



# Fontana Unified School District

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## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## From FOHI to the Fleet, MCJROTC Cadets Earn Life-Changing Naval Scholarships

**FONTANA, CA** - Two Fontana High School (FOHI) Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (MCJROTC) cadets are preparing to take the next step in their academic and military journeys after earning highly competitive naval scholarships, a milestone capping off a year of success for FOHI's MCJROTC program.

Cadet Stephanie Mendoza has been awarded a Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) scholarship, valued at approximately \$180,000, which will cover the cost of her undergraduate education and would lead to a commission as an officer in the United States Navy. Cadet Yamileth Velasco has been accepted into the Naval Preparatory Program (NPP) at Norwich University, a pathway that covers a full year of preparatory study before transitioning into a four-year NROTC scholarship, bringing the total value to an estimated \$370,000.

"These opportunities don't happen by chance," MCJROTC program Senior Marine Instructor LtCol Denny Meelarp said. "We set the bar high, and our cadets consistently rise to meet it. They've put in the work, and now they're seeing what's possible because of it."

Mendoza's path has been one of precision, both in the classroom and on the range. A standout member of the MCJROTC marksmanship team, she played a key role in helping Fontana High School compete at the 2026 All Service JROTC National Championship at Camp Perry, Ohio, where the team placed 11th overall among all service branches and fifth among Marine Corps teams nationwide.

Individually, Mendoza earned the Distinguished Shooter Badge, the highest honor in JROTC marksmanship, awarded only to cadets who demonstrate consistently elite performance across multiple competitions. Mendoza is only the second student in school history to receive the distinction, further cementing her impact on the program.

"I feel like everything I've done, especially marksmanship, helped show how involved I was," Mendoza said. "Receiving the scholarship opens a lot of doors, and I'm proud of that, even though I'm still figuring out what the next step looks like."

Mendoza plans to pursue a degree in chemistry, building on a strong academic foundation that includes Advanced Placement coursework and involvement in programs such as Advancement Via Individual Determination and the California Scholarship Federation. As she weighs her final college decision, she is considering how to balance her academic goals with the opportunity to serve.

Velasco has established herself as a leader both inside and outside of the classroom. A four-year member of the MCJROTC program, Velasco currently serves as the unit's Commanding Officer (CO), holding the rank of Cadet Lieutenant Colonel and overseeing all aspects of the program's operations. Her responsibilities include supervising staff, ensuring accountability across the unit, and guiding younger cadets. Velasco is also the team captain for girls water polo and MCJROTC "Raiders," where a unit showcases their physical resolve through high-intensity training and skills exercises in a fitness competition.

"The program really helped build my character and leadership," Velasco said. "Earning this opportunity makes me proud, and it shows that all the work paid off. It opens possibilities for me, and I want to be an example for my siblings, too."

Velasco will attend Norwich University, where she intends to major in chemistry while exploring a future in forensic science and law enforcement. She credits MCJROTC with helping her develop the leadership skills that carried over into her athletics and academics.

Mendoza and Velasco will be honored alongside their families and peers at the FOHI MCJROTC Awards Night on Wednesday, May 6, from 5:30 – 7 p.m. at Fontana High School.

"Stephanie and Yamileth exemplify the very best of Fontana Unified," Superintendent Miki R. Inbody said. "Their dedication, leadership, and perseverance have opened doors to extraordinary opportunities, and we are incredibly proud of the example they set for their peers and the future they are building for themselves."

**PHOTO CAPTION:**

**MCJROTC\_SCHOLRASHIPS1:** Fontana High School MCJROTC cadets Stephanie Mendoza (left) and Yamileth Velasco (right) celebrate earning prestigious naval scholarship opportunities, recognizing their leadership and academic achievement.

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