



AZUSA

UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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CONTACT: Mark Vidal

Valerie Martinez

(909) 445-1001

Azusa Unified Elementary Students Envision Futures During CHAMP Graduation Ceremony at APU

Azusa, CA - With all of the pomp and circumstance of a university commencement, more than 200 Azusa Unified fourth- and fifth-graders received diplomas at a graduation ceremony recognizing their completion of Azusa Pacific University's College Headed and Mighty Proud (CHAMP) program on Nov. 30.

As family and friends cheered them on, 216 students from Magnolia, Murray, Paramount and Valleydale elementary schools formed a procession at the Richard and Vivian Felix Event Center, with their principals and teachers calling out the graduate's names, along with their future professions and college majors.

"I learned reasons for going to college that I would never have thought of without this program. We even filled out college applications," said Magnolia Elementary fourth-grader Valerie Palacios, who excitedly detailed the highlights of CHAMP as she addressed the auditorium. "It may seem like college is a long way off, but we'll all be there in 2025!"

Now in its 25th year, CHAMP, administered through an exclusive partnership with the APU Academic Service Learning and Research Department, is a semester-long program designed to inspire elementary school students to begin planning their post-secondary education, with the assistance of APU student mentors.

AUSD students met with their mentors once a week for eight weeks, discussing a wide range of topics related to preparing for college, including college admission, financial aid and career exploration. The highlight for many was a campus tour of APU.

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As part of the program, students were tasked with imagining what their college major and career would be. There was no lack of ambition in their choices. At the graduation ceremony, Paramount Elementary fourth-grader Anthony Rodriguez was announced as “Future President of the United States.”

Former Magnolia student and CHAMP graduate Natalie Sanchez, now a freshman at APU, spoke about how the program motivated her to start believing that a college education was achievable.

“I want to be an elementary school teacher,” Sanchez said. I’m so blessed to have been in a program that allowed me to chase my dreams. I truly believe I can do anything I want to.”

Recognizing that parents play the most crucial role in determining whether their children will attend college, the CHAMP graduation ceremony serves as a way for families to be comfortable with being on a college campus.

“CHAMP is one part of a long-range plan to get your children into college, and there is so much you can do as parents to help them,” Assistant Superintendent of Education Services Arturo Ortega told the crowd. “Three things you can do now is learn to love learning, instill high expectations and set an example.”

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Champ1: More than 200 Azusa Unified fourth- and fifth-graders experienced first-hand how attainable a college education is after graduating from the College Headed and Mighty Proud (CHAMP) program at Azusa Pacific University on Nov. 30.

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