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Oakland High School for Immigrants Wins Grant

Tyche Hendricks, Chronicle Staff Writer

An Oakland high school focused on newly arrived immigrant students - they hail from 25 countries and speak 29 languages - is part of a school network receiving a national award today for success in integrating immigrants into the fabric of American society.

"We're very excited about it," said Carmelita Reyes, principal at Oakland International High School. "We're being seen as a model for other urban areas facing immigration challenges."

The E Pluribus Unum Prize, inaugurated this year by a nonpartisan Washington think tank, bestowed \$50,000 apiece on four groups working to help foreign-born residents assimilate. They were chosen from among 500 applicants.

The Migration Policy Institute set out to find innovative programs that can be replicated elsewhere, "whose success benefits both newcomers as well as Americans who have been here for generations," said Michael Fix, co-director of the institute's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy.

In addition to the Internationals Network for Public Schools - which includes the Oakland school, several in New York and another set to open in San Francisco this fall - the winners are:

- An early childhood and parenting program for immigrant families in El Paso.
- A one-stop information center for immigrants in Littleton, Colo., that includes a one-on-one citizenship mentoring program.
- A public education campaign in Nashville aimed at creating dialogue and understanding between immigrant and native-born Tennesseans.

The 200 teenagers at Oakland International High School get intensive English instruction throughout the school day as well as the academic content required to graduate from high school and prepare for college, said Reyes.

Students work together in small groups, practicing their English but also sharing what they're learning in their native language, she said.

"If a newly arrived Yemeni kid is sitting next to (an Arabic speaker) who has been here for a while, there's translating going on," said Reyes.

"Having kids teach kids is the best way to actually learn content."
Learn more

For information about the E Pluribus Unum Prizes, go to www.migrationinformation.org/integrationawards.