



# Whittier Union

## HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

*To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...*

### NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** March 7, 2022    **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia    **PHONE:** 909-273-9840

## Whittier Union Senior Receives Award of Merit for Academic Excellence and Resilience

**WHITTIER** – La Serna High School senior Carmela Claytor has never lost her love for learning, even through the most trying times. From being placed in foster care as a freshman to struggling through distance learning as a junior, Claytor has remained focused on academic achievement and has emerged as one of La Serna’s top-performing scholars and student leaders.

For her resilience and leadership, Claytor, who has a 3.73 GPA and has gone from being an intervention student as a freshman to an academic mentor as a senior, was recognized with an Award of Merit by the Whittier Union Board of Trustees during its Feb. 22 board meeting.

“I’m truly grateful to not only share my story with you but also highlight the amazing individuals and programs that helped me get to where I am today,” Claytor said. “I’d like to thank my mom, who introduced me to this wonderful campus, my grandparents and younger siblings for their love and support, and my amazing teachers and counselors at La Serna. Thank you for always believing in me.”

Claytor had just entered La Serna High as a freshman when she and her siblings were taken into foster care. Although Claytor was relocated to a home in La Puente, she insisted on staying at La Serna High and asked her social worker to make transportation arrangements so she could continue her schooling there.

Enrolled in La Serna High’s freshman intervention program, Guided Studies, Claytor immediately formed a close bond with intervention specialist Lisa Barnes, who connected Claytor with clothes and food, and paired her with an academic mentor who instilled in her the importance of working hard to achieve her dreams of college and career. Claytor also joined the Homework Club, which provided her with a quiet place to study.

Claytor has received considerable assistance from her counselor, Elizabeth Morales, who encouraged her to get involved in monthly Foster Youth Lunch meetings, where she met other students in foster care facing similar issues and worked to develop her soft skills and focus on the positive. Through Foster Youth Lunch meetings, Claytor took her first steps toward applying for financial aid and filling out college applications.

Claytor blossomed as an academic leader, earning straight As for three consecutive semesters and establishing herself as a role model for her younger siblings. Joining La Serna High’s Film & Media Academy (FMA), Claytor found a love for art and a passion for photography and graphic design, eventually designing logos for FMA and lending her art skills to T-shirt and banner designs seen throughout the school.

Claytor faced more challenges during her junior year, when COVID-19 brought shuttered campuses and distance learning. Claytor fell behind in her studies and her grades suffered, but with help from her teachers and counselors, she took the steps to get back on track, taking summer school for credit recovery and attending Río Hondo College to make up a Spanish class.

Claytor reunited with Guided Studies and the Homework Club at the beginning of her senior, this time as academic mentor, bringing her journey at La Serna High full-circle. Imparting wisdom gained through years of challenges, Claytor connects with her Guided Studies students as she makes plans to attend college, earn a Multiple Subject Teaching credential and pursue a career as an elementary school teacher.

“Carmela is a goal-oriented student, kind, positive, respected and admired by her peers and teachers,” La Serna High Principal Griselda Castro said. “She appreciates every opportunity available to her and is a leader who listens to others and likes to solve problems. I have no doubt that she will continue to shine and be an asset to our community. For Carmela, life has not been easy but she is without a doubt resilient, and we wish her the best of luck.”

### PHOTO CAPTION

**WUHSD\_CLAYTOR1:** La Serna High School senior Carmela Claytor was recognized with Award of Merit by the Whittier Union High School District Board of Trustees during its Feb. 22 board meeting. Claytor, who was placed in foster care during her freshman year, overcame many challenges to emerge as a student leader and one of La Serna’s top scholars.

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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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