



Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 5, 2016

CONTACT: Valerie Martinez

Juliette Funes

(909) 445-1001

La Serna High School, Community Leaders Partner to Support At-Risk Youth

WHITTIER – La Serna High School this school year kicked off its newest academic support program that enlists influential community leaders to guide juniors as they plan their futures and offer words of support to those who may be struggling.

HAVEN extends La Serna's Organized Academic Support in School (OASIS) program, a special intervention course that has turned around the lives of a majority of its students, motivating youths to earn higher GPAs and go on to graduate. The effort is led by teacher Ken LaVigne, a 2012 California Teacher of the Year.

"Many of these students come to school carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders – personal struggles, difficult family situations and other challenges that stop them from focusing on their studies," said LaVigne, who primarily teaches support classes. "HAVEN aims to provide a guiding light for our school's most at-risk students. They're great kids. They just need direction."

Launched in 2007, OASIS includes sophomore and juniors who are most likely to drop out of high school, are behind in credits, have failing grades or have poor attendance and behavior.

They receive extra academic, social and emotional support from LaVigne, their teachers, counselors and high-achieving student mentors. Students in OASIS learn study skills, accountability, time management, goal setting, note-taking, character building and self-esteem development. They enter the program with an average GPA of 0.93 and typically exit with a 2.28 GPA.

To ensure students continue improving their grades and progress, LaVigne developed HAVEN, which emphasizes senior project planning and post-high school academic and career goal setting – with support from members of the Friends of La Serna, Whittier Host Lions Club and Soroptimist International of Whittier.

Serving as adult mentors, these successful community leaders, many of whom have faced obstacles of their own, help students plan their futures and introducing skills necessary for continued academic and career success.

"Our adult mentors have the potential to alter the lives of these students, who are learning how to set goals and what it takes to be successful," said LaVigne, a former football coach who has used his wisdom to help teens find their own motivation for success. "Hearing powerful stories of strength and resiliency is empowering to young minds."

From September to October, students heard stories of perseverance from panels of Whittier community members – including business owners, judges, doctors and educators – who told stories of their individual paths to personal and professional success.

Students subsequently participated in mock interviews with the mentors, who provided feedback on appearance and attire and preparation.

Over the course of the next few months, students will work with mentors to explore potential areas of interest for a senior project research paper and field work for the following year. At the end of the school year, students and community partners will hold a culminating celebration.

“These students in particular need mentors to believe in them and motivate them to persevere in the face of adversity and this program provides them that avenue,” La Serna Principal Ann Fitzgerald said. “I want to thank Ken for his extraordinary vision. I am also grateful to our business and civic leaders, who are providing support and guidance to those who need it most.”

PHOTO CAPTION:

120516_WUHSD_HAVEN: La Serna High School teacher Ken LaVigne hosts a panel of influential community leaders who are mentoring students in the school’s new intervention program, HAVEN. HAVEN extends La Serna’s Organized Academic Support in School (OASIS) program, a special intervention course that has turned around the lives of a majority of its students, motivating youths to earn higher GPAs and go on to graduate.

###

*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.*

WUHSD Board of Trustees

Leighton Anderson, President ■ Tim Schneider, Vice President ■ Dr. Ralph S. Pacheco, Clerk ■ Russell Castañeda Calleros, Member ■ Jeff Baird, Member
Martin Plourde, Superintendent

9401 S. Painter Avenue, Whittier, California 90605-2798 ■ (562) 698-8121 ■ www.wuhsd.org