Since launching its online learning program, Whittier Union has engaged students through Google Classroom, where nearly all teachers post assignments and projects, boosting collaboration and enhancing communication in an entirely new way.

During the transition from in-classroom instruction to remote learning, the District provided teachers and staff with continued professional development to carry out classes from home, adapt curriculum in collaboration with course leads and strengthen technology integration.

To ensure students were connected and had the technological access to learn from home, Whittier Union distributed Chromebooks and wireless hotspots to families and assigned Google Voice numbers to students and staff. The District also conducted regular outreach to the small percentage of students who were less active on Google Classroom.

“Almost overnight, we underwent a dramatic shift in the way we educate our students that changed the traditional school day as we continued on page 3.”

Innovative Online Lessons Engage Students

Whittier Union Adult School teacher Marla Damico uses video conferencing to ensure continued learning through the District’s online learning Program.

BY THE NUMBERS: ONLINE LEARNING @ WUHSD

95% STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
98% TEACHERS ON GOOGLE CLASSROOM
1,500+ CHROMEBOOKS DISTRIBUTED
300 WIRELESS HOTSPOTS DISTRIBUTED TO FAMILIES
680 GOOGLE VOICE NUMBERS ASSIGNED

Whittier Union High School District
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We never imagined ending the 2019-20 academic year like this, but this crisis has made one thing clear – we will do Whatever It Takes to ensure our students receive the education they deserve and the vital sustenance and support they need to overcome even the most unexpected barriers.

Over the past two decades, Whittier Union has experienced great success in closing the achievement gap, increasing graduation and college-going rates, and embracing technology as an essential tool for our instructional program.

We saw just how critical it is to integrate technology into our curriculum when the health crisis forced us to swap our traditional face-to-face interaction for a digital learning environment in March. It has been a challenging endeavor, to say the least.

We never imagined ending the 2019-20 academic year like this, but this crisis has made one thing clear – we will do Whatever It Takes to ensure our students receive the education they deserve and the vital sustenance and support they need to overcome even the most unexpected barriers.

We are beyond proud of the leadership across our schools and among our educators, who have led this shift in instruction and are finding new ways to support every student.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I want to thank the entire Whittier Union community for your patience and understanding as we’ve adjusted to a new way of living, learning and teaching.

I also want to recognize our Class of 2020 – this amazing group of seniors whom we have had the pleasure of spending the last four years (nearly 720 days) with, learning their stories, giving them the gentle push they need to reach their potential and preparing them for their next steps in college and careers.

Our traditional June ceremonies may not happen the way we had planned, but we are committed to doing everything in our power to give our seniors the opportunity to walk across the stage, earn their diploma, and cel-

“...
When Whittier Union physically closed its campuses on March 16, the District’s Nutrition Services staff, clad in protective gear and face coverings, began gathering every day to assemble breakfast and lunch meals for area children and teens, delivering them through a grab-and-go/curbside pick-up service.

The District was on track to serve 172,000 free meals from its six distribution sites before the end of the 2019-20 school year, providing families comfort and support during a time of unease.

“Our Nutrition Services staff have been on the front lines, working tirelessly to support our students and families when they need us most and providing a sense of hope, stability and positivity,” Superintendent Martin Plourde said.

Whittier Union schools were closed through the end of the academic year to limit the spread of COVID-19, promote social distancing and ensure the safety of students and staff.

Still, that didn’t stop the District’s essential meal service from continuing or Nutrition Services staff members from prioritizing the nutrition and health of students. In appreciation of their dedication, community members donated homemade masks and face coverings, celebrated staff with drive-by parades and donated breakfast items.

“Those small gestures are incredibly appreciated by our staff, especially at this time,” Director of Food and Nutrition Services Elizabeth Brown-Smith said. “We’re a community that looks out for one another and we’re deeply grateful for it.”

Innovative Online Lessons Engage Students

(continued from page 1)

know it,” Superintendent Martin Plourde said. “Still, our teachers, staff and administrators jumped on board, putting in all the effort necessary to learn how to teach our students remotely, effectively and with the same rigor. Virtual instruction is new territory for us, but our commitment to students and their achievement is unwavering.”

The District’s efforts have been felt widely by students.

“The first week was the hardest and it’s been challenging,” said Pioneer High School senior Robert Sanchez Serrano, who is taking four Advanced Placement courses. “But the teachers have definitely put in a lot of effort to make sure students have the materials they need, and they’ve done an amazing job with keeping in touch with students every day.”

For 15-year Pioneer High chemistry teacher Julia Bermudez, adapting her teaching has included voice recording her notes, sharing online simulations to replace some hands-on experiments and constantly checking in with students through Google Hangouts, Remind and other apps.

“As a teacher, it’s built in our system to be adaptive because education constantly changes, and with those changes come new ideas and expectations,” Bermudez said. “It comes naturally in the classroom, but adapting and creating new lab experiments, coming up with ideas and thinking outside the box has been an interesting endeavor. It’s exciting to do things I’ve never done before.”
Five Whittier Union students recently earned Award of Merit recognitions from the Board of Trustees for tackling personal feats and beating the odds to rank among the District’s top students.

Denisse Palominos, California High
Denisse Palominos – who maintains a 4.1 GPA and is captain of the Cal High volleyball team – is a member of the Business Academy and takes challenging Advanced Placement and honors courses.

She also is an LCAP Advisory student representative and has been selected as a Student of the Month three times. She looks forward to a career in business and real estate.

“I’d like to thank everyone at Cal High for their support,” Palominos said. “I definitely wouldn’t have had all of these opportunities at school without them.”

Cristian Rodriguez, Whittier High
Cristian Rodriguez loves working behind the scenes – whether that’s by providing support as a member of the Vic Lopez Auditorium Technical Crew or helping to co-author and publicize his family’s literary projects.

Rodriguez has a 4.45 GPA and is a member of the Whittier High’s Cardinal Brigade marching band.

“I want to thank all the amazing teachers and staff who have helped me throughout my journey at Whittier High,” said Rodriguez, who plans to attend UC Berkeley and work for a film production company.

Jocelyn Jimenez, La Serna High
Whether she is helping her classmates fulfill their potential as an OASIS/HAVEN mentor or catapulting her team junior varsity tennis team to success, Jocelyn Jimenez is a born leader who is dedicated to empowering those around her.

Jimenez, who has a 4.3 GPA, will attend Claremont McKenna College on a full-ride scholarship and pursue a career in law.

“I just want to say that the Lancer community has truly been supportive and has shaped me into the person I am today and who I want to be in the future,” she said.

Robert Sanchez Serrano, Pioneer High
Robert Sanchez Serrano, who has a 4.4 GPA, has completed 16 AP classes, has 280 course credits under his belt and is taking several dual enrollment information technology classes at Rio Hondo College.

He attributes his dedication to his teachers and counselors.

“Pioneer High is such a great school,” said Serrano, who plans to major in mechanical engineering at Cal Poly Pomona. “My biggest inspirations are my teachers.”

Angel Moreno Gallegos, Santa Fe High
Although initially difficult to accommodate to a new culture and language, Angel Moreno Gallegos quickly developed a high level of perseverance to eventually become a member of ASB and president of the Expanded Horizons Club.

Despite entering high school as an English Language Development level 1 student, Gallegos, who has a 4.12 GPA, is now taking six AP classes with no language support. He plans to study chemical engineering.

“Angel ranks well within the top students that have demonstrated a superior level of motivation, maturity and enthusiasm for learning and his future,” Expanded Horizons Director Rosa Zavala-Ramirez said.

Longtime WUHSD Educator Appointed Assistant Superintendent
Longtime La Serna High School principal and District educator Ann Fitzgerald has been appointed to serve as Whittier Union’s new assistant superintendent of personnel services effective July 1.

Born and raised in Whittier and a graduate of Whittier College, Fitzgerald began her teaching career at La Serna in 1994. She was appointed as assistant principal of curriculum and instruction in 2003 and was named principal of the Lancer campus in 2012.

“Whittier Union is an exceptional place to learn, work and develop as an educator,” Fitzgerald said. “Our teachers, staff and administrators all work together in close collaboration for the benefit of our students and I look forward to building on that strong foundation with our teachers and staff.”

Over the course of her career, Fitzgerald has been instrumental to the success of La Serna’s student academic achievement, attributed to its bell schedule, which provides intervention support for students during the school day. The structured program has led to a 96% daily attendance rate, 98% graduation rate and nearly 70% of all graduates meeting college entrance requirements.

She was named the Association of California School Administrators Region 15 Principal of the Year in 2019.

“Throughout her career, Ann has been an innovative leader and a great role model and ambassador in the community,” Superintendent Martin Plourde said. “Her intimate knowledge of our District has been vital to our success and will serve us well as she continues to work collaboratively with our administrators, teachers and staff at every level in her new role.”
Santa Fe Senior Earns Full-tuition Posse Scholarship

Santa Fe High School senior Roman Vargas entered middle school without any expectation of ever attending college, but six years of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) classes and rigorous academic opportunities taught him to set goals, collaborate with classmates and work toward achieving post-secondary success.

Vargas – a first-generation college student with a 4.2 GPA – is making his dreams come true after winning a full-tuition Posse Foundation scholarship to attend Hobart and William Smith Colleges (HWS), where he will major in history.

“This is a tremendous achievement for me because it is one of the most competitive scholarships in the country,” Vargas said. “I am excited to go to HWS because of its mission to create lives of consequence – to give back to the community, help others and make a difference.”

The Posse Foundation identifies students with extraordinary academic and leadership potential, but who may be overlooked by traditional college selection processes.

As an AVID student, Vargas learned to pay close attention to detail, a skill that will help him in potential career paths as an archaeologist, museum curator or teacher. It was especially helpful while he was a photographer and writer for the yearbook staff at Santa Fe, an AVID National Demonstration School.

“Roman’s leadership skills on campus and in the classroom have made him a standout Chief from the beginning,” Principal Craig Campbell said. “We are proud of his accomplishments and the contributions he has made to Santa Fe. We wish him the best as he pursues his dreams to shape the future.”

Whittier High Students Rise to Challenge to Win District Science Cup

Whittier Union physics students put their scientific knowledge to the test, performing a series of challenges during the third annual District Science Cup, which saw Whittier High take home the winner’s cup.

Nearly 100 competitors locked horns on March 6 to compete in challenges that included racing an electric boat, constructing a water filtration system and creating a Rube Goldberg machine. The event concluded with the Science Bowl.

Whittier High emerged as the overall champion, Santa Fe High finished in second place and Pioneer High took third place.

“Every year I am amazed at how creative our students are, and how well they work together to find solutions. It doesn’t always go as planned, but the whole point is to learn from your mistakes and store that knowledge for the next challenge,” Pioneer High physics teacher Matt Murray said. “It’s a friendly competition. Our kids are motivated to win, but they also have a lot of fun.”

Whittier High emerged as champion in the electric boat race (Cal High came in second and Pioneer third) and the Rube Goldberg machine (Santa Fe came in second and La Serna third). Pioneer took first place in the water filtration challenge (Cal came in second and Whittier third) and Santa Fe High won the Science Bowl.
As part of its Student Well-Being Program and efforts, Whittier Union has ensured continued service to students in need of support and resources as they cope with social isolation during a pandemic that has prevented them from returning to school and having access to friends or structure.

“We’re social beings and that social interaction has been very limited for us all, especially our kids,” Student Support Services Director Amy Larson said. “Our schools and adults are their mentors who are guiding them into adulthood. It’s important for that guidance and support to continue, especially when our kids may be struggling even more than usual.”

In 2014, Whittier Union established a Districtwide Student Well-Being Program to address challenges impacting student health and wellness, increase school-site support and provide resources for families. The District recently received the Lifesaver Award from Los Angeles County for its robust suicide prevention protocols.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified various forms of stress among students and families as they learn to deal with a new normal of physical/social distancing, home confinement, remote learning and family challenges.

Whittier Union staff – which includes two licensed social workers, a school psychologist and social work interns – has engaged students academically and remained connected through phone or video sessions to support their social-emotional wellness.

Student and community resources are available at www.swbwuhsd.wordpress.com.

**Whittier Union Supports Health Care Community**

The Whittier Union family came together to comfort and support health care workers and PIH Health Whittier’s efforts to care for the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Upon hearing that hospitals were seeking ear guards – which allow surgical face masks to wrap completely around the head and reduce ear strain for medical professionals working long hours in full personal protective equipment – Whittier High engineering teacher Steve Swanson used a 3D printer he was testing for classroom use prior to school dismissals to create over 300 devices.

The District also collected and donated much-needed supplies, including disinfectant wipes and goggles, to the hospital.
**Sierra Vista ASB Holds ‘Patties for Patients’ Fundraiser**

Sierra Vista High School’s Associated Student Body on March 5 hosted its first-ever “Patties for Patients” charity barbecue, raising $578 for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society—the most ever raised since the ASB was organized seven years ago.

“When we first organized ASB, it was our goal to improve not only our school, but also our community,” Sierra Vista Director Nicki Buchholz said. “It’s a good feeling when you know you helped save a life.”

The event is a take on the “Pennies for Patients” campaign, which raises funds for cancer research. All proceeds and additional donations were donated to the organization.

“Our loving and generous Sierra Education Center family came together once again to give to those in need,” ASB Activities Director Patricia Zazueta said. “Our ASB did such an amazing job serving those on campus. Their smiles and enthusiasm to be a part of something important made all the difference.”

**Academic Decathlon Teams Impress at County Competition**

Santa Fe and Whittier high schools were among 38 teams to compete against some of the region’s top scholastic achievers at the Los Angeles County Academic Decathlon competition in February, with Santa Fe celebrating its debut performance by winning 12 medals.

“We are incredibly proud of how well our team performed in their first attempt at this challenging and rigorous competition,” Santa Fe Academic Decathlon Coach Annette Snow said. “This reflects their many, many hours of studying and preparing prior to the competition itself.”

Santa Fe High’s decathletes included senior Griselda Chavez (Gold Medal for Interview and Bronze Medal for Speech); and sophomores Tania Padilla (Top Decathlete Gold Medal, Silver Medal for Essay and Gold Medal for Interview); Guillermo Lopez (Silver Medal in Science and Bronze Medal for Speech); Germain Becerra (Bronze Medal in Science, Gold Medal in Economics and Silver Medal for Interview); Ashley Padilla and Chu both achieved perfect scores for their interviews.

“Three students from the Whittier High Class of 2020 have been our team’s top scorers in three of the last four years and our team has won 28 medals in the last two years, so this has been a special group,” Whittier High Academic Decathlon Coach Kele Perkins said. “We are proud of everyone’s performance.”

**Cal High Students Compete in JPL Science Bowl**

California High School was one of 24 teams from the greater Los Angeles area invited to participate in the 2020 National Science Bowl Regional Competition at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in January.

Cal High seniors Patrocinio Ramirez, Mark Gonzalez, Steven Leal, Mai Quesada and Caroline Schloss were asked rigorous questions over five rounds of the academic competition, which drew over 200 students, parents, coaches and guests.

This was the Condors’ first appearance.

“We are so proud of our students for working as a team to achieve this feat and giving it their all to make the Condor campus proud,” Principal Bill Schloss said. “I want to thank our dedicated teachers and staff for guiding our students toward academic greatness.”

Coordinated by the Department of Energy, the round-robin/double-elimination tournament challenged high school science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) students with questions about chemistry, biology, physics, mathematics and astronomy, as well as Earth and computer science.

Although the Cal High team did not advance to the finals, students were treated to a presentation by project managers of the Mars Rover program and visited the assembly facility to view the newest Mars Rover.

Supplemental reading: [Image 35x464 to 190x600] [Image 218x36 to 394x191] [Image 210x249 to 449x430] [Image 393x488 to 591x690]
Pioneer High School students cheered loudly during a math competition in November that pitted a group of calculus students against Whittier College math majors, a contest that saw the high school math whizzes triumph over their collegiate peers.

Dubbed the Derivative Bee, the academic competition was created by Pioneer High Class of 2016 graduate Dallas DeHart. She is a senior at Whittier College and serves as president of the math club.

“I think the Bee is a great way to bring the high school and college communities together,” DeHart said. “Whittier professors and Pioneer faculty helped come up with the questions. Everybody was really pumped up and cheering. You couldn’t ask for a better response.”

The event presented Pioneer and Whittier College students with several rounds of calculus equations. Working individually, in pairs and as a team, the students were continually challenged with questions about limits, tangent lines and second derivatives.

“I was honored to see my Calculus AB and BC students work as a cohesive team and come out as winners,” Pioneer calculus teacher Yolanda Johnson said. “Credit must be given to our Jaime Escalante Summer Math Academy, which has put our kids in a position to both learn and excel in calculus at a rigorous college level. This is so great for Pioneer.”

DeHart returned to Pioneer to help light the Titan Torch with the 21 winning calculus students. She hopes that the Derivative Bee can continue after she graduates from Whittier College.

“If I have to come back to bring them together, I will,” DeHart said. “Pioneer is my family.”

Close to 300 La Serna High School students were given the freedom to make their own financial decisions – and learn the unpleasant consequences of spending beyond their means – during Bite of Reality, a financial literacy event held in November.

Students in the school’s Guided Studies, OASIS, HAVEN and Read 180 academic intervention programs, their mentors and consumer math students were assigned a fictional occupation, salary, spouse and family, student loan/credit card debt and health insurance payments.

“This is a chance for our students to learn what awaits them after high school and the choices they will have to make on their own – decisions about the type of car they want, where they want to live and how much they can afford to spend on their wants and needs,” HAVEN/OASIS teacher Ken LaVigne said.

Teens visited various merchant tables, where volunteer “sellers” provided options for groceries, transportation, entertainment, household items, child care, housing and utilities, clothing and personal care. Students managed budgets, unexpected windfalls and pushy car salespeople.

“I just realized a car is very expensive,” said senior and academic mentor Sintia Leal. “I learned that I need to keep track of my purchases and really look at what I need.”

The event was sponsored by a long-time La Serna supporter, the Credit Union of Southern California, which launched a $50,000 endowment to ensure OASIS students find enduring success after graduation.

La Serna Students Learn Financial Responsibility During Bite of Reality

Pioneer Calculus Students Triumph Over College Peers

District programs, activities and practices shall be free from discrimination based on race, color, ancestry, national origin, ethnic group identification, age, religion, marital or parental status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or expression, or genetic information; the perception of one or more of such characteristics; or association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics.