



WHITTIER UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 4, 2026 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Junior Selected as Distinguished Women of L.A. County Finalist

WHITTIER –When La Serna High School junior Gianna Sarmiento began looking for post-secondary scholarship opportunities, she searched for a program that could not only pave the way for success in college and career, but one that was also competitive and allowed her to showcase her academic prowess and creative abilities.

Sarmiento was one of just 22 Southern California students selected as a finalist for the Distinguished Young Women (DYW) of Los Angeles County's Class of 2027 Showcase, held April 18, where she competed for an opportunity to represent L.A. County at the Distinguished Young Women of California showcase in July.

Though Sarmiento was not among the four young women chosen to represent the state, as part of the DYW Los Angeles County Class of 2027 she is eligible for college scholarships at a select list of universities and colleges across the United States, with potential scholarships worth anywhere from \$1,000 to \$31,000 a year.

"My experience with the DYW program has been great," Sarmiento said. "I've had the opportunity to meet so many wonderful women. I'm making connections and receiving excellent advice on college and careers. When I first came to the program, I was a little intimidated. But they have made me feel so welcome."

The DYW Showcase competition is divided into five categories: scholastics, interview, talent, fitness, and self-expression. A judge's panel awards points in each category.

"I was excited for the talent portion," Sarmiento said. "I've played piano for about 10 years but have never really put myself out there. But I'm a competitor, so this was a perfect chance for me to showcase my skills. For the panel interview, it was intimidating to be interviewed by five judges, but to have my public speaking skills both tested and improved was an amazing experience for me."

The DYW is a national scholarship program that promotes academics, leadership, and talent in young women who receive opportunities to earn scholarships and develop their skills through the DYW Life Skills Workshop. Sarmiento said she discovered DYW while searching for scholarship opportunities through La Serna's College and Career Center.

"I am interested in majoring in public health and am looking towards a career as a pediatric oncologist," Sarmiento said. "My dream colleges are UCLA and UC San Diego, which are expensive, so I have been looking for scholarships to help pay my way through college."

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Sarmiento has developed into a campus leader since she arrived at La Serna and enjoys volunteering her time to help her classmates, especially incoming freshmen. Sarmiento is also a member of Link Crew, a program designed to make new students feel welcome as they transition from middle school.

Sarmiento helps to organize La Serna’s Summer Bridge program, which allows incoming freshmen an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the campus and meet their new classmates. Sarmiento also serves as a mentor for La Serna English learners.

Sarmiento is an avid reader and a member of La Serna’s Creative Writing Club Board, where she contributes short stories. One of Sarmiento’s favorite authors is Kristen Hannah, whose 2024 novel “The Women,” which focuses on the overlooked contributions and trauma of women on the battlefield, particularly resonated with her.

“We are so proud of Gianna for being selected as a Distinguished Young Woman. She is truly an inspiration for any Lancer student who is looking to empower themselves with knowledge and leadership opportunities,” La Serna principal Griselda Castro said. “We can’t wait to see where the future takes Gianna.”

PHOTO CAPTION

WUHSD_DYW1: La Serna High School junior Gianna Sarmiento was one of just 22 Southern California students selected as a finalist for the Distinguished Young Women of Los Angeles County’s Class of 2027 Showcase, held April 18.

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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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