



Whittier Union HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

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

Whittier Union High School Commitment to Extracurricular Science Program Paying Dividends

WHITTIER – Pioneer High School’s extracurricular science program has grown by leaps and bounds over the past seven years, providing students with a broad base of experiences to build their confidence and skills through the rigorous study of science, technology, engineering and mathematic (STEM) subjects, preparing them for post-secondary opportunities.

Pioneer STEM students are coding and constructing projects of their own design, with many of the projects falling outside traditional high school coursework, as they work to develop and execute their own scientific research, work that culminated in Pioneer’s second annual Science Fair, where more than 160 student engineers competed to earn top prizes in several STEM categories.

“Creating an opportunity for our students to do quality research at a high level, and to show prospective universities that they have valuable skills, make the science fair a truly enriching experience,” Pioneer High science teacher Natalie Connolly said.

Pioneer High junior Olivia Jimenez won the Science Fair’s overall top prize for her project exploring whether seawater reverse osmosis brine water can be used to power a desalination plant.

Jimenez’s project was one of 13 Pioneer High Science Fair projects to qualify for the L.A. County Science and Engineering Fair, where it won a third-place medal in Environmental Management, qualifying it for the California State Science and Engineering Fair, where it took fourth place in Environmental Engineering. Jimenez’s work was also recognized with a Southern California Paleontological Society Award for Academic Excellence.

Jimenez was recently accepted into the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s (MIT) exclusive MITES program for aspiring STEM majors, a six-week program where students take college courses, work on STEM projects, and engage with college admissions counselors, receiving a real college experience that introduces them to peers from across the country.

“I was surprised to get accepted into the program because it’s very exclusive,” Jimenez said. “I am so well supported by my teachers – Mr. Murray, Mrs. Bermudez, and Mr. Chavez – who have really helped me to understand some of the higher-level physics and chemistry concepts that gave me a stronger understanding of my project, as well as offering advice and helping me troubleshoot.”

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Pioneer senior Alison Banda’s project “Does Frequency Affect Phaseolus Vulgaris?” earned an honorable mention in the Plant Biology and Physiology category at the L.A. County Science and Engineering Fair, and Banda was also the recipient of the Outstanding Young Scientist award from the California Association of Professional Scientists, for exemplary design of her experiment.

Pioneer seniors Jordan Ramirez, Xiomara Zamacona, and Victoria Ortegon were recognized with honorable mentions in Chemistry for their project, “What Type of Hair Absorbs Oil out of Water the Best?”

Pioneer’s extracurricular science program and success is fueled by its popular afterschool Science Club, which focuses on preparing students for multiple science competitions, like the National Science Bowl at Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), the Science Olympiad, and the Whittier Union Science Cup.

This year, Pioneer High’s Science Club team scored its second consecutive WUHSD Science Cup championship, becoming the first school in Science Cup history to win back-to-back titles. Science Club team members dominated the Wind Power and Balsa Wood Bridge events. Earlier this year, the Science Club participated in their first-ever Science Olympiad, making a solid first impression.

“Science Club allows the students a place to prepare for the events of the upcoming competitions, but it also acts as a central spot where we organize science-themed field trips like the CityLab program at UCLA or nighttime tours of the Aquarium of the Pacific,” Pioneer High science teacher Matt Murray said. “After school, the students really take ownership of their enthusiasm for STEM, and together they inspire each other.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

WUHSD_SCIENCEPROGRAM1: Pioneer High’s extracurricular science program and success is fueled by its popular afterschool Science Club, which focuses on preparing students for multiple science competitions, like the National Science Bowl at Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), the Science Olympiad, and the Whittier Union Science Cup.

WUHSD_SCIENCEPROGRAM2: Pioneer High School Science Club members hoist a trophy and unveil a banner celebrating their second consecutive Whittier Union Science Cup championship, becoming the first school in Cup history to win back-to-back events. Pioneer’s extracurricular science program has grown considerably in the last seven years, providing students with a broad base of experience to build their confidence and skills in STEM fields.

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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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