



# Whittier Union HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

*To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...*

## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** Nov. 29, 2021    **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia    **PHONE:** 909-273-9840

## **Pioneer High School Senior Recognized for Resilience and Determination**

**WHITTIER** – Pioneer High School senior Samantha Araujo was a freshman when she was summoned to her counselor’s office and told her father – the man who inspired her to be a scholar – had just died.

Araujo spent weeks grieving, lacking the motivation to get out of bed. One day, Araujo began rereading her father’s encouraging text messages and returned to school with renewed enthusiasm. Araujo found an extended family in the Pioneer High Spirit and Dance team and a mentor in Dance Team Director Christine Avila.

Araujo, who was honored as Pioneer High’s 2021-22 standout student, was recognized by the Whittier Union Board of Trustees with an Award of Merit during its Nov. 9 board meeting, honoring her resilience and determination in the face of adversity.

“What has helped me to continue to be the best version of myself every day is reading the texts I got from my father and the encouraging messages he sent, such as ‘have an amazing day,’” Araujo said. “With my mother by my side, my amazing siblings, and my amazing family of friends, teachers and coaches, I am determined to be the scholar that my father always knew I could be.”

As a freshman at Pioneer, Araujo embraced school life and loved how friendly everyone was, from students to staff. Araujo was determined to find an extracurricular activity to match the family atmosphere on campus and she found it by trying out for and joining the dance team.

Araujo quickly found a mentor in Avila, who not only inspires Araujo to push herself and go the extra mile in becoming the best dancer she can be, but also helps Araujo when she is having a bad day or struggling. The lessons Avila has taught Araujo have helped transform her into a campus leader.

“Samantha exemplifies Titan pride in every aspect,” Pioneer High Principal Lilia Bozigian said. “She is a model student who comes to school every day and makes it a better place. Her resilient spirit and love for life are felt when she performs and leads her fellow Titanettes.”

Araujo’s father attended her very first dance performance; the two went to breakfast after, where he told her how proud he was of her for finding an activity that she loved. He also

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encouraged her to follow her heart in everything that she did. It would be the only dance team performance that Araujo’s father would see.

Helped by her mother, Araujo has navigated through difficult times, first working through the loss of a loved one and then enduring the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures. Through it all, Araujo has never forgotten the story her father told her of being accepted to USC but not being able to attend. Ever since then, Araujo has had a dream of attending USC and majoring in history, with hopes of becoming a history teacher.

As an Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) student, Araujo has acquired the tools to succeed and the confidence to aspire to higher education, applying to USC, UC San Diego, UC Santa Barbara and UC Irvine.

“I know my father is always looking down on me and is my No. 1 supporter, right next to my mother,” Araujo said. “Knowing my father is watching over me has helped me push myself every day to be the best inside and outside the classroom.”

### PHOTO CAPTION

**WUHSD\_AWARD1:** Pioneer High School senior Samantha Araujo was recognized with an Award of Merit by the Whittier Union Board of Trustees for her resilience and determination to overcome the death of her father when she was a freshman. Text messages left by her father continue to inspire Araujo, who hopes to attend USC in honor of their bond.

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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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