



# El Monte Union High School District

Community Committed to College and Career

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **El Monte Union Names Inspiring Educator, Alumnus its 2018-19 Teacher of the Year**

**EL MONTE** – When South El Monte High School Class of 2018 graduate Samantha Gowin stressed over her future after graduation, English teacher and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) coordinator Cesar Castellanos always found the right words to instill confidence and ease her mind.

“Mr. Castellanos took me under his wing and became the father figure that I very much needed throughout high school,” said Gowin, now a freshman at UCLA. “He always showed patience and kindness, answered my questions and treated me like his own daughter. I will always be grateful for this man who took the time to really define what being an educator means.”

Castellanos’ reputation for constantly supporting his students in and out of the classroom and empowering them to realize their dreams of attaining a college education has earned him El Monte Union High School District’s highest honor: 2018-19 Teacher of the Year. He was recognized in front of his peers during the District’s annual Opening of School program on Aug. 14.

“This is a tremendous honor, but for me, it is all about the students and how we as teachers have the power to shape the trajectory of a family for an entire generation,” Castellanos said. “Many of my AVID students are the first in their family to attend college. My greatest joy is to see my students get that spark of recognition, that they have achieved something great. That is truly a reward in itself.”

Castellanos, a graduate of Rosemead High School, joined El Monte Union in 2011, teaching at El Monte High School for two years before moving to South El Monte, where he has served as the school’s AVID coordinator since 2014.

The elective class helps traditionally underrepresented students forge a path to college by boosting their study skills and offering academic, social and emotional support.

South El Monte Class of 2018 graduate and first-generation college student Samantha Rodriguez, a freshman at UC San Diego, was amazed at how quickly Castellanos was able to connect with his AVID students and make an impact on their lives.

“On the first day of class, Mr. Castellanos told many stories about himself and was very engaging. The next day he quizzed us on it. It completely drew the students in,” Rodriguez said. “He has such a bubbly

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personality and he always wants to hear what the students have to say. When he explained the college application process, it all made sense. Now I can pass that knowledge to my younger brother.”

Castellanos’ dedication to his students doesn’t end when the bell rings. Castellanos spends many hours fundraising to help pay for annual AVID student field trips to universities across California, including Stanford, UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz. He has also helped to expand the school’s AVID program by regularly recruiting students at feeder middle schools. He also heads the school’s new Early College Academy, in which students have the opportunity to earn college credits through Rio Hondo College.

Castellanos wants to ensure nothing stands in the way of his students attending college, whether that means raising money for a dorm room deposit or paying a college application fee out of his own pocket.

“Cesar is completely selfless. The kids are always on his mind,” South El Monte English teacher Danny Magaña said. “He will do whatever it takes to get his students into a college or university. He sets the tone for the rest of us. He is such an inspiration.”

Castellanos also teaches journalism and advises the staff of the school newspaper, the Eagle’s Nest. In December 2017, Castellanos received the Bobby Salcedo Esperanza Award, given to outstanding educators who exemplify a tireless commitment to education, including mentoring students facing hardship and inspiring them to pursue a college education.

“Mr. Castellanos, a product of the El Monte Union High School District, exemplifies what it means to be an educator, always putting the well-being of our students first and doing whatever it takes to ensure they are successful in whatever endeavor they wish to pursue,” Superintendent Dr. Edward Zuniga said. “It is because of teachers like Mr. Castellanos that we are able to achieve our collective goal of preparing our students for personal and academic excellence.”

### **PHOTO CAPTIONS:**

**090718\_EMUHSO\_CASTELLANOS1:** For his dedication to helping his students realize their dream of going to college, South El Monte High School English teacher and AVID coordinator Cesar Castellanos was recognized as the El Monte Union High School District 2018-19 Teacher of the Year.

**090718\_EMUHSO\_CASTELLANOS2:** South El Monte High School English teacher and AVID coordinator Cesar Castellanos was recently recognized as El Monte Union High School District’s 2018-19 Teacher of the Year. Considered by many students as a father figure, Castellanos also serves as SEMHS journalism instructor and adviser for the school newspaper, the Eagle’s Nest.

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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.*