



Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Oct. 29, 2018

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Whittier Union Selected as a ‘Bright Spot’ District for Advancing Equity, Closing Achievement Gap

WHITTIER – Whittier Union High School District has been selected as one of three Bright Spot honorees by The Education Trust-West for advancing equity, closing opportunity and achievement gaps and strengthening the pipeline to college for traditionally underrepresented students.

Whittier Union was recognized along with Pasadena City College and Chula Vista Elementary School District at Ed Trust-West’s 2018 Education Equity Forum in September for demonstrating a commitment to excellence and implementing strategies and practices that generated positive outcomes for students of color, low-income students, English learners and first-generation college students.

“We have often said that demographics do not determine destiny for students at Whittier Union, and it is a philosophy that our team of teachers, administrators and staff embody every day because we believe that all students deserve the opportunity to go to college and that barriers will not stand in their way,” Superintendent Martin Plourde said. “We have worked collectively to ensure that our students are equipped with the tools and knowledge to succeed once they graduate and take the next step of their academic careers. It is an honor to be recognized for our efforts.”

Ed Trust-West – the Oakland-based office of the nationally recognized Education Trust in Washington, D.C. – advocates for educational justice and the high academic achievement of students in pre-k through college, particularly those of color and those living in poverty.

The forum aimed to bring together equity-driven and student-focused education leaders to learn about new and best practices for supporting student achievement – an arena in which Whittier Union has achieved tremendous success.

Most students at Whittier Union – 88 percent – are Latino. More than seven in 10 students are low income and almost one in 10 are English learners.

Still, about 55 percent of seniors complete the a-g course sequence of classes required for college entrance – 8 percentage points higher than the state average. A-g completion rates for Latino students are almost 15 percentage points higher at Whittier Union than for Latino students statewide. And in 2017, the District had a 97 percent graduation rate and 94 percent of students made progress on the state School Dashboard’s EL Progress Indicator.

For nearly two decades, the District has intentionally created systems and structures to meet the needs of students and carefully analyzed data to understand which students are succeeding in college prep

courses and which need additional support. Each campus uses the data to refine practices to support student success and expand college and career readiness opportunities.

For instance, each school has its own bell schedule and college-bound program, such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) or Puente, to reflect students' needs and ensure they have access to embedded supports during the school day. Every student is also automatically enrolled in the 15-course a-g sequence required for college admissions starting in ninth grade.

Educational teams meet regularly to find best practices to support English learner students and developed common grading practices. Despite the instructional differences of each school, they all provide students with the same expectations, curriculum, assessments and opportunities.

“Our educators are innovators who share a collective vision for success and are constantly finding ways to improve student academic achievement,” Plourde said. “They are deeply committed to our students and our community, and it is through their efforts that our District has been as successful as it has.”

PHOTO CAPTION:

102918_WUHSD_BRIGHTSPOT: Whittier Union High School District in September was selected as a Bright Spot honoree by The Education Trust-West for advancing equity, closing opportunity and achievement gaps and increasing college access to traditionally underrepresented students, including students of color, low-income students, English learners and first-generation college students. Pictured are members of the Spanish 2 Best Practices team, one of many collaborative teams across the District that contribute to student success.

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The Whittier Union High School District provides all students with an engaging, quality standards-based instructional program delivered by a well-trained staff resulting in improved student achievement. Whittier Union High School District works to achieve and maintain excellence in providing a comprehensive education for all students.

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