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Pupils from Scroggins Elementary School visited Washington, D.C. The trip, which took place July 9-13, included a full schedule of touring and a visit with Rep. Gene Green of Texas.



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Scroggins pupils visit nation's capital

Trip part of Cooperative After-School Enrichment program

By FLORI MEEKS
Chronicle Correspondent

Eli Mendoza, 13, has been learning how the government works for most of the summer, but he got to see it in action when he and 28 classmates from Scroggins Elementary School visited Washington, D.C.

The trip, which took place July 9-13, included a full schedule

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of touring and a visit with Rep. Gene Green, D-Houston.

"We went inside the Capitol, and we saw the White House," said Eli, who will be a sixth-grader this fall. "I learned a lot."

Mendoza and the other students have been participating in the Cooperative After-School Enrichment program at their campus this summer.

Scroggins' curriculum, MicroSociety, provides students hands-on lessons on the economy and government. For the last three years, the participants have been wrapping up the program with a trip to Washington.

"Our MicroSociety after-school program was selected because it provides a well-rounded program for our population of students," said Nina Taylor, who coordinates the program at Scroggins.

Students learn about the economy by using their own money system and running a bank and small businesses.

For the government side of the program, the students elect representatives, and write a constitution and Bill of Rights.

"It's all about real-world experiences," Taylor said. "We even have a police force."

Eli has just wrapped up his first year in the program. He was the account manager for its bank.

"It's really good," he said. "I like it. I try to respect the customers and do what they need."

The philosophy behind CASE is every child deserves a quality after-school program, said Shawn Petty, partnership regional coordinator for CASE.

CASE helps Houston-area schools with after-school programs by providing resources, training and leadership as needed, and in some cases, helping schools find funding.

"Education has changed so much, and so has the work world," Petty said.

"Most kids are left on their own between 3 and 6 p.m. If you can provide quality after school programming, they can stay out of trouble. You also can teach them skills."

CASE supports programs in districts throughout greater Houston. The Scroggins program is part of the CASE Partnership Project, which largely focuses on campuses with at-risk, low-income populations.

Edgar Gonzalez, 18, is big fan of CASE's MicroSociety program. He participated in elementary school, and started assisting the Scroggins teachers during his 10th grade year at Cesar Chavez High School.

In fact, he's one of several program alumni who helped chaperone the Washington trip.

"The program helped me out," said Gonzalez, who will attend University of Houston-Downtown this fall.

"My parents were working. It helped me stay focused instead of being on the street getting in trouble.

My goal is to help kids the way I was helped out."

Assisting with the trip to Washington was icing on the cake, he said.

"A lot of the kids don't get to travel at all," said Gonzalez, who hopes to create an athletic program for at-risk youths one day.

"It's just great. They weren't expecting to learn as much as they have about how the government works and its history."

At one point in the trip, the students got to see some of the U.S. presidents' school report cards and transcripts.

"Some of the grades weren't outstanding," Taylor said.

For a group of students who don't always earn all As, this was pretty encouraging, she said.

"I told them you have to work hard and have dedication," she said. "This was something they all went to look at again."

When the students went into the gallery for the House of Representatives, Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas happened to have the floor.

"She was talking about the need for grants to help students pay for college," Taylor said. "It was great. This whole trip was awesome for them."

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