



Whittier Union

HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Feb. 25, 2022 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-273-9840

Whittier Union Intervention Students, Academic Mentors Build Trust Through Ropes Course Challenge

WHITTIER – Testing their capacities for endurance and perseverance, nearly 150 La Serna High School Oasis/HAVEN/Guided Studies students and their academic mentors worked to build their leadership skills and bond with one another during the intervention program’s annual Spring Reward Field Trip, held at the Orange County Ropes Course on Feb. 9.

At a height of more than 60 feet and clasped securely to an overhead zip line, students navigated the challenging course, climbing up ropes, stepping precariously on ramps and boards, then repelling back down, all the while being cheered on by their classmates.

“This was a fantastic day for our students and we had the largest group in our history,” said Lisa Barnes, La Serna High’s intervention specialist and Oasis/HAVEN adviser. “It was wonderful to see the students and mentors interacting outside of school, overcoming their fears and enjoying their well-deserved field trip. It was a fantastic day of teamwork, courage and opportunity.”

The field trip, the program’s first outdoor activity since the 2019-20 school year, was a reward for Oasis/HAVEN/Guided Studies students who completed their fall semester with an exemplary report card. Students received an Oasis T-shirt and a visit from former La Serna High teacher Ken LaVigne, who created the program in 2007 and guided it until his retirement in 2019.

LaVigne began the field trip with an inspirational speech, giving students a history of the program and highlighting concepts students learn as part of their Words of the Week lesson plan, such as resilience, trust, teamwork, courage and opportunity – words that would help them through their ropes course experience.

La Serna High sophomore and Oasis student Kylie Mai said she was nervous as she assessed the challenges that the large ropes course presented and approached it with caution. Through the support and guidance of her Oasis mentor, La Serna High senior Mark Bermejo, and O.C. Ropes course workers, Kylie was able to face her fears and complete the course.

“I’d like to give a shout out to Mark, my mentor, and all the workers at O.C. Ropes,” Kylie said. “Mark was there for me when I was scared throughout the course. He encouraged me when I kept thinking about giving up. The workers there were so nice. They told me stories about themselves overcoming obstacles in their lives. It was a great experience.”

Bermejo relished the opportunity to help Kylie and other students develop trust, enhance their self-esteem and build their character.

“The best part of the field trip was seeing people scared to climb the ropes, but do it anyway,” Bermejo said. “Sometimes you need to acknowledge that you are scared, but not let that hold you back.”

The multi-tiered intervention programs are designed to help struggling students stay on track to graduate high school, pairing them with academic mentors and emphasizing teamwork. Incoming freshmen are placed in Guided Studies based on input from their feeder schools. Sophomores with the least amount of credits and lowest GPAs are placed in Oasis, with parent approval. HAVEN is a life skills elective for juniors who have expressed a desire to pursue college or career.

“The academic and socio-emotional support provided by the Oasis/HAVEN program has helped countless Whittier Union students realize their dream of graduating from high school and making a positive impact in their community,” Superintendent Martin J. Plourde said. “Thank you to Lisa Barnes for continuing the tremendous work started by Ken LaVigne, as well as our outstanding mentors, whose dedication and spirit have helped transform the lives of their classmates.”

PHOTO CAPTION

WUHSD_ROPES1: Nearly 150 La Serna High School Oasis/HAVEN/Guided Studies students and their academic mentors worked to build their leadership skills and bond with one another during the intervention program’s annual Spring Reward Field Trip, held at the Orange County Ropes Course on Feb. 9.

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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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