



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 22, 2026 CONTACT: Maria Hernandez PHONE: (909) 447-2406

## El Monte Union Class of 2026 Graduates Inspire Hope for the Future

**EL MONTE** – Whether pioneering student-led aerospace research or conducting scientific lab work as first-generation scholars, six El Monte Union High School District standout seniors are charting bold futures as they prepare for graduation.

Through Advanced Placement courses, dual enrollment opportunities, career technical education pathways, and leadership programs, El Monte Union students have the opportunity to participate in academic and career-focused experiences in fields including public health, business, engineering, and public service.

“These remarkable seniors showcase what makes El Monte Union so special,” Superintendent Dr. Edward Zuniga said. “Their stories are all different, but each reflects a desire to make a meaningful impact on the world around them. We are incredibly proud of the paths they have forged and excited for what comes next.”

Born in a remote village in southern China, Rosemead High School (RHS) senior Kylie Chau immigrated to California with her family at age four. When she arrived at RHS, Chau emerged as a campus leader through the Rosemead Medical Club, city youth leadership work, advocacy through Planned Parenthood, and hands-on scientific research at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center’s Ljubimov Lab. Chau plans to attend UC San Diego to study public health before pursuing medical school, aiming to improve long-standing health conditions in underserved communities.

“Comparison is the thief of joy,” Chau said. “When we spend too much time focusing on our flaws, we forget that progress is part of the journey. Instead of comparing ourselves to others, we should redirect that energy toward self-improvement and remember the effort it took to reach where we are today.”

At South El Monte High, senior Thu Nguyen has grown from a shy student adjusting to a new country and language into a confident scholar and campus leader. Born in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, Nguyen immigrated to the United States after first grade. At South El Monte, she joined the California Scholarship Federation, the Freshman Mentoring Program, Future Business Leaders of America, Women’s Empowerment, and ActiveSEM, while also participating in Math and Science Upward Bound and the University of Southern California Bovard Scholars program.

Nguyen balanced these commitments with volunteer work and part-time jobs to help support her family, all while maintaining a 4.36 GPA. Nguyen hopes to attend USC where she plans to major in business administration as a step to her future goal of working for a global company.

“I would tell my younger self to be more self-assured and trust herself more,” Nguyen said. “Don’t let negative thoughts or imaginary risks control your feelings or actions. Ignore what others may say or think, stop worrying about things that might not even happen, and just go for it.”

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After moving seven times, attending six schools, and navigating difficult early high school years, senior Symantha Eden Gonzalez found a fresh start at Fernando R. Ledesma High School, where new connections helped shift her academic and personal trajectory. She became involved in Color Guard, Comedy Sports, Leo Club, and the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council, allowing her to build confidence, serve her community, and advocate for her classmates. Along the way, she transformed her academic habits, completed her credits early, and enrolled at Mt. San Antonio College, where she plans to study business administration before transferring to a four-year university.

"I have been in situations a normal high school student should not go through, but over time everything gets better, and it will only get better from here," Gonzalez said. "I had the right people in my corner cheering me on, and now I always make sure to reach out, stay organized, and keep moving forward."

At Arroyo High, senior Hayden Luong has used his academic excellence to share his passions with his community. As founder and president of Aerospace Research & Mechanical Sciences, Arroyo's first student-led rocketry team, Luong helped secure funding through the Northrop Grumman Foundation and led development of the team's American Rocketry Challenge competition rocket, Astraesus. As a UCLA State Summer School for Mathematics and Science alumnus and standout runner in cross country and track, Luong embraces challenges in and out of the classroom. He will attend the Georgia Institute of Technology as an A. James Clark Scholar, a program designed to develop the next generation of engineering leaders, where he plans to study aerospace engineering.

"If you put your mind to a goal, despite how challenging it can be, anything is possible with hard work," Luong said. "Doubt may overwhelm you, you will fail multiple times, but you will learn, you will recover, and you'll find wins."

At El Monte High School, senior Jorge Maldonado entered as a student hesitant to step outside his comfort zone. Over four years, Maldonado emerged as a leader and scholar. He helped launch El Monte High's Science Olympiad team and guided it to the state-level competition while also participating in cross country and track. Maldonado will attend USC this fall to study aerospace engineering, with hopes of one day contributing to NASA projects like Artemis.

"If I could give my freshman self one piece of advice, it would be to live more," Maldonado said. "Life is short, so take time to enjoy friends, family, and nature, and most importantly make space for yourself beyond just school."

At Mountain View High, senior Briana Sanchez has built a legacy of leadership as a first-generation student who ranked top of her class. She founded the Lady Vikes Empowerment Club, a student-led group offering peer support, and served two terms as Key Club International president, facilitating more than 2,000 community service hours.

Sanchez also represented Mountain View as its Girls State delegate, served as Associated Student Body president-elect and competed in basketball, cross country, track, and tennis. Sanchez will attend UCLA in the fall to study business economics.

"The beautiful memories and connections you build open so many doors. I knew each experience would prepare me for the real world," Sanchez said. "I want to use all the skills I've developed to uplift others, transform lives, and leave a lasting impression of excellence, perseverance, and meaningful impact."

#### **PHOTO CAPTION:**

**EMUHSD STANDOUT SENIORS 1:** El Monte Union spotlights six standout seniors from the Class of 2026. From left to right: Rosemead High School senior Kylie Chau, South El Monte High School senior Thu Nguyen, Fernando R. Ledesma High School senior Symantha Eden Gonzalez, Arroyo High School senior Hayden Luong, El Monte High School senior Jorge Maldonado, and Mountain View High School senior Briana Sanchez.

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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.*