



## Press Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Whittier Union Puente Program Seniors Awarded for Academic Excellence, Community Service

**WHITTIER** – Three Whittier Union High School District seniors who have shown resiliency in their academics and commitment to serving their community are among 24 students in California to be recognized with the 2018 Puente Statewide Academic and Leadership Award.

Celeste Chastine from California High School, Daniel James Preciado from La Serna High School and Analaura Amezcua from Whittier High School received the award in October. Scholarship recipients will be announced in late spring.

The Puente Project, sponsored by the University of California, is a national award-winning college preparatory program designed to increase the number of underrepresented high school students who enroll in four-year universities, earn degrees and return to the community as leaders for future generations.

“These three student leaders display the achievement and ambition we foster at Whittier Union, where our college-going culture and student achievement data is continually blossoming due to the support of our dedicated Puente teachers and staff,” Superintendent Martin Plourde said. “We are tremendously proud of our students’ accomplishments thus far, their commitment to pursuing postsecondary education and pledge to positively impact their community.”

Students in the program, known as “Puentistas,” work closely with Puente counselors and teachers to prepare and adhere to an academic plan that focuses on college readiness. They also visit college campuses and take part in leadership activities that allow them to practice life-long community service.

California High School, which adopted the program in 1995, has been recognized as one of the highest-performing Puente sites in the state based on the number of students who applied to four-year universities and the number who were accepted.

“Before my involvement in Puente, I didn’t think that I would be able to go to college at all,” said Chastine, who has been in the program since her freshman year. “Puente has truly helped me understand that I can continue in my educational career and achieve my goals of becoming an elementary school teacher.”

Chastine – who holds a 4.2 GPA and plans to attend San Jose State University – has taken various Advanced Placement courses, participates in community service clubs on campus and is a member of

the Cal High marching band. Chastine discovered her passion for teaching while volunteering at Think Together, an after-school enrichment program.

For Preciado, a first-generation college student and La Serna baseball player, Puente's supportive teachers and counselors have provided him the foundation to succeed in his academics and experience personal growth. While at La Serna, Preciado, who holds a 4.08 GPA, has taken several AP and honors courses, mentored students as a Link Crew and OASIS leader, and participated in the school's political debate club. His passion for community service is fueled by the Whittier Area Community Church, where he has served as camp leader for the last three years.

"I have become a leader on the La Serna campus as a student-athlete, a mentor and a Puentista," Preciado said. "My experience as a member of the Puente Program has truly enlightened me, instilled confidence in me, and has motivated me to be the best version of myself."

Amezquita – who is ranked first in her class with a 4.59 GPA and plans to attend Stanford University as a political science and psychology major – has championed healthy living in her community. Through her work with community wellness program Activate Whittier, Amezquita created a Healthy Pick Logo that is displayed in three local Whittier stores to help consumers locate healthy food options. She is the first-ever student president of the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA), is a member of Junior State of America, and helped raise \$1,550 in scholarships for students through a shoe drive program.

"I arrived in the United States when I was 6 years old and I came from a very low-income family, so college seemed like a dream that had no way of becoming a reality," Amezquita said. "My Puente mentors helped me to rebuild that bridge to college that I had burned long ago. It's because of the long talks with my Puente counselor, my teacher and my fellow Puentistas that I've realized I am capable of higher education, and will stop at nothing to achieve it."

#### **PHOTO CAPTIONS:**

**111317\_WUHSD\_PUENTE1:** Celeste Chastine from California High School was one of 24 students in the state to be recognized with the 2018 Puente Statewide Academic and Leadership Award. She holds a 4.2 GPA and plans to attend San Jose State University.

**111317\_WUHSD\_PUENTE2:** La Serna High School senior Daniel James Preciado was recognized with the 2018 Puente Statewide Academic and Leadership Award for his academics and community service.

**111317\_WUHSD\_PUENTE3:** Whittier High School senior Analaura Amezquita, who is ranked first in her class, was honored with the 2018 Puente Statewide Academic and Leadership Award.

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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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