



**Los Angeles Unified School District, Local District Central**  
**Young Oak Kim Academy**  
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**Michelle King**  
*Superintendent of Schools*  
**Roberto A. Martinez**  
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*Principal*

*January 12, 2016*

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

*Young Oak Kim Academy* is honored and proud to support the nomination of the late Colonel Young Oak Kim for the 2016 Presidential Medal of Freedom. His heroic service in the United States Army and his pioneering leadership in underserved communities deem him a meritorious American citizen.

Our school is named after Colonel Young Oak Kim for many thoughtful reasons. First & foremost, he is a Korean-American hero who is not only a product of our local community, but also he returned to this area to serve others in many capacities. Our middle school, located in the heart of Koreatown, is quite special as it focuses on a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) curriculum, has single-gender classes serving boys' and girls' brain-based learning, and provides Korean language elective classes. Young Oak Kim would be quite proud that the school, which honors his legacy is providing his community's children with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and cultural education.

Born in 1919 to immigrant parents, Colonel Young Oak Kim was a valiant Korean American war hero served in the United States Army during World War II and the Korean War. During World War II, Kim served as the only Korean American in the famous Japanese American unit, the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion/442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team. The Army offered him a transfer due to fears of ethnic conflict, but he refused, declaring, "There is no Japanese or Korean here. We're all Americans and we're fighting for the same cause." This sentiment underscored Kim's character, having the valor of a warrior with a heart of benevolence.

Throughout his military career, Young Oak Kim earned several awards, including the U.S. Distinguished Service Cross, but he remained a humble global citizen. The Korean War was the first time Kim had been in Korea, and he felt the need to give back to his origins. While serving in Seoul, he led his battalion in adopting an orphanage of over 500 children, who grew up to be successful innovators and leaders in the workforce.

After his retirement from an exemplary military career in 1972, Kim dedicated his life to serving minorities, youth, and the poor in his native Southern California. He was active in working with Special Services for Groups, a non-profit service organization that promoted equal opportunities for vulnerable minorities. He became a founding member of numerous non-profit organizations in the region, including the Korean American Museum; the Korean American Coalition; and the Korean Health, Education, Information and Research Center. When he was on the board of the United Way Los Angeles Chapter, he added the organization's programs for the Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese,



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and Korean American communities. Kim was also chairman of the Center for Asian Pacific Families, which, under his leadership, became the largest women's shelter in Southern California in the 1990's. He was also dedicated to preserving the history of contributions of the Japanese American military units of World War II. He helped to establish the Japanese American National Museum, the Go For Broke Monument, and the Go For Broke Educational Foundation.

Every year at Young Oak Kim Academy, we hold a Quiz Show to honor Colonel Young Oak Kim's life and extensive contributions. We invite all students to participate, and they prepare by reading the book "Unsung Hero." We hold the show in our gymnasium to accommodate the 500+ crowd and media. It is a true/false quiz show so that hundreds of students may participate. The Young Oak Kim Center at UCR is very generous in providing students with school supplies and gift cards for their participation and success in the quiz show. Our school staff and students learn so much about Young Oak Kim before, during, and after this event, which makes a huge positive impact on our school culture and identity.

Col. Kim passed away in 2005, but his legacy lives on through the lives he saved during his service in the U.S. Army and the impact his organizations continue to make on new generations of Americans striving to fulfill their American dream. At *Young Oak Kim Academy*, we recognize Kim's pioneering leadership and value the altruism, courage, and commitment to equality that life's work exemplified, particularly for underserved communities. Because of his exemplary contributions to our nation, Young Oak Kim is a worthy candidate for the highest civilian award in the United States, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Respectfully,

*Edward Colación*  
*Principal*