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**Crespo Elementary student wins annual Martin Luther King Jr. Oratory Competition**

*Fourth-grader wins $1,000 prize for original speech inspired by civil rights leader*

*Jan. 13, 2017* – Crespo Elementary School fourth-grader Nhedrick Jabier flexed his muscles, threw a few punches, and neatly fixed his bowtie as he channeled the legendary boxer Muhammad Ali while presenting his winning speech on what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr would have thought about Ali’s contributions to society.

Jabier, a native Spanish speaker who moved to Houston three years ago with his parents from Puerto Rico, was awarded first place for his original speech titled “Greatest” at the 21st annual Martin Luther

King Jr Oratory Competition. The event was held Friday at the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church of Christ in downtown Houston. He was among 12 HISD students to participate in the final round of

the competition sponsored by Gardere Wynne Sewell LLP.

The program invites fourth-and fifth-grade students to write and present a short original speech that envisions King’s message in today’s world. This year’s theme was “If Dr. King were alive today, what

would he say about Muhammad Ali’s contribution to society?”

“You have to be brave to perform this speech,” Jabier said after being announced as the winner. “This competition has changed me because I learned a lot about Martin Luther King, Muhammad Ali, and their

message. We’re all brothers and sisters, and we all should be treated the same way. In my speech, I talked about Muhammad Ali being great, and he always thought that others could be great too. Martin

Luther King thought all people could be great and that we have to stand up for each other to do what’s right.”

Second-place winner Zyahra Barnes of Windsor Village Elementary School and third-place winner Kamarah Pennamon of Blackshear Elementary School intertwined both leaders’ fight for freedom

and justice in their speeches.

“How can I possibly talk positively about Muhammad Ali when we had two different perspectives?” Pennamon said while acting as Dr. King in her performance. “It is no secret that he liked to fight and break jaws, and I like to fight against unjust laws. But we had a bond that unpopular to most that I think deserves to be remembered.”

During the competition, students are judged based on delivery, stage presence and decorum, content interpretation, and memorization. The winner was awarded a $1,000 prize. The second place winner received a $500 prize while the third place winner was presented with a $200 prize. A $100 monetary award was given to the remaining finalists: Olutobi Adeyeri, Valley West Elementary School; Alan Cabanas, Anderson Elementary School; Mariyah Calvin, Bruce Elementary School; Jazell Coleman, Thompson Elementary School; Jernee Craig, Whidby Elementary School; Sebastian Garza, Cornelius Elementary School; Thomas Johnson, Burrus Elementary School; Leana McGee, Lockhart Elementary School; and Caitlyn Thompson, Pleasantville Elementary School.

More than 230 students participated at in-school rounds held late last year to qualify for 24 positions to represent their schools at the semifinals. Twelve finalists were then selected to advance.

“Each and every student – not just our winners – who participated in the Martin Luther King Jr Oratory Competition are among some of our most brightest and talented scholars at HISD,” said HISD Board of Education President Wanda Adams. “They each had an opportunity to learn about important figures of our history. We are grateful to all the educators and parents who helped these students prepare for this program. Our students’ voices and words in this competition inspired me and many others.”

The winner will be interviewed Monday live on Channel 2 KPRC News at 6:15 a.m. and again on Fox 26 news at 9 a.m. He also will be recognized at the Children’s Museum of Houston MLK celebration on Monday. The winning speeches can be viewed online at Facebook.com/HoustonISD and on <http://bit.ly/2ith5mE>.