



WHITTIER UNION

HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Aug. 13, 2026 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Welcomes 2026-27 School Year with Renewed Commitment to Excellence

WHITTIER – Whittier Union High School District commenced its 2026-27 school year with spirited back-to-school events held over three days, holding rallies and celebrations for more than 9,200 students, welcoming the incoming Class of 2030, and ushering in a renewed commitment to excellence, achievement, and growth.

During the First Day of School on Aug. 12, students were greeted by cheer squads, mascots, inspirational signs, and band groups performing music while classmates hugged and high-fived after a long summer break. Teachers welcomed a host of new students to their classrooms, which were adorned with school and college pennants, pointing the way to a school year with the potential for greatness.

Whittier Union launched the school year with its annual Day One event on Aug. 10, which brought together District staff for a day of reconnection as they looked forward to the new year. Day One was followed by Freshman First Day on Aug. 11, where Whittier Union's newest students received the red-carpet treatment, meeting new classmates, touring their new campuses, playing games, receiving tips and advice from leadership, and enjoying performances from cheer, band, and choir.

"I am excited about building new connections and getting the chance to strive in school," La Serna High School incoming freshman Dylan Serna said. "Freshmen First Day has given us some insight on how the school functions and how welcoming the community really is."

The new year brings the arrival of the District's newest mascot, the Santa Fe High School Sentinel. Santa Fe High selected a new mascot to comply with a new California law which prohibits public schools from using Native American-themed mascots. After a monthslong campaign, which resulted in thousands of student and stakeholder survey submissions and informational meetings, the Sentinel was chosen.

"The Sentinel embodies the values of our community identified from the beginning – including bravery and courage – and reflects a sense of guardianship and pride, while honoring Santa Fe's legacy of resilience and excellence," Santa Fe Principal Craig Campbell said.

Two schools will also begin the 2026-27 school year with new leadership. Former Director of Business Services Steven Rodriguez now leads the United Sierra Education Center as principal, which includes Frontier High School, Sierra Vista High School, Whittier Union Adult School, and the Adult Transition Program. At La Serna High School, Dr. Sam Sanford has been named interim principal. Sanford was previously assistant principal at La Serna.

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Whittier Union also begins the new year with new policies and guidelines on modern technology. The newly-instituted Whittier Union Mobile Device Policy bans cell phones from being used during instructional time, provides guidelines for smart devices, institutes privacy restrictions, and warns of consequences for unauthorized use.

"At Whittier Union, we treat instructional time as our most precious resource. It represents the moments when students and staff come together to learn, grow, and thrive," Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services Lilia Bozigian said. "The Mobile Device policy helps to ensure that instructional time remains focused on classroom learning, with fewer distractions. Students will still have full access to their phones during non-instructional time and for emergencies."

Whittier Union is also debuting a new set of Artificial Intelligence (AI) guiding principles focused on using AI in ways that are human-centered, ethical, secure, and designed to support student success while strengthening, not replacing, the role of teachers and human connection.

The AI guidelines bring clarity to much-discussed issues and concerns such as AI literacy, human-first use, academic integrity, transparency and responsibility, personalized learning, privacy and safety, training and readiness, and college and career readiness. More information can be found on the District [website](#).

"The first day of school at Whittier Union is always an exciting time. It's wonderful to see the enthusiasm, energy, and confidence of our students as they begin a new chapter," Superintendent Dr. Monica Oviedo said. "Our commitment is to make sure every student feels supported, challenged, and inspired to discover their strengths, pursue their dreams, and reach their full potential. Together, we will continue to do *Whatever It Takes* to help our students succeed across Whittier Union. I look forward to all that we will accomplish together during the 2026-27 school year."

PHOTO CAPTIONS

WUHSF_FIRSTDAY1: Whittier Union incoming freshmen celebrate the start of the 2026-27 school year during the District's annual Freshmen First Day event on Aug. 11.

WUHSF_FIRSTDAY2: Whittier Union students receive a spirited welcome back to campus through celebratory cheer tunnels on the first day of school on Aug. 12.

WUHSF_FIRSTDAY3: Whittier Union kicked off the 2026-27 school year on Aug. 12, welcoming students back to campuses, where classmates reconnected and set the tone for another successful year.

WUHSF_FIRSTDAY4: Whittier Union staff reconnect after the summer and share goals for the 2026-27 school year during the District's Day One event on Aug. 10.

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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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