

Whittier Union High School District

Serving the communities of Whittier, Santa Fe Springs and portions of Norwalk, La Mirada, and La Habra Heights

Summer 2009 *A Legacy of Excellence*

Commencement Just the Beginning for Class of 2009

Despite clouds of economic uncertainty overhead, nothing dampened the spirits of the 2,776 Whittier Union seniors who celebrated their graduation during commencement ceremonies held in June.

“Seniors, you are in a good place. This is the best time for you to be in college and learn as much as you can,” said Principal Lori Eshilian at Whittier High School’s ceremony. “In just a few years you will be ready for the opportunities that come your way.”

The great majority of this year’s senior class plan to do just that. A recent survey of graduating seniors shows that 83 percent plan to go on to post-secondary education. Of those, 27 percent plan to attend a four-year college or university, 52 percent will attend community college while 4 percent will go to a technical college.

Whittier Union seniors have been accepted to some of the most prestigious universities in the nation. These universities include Brown, Columbia, Loyola Marymount, Notre Dame, Oregon State University, Princeton, Stanford, the University of Arizona, the University of Southern California, and Whittier College.

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IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

Freshman First Day
September 1, 2009

First Day of School for All Students
September 2, 2009

BACK TO SCHOOL NIGHTS 2009-2010

California High School 5:30 p.m., October 1	La Serna High School 7:00 p.m., September 23	Santa Fe High School 6:00 p.m., September 16
Frontier High Schools 5:30 p.m., September 29	Pioneer High School 6:00 p.m., September 21	Whittier High School 6:00 p.m., October 14

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Superintendent's Message



Sandra Thorstenson
Superintendent

As the first day of school quickly approaches, we are eagerly preparing to welcome a new freshman class and greet our returning students for the 2009-10 school year.

This will be a year of changes and challenges as we continue to strive for higher levels of academic achievement in the face of state funding cuts due to the recession. I want to assure you that although our financial resources are greatly diminished, this economic crisis will not diminish the passion with which we will work on behalf of our students.

Our principals are a prime example of that passion. Each works tirelessly on behalf of his or her students, teachers, staff and parents. As you will read in this newsletter, we have a few

new principals and, together with their respective teams of assistant principals and dedicated staff, they will bring renewed energy and focus to their schools. I am certain they will provide the best leadership possible for their schools and will continue to build upon Whittier Union's level of excellence.

As you will read about in our newsletter, that excellence was personified by the graduating class of 2009. Almost 100 percent of our seniors passed the California High School Exit Exam and the majority are going on to colleges or trade schools in the fall.

Our seniors' academic success is a testament to their hard work and to the diligent efforts of teachers, staff, administrators and parents who work collaboratively to provide students with the best preparation possible for post-secondary education and fulfilling careers.

It takes true teamwork for our students to continue to reach increasingly higher levels of academic achievement year after year. As we face these lean economic times, I ask all of you in our Whittier Union community to assist us in maintaining the academic rigor, relevance and relationships we have worked so hard to build.

As many of you know, the state budget crisis is far deeper and more devastating than initially estimated. Whittier Union's state revenues have been cut by 20 percent. With 84 percent of all District expenditures in salaries and benefits and only 16 percent of our budget expended on non-personnel costs, we were forced to cut four classified positions per campus in order to begin

to meet our fiscal responsibilities.

Many of the staff members currently in these positions are planning to retire, so the number of actual people laid off will likely be seven. Still, each position lost hurts. The positions to be eliminated include locker room attendants, library media technicians and five clerical positions. In addition, the following positions will also be reduced: two painters, one landscape maintenance supervisor and one mail clerk.

During the last two years, everyone in the District worked diligently to cut expenditures in an effort to avoid job losses for as long as possible. We used our reserve of \$4.9 million that was established to mitigate the anticipated decline in enrollment, an additional \$4 million provided to us through Federal Stabilization funds and \$1.2 million in Federal Stimulus funds which can be applied to the general fund budget. Unfortunately, these are one-time funds and the state cuts to our revenue keep coming.

This year and next, cuts to our budget will equally impact all segments of the District: classified, certificated and administration. In addition, certificated and classified administrators already have taken a 3 percent pay cut.

The next few years will be a true test of our abilities to do more with less. I am confident that we are up to the task and that we will weather this fiscal storm without losing sight of our mission because I have great faith in the abilities and optimism of all those who are a part of Team Whittier Union.

Whittier Union Students Reaching Higher Levels of Academic Achievement

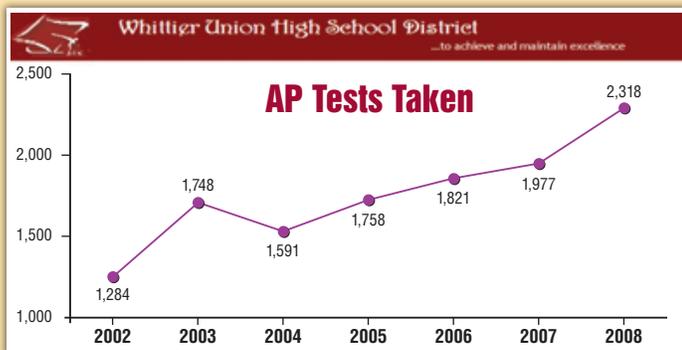
Whittier Union High School District is one of few school districts in California to have attained and sustained substantial academic progress over several years.

The District's scores on the California State Academic Performance Index (API) have increased steadily over the last five years, reaching 728 in 2007-08, a 25-point increase over the previous year.

It is one of a small number of districts in the state to have significantly narrowed the achievement gap. Currently, there is only a 10 percent difference between the highest and lowest performing students.

This year, 99.94 percent of the District's seniors passed the California High School Exit Exam and more students than ever before are taking Advanced Placement courses and Advanced Placement tests in preparation for college.

This progress is the direct result of the District's "Whatever it Takes" initiative that includes the use of common assessments for the purpose of improving instructional practice and implementation of a Pyramid of Interventions for students who are not achieving appropriately.



	ELA	Math
2006	99.3%	99.7%
2007	99.8%	99.8%
2008**	99.3%	99.5%
2009**	99.6%	99.8%

**Includes Students with Disabilities (1st year: 2008)

New Principals to Lead District Schools

When Whittier Union's students return to school on September 2, they will be greeted by three new principals ready to help them make a great start to the new academic year.

At **La Serna High School**, **Drew Passalacqua**, Ed.D, will welcome students as the new Principal of La Serna High School. Dr. Passalacqua was Principal at Granada Middle School in the East Whittier City School District and was an Assistant Principal for several years at Westlake High School in the Conejo Valley Unified School District. Dr. Passalacqua replaces La Serna High School Principal Martin Plourde who has been promoted to the position of Assistant Superintendent of Personnel. Plourde is replacing Leo Camalich who has retired.

Pioneer High School students will be greeted by **Monica Oviedo**, Ed.D. Dr. Oviedo was Principal of Santa Fe High School for five years and was also an assistant principal there. She joined



Dr. Drew Passalacqua



Dr. Monica Oviedo



Kevin Jamero

Whittier Union as a social studies teacher at Pioneer High in 1997. Dr. Oviedo recently was named Principal of the Year by the Association of California School Administrators for Region XV, which includes most of Los Angeles County.

Kevin Jamero takes over as Principal of **Santa Fe High School**. Jamero was Assistant Principal of Curriculum at the school and is

trusted and respected by students and staff. He has more than 10 years of excellent experience as an administrator, teacher and coach at the school. Jamero began his career teaching science at Santa Fe High School in 1997 and was later promoted to the position of Science Department Leader. He has also served Santa Fe as Assistant Principal of Guidance.

District Schools Excel Among Similar Schools in State

Whittier Union's high schools continue to earn high ranks when compared to other schools in the state with similar educational opportunities and challenges, according to results from the 2008 Base Academic Performance Index (API) report released by the California State Department of Education (CDE).

The API reports include school API ranks that allow the public to compare performance at an individual school to all others in the state (statewide ranks) as well as to schools with similar educational opportunities and challenges (similar schools ranks). The ranking shows where a school's 2008 API falls on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the highest).

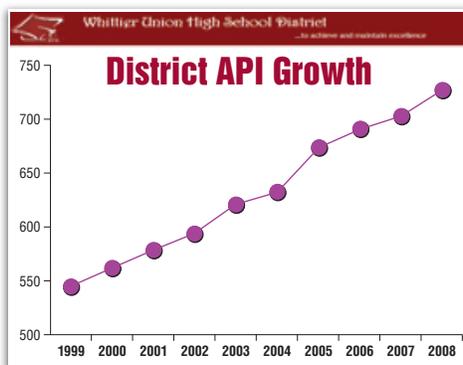
California High School ranked a 10 among similar schools. La Serna High School ranked a 9 in both the statewide ranks and when compared

to similar schools. Santa Fe High School ranked a 9 among similar schools, Whittier High School ranked an 8 and Pioneer High School ranked a 6.

"Our students, teachers and staff continue to

prove that high academic achievement is attainable and sustainable regardless of the challenges we face," said District Superintendent Sandra Thorstenson. "Even in these difficult economic times, everyone in our District remains dedicated to providing a comprehensive program of excellence that includes the arts, and to ensuring that all students achieve at higher levels and master the standards.

"The API at all of our schools continues to rise because our faculty and staff are working collaboratively to implement our 'Whatever it Takes' initiative to provide a strong instructional program and our Pyramid of Interventions that provides the time and support students need to succeed. As a result of these efforts, we have reaped benefits for our students at every school," Thorstenson said.



Three District Schools Make Newsweek's Top 1,500 List

Whittier, Pioneer and Santa Fe high schools made *Newsweek* Magazine's list of the Top 1,500 high schools in the nation. It was the first time Whittier and Pioneer made the list and the third time for Santa Fe High.

"We're thrilled to see that Whittier, Pioneer and Santa Fe high schools made *Newsweek's* Top 1,500," said District Superintendent Sandra Thorstenson. "The designation is a wonderful affirmation of the academic strides being made at these three schools and of our Districtwide effort to provide relevant and rigorous academic programs for all students at each of our schools."

Newsweek annually selects high schools for

the list by taking the total number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate or Cambridge tests given at a school in May, and dividing by the number of seniors graduating that year. All public schools that achieve a ratio of at least 1.000, meaning they had as many tests in 2008 as they had graduates, are put on the list. According to *Newsweek*, less than 6 percent of the approximately 27,000 U.S. public high schools managed to reach that standard this year.

The rationale of the researchers at *Newsweek* is that the best high schools give as many students as possible the opportunity to take college-level classes and exams so that they are better prepared for the intense aca-

demical challenges of college.

At Whittier Union high schools, Advanced Placement courses are offered in math, science, English, history, and languages.

"The teachers and counselors at our schools not only encourage all students to take challenging Advanced Placement courses, but also provide the necessary support students need to be successful in these college-level classes," Thorstenson said.

"Increasing student participation in Advanced Placement courses is one of the many ways in which Whittier Union is continuing to close the achievement gap and to ensure that our students leave our high schools well-prepared to tackle post-secondary education."

Modernization Update

District officials currently are finalizing a list of proposed projects to be funded under Measure W. Passed by 72 percent of voters in November 2008, Measure W is a general obligation bond that extends current property tax assessments and will generate approximately \$75 million. As required under the terms of the measure, these funds can only be used for construction projects that improve campus facilities and cannot be used for instructional purposes.

Projects undertaken during the last 10 years have been funded by Measure C, passed by voters in 1999. Current projects funded by that measure include **La Serna High School's** new cafeteria and multipurpose building. In September, students will enjoy food prepared in a brand new, state-of-the-art kitchen complete with gleaming stainless steel appliances and countertops, new ovens, shiny new floors and a huge walk-in refrigerator and freezer.

"It is a truly professional kitchen and cafeteria and a vast improvement over La Serna's old kitchen," said Judy Rooks, District Director of Food Service.

Snack and lunch distribution will be more efficient because students can pre-select what they want to eat and wait in shorter lines to pick up their meals. As part of the project, the band room has been enlarged and upgraded as has the choir/drama classroom.

The remodeling of La Serna's East Quad is also underway and scheduled to be completed in December. The Quad project will include amphitheater-style seating to enhance the functionality of the area for multiple uses. And construction is expected to be completed in early 2010 on La Serna's career technical educa-



Judy Rooks, right, and Blanca Bates in La Serna High School's remodeled kitchen

tion classrooms.

When **Pioneer High School** students come to school, they will pass through a brand new entry way featuring signage with LED display and visit the newly remodeled guidance and administration buildings. The Pioneer administration buildings have undergone an extensive remodel/reprioritization to improve services to students and faculty. Attendance and Guidance offices are now in Building A and the Principal's and Assistant Principals' offices are in Building B. The new entrance through Building A will be used after the school day has begun to control access to the campus and enhance security. Students will continue to use the gates between Buildings A and B before and after school.

At **Whittier High School**, work on the new

cafeteria and multipurpose room is expected to be finished in December. New paving and site work is beginning on Building W that houses two large classrooms, restrooms and an office. The work will be done before school starts. A shade structure for that area will be installed in spring of 2010.

California High School will be undergoing some major changes as the campus entry point is shifted from the Mills Avenue entrance to the Hawes Street entrance where the student parking lot is located. The administration offices will be moved to art Building J after it is remodeled. Art classes will be moved to Building Y1. The construction of a new cafeteria will begin as soon as the temporary cafeteria is operational. There are also plans to modernize several classrooms as well as the administration and science buildings pending final approval by the Division of the State Architect, but it is hoped that work will begin by the spring of 2010.

In addition, plans are being developed for a remodel of the California High School large Quad that will include amphitheater-style seating, brick pavers and tall palm trees.

New and returning students at **Santa Fe High School** will enjoy a remodeled locker room complete with new lockers, flooring and improved plumbing. In addition, four semi-permanent classrooms are being added to north campus. Each classroom is 960 square feet and features air conditioning and cabinetry for storage.

Plans for the modernization of the business, science, and art buildings are in the bidding process and the projects are expected to be completed by December. Designs are being made for a new science building, which is scheduled to be completed by December 2010.

Graduation Celebrations continued from page 1

For many students, the cost for their post-secondary education will be eased by financial assistance. The Class of 2009 received more than \$4 million in scholarships, grants and loans.

During their commencement speeches, principals noted that this year's senior class did much to increase the level of their schools' academic achievement.

A District record-breaking 99.94 percent of seniors passed the California High School Exit Exam. More students than ever before completed the course work necessary to attend colleges in the University of California and California State University systems.

Many went the extra mile by taking Ad-

vanced Placement courses or taking courses at local community colleges while completing their high school requirements. In fact, 21 Sierra Vista graduates also received Associate of Arts degrees from Rio Hondo College through the Dual Enrollment program.

Proving that it's never too late to achieve your goals and dreams, one very special graduate was the first to receive her diploma during Whittier High School's graduation in the Vic Lopez Auditorium. Gladys Whitaker-White, age 94, from the class of 1934 had waited 75 years for this long-time dream to come true. There was a polio epidemic in 1934 that resulted in the restriction of public gatherings. Mrs. Whitaker-White's class never had a graduation ceremony. Betty Best, one of her daughters, arranged for



her to participate in this year's commencement.

"I'm touched that the students were generous enough to share their special day with me," Whitaker-White said. "This is a great honor!"

Welcome to Whittier Union High School District

We have developed this newsletter to inform parents and community members about the programs and events occurring in our schools. In each edition, we will provide district-wide information, including facilities updates. Our goal is to allow readers the opportunity to get an inside look at what makes our students so successful as adults.