



WHITTIER UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Dec. 20, 2024 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Students Spread Holiday Cheer, STEM Inspiration through Annual Tradition

WHITTIER – Students from Whittier High School’s Cardinal Academy of Technology (CAT) continued a cherished end-of-year tradition when they made their annual holiday visit to Lydia Jackson College Prep Academy to spread holiday cheer on Dec. 6, delighting dozens of Lydia Jackson second grade students.

The holiday visit has been a tradition for the two schools for 20 years, with Whittier High juniors enrolled in the CAT program bearing gifts, telling stories, and singing songs to the elementary students, while also inspiring the students to consider pursuing science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) subjects as they progress through school.

“This is a day our students look forward to because there is a lot of joy in the room for the students and the teachers,” Whittier High English teacher Matt Francev said. “We are happy to have our CAT students adopt a classroom because it’s the best way to build relationships with our feeder schools and districts.”

The Cardinal Academy of Technology is a four-year engineering pathway that provides students with a comprehensive overview of STEM concepts and sets them on course for careers in STEM-related fields. CAT combined the best of two former academies offered at Whittier High, the Cardinal Computer Academy and the STEM Academy.

Nearly 40 CAT students, with the Whittier High Cardinal mascot joining them, visited two second-grade classes and a special education class. After introducing themselves and talking up the CAT program and the wonders of technology, the students sat down and took turns reading “The Grinch Who Stole Christmas” and “The Polar Express.”

“Our students are shy at first when the high school students arrive, and a little bit in awe of them,” Lydia Jackson Principal Bernadette Leeper said. “Once the CAT students begin reading, our students open up and become focused and engaged. I love this program because our students can get a glimpse of their future selves and begin to dream big.”

After reading to the Lydia Jackson students, CAT students played Santa Claus and gave out goody bags filled with pop culture stickers – made from CAT’s sticker-making machine, age-appropriate books, pencils, backpacks, rubber bracelets, and 3-D cats with the CAT logo – made from the CAT’s 3-D printing machine.

“The present giveaway is especially cherished by the students,” Francev said. “For some of the Lydia Jackson students, these may be the only gifts they receive for the holidays. The CAT students are aware of this and are mindful of the positive impact they are making.”

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Beyond the gift-giving and holiday spirit are special moments that show the 20-year tradition has come full circle. Among this year's CAT students spreading holiday cheer were two former Lydia Jackson students who received gifts when they were in the second grade.

There is a family connection for both Francev and Leeper, as well. Leeper's son is a current Whittier High junior and CAT member who joined in this year's holiday festivities. Francev's daughter, now a Lydia Jackson third grader, received presents during last year's holiday visit.

"I know these gifts have a positive impact because my daughter immediately put all her CAT stickers on her water bottle, and her 3-D cat travels with her everywhere in her backpack," Francev said. "For former Lydia Jackson students who return to their old campus, they thoroughly enjoy seeing it from the other side."

PHOTO CAPTIONS

WUHSD_CAT1: Lydia Jackson College Prep Academy second graders pose with the Whittier High School Cardinal mascot during the Whittier High Cardinal Academy of Technology's (CAT) annual holiday visit to the school on Dec. 6. CAT students read stories and handed out holiday gift bags filled with school supplies, books, and CAT-themed stickers.

WUHSD_CAT2: Whittier High School juniors enrolled in the school's Cardinal Academy of Technology (CAT) make their annual holiday visit to Lydia Jackson College Prep Academy. CAT students talk up the program to Lydia Jackson second graders while looking to inspire the next generation of Whittier Union students to pursue STEM subjects. The students also played Santa Claus, giving out goody bags filled with school supplies and stickers.

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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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