."

This is the second year the County Office of Education and the Court Community Outreach Committee partnered to host Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution engagement events for local students. To make this year's event a success, the County Office of Education and Court Community Outreach Committee partnered with the Fred T. Korematsu Institute, Japanese American Association of the Greater Bay Area, Bain, Mazza & Debski LLP, and Cotchett, Pitre, & McCarthy LLP. Lunch was provided by the County Office of Education, Takahashi Market, Suruki Market, and San Mateo County Board of Supervisors President David Canepa.

“I hope our Fred Korematsu events help to inspire students to have the courage to stand up for what they believe is right and to fight for justice,” said Judge Renee C. Reyna of the San Mateo County Superior Court. “These educational opportunities will help to create the next generation of advocates, teachers, lawyers, and judges. I am proud to be a part of Fred Korematsu Day and thankful to all of our community outreach partners who give their time and effort to make these events successful.”

"Our annual Fred Korematsu Day events are a testament to the power of partnerships in amplifying student engagement and understanding of civil liberties and social justice," added Nancy Magee, San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools. "We are grateful for the support of our partners in making these educational opportunities as enriching and engaging as possible to inspire the next generation of advocates for justice and equality."

About the San Mateo County Office of Education

The [San Mateo County Office of Education](#) provides key support and resources to the 23 local school districts in San Mateo County as well as early learning and care providers, all schools and educators, partner organizations, and the greater community to support excellence and equity in education. It provides services that can be done more efficiently and economically at the county level, offers instructional and technical support, instructs special populations of students, helps develop the education workforce, and leads high-impact countywide initiatives to benefit San Mateo County students and families.

About the San Mateo Superior Court Community Outreach Committee

The [San Mateo County Superior Court Community Outreach Committee](#) connects San Mateo County residents, organizations, and educational institutions with their local judicial system. It consists of judicial officers from the San Mateo County Superior Court and representatives from the San Mateo County Office of Education, San Mateo County Attorney’s Office, San Mateo County District Attorney’s Office, San Mateo County Private Defender Program, San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office, San Mateo County Bar Association, and various community organizations who collaborate on community events throughout the year.

Nancy Magee

San Mateo County Office of Education
nmagee@smcoe.org
(650) 802-5554

Dan Radovich

San Mateo County Superior Court
dradovich@sanmateocourt.org
(650) 261-5051



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS