

RAMON CORTINES

b. July 22, 1932

EDUCATOR

**“Someone asked me,
‘What are you?’ and I said,
‘I’m a teacher.’ That’s the highest
of the hierarchy.”**

*“Success is knowing who you are.
If you don’t like yourself, change.”*

Ramon Cortines is a nationally respected educator. He served as the superintendent of the Los Angeles and New York City school districts.

Born in San Antonio, Texas, Cortines was adopted and raised in San Francisco. His parents, who lacked higher education, stressed the importance of

academics. He received a bachelor’s degree in speech and education and master’s degrees in school administration and adult learning from Pasadena College, now Point Loma Nazarene University.

Beginning his career in 1956, he taught at the elementary, middle, high school and college levels. He served successively as superintendent of the Pasadena, San Jose, San Francisco, New York City and Los Angeles school districts. He also served as the advisor to the U.S. Secretary of Education and as the assistant secretary for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Cortines is known for the open dialogue he fostered between parents, unions and administration, and for his hands-on approach to problem solving. As superintendent, he fielded phone calls from parents and routinely made unannounced visits to his district’s schools. “You can’t make decisions, know what teachers are going through, know what children and young people are bringing to a school if you don’t observe it,” he said.

Cortines increased academic achievement while cutting budgets. He served struggling school districts as a superintendent and as a consultant. Now retired, he serves as a mentor to five California superintendents.

Cortines considers himself first and foremost a teacher. “Someone asked me, ‘What are you?’ and I said, ‘I’m a teacher.’ That’s the highest of the hierarchy.”

A visual and performing arts high school in California is named in his honor. In 2011, Exploratorium presented him with its Outstanding Educator Award.



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