



Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 4, 2015

CONTACT: Valerie Martinez

Juliette Funes

(909) 445-1001

First-Generation College-Bound Teens Earn \$500 Bilingual Education Scholarships

WHITTIER, CA – Two Whittier Union seniors have been recognized by the Los Angeles County Bilingual Directors' Association for overcoming personal challenges in order to excel in high school and for making plans to pursue careers in education.

Victor Uriarte of Pioneer High School and Yodd Mena of Whittier High School have received \$500 Shelly Spiegel-Coleman scholarships for their dedication to bilingual education, bilingual proficiency and for serving as mentors and tutors to their peers.

"In middle school when I took my first science class, I knew that was what I wanted to study," said Uriarte, who plans to major in astrophysics at UCLA and teach astronomy. "Growing up, I wasn't given the opportunities that I have today, so I want to make an impact on someone's life by teaching them astronomy at an early age."

Mena, who plans to major in Spanish in college, said she is thrilled to use the scholarship toward pursuing her academic and personal goals.

"When I began taking Spanish classes at my high school, I did not realize I would soon become enamored with its beauty," she said. "I hope to pursue my dream of teaching others what I have learned and help others discover how much more there is to explore."

The Los Angeles County Bilingual Directors' Association awards the scholarships to bilingual high school seniors who plan to enroll in college courses leading to teaching or counseling credentials that focus on addressing the needs of English learners through the promotion of bilingual education and multicultural diversity.

Uriarte and Mena each overcame personal barriers to achieve academic success, growing up in single-parent households where access to higher education seemed limited, if not impossible.

However, both embraced the extensive programs Whittier Union offers to support student matriculation into college, including a strong English Learner program that provides a pathway to college readiness, a comprehensive Horizons Program that includes academic, career and pre-college advisement, and the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, which helps students develop college-level academic skills.

The District also offers the Seal of Biliteracy, which recognizes graduating seniors who have demonstrated linguistic achievement in two or more languages, and partners with Whittier College to promote English learner success and academic language proficiency.

Uriarte, who has a 4.29 GPA and is ranked fourth in his class, has been awarded honor roll and top 25 at Pioneer all four years. He is an Advanced Placement Scholar who has served as president of the school's California Scholarship Federation, vice president of the community service-based Leo Club, captain of the cross country and track teams, and has participated in the AVID program.

Mena maintains a 3.98 GPA and serves as an Academic Mentor in Whittier High's Guided Studies program. She is a member of the New Horizons Club and has participated in both the Senators and Academic Mentors programs for two years. Upon graduation, she will receive the Seal of Biliteracy. Mena plans to attend Rio Hondo College and transfer to a four-year school.

"Bilingual education serves as a great form of personal enrichment for our students, but it also opens new doors for learning opportunities and interpersonal development," Whittier Union High School District Superintendent Sandra Thorstenson said. "By working together, embracing diversity and offering a comprehensive educational experience for students, we're collaboratively closing the achievement gap."

###

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.

WUHSD Board of Trustees

Jeff Baird, *President* ■ Leighton Anderson, *Vice President* ■ Tim Schneider, *Clerk* ■ Dr. Ralph S. Pacheco, *Member* ■ Russell Castañeda Calleros, *Member*
Sandra Thorstenson, *Superintendent*

9401 S. Painter Avenue, Whittier, California 90605-2798 ■ (562) 698-8121 ■ www.wuhsd.org