

PRESS RELEASE

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Pomona Unified Student One of 55 in World to Achieve Perfect AP Spanish Exam Score

POMONA – Pomona Unified student Karina Aguilar has gained international recognition as one of only 55 students in the world to earn a perfect score on the Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish and Culture exam, also making her one of 322 in the world to attain a perfect score on any AP exam last year.

The former English learner heard of the unprecedented feat during a surprise celebration with friends and family while in her AP Spanish literature class at Garey High School on Jan. 21.

“Karina’s determination in her classes and ambitious test scores are a testament to how our student-success initiatives have flourished,” PUSD Board of Education President Adrienne Konigar-Macklin said. “Students like her shape our schools and are the motivation behind new and improved programs that bolster high-quality instruction for this 21st-century workforce they will join. We are all very proud of her for putting our District and Garey High School on the map.”

Aguilar, 17, is a model senior at Garey High, carrying a 4.8 GPA and juggling a rigorous academic schedule with a host of extracurricular activities. She participates in tennis, soccer and drama, is a member of the Associated Student Body (ASB) and LINK mentoring program, and is enrolled in several AP courses.

All of this, she says, wouldn’t have been possible without the help of her teachers and Garey staff.

“I spend almost as much time at school as I do at home,” Aguilar said. “It has an amazing family-like atmosphere and the teachers motivate all students to always do the best they can. Honestly, I am still trying to process my test score, but seeing how proud my teachers are makes me feel really amazing.”

Garey High Principal Stacey Wilkins called Aguilar an inspiration to her fellow classmates and he hopes her success will entice other students to pursue AP classes.

“I could not wait to tell her about her perfect test score,” Wilkins said. “I think she was shocked because the students and teachers seemed to be more ecstatic than she was at the moment. She has elevated what being a Garey High School Viking is all about.”

Last year, Aguilar enrolled in the AP Spanish class — taught by Jose Morales — to explore Latin American culture and learn more about her heritage. It was there that she learned skills and lessons through discussions she had with classmates and Morales. Learning from this interactive classroom environment helped her through the 65 print and audio questions and four free-response writing prompts on her AP Spanish and Culture exam.

“I was completely surprised, not because she is incapable, but because it is unheard of to get a perfect score on the AP exam,” Morales said. “This is the first time I have heard of it being done, but Karina has always been a driving force in my class and volunteers to help other classmates any chance she gets. She has worked exceptionally hard to get this far.”

Aguilar moved to California from Mexico in 2001 and became proficient in English by third grade. She says she was motivated and inspired by her parents, who worked hard to find jobs in the United States to get their kids the best education possible.

“I saw how hard it was for them to find jobs without a college education and the sacrifices they made, so I made it my mission to make them proud and to be able to give back to them one day,” Aguilar said.

Due to her perfect score, Aguilar now has the opportunity to earn college credit for her AP class and plans on studying public policy with an emphasis on education at a four-year university. She also hopes to one day serve on the Pomona Unified Board of Education and continue making college more accessible.

“Our students are prospering at all campuses every day through our robust enrichment programs,” Superintendent Richard Martinez said. “The support from our teachers and staff make it all possible for our students to excel, and Aguilar is a perfect example of the incredible feats our Pomona Unified students can achieve if they work hard.”

PHOTO CAPTION:

AGUILAR: Garey High School senior Karina Aguilar stands with Principal Stacey Wilkins in front of Garey High School in Pomona. Aguilar is one of 55 students in the world to earn a perfect score on her AP Spanish and Culture exam last year.

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