



Press Release

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Bell Gardens High Senior Named Gates Millennium Scholar

Jesus Rios, Ranked 5th in His Class, to Attend Berkeley to Study Nuclear Engineering

MONTEBELLO – Bell Gardens High senior Jesus Rios – a musician, athlete and stellar student – will study nuclear engineering this fall at University of California, Berkeley after receiving a Gates Millennium Scholarship, a prestigious award bestowed to only 1,000 students across the nation.

The scholarship will cover all of Rios' college costs, as well as provide academic and social support, mentoring and leadership training opportunities throughout his college career. Rios has achieved a 4.26 weighted GPA and is poised to graduate fifth in a class of 657.

“As a brilliant student, who is dedicated to his community – on campus and off – Jesus is poised to become a leader, ready to contribute great things to our world,” Montebello Unified Board President Edgar Cisneros said. “We are so proud to call Jesus a student and alumnus of Montebello Unified. Congratulations to him and his family for this honor.”

Rios plans to use his degree, and subsequent graduate degrees, to discover and use sustainable and alternative energies. He is also interested in studying music theory, after having participated in orchestra, jazz band, mariachi and the school's culture band, Serenatas, at Bell Gardens High (BGHS).

“I come from a low-income background and I'm excited to give back to my family and community,” Rios said.

At BGHS, Rios participated in numerous programs sports and activities on campus, including soccer, track and field, and wrestling. He was also a member of the California Scholarship Foundation, the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and the Chivalrous Brotherhood Club on campus.

“Jesus is an extremely intelligent, mature, diligent and personable individual,” said Tracy Brendzal, a college counselor at BGHS. “Jesus is a true scholar whose potential is immeasurable.”

Rios, an Advanced Placement Scholar, credits Bell Gardens High for offering a variety of AP courses that helped him excel in the classroom, particularly science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) classes.

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He also attributes much of his success to Montebello Unified’s College Bound Today – a unique, growing program that pairs MUSD students with mentors, provides academic support and exposes students to college options early in their high school career.

“College Bound Today helped me get my scores up, while providing mentorship,” Rios said.

The Millennium Scholars Program – established in 1999 through a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation -- provides outstanding low-income African American, American Indian/ Alaska Native, Asian American/ Pacific Islander and Hispanic American students with the opportunity to complete an undergraduate college education in any discipline they choose.

Rios is one of two Gates scholars from MUSD; Erica Suh of Montebello High School also won one of the rare scholarships.

“We are so proud of Jesus and Erica who illustrate the level of accomplishment our students can achieve with the resources and tenacity,” Superintendent of Education Susanna Contreras Smith said. “We are so proud of Jesus and commend his teachers, staff and Principal Juan Herrera for this exceptional award.”

The goal of the Gates Millennium Scholars Program is to promote academic excellence by providing thousands of outstanding students, who have significant financial need, with the opportunity to reach their full potential. The program is known for its recipients’ high graduate rates – a six-year rate of more than 87 percent (28 percent higher than the national graduation rates for all students and comparable to the rate for students from high-income families).

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Montebello Unified School District is a dynamic learning institution employing top-quality educators. It is the combined work of many that allows the District to continue educating more than 30,000 students every year using the 40 Developmental Assets at all of our school sites. It is through everyone’s efforts – students, parents, teachers, staff and administrators – that we are achieving the District’s number one goal of raising student achievement. Learn more online at www.montebello.k12.ca.us.