Founder’s Message

By Dr. Jacqueline Elliot, President & CEO, PUC National

As we conclude the 20th year since the founding of Community Charter Middle School, there is much to be proud of as we reflect on the growth of our network and the many accomplishments of our students, staff, schools, and communities. However, it’s evident that shaping the future of America through our work in public charter schools today has taken on new challenges that could never have been predicted. With the appalling rise of racism, the horror of violence, the threat of ICE, and the large number of young people who relate best to others through a glass screen, it’s clear that the heroes who now commit to a journey in public education are faced with a very heavy lift. Never has it been more important for us to empower our students with critical thinking skills, confidence, relational skills, a belief in themselves and their abilities, a belief that they can overcome challenges, strong values, a commitment to social justice, and a commitment to the well-being of those around them and to society overall. That’s why my message today is one gratitude to the educators, parents, school and PUC National staff, all of whom remain tirelessly focused on achieving the same outcomes in our schools today as we focused on achieving in 1999 with the first 100 students. It’s normal to feel overwhelmed by the immensity and challenges of our work today but the following story reminds us that if we continue on our path forward, taking it one day, one student, and one challenge at a time, we do indeed the make the difference that has been our focus for 20 years.

A young girl was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. When she came to each starfish, she would pick it up, and throw it back into the ocean. People watched her with amusement. She had been doing this for some time when a man approached her and said, “Little girl, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can’t save all these starfish. You can’t begin to make a difference!”

The girl seemed crushed, suddenly deflated. But after a few moments, she bent down, picked up another starfish, and hurled it as far as she could into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied, “Well, I made a difference to that one!”

The old man looked at the girl inquisitively and thought about what she had done and said. Inspired, he joined the little girl in throwing starfish back into the sea. Soon others joined, and all the starfish were saved.

— Adapted from 'The Star Thrower' by Loren C. Eiseley
Congratulations to PUC’s Class of 2019!

To view all of the graduation photo galleries, please visit each school’s Facebook page. See page 7 for links.
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Joe Garza Receives Award as Mentor of the Year

Submitted by Sarah Seinfeld, Alumni Teach Project Manager

“I never thought that I would receive an award like this…” Mr. Garza stated as he accepted his award as “Mentor of the Year” from the National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) in Chicago, Illinois on Tuesday, May 14, 2019. Joe Garza, 6th grade humanities teacher at CALS Middle School, was selected for this recognition among a group of nearly 20 mentors from different residency programs across the country.

Mr. Garza has had the longest standing record of commitment to the PUC ATP program, serving in the mentor role every year for the past 5 years. In this role, Mr. Garza acts as a co-teacher, guide, and role model for a PUC alumni who is learning to become a PUC teacher. Despite his many years of experience, he continues to hone his skills as mentor by fully engaging in every opportunity for professional development in both mentoring and teaching practices. He continues to be a source of inspiration and strength for other mentors by hosting others in his classroom for a huddling mentor lab experience and offering to share his practice via video and self-reflection. He also goes above and beyond to develop his residents, meeting with them on weekends, providing extra planning supports, and being open to taking risks in the classroom. He has maintained strong relationships with all of his previous residents and the CALS community at large, of which he has been a part for over a decade.

Mr. Garza is the first teacher educator to receive this recognition along with a special trip to Chicago to attend the NCTR Annual Symposium. He was able to share his story with an audience of over 100 educators, bringing many of them to tears with his moving words. He ended his speech by acknowledging all that he has learned from his residents over the years, including his current resident, Daniel Zepeda. “My current resident, Daniel, has reminded me about the joy and laughter of teaching. He has reminded me that teaching is a work that involves the pendulums of relationship and rigor.” May all educators be reminded of rewards of teaching as we wrap up another school year and continue to inspire young people to commit to uplift their communities now and forever.
PUC Triumph Charter High School would like to recognize our Class of 2019 graduate, Michelle Venegas. In May 2019, amidst the bustle of senior activities and finals, Michelle graduated from Los Angeles Mission College. At only 17 years old, she now holds an Associate’s Degree in General Studies with an emphasis in Social and Behavioral Sciences. Michelle is the second PUC TCHS student to walk across the college stage prior to walking across the high school stage. Any student with the drive to become a college graduate before they are high school graduate is a force to reckon with in this world!

Michelle’s journey to her college degree began in the spring of 9th grade when she took a Child Development course taught on the PUC TCHS campus. As an early college high school, PUC TCHS, like all PUC schools, hosts 1-2 classes on their campus that are taught by college faculty. Michelle continued to take college classes regularly from then on, including attending summer school for two summers. She even branched out from the classes taught on the high school campus by taking classes directly on the LA Mission College campus where she completed the majority of her coursework.

Although Michelle initially took classes to finish college early and save her parents money, she eventually decided she wanted to go all the way and earn her Associate’s Degree. It was then that she really stepped up her efforts. Through grit and determination, Michelle earned 36 units toward her Associate’s Degree during her senior year of high school alone, attending both college and high school full-time. Despite this heavy college course load, her high school grades did not suffer. She managed to earn a 4.17 GPA both semesters of her senior year, straight A’s, and graduated PUC TCHS with the highest of honors.

Michelle accomplished this amazing achievement with the support of her parents, Jeanne and Oscar Venegas. She states that the biggest lesson she learned throughout this experience was that “challenges will come, but as long as you work hard you will make it”. Michelle embodied this lesson throughout high school and she will continue to do so as she furthers her education at Cal State Northridge in the fall where she will major in Criminology & Justice Studies.

Michelle is a wonderful example of what a person can achieve with a goal in mind and tremendous work ethic. She is also an example of how kindness and ambition are not always mutually exclusive. That in itself is refreshing! PUC TCHS could not be prouder of this young woman and wishes her all the best in her undoubtedly bright future.
Congratulations to PUC Staff Members who Graduated as part of the Class of 2019!

Name: Christine Sartiaguda  
Degree Obtained: Doctorate in Education  
School: University of Southern California  
Date obtained: May 9, 2019  

Name: Modesta Urbina, teacher Milagro  
Degree obtained: M.A. School Administration  
School: Loyola Marymount University  
Date obtained: May 12, 2019  

Name: Tracy Bagatelle-Black, MFT Trainee PSEC  
Degree Obtained: Master’s degree in psychology with an emphasis on marriage and family therapy  
School: Phillips Graduate University  
Date obtained: April 30, 2019  

Name: Sandra Young, MFT Trainee PSEC  
Degree obtained: Masters in Marriage and Family Therapists  
School: Tuoro Worldwide University  
Date obtained: April 30, 2019  

Name: Juan Cornejo, College Counseling Intern LCHS  
Degree Obtained: Masters in School Counseling  
School: California State University, Northridge  
Date Obtained: May 16, 2019  

Name: Juliet Nazaryan, MFT Trainee  
Degree: Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology, Marriage and Family Therapy  
School: Pepperdine University  
Date: May 18, 2019  

Name: Joel Aparicio, Teacher Assistant at CCES  
Degree obtained: Bachelors in English Subject Matter  
School: California State University, Northridge  
Date obtained: May 20, 2019  

Name: Natasha Aftandilians, MFT Trainee  
Degree: M.A., Psychology with an Emphasis on Marriage and Family Therapy and PPS Credential  
School: Phillips Graduate University  
Date Obtained: April 2019  

Name: Ana Nguyen, Teacher Excel  
Degree Obtained: Masters in Environmental Science & Hydrology  
School: Cal State University, Los Angeles  
Date Obtained: May 2019  

Name: Colleen Lindsay, Teacher CCECHS  
Degree Obtained: Masters in Education  
School: Loyola Marymount University  
Date Obtained: May 2019  

Name: Monica Anacleto, Teacher CCES  
Degree Obtained: Masters in Education with a Preliminary Administrative Degree  
School: Loyola Marymount University  
Date Obtained: May 2019  

Name: David Cruz Quiroz, Inclusion Assistant Inspire  
Degree Obtained: Bachelor of Arts in English subject Matter and Minor in Teaching English as a Second Language  
School: California State University, Northridge  
Date obtained: May 20, 2019  

Name: Jennifer S. Velasquez, SIS Analyst PUC National  
Degree obtained: Master of Business Administration  
School: Woodbury University  
Date obtained: May 11, 2019  

Name: Armando Raul Mercado, IT Technician PUC National  
Degree Obtained: Bachelor of Science in Computer Science  
School: California State University, Northridge  
Date Obtained: May 17, 2019  

Name: Briana Mills, MFT Trainee PSEC  
Degree obtained: Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy  
School: California State University, Northridge  
Date Obtained: 5/16/19  

Name: Chantel Lopez, Teacher CCES  
Degree obtained: Masters of Arts in Education, Administration  
School: Concordia University, Irvine  
Date Obtained: June 2019  

Name: Sonia Bradley, MFT Trainee  
Degree obtained: Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy  
School: University of Southern California  
Date obtained: May 10, 2019  

Name: Anais Campa, Assistant Principal Excel  
Degree obtained: Masters of Arts in School Leadership  
School: Loyola Marymount University  
Date Obtained: May 12, 2019
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