



Whittier Union HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Feb. 21, 2024 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Senior Receives Award of Merit for Initiative, Commitment to Graduating

WHITTIER – When La Serna High School senior Marcos Barajas launched his streetwear clothing line as a junior, he never dreamed he would come to school and see his classmates wearing his latest designs and showing off his brand to their friends. The recognition Barajas has received for his creations shows how far he has come since a challenging freshman year.

After recording a 0.4 GPA in ninth grade, Barajas was selected for La Serna’s Back-on-Track program, paired with an “admin buddy” for support, and placed in the school’s award-winning OASIS Studies program, where he was assigned a peer academic mentor. As he progressed through the programs, Barajas said he began to believe in himself again and put in the extra work to restore his school credits.

Now on track to graduate, Barajas has a 3.0 GPA, was a recipient of La Serna’s “Be Your Best” award and is committed to working with struggling underclassmen as a Haven academic mentor. For his hard work and dedication to overcoming adversity, Barajas was presented with an Award of Merit by the Whittier Union Board of Trustees during a meeting on Feb. 13.

“The opportunity you have given to students like me is an amazing thing,” Barajas said. “I could not have overcome these obstacles alone. I would like to thank my family and my teachers in the OASIS and Haven programs, because they have given me the motivation to improve myself, as well as my student mentors, who are not just friends to me, but also my role models.”

Barajas moved to Whittier with his family when he was in middle school, but was completely disengaged from his studies, inattentive in class, skipping tests and surrounding himself with peers who were engaging in negative behaviors. When a close family friend died from a drug overdose, Barajas said he slipped further into a negative mindset.

Barajas’ freshman year saw him on the brink of flunking out of school, but also brought him into the purview of La Serna’s powerful Guided Studies intervention programs.

With La Serna Principal Griselda Castro as his “admin buddy,” and OASIS mentors to guide him, Barajas responded positively, eventually becoming self-motivated, turning in homework on time, attending afterschool tutoring, and earning praise from his teachers.

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As he progressed, Barajas started to show off his creative side, debuting his “Ain’t Who You Think I Am” clothing line and, inspired by his artist father, playing music. Barajas has also embraced his role as a mentor, participating in La Serna’s Leadership Conference Summit the past two years, as well as joining the Green & Clean Business Academy and returning to the Guided Studies program as a Haven mentor.

Barajas said he is looking forward to continuing his education at community college, with an interest in business management, marketing and financial literacy, and working towards establishing a successful business.

“Marcos has had a challenging journey, but I’m delighted and proud to say that he is back on the track to graduation,” Castro said. “Marcos has shown great appreciation for his Guided Studies teachers and mentors, for giving him the time, support and guidance to get his work done and preparing for tests. Thank you to our Guided Studies team for keeping Marcos accountable, motivated and helping him develop a positive mindset.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS

WUHSD_AWARD1: La Serna High School senior Marcos Barajas was recognized with an Award of Merit from the Whittier Union Board of Trustees during a Feb. 13 meeting. Barajas received the award for his determination to recover his credits and get back on track for graduation.

WUHSD_AWARD2: La Serna High School senior Marcos Barajas celebrates receiving an Award of Merit alongside La Serna High administrators, teachers, and support staff during a Board meeting on Feb. 13.

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OUR MISSION:

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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