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NEWS RELEASE

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Fontana High MCJROTC Academic Team Makes History with Third-Place National Finish

FONTANA – Fontana High School Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (MCJROTC) cadets stepped onto the national academic stage for the first time from June 12-16, joining the country’s top programs at the JROTC Leadership & Academic Bowl (JLAB) National Championship in Washington, D.C.

By the end of the competition, cadets Kimberley Flores, Rosario Negrete, Marcos Alvarenga, and Angel Rios had made school history, earning third place among Marine Corps JROTC academic teams and establishing Fontana High as one of the nation’s strongest programs.

“These students knew the answers, but the challenge was getting them to trust themselves enough to buzz in and show it,” Fontana High Senior Marine Instructor LtCol Denny Meelarp said. “Once they realized they belonged there, they started competing with more confidence, and I could not be prouder of how they responded.”

Fontana High advanced to the national championship after completing two online qualifying rounds, in which the team scored 98 out of 100. Only eight MCJROTC programs advanced to the nationals, selected from approximately 280 participating schools, earning the team an all-expenses-paid trip to compete in Washington, D.C.

The JLAB National Championship tested cadets in a head-to-head format that challenged their knowledge of math, science, language arts, financial literacy, history, geography, and current events. Unlike the online qualifying rounds, the national competition required students to buzz in quickly and answer under time constraints.

During one close match, the Steelers were down five points when Flores buzzed in on the final question, a 10-point opportunity, and answered correctly to secure the win. For Flores, the moment capped three years with the academic team and several seasons of coming close to qualifying for the national competition.

“Flores is usually very quiet, but at nationals she turned it on,” Meelarp said. “She had worked toward this opportunity for years, and when the team needed her, she stepped up in a way that made all of us proud.”

Rios, who competed as a freshman, also emerged as one of the team’s strongest contributors, bringing the academic drive of a student who is already a year ahead in credits and on the path to graduating

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early. Alvarenga and Negrete, both sophomores during the competition, helped the team work through questions and stay composed during the timed rounds.

Beyond JLAB, the trip gave cadets the opportunity to experience the nation's capitol and visit landmarks including the Marine Corps Museum, Arlington National Cemetery, the Capitol Building, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

"Our Fontana High cadets have shown that academic excellence takes many forms and displayed the raw courage it takes to compete against the very best," Superintendent Miki R. Inbody said. "We are incredibly proud of Kimberley, Rosario, Marcos, and Angel for making history and representing Fontana Unified with distinction on a national stage."

PHOTO CAPTION:

FUSD_MCJROTC_JLAB1: Fontana High School MCJROTC Academic Team cadets (from left to right) Rosario Negrete, Kimberly Flores, Marcos Alvarenga, and Angel Rios celebrate their third-place finish at the JROTC Leadership & Academic Bowl National Championship, held June 12-16 in Washington, D.C.

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