



Whittier Union HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 20, 2020 **CONTACT:** Juliette Funes, William Diepenbrock **PHONE:** 909-445-1001

Harvard-bound Whittier Union Valedictorian Partners with PIH Health for COVID-19 Awareness Campaign

WHITTIER – Before spending the next four years studying biomedical engineering at Harvard University, Whittier High School graduate Julia Casas is dedicating her summer to working with PIH Health Whittier Hospital to develop a volunteer social network and raise awareness of COVID-19 and the available health services in the community.

Casas, who is one of Whittier High's seven valedictorians for the Class of 2020, is working with PIH Health volunteer services and health marketing administrators to compile a large volunteer database; create a volunteer website, social media accounts and weekly newsletter; coordinate donations of personal protective equipment; and organize online fundraisers.

"A large percentage of Whittier residents are at risk for COVID-19," Casas said. "Because many people have stopped volunteering out of health concerns, I want to recruit a team of young people and senior citizens to help ensure that health resources are reaching those who need them the most."

The project is part of the Ivy League's SPARK program, which enables freshmen to develop a public service project at home while receiving funding and ongoing support from Harvard staff, faculty and student leaders. Students may earn a \$1,500 stipend if they commit to 100 hours of community service.

"I am very passionate about helping others and I hope this experience helps me achieve my dream of starting a public health nonprofit that provides low-income/undocumented families with vital medical services they could not afford otherwise," Casas said.

Casas has long been passionate about female representation in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields. She established the Voices of Women in STEM club, Whittier High's first-ever feminism-centered club, and organized school's first-ever STEM Career Fair, which featured doctors, nurses and engineers who spoke to students about their jobs. She was also Robotics Club president and volunteered teaching Mill School and Technology Academy female students how to fly drones and code basic programs in JavaScript.

In summer 2019, she was selected for the MIT MITES engineering program, conducting research at the acclaimed Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, renowned for creating the Human Genome Project.

"I want to set an example for third-grade girls and show that anyone can be successful in whatever their passion may be, and I am beyond excited to start the next chapter of my academic journey at Harvard," she said.

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Among the universities Casas was [accepted](#) to are Carnegie Mellon, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, Stanford, UC Berkeley and Wellesley College.

“Julia is a natural born leader who is determined to make a change in the world, so we are in no way surprised that she continues to give back to her community,” Principal Timothy Liggett said. “She is a true Cardinal and we wish her all the best.”

Casas is still looking for Whittier-area youth volunteers for her project. Interested participants can contact Casas at juliacasas@college.harvard.edu.

PHOTO CAPTION

072020_WUHSD_CASAS: Whittier High School Class of 2020 graduate Julia Casas – who will continue her academic pursuits at Harvard University – is partnering with PIH Health Whittier for a COVID-19 awareness campaign as part of a community public service project sponsored by the Ivy League.

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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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