



# Whittier Union HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

*To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...*

## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** April 23, 2024    **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia    **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

## **Whittier Union Senior Triumphs Over Challenges, Receives District Award of Merit**

**WHITTIER** – When California High School senior Isabella “Izzy” Nunez became a starter on the Condor girls’ varsity soccer team as a freshman, she was looking forward to the camaraderie and sense of belonging that comes from playing team sports. Instead, Nunez began feeling extreme pain and stiffness in her joints, the first signs of an eventual diagnosis of juvenile rheumatoid arthritis.

The arthritis was so painful that Nunez needed help getting out of bed in the morning. After many soccer games in her freshman year, Nunez had to be carried off the field by her father. The most frustrating aspect for Nunez was that after all her training and work to get to an elite level, it was possible she would have to give up sports because of a debilitating disease.

Cal High girls’ soccer coach Brian Bordier, however, understood Nunez’s pain, and inspired her to fight back and regain her footing on the pitch. Nunez would go on to play four years of varsity soccer, three years of varsity lacrosse and serve as kicker for the Cal High football team, all while maintaining a 4.6 GPA, becoming one of Cal High’s top scholar-athletes, as well as a health and wellness advocate.

Nunez was recognized for her resiliency and inspirational story by the Whittier Union Board of Trustees, who honored her with an Award of Merit during an April 9 Board meeting.

“Despite rheumatoid arthritis becoming part of my identity, I have learned at Cal High that it does not define me,” Nunez said. “Cal High has prepared me for continued academic success by offering rigorous curriculum, which allows me to explore my interests. Most importantly, Condor spirit has cultivated a strong sense of community for me.”

The arthritis bent but did not break Nunez, who persevered through a long period where she regularly missed classes and practices because of pain and doctor’s appointments and ran through a gauntlet of different medications. Oftentimes, she said, the suffering was too much for her, but she was continually supported throughout the years by her coaches and teammates.

Nunez never wavered from her studies, completing seven Advanced Placement (AP) courses and enrolling in Cal High’s esteemed Scholar’s Program, which helped her forge strong bonds with her classmates.

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Nunez said she is especially grateful for the support she has received from Cal High administrators, faculty and staff, including computer science teacher Alberto Flores and principal Bill Schloss.

Now, Nunez is eager to get to the next step of her journey, planning to double major in Health and Human Services and English on a pre-med track, with a dream of becoming a pediatric rheumatologist or immunologist. In this career path, she aims to redefine what it means to be for children to be chronically ill, contending that it's not a restraint or weakness but something that builds perseverance and strength.

"I aspire to be the kind of doctor who listens by embodying the enduring support of my family, Coach Bordier's understanding and empathy, Mr. Flores' prioritization of student well-being, and Mr. Schloss' remarkable ability to connect with his students," Nunez said. "Thank you so much for this honor. I can't wait to see what the future holds."

While Nunez's dream school is USC, she is also considering UCLA and UC San Diego. Nunez has earned several prestigious scholarships, including a UC Regents Scholarship to UC Irvine and UC Davis, and a Dean's Scholarship at USC.

"Izzy Nunez has inspired us all with her resilience and character, emerging as a role model and campus leader who is the personification of Condor pride," Schloss said. "Despite all her challenges, Izzy refused to give up and, instead, pushed herself to work harder and lead by example, becoming captain of her soccer and lacrosse teams. We wish her all the best."

### PHOTO CAPTIONS

**WUHSD\_AWARD1:** California High School senior Isabella "Izzy" Nunez celebrates receiving an Award of Merit from the Whittier Union Board of Trustees during its April 9 Board meeting alongside Principal Bill Schloss. Nunez was recognized for her resiliency in shaking off a diagnosis of juvenile rheumatoid arthritis to become a scholar-athlete and role model on campus.

**WUHSD\_AWARD2:** California High School senior Isabella "Izzy" Nunez is celebrated by California High School staff after receiving an Award of Merit from the Whittier Union Board of Trustees during its April 9 Board meeting.

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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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