



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Feb 25, 2026 CONTACT: Maria Hernandez PHONE: (909) 447-2406

El Monte Union Seniors' College Dreams Realized Through QuestBridge Scholarships

EL MONTE – After four years of excellence both inside and outside the classroom, four El Monte Union High School District (EMUHSD) students earned coveted QuestBridge Match Scholarships, securing early admission to some of the nation's most respected universities with combined award amounts totaling more than \$1 million.

Arroyo High School seniors Samuel Ye and Thomas Mach, along with South El Monte High School seniors Ailani Rodriguez and Henry Liem, are among 2,550 of the nation's highest-achieving students receiving this honor. They will represent EMUHSD at top universities in the fall, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Northwestern University, Claremont McKenna College, and Princeton University.

"We proudly congratulate these exceptional students on their remarkable achievements and well-earned acceptances to prestigious universities across the nation," EMUHSD Superintendent Edward Zuniga said. "Their journeys speak to the resilience, curiosity, and ambition that define our school communities. Their families and the entire District share in this celebration as they carry El Monte Union's culture of excellence into their next chapter."

At MIT, Ye plans to study electrical engineering and computing, following a rigorous high school experience defined by academic intensity and wide-ranging involvement in clubs and athletics. During his junior year, he completed seven Advanced Placement (AP) courses— three self-studied — while also taking advanced math classes at the community college level.

Beyond the classroom, Ye competed in Science Olympiad and track and field while balancing part-time work in food service and as a library tutor. An electrical engineering internship at the University of Southern California, where he designed circuits and communication devices, ultimately solidified his decision to pursue the field.

"I want everyone to know you miss 100% of the shots you don't take," Ye said.

Earning the QuestBridge match also carried significance for his family, easing financial pressure and affirming the sacrifices his mother made while working in food service. Inspired by his grandfather's visual impairment, Ye hopes to develop bionic eye technology to help address blindness worldwide.

Mach will attend Northwestern University this fall to study mechanical engineering with an aerospace focus, inspired by watching SpaceX successfully catch a rocket booster during the IFT-5 launch. Throughout his high school career, Mach balanced high level academic coursework with four years as a varsity cross country and track athlete, serving as team captain for both sports during his junior and senior years.

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“My experiences taught me that constraints do not limit you,” Mach said. “Instead, they teach you how to be resourceful and creative.”

Through an internship with TreePeople as part of the Cindy Montañez Young Leaders Program, Mach helped lead a coastal cleanup that coordinated more than 110 volunteers across the District. His hands-on problem-solving skills were shaped early by fixing everything from bike derailleurs to cracked phone screens. The QuestBridge scholarship removed a financial barrier that once made private universities feel out of reach for Mach’s family, allowing him to pursue ambitious engineering goals without added burden.

Rodriguez will attend Claremont McKenna College in the fall. Initially hoping to study out of state, the match held special meaning, as her older sister attends the college, offering guidance alongside the full-ride scholarship. Rodriguez plans to double major in integrated science and economics. In high school, she completed AP coursework, participated in Future Business Leaders of America, and deepened her interest in research and public service through internships at the Scripps Research Institute, where she presented neuroscience lab findings of alcohol’s effects on the brain, and the Library of Congress, where she shadowed financial staff and gained experience in budgeting and accounting.

“I’m really grateful for my family — my mom, my dad and my siblings — because without them, I wouldn’t be here,” Rodriguez said. “This scholarship is a huge blessing and I’m just so grateful.”

Liem described learning he had been matched with Princeton University as both exciting and overwhelming.

A highly involved student, he serves as president of a tutoring and engineering club on his campus and directs his school’s Freshman Mentoring Program. He also completed college-level coursework at Río Hondo College while taking AP classes in linear algebra, multivariable calculus, and differential equations, which he said expanded how he saw the world and deepened his interest in mathematics. In addition, Liem participated in an Active San Gabriel Valley internship, where he learned about city planning, collecting community data, and how public policy decisions are shaped. He plans to major in mathematics and views college as an opportunity to further explore his interests while refining his academic focus.

“I want to thank my family for their support on this journey,” Liem said. “I’m also grateful to my teachers and friends who guided me and encouraged me through challenging classes and activities. Their belief in me helped make this achievement possible.”

PHOTO CAPTION:

EMUHSD QUESTBRIDGE SCHOLARS 1: From left to right: South El Monte High School senior Henry Liem, Arroyo High School seniors Thomas Mach and Samuel Ye, and South El Monte High School senior Ailani Rodriguez were named QuestBridge Match Scholars, earning early admission and full-ride scholarships to prestigious universities. The students were recognized during the El Monte Union High School District Board of Trustees meeting on Feb. 4.

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The vision of the El Monte Union High School District is to empower and motivate our students to be resilient, college and career ready, lifelong learners and contributing members of our global society.