



# Whittier Union HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

*To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...*

NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** Mar. 04, 2021    **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia    **PHONE:** 909-273-9840

## **Whittier Union Scholars Take Top Honors at 2021 LACOE Academic Decathlon**

**WHITTIER** – Whittier High School junior Steven Curfman knew the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) 2021 Virtual Academic Decathlon would feel different this year, with Zoom conferencing and breakout rooms replacing the festive team atmosphere and audience participation that make the event so popular among students and families.

Tackling the transition to an online competition with vigor, Curfman led the way with five gold medals and helped guide the Cardinal AcaDec team to a first-place Division III finish. The Cardinals narrowly edged out District rival Santa Fe High School, which took second place in Division III in only its second year of competition.

“AcaDec required a lot of independent will as well as support from the entire team, but we were able to persevere,” Curfman said. “The Cold War theme was very appealing and kept me motivated to focus on a variety of subjects which I medaled in. Overall, the experience was one I will never forget, and I’m grateful for the opportunity this year.”

Whittier’s and Santa Fe’s strong showing in the 2021 competition reflects students’ and coaches’ determination to succeed, rising to the challenges of studying independently and staying focused during a year of remote learning and social distancing.

“This year’s decathlon was definitely different. It was strange having all the events online, especially speech and interview,” Whittier High junior Sophia Rodriguez said. “But it was still an incredible experience that I’m fortunate enough to have been a part of.”

Whittier High was awarded 27 medals, with Curfman and Rodriguez finishing with the top two overall individual scores in Division III, winning gold and silver medals respectively. Santa Fe, led by junior Tania Padilla and junior Germain Becerra, scored 21 medals, and were named LACOE’s 2021 Most Improved Team. Santa Fe also took third place in Super Quiz, earning bronze medals for each team member.

“Despite the circumstances due to COVID, I still think that our team made the best of it,” Padilla said. “I’m very proud of our team for all of our hard work.”

Whittier High economics teacher Kele Perkins has coached the Cardinal AcaDec team since 2015. Perkins used his sixth-period Academic Teams class to recruit potential team members. As a coach, his goals are

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to field a successful team and to strengthen a student’s academic capabilities, which will prepare them for college and career.

“Our team stayed motivated to study independently this year and it really paid off. I am very proud of what they have accomplished,” Perkins said. “Students participating in AcaDec receive a well-rounded education, knowing a little about everything. That’s a big draw for me as an instructor. At first students think about medals, but later they realize the long-term benefits.”

Two years ago, Santa Fe High English teacher Annette Snow was approached by Padilla and Becerra, who wanted to establish an Academic Decathlon team and asked Snow to be their coach. Despite being unfamiliar with the competition Snow accepted and, using Perkins as a mentor, has helped build a team that is just beginning to tap its potential.

“Academic Decathlon prepares students for the rigors of higher education,” Snow said. “Each year a student participates, their confidence grows. Categories like speech, interview, and essay writing are all skills they will use in college and beyond.”

Academic Decathlon is a competition consisting of ten events, including Super Quiz, with a common theme linking the subjects. This year’s theme was the Cold War. Teams are divided into three groups, based on grade point average – Honor, Scholastic and Varsity. Individual scores are combined to determine the winning teams.

### PHOTO CAPTIONS

**WUHSD\_030421\_ACADECA1:** Whittier High School’s Academic Decathlon team, led by junior Steven Curfman, took first place among Division III high schools during the LACOE 2021 Virtual Academic Decathlon. Curfman won 5 gold medals, including one for the top individual score in Division III.

**WUHSD\_030421\_ACADECA2:** Santa Fe High School’s Academic Decathlon team took second place among Division III high schools during the LACOE 2021 Virtual Academic Decathlon in only its second year in the competition, led by junior Tania Padilla, who won four medals, including a silver for top individual score in Division III.

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