



WHITTIER UNION

HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Dec. 1, 2025 **CONTACT:** Amanda Nieto **PHONE:** 909-447-2407

Whittier Union Senior Receives Award of Merit for Resilience and Leadership

WHITTIER – Sierra Vista High School senior Sophia Rivera is looking to graduate at the end of the fall semester, completing a high school journey that saw her transform from a shy, at-promise student uncomfortable in a big school environment to a campus leader looking toward college and career.

For her resilience and leadership abilities, the Whittier Union Board of Trustees presented Rivera with an Award of Merit during its Nov. 18 meeting, where she thanked her school's administrators, teachers, and her family for their constant support and encouragement.

"I want to say a huge thank you to the Board for giving me the opportunity today to be honored; it means a lot to be standing up here," Rivera said. "It's been a pleasure being a student leader at Sierra Vista. The school shows me nothing but support and help when I need it, and my family is always supporting me from home."

Rivera began her freshman year at La Serna High School, but quickly realized that she could not thrive academically in a large school setting. It was then that Rivera discovered Sierra Vista's Independent Study program. Rivera found her path to success pursuing the program's 100% virtual option, moving forward academically even when connection felt difficult.

At the end of her junior year, Rivera had acquired enough credits to resume her studies at a comprehensive high school, and she began her senior year at California High School. However, Rivera still felt overwhelmed by the school's size and ultimately returned to Sierra Vista. Once back on campus, her growth accelerated quickly.

Rivera was persuaded by her teacher, Jose Martinez, to join Frontier High School's leadership class on a daily basis. Frontier's leadership has long been available to Sierra Vista Independent Study students, but Rivera became the first student to show up every day and participate fully in the joint activities.

Soon, Rivera was leading activities at Sierra Vista, serving as the student voice for the school's first-ever field day – suggesting games, walking the venue, and helping design games.

Supported by her positive experiences at Sierra Vista, Rivera is now considering her post-secondary options and exploring hands-on career pathways. Her earlier hesitation has progressed into increased confidence as she plans for her future.

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“Sophia’s transformation has been remarkable,” Sierra Vista Principal Margie Moriarty said. “Sophia still considers herself shy, but she has learned that shy does not mean small. Shy does not mean incapable. This is what at-promise looks like. Not limitations, but potential waiting for the right conditions to flourish.”

PHOTO CAPTION

WUHSD_AWARD1: Sierra Vista High School senior Sophia Rivera was presented with an Award of Merit from the Whittier Union Board of Trustees for her resilience and leadership abilities during the Board’s Nov. 18 meeting.

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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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