The LOFT (Latinx On Fast Track) Leadership Institute
Class of 2021

Student Bios

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Business & Finance

Diego Elías
Major: Economics, Mathematics, and Statistics
Heritage: Peruvian

“My first interest in business and finance came from my parents,” says Diego, whose parents met while working at a bank in Washington, D.C. As he got older, his mother became an Economics professor and his father an economic consultant, so Diego grew up learning about the fields and cultivating a love for them thanks to his parents. When he got to high school, he sought every opportunity to continue expanding his business and finance knowledge base. Most recently, he has gained hands-on finance experience by helping his dad with keeping track of the profit and operating costs of his small motorcycle business. Diego has conducted research regarding economic incentives for fighting climate change and ways to improve the healthcare system’s efficiency along with professors from Radford University and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Last year, he was accepted to the Virginia Summer Residential Governor’s School for STEM and the Virginia Aerospace Science and Technology Scholars Program, a residential summer academy at the NASA Langley Research Center. Diego is a member of his school’s chapters of the National Honor Society and the Science National Honor Society. He has a 3.98 GPA and is among the top students in his class. He has been recognized for his academic achievements and research, receiving the Rotary Academic Achievement Award, the College Board National Hispanic Recognition, and the award for Best Environmental Research by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to name a few. He plans on studying Economics, Mathematics, and Statistics at Johns Hopkins University, the University of Virginia, or Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
Isabella Monroy
Major: Operations Management and Business Analytics
Heritage: Puerto Rican and Guatemalan

Of Puerto Rican and Guatemalan descent, Isabella has been taking business classes as part of her school’s International Trade, Transportation and Tourism Program since the beginning of her high school career. The program has given her the chance to explore possible career pathways and delve into topics revolving around business leadership and management, finance and economics, and international business, among others. Beginning her junior year, Isabella has been dual-enrolled at Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland, where she has continued to learn about the world of business through classes like Transportation and Logistics and Supply Chain Management. Upon graduation, she will have completed 18 dual-enrollment credits and will receive a Transportation, Logistics and Cargo Security certificate. Devoted to community service and youth leadership, Isabella serves as Historian of her school’s Spanish National Honor Society and is a member of its National Honor Society and Key Club. Since 2017, she has been a dedicated and loyal volunteer at Sarah’s House, a local supportive housing program for homeless families. Isabella wants to make a difference as a woman and a leader in business. She will attend the University of Maryland, George Washington University, or New York University, where she will study Operations Management and Business Analytics.
Lucas Clavijo  
Major: Business Administration  
Heritage: Colombian

Growing up playing with LEGOs, Lucas Clavijo experienced his first taste of creativity. They were the figurative and literal building blocks upon which his desire to become a “promethean problem-solver in business” was built. This spirit for innovation has since driven him academically and professionally. For instance, he has already founded his own organization, The Aux Project, which fundraised and awarded a scholarship for music production amounting to $2000. It is hardly surprising that his teachers all commend him for his attitude and work ethic, traits which set him apart from his peers. These traits have allowed him to achieve an impressive GPA of 3.90, amid rigorous coursework and extracurricular activities. In fact, he has had various awards conveyed upon him, including being named AP Scholar with Honor in 2019 and AP Scholar with Distinction in 2020. Lucas’s interest in business is acute and matched perhaps only by his commitment to the environment. In his future career, he hopes to effect a paradigm shift in business practices that focus on becoming an environmentally conscious global community. This dedication is clearly visible in his participation in groups like Citizen’s Climate Lobby and Junior States of America, in which he occupies the position of Gulf Coast Regional Mayor, and he has worked to address pertinent issues relating to environmental racism. Community service is of extreme importance to Lucas, who sees it as not only an avenue to evolve as an individual person, but also as an opportunity to create a communal sense of pride and collaboration to bolster everyone’s well-being. He is driven, he says, by the diverse array of colour and heritage that he sees in the people around him. Lucas plans to continue on his journey toward becoming a businessman by studying Business Administration at New York University, the University of Southern California, or Carnegie Mellon.
Julieta Silva  
Major: Advertising, Communications, Business Administration, Radio-Film-Television, Entrepreneurship  
Heritage: Mexican

It is not often that one comes across such an exceptionally intelligent, inquisitive, diligent, and helpful young woman. Julieta Silva, in the eyes of her teachers and peers, is one of them. Gifted, enthusiastic, and with unlimited potential, Julieta always challenges herself by taking the most rigorous courses offered at her high school, achieving a strong GPA of 3.77 and earning the distinction of being an AP Scholar with Honors. Additionally, she is the General Manager of Change by Gen Z, the Video Coordinator of Spread the Love and the Historian of her local H.O.S.A. chapter. For Julia, her time in high school can be defined by two passions: Media Production and Business Administration. After interning at an advertising agency in Mexico, Julia decided to create her own video editing and production business to help document the lives of families who had no other means of capturing important memories. Visual communication, she says, touches people’s hearts and plays a strong role in building interpersonal relationships, and she managed to do just that through her business. Julia’s primary goal is to help her community and those around her. It is this desire to give back that inspired her to volunteer with Unidos Para Ayudar, a local group that donates food supplies to a home for children. During her time there, she has also learned important lessons that will surely help in her future in business. Leaders, she says, know how to value teamwork, as the success of a business hinges upon effective management. Being a good leader means seeing the world through someone else’s eyes and understanding their perspective. And Julia is bound to be an excellent leader in her future. She plans to study Advertising, Communications, Business Administration, Radio-Film-Television, or Entrepreneurship at Northeastern University, Boston University, or the University of Texas at Austin.
Kayla Goodman
Major: Music Business and Entertainment Industries with Business Administration
Heritage: Mexican

Kayla Goodman is a natural leader and coupled with her capacity and desire to make connections with everyone she meets, she is already well on her way to becoming a business executive. As the Student Council Class President, as well as president of the National Honor Society, she continues to hone the many qualities that prepare her well for a career in business. As a sophomore, Kayla took the Travel and Tourism class at her high school, where she led a team of seniors to plan, organize and execute a field trip to the Everglades. Though stressful at times, she loved the nitty-gritty of planning and organizing her peers, all of whom were older than her. Leadership is clearly something Kayla embodies, and she has learned that no leader is great without seeking wise counsel and looking back to review decisions and actions. That’s probably why she has been so successful. In terms of community service, Kayla tutors, plays in church bands and assists her teachers. She knows that small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world, as goes the quote by Howard Zinn. She has also raised $2100 for a town in Angola where her grandmother plans to travel as a missionary later this year. Kayla is proud of her Mexican heritage and feels that it has fundamentally shaped who she is today. She also realizes that to empower this and future generations of Latinos, it is important to promote and honor cultural pride – to say the Hispanic community have worked hard is a vast understatement, and she is no exception. With a stellar GPA of 4.00, Kayla is an academically gifted student, having also been on the Principal’s Honor Roll and received an Advanced International Certificate of Education. She plans to continue on her journey to becoming a business executive by studying Music Business and Entertainment Industries with Business Administration at the University of Miami, Florida International University, or the University of Pennsylvania.
Cindy Ledezma
Major: International Business Management with a minor in Spanish
Heritage: Mexican

Cindy excels as a leader, both in her community and, most significantly, at home, as the oldest daughter and right-hand to her father in her single-parent family. She had an early introduction to the business world while growing up, as she assisted her dad through the humble beginnings of his car detailing company. That is where she began to hone her accounting skills, fine-tuned her customer service abilities, and became a time-management pro. Evidence of her superior time-management is her ability to maintain a 4.0 GPA while completing her school’s most academically challenging program, taking part in its IT Academy, working two jobs (three in the summer), caring for her siblings, and giving back to her community by carrying out service projects. At 17 years old, she already runs two businesses of her own, one where she makes and sells baked goods and the second through which she designs websites for small businesses in her city. She is a member of her school’s chapters of the Sociedad Honoraria Hispánica and Future Business Leaders of America, has been honored by the National Center for Women & Information Technology, and has also received awards for her Business abilities. Cindy plans on pursuing a degree in Business Management and a minor in Spanish at the University of Arkansas or the University of Central Arkansas.
Steicy López  
Major: International Business with a concentration in Marketing  
Heritage: Mexican

The idea of social entrepreneurship and the opportunity to contribute to creatively solving unmet needs in society are what most attract Steicy to pursue a career in Business. “I'm most motivated when I know I am helping others,” she says. She started her own 3D printing company with this in mind, and realizing the potential 3D printing has to improve the lives of those around her, she did not stop just there. She continued on to establish and lead her school’s 3D department. She trained her fellow schoolmates and went on to help other schools set up and maintain their own 3D printers. Earlier on in the pandemic, she used her personal 3D printer to make and donate 100 face shields and 100 ear reliefs to St. Luke's Hospital. Her role in her school’s Education Accelerated by Service and Technology, or EAST, program, a program that equips students with the latest technology and tasks them with implementing it to solve problems affecting their communities, has allowed Steicy to lead and innovate in impactful ways. Her involvement with her school’s DECA chapter and Debate club has also given her the chance to further develop and practice skills, such as managing, selling, and branding, that will serve her well in her future career. Recently, she led her team of 5 in designing and creating wearable space technology and on to become the National Champions of NASA’s Wear competition. Beyond all this, Steicy is a dedicated student and maintains a 3.9 GPA with a schedule filled with Honors and AP courses. She will attend the University of Arkansas or Pittsburg State University, where she plans on earning a Bachelor of Science degree in International Business with a concentration in Marketing.
Mateo Hernández has always been fascinated by finance and the stock market. One day, he hopes to become a shrewd hedge fund manager, and as president of his school’s Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), he is well on his way to realizing his dreams. As president, he manages the club’s 95 members, which in itself demonstrates his leadership adeptness. To fund his school’s FBLA chapter, he has been actively involved in helping to raise money, whether by volunteering at volleyball concessions or selling donuts. Mateo’s leadership qualities extend beyond his role as president. He also founded the first Youth League of United Latin Americans Council in his area, which helps promote higher education for immigrants and Hispanic people. As the son of an immigrant, Mateo is committed to giving back to the Latino community, and he feels community service is incredibly powerful and meaningful. Mateo’s Latino heritage is important to him, and he enjoys singing mariachi music with his abuelita and spending time with his family, eating arrachera, sopita, and more. Academically, Mateo is incredibly gifted. With a GPA of 4.00, he has also been recognized for various awards and commendations and recently completed a 5-week pre-college summer experience through the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he dove into finance, marketing, and accounting. In addition to his academic success, Mateo also already maintains his own portfolio, with strong returns, and has bought stocks such as Canadian Solar and Trulieve. He plans to study Finance at the University of Notre Dame, University of Michigan, or the University of Chicago.
Andrés Díaz  
Major: Communications, Marketing, Business or Political Science  
Heritage: Mexican

Andres wants to go into the world of business to create positive social change. He has been strengthening his abilities to work towards that goal through opportunities in and out of school. His readiness for college-level work has allowed him to take courses at Stanford and Columbia University, where he has taken Marketing and Entrepreneurship classes. As part of his Technology Entrepreneurship class at Stanford University, Andres created CONNECT, an app that streamlines the process of finding and offering volunteering opportunities for volunteers and organizations. At Columbia University, Andres combined his passions for entrepreneurship and activism in a class that explored how marketing, business strategies, technology, and environmentalism can be incorporated into a perfect blend to enable the use of business ventures to promote positive social change. He serves as Vice President of Communications of his school’s Student Body Executive Committee and is in many ways the voice and face of his school in his role managing various social media accounts for his school’s Student Government, its Robotics Team, and as an Admission Ambassador. He has been entrusted with these roles thanks to his sound judgment and his creative eye for moments and messages that stick. For Andres, being involved in his community is both necessary and educational. For the last four years, he has been involved with My New Red Shoes, a nonprofit organization with the mission of improving the quality of life and well-being of children and youth by reducing the impact of economic inequality across the Bay Area. He plans to continue his academic journey by studying Communications, Marketing, Business, or Political Science at Columbia University, Stanford University, or the University of Southern California.
Melissa Venegas
Major: Economics and Finance
Heritage: Mexican

Without a full understanding of the concept of business, Melissa was running a small enterprise of her own in fifth grade, walking into school every day with personally handmade bracelets to sell during recess. Encouraged by her classmates and how mesmerized they would be when looking at her bracelets, Melissa continued making and bringing them to school. “I enjoyed being able to supply the demand of jewelry in the playground, and I was even more encouraged to continue production as soon as custom orders began to be placed,” she recalls. This childhood business was where Melissa’s curiosity for the world of business began. She has since continued to look for opportunities to develop her understanding of the field. After taking an introductory business class at her local community college, she started an internship with the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce. Her learning journey carried on last summer when she participated in Stanford’s Summer Session. Focused on business and innovation, she spent her summer diving into the debiting and crediting aspects of accounting and discovering how artificial intelligence is evolving. Melissa is dedicated to giving back to her community and wants to ensure all in her city have access to the same opportunities and resources. She has volunteered at local food banks, organized events that help connect and provide members of her community with the resources they need, and worked to encourage them to advance their education by creating a website with information about college and pursuing higher education, among others. A standout student, Melissa has a 4.0 GPA and is ranked along with the top in her class. She will attend Stanford University, Yale University, or the University of California, Berkeley, where she plans to study Economics and Finance.
Jordan Romano
Major: Economics
Heritage: Puerto Rican

According to Jordan Romano, business economics is a field relevant to every industry and to social economic parameters worldwide. That’s one of the reasons he finds it so fascinating and why he’s nurtured his fondness and passion for the subject since his freshman year of high school. To prepare for his future success, Jordan has taken business classes and serves as Vice President of his high school’s DECA club. He has also participated in various NYS regional and local competitions, winning various business awards. For the past 10 years, Jordan has volunteered with Community Mayors Inc. an event that puts on a holiday celebration for underprivileged children in the area. The event serves 4,000 children from all over New York City, and according to Jordan, is as rewarding and soul-fulfilling for him as it is for them. Jordan calls community service both powerful and necessary, and this view is shaped by his exposure to it from a very young age. Whenever possible, he and his family find ways to be charitable with their time, and he hopes to use a degree in business or economics to propel him forward and allow him to serve his community on an even greater scale. Whether by hiring and educating employees from underrepresented communities, or starting businesses in those very same communities, he hopes to use his business acumen to give back. In addition to being committed to fueling his knowledge of business, Jordan is also a stellar student and maintains a 4.00 GPA amid a rigorous course load. A proud Puerto Rican, he hopes to continue pursuing his lofty goals at Yale University, Cornell University, or Boston College.
Sofia Palacios Ferrer  
Major: Marketing  
Heritage: Chilean, Peruvian, and Venezuelan

According to Sofia Palacios-Ferrer’s teacher, there are many qualities that teachers look for in a “great student”: motivated, hard-working, interested in the course content, and willing and able to help lead class discussions. To him, Sofia embodies every single one. Sofia is a committed and diligent student, whose curiosity and capacity for learning are self-evident. After reading Daniel Kahneman’s Thinking Fast and Slow, she became fascinated by the ways in which our brains form subconscious biases, which influence and control decision-making. In many cases, marketers use the same underlying psychology to influence customers to buy their products. It’s clear how this could be used to facilitate purchasing, but Sofia’s also interested in the more positive and human aspects – how might we use tools like these to improve society? Throughout her high school career, Sofia has developed and honed her interest in marketing and immersed herself in the field. She participated in Columbia’s Marketing Summer Internship Program and worked as an intern at Blue Opal Capital, a Wall Street investment firm. Currently, she is engaged in a project where she’s employing her marketing know-how and working with a local cable television and the mayor’s office to foster positivity within the community and combat the effects of social isolation caused by the pandemic. Sofia’s impressive extracurricular activities also include community service projects such as tutoring and participating in food drives, as her parents have always highlighted the importance of giving back to her community. Sofia’s academic record speaks for itself – with a perfect 4.00 GPA, a host of awards and distinctions, and a course load crammed with AP classes, she hopes to continue her pursuit of becoming a purpose-driven business leader giving back to the community by studying Marketing at University of Pennsylvania, University of Notre Dame, or University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.
Niheshly Quiñones
Major: Marketing
Heritage: Puerto Rican

“From playing pretend in my toy house and selling lemonade, to making bracelets and vending them to my friends in elementary school, selling or promoting a brand has unceasingly been what I have loved most,” says Guaynabo, Puerto Rico resident Niheshly. She has been navigating the world of business, exploring and learning about its different aspects through numerous pursuits from a very young age. One of these pursuits has been her involvement with the production of “Los Sábados Pa’ la Plaza,” a cultural event that brings together local small businesses and entertainment to celebrate at the Santiago Palmer Plaza every Saturday afternoon. At the event (currently on pause due to pandemic regulations), Niheshly serves as a guide, helping people from all over the world explore and find their way around. In the evenings, she lends a hand at Farmer’s Bite, her family’s homemade sweets business, where she engages with clients, sells and distributes merchandise. Most recently, she has worked as a videographer and editor for The White Golden Music, a budding music management and production company, where she has put her creative, strategic, and adaptive chops to use while shooting music videos. “Everyday, I wake up with the objective to help in any way possible,” says Niheshly, who is committed to giving back to her community. As part of her community service, she has volunteered at animal shelters, town cleanups, and dearest to her heart, she has assisted at Casa Cuna San Cristobal, a local children’s orphanage, helping the children foster a sense of belonging and home. She plans on studying Marketing at Pennsylvania State University, Lynn University, or Iowa State University.
Victoria Torres
Major: International Business with a minor in Economics or Marketing
Heritage: Puerto Rican

When speaking about Victoria, her guidance counselor thinks of the words “leadership, adaptable, organized, dedicated, focused, honest, hardworking, persuasive and motivated.” These are all qualities that define this Caguas, Puerto Rico native. Working with her school’s Student Council, she has organized a yearly 5K run, starting in 2019, with the aim of raising funds for the CAP Foundation. The CAP Foundation is a nonprofit organization that works to serve pediatric cancer patients at the Hospital Pediátrico Universitario Dr. Antonio Ortiz. Leading these organization efforts has helped Victoria realize she wants to pursue a career in business. “[It] helped me realize that I need to study something related to business. It opened a lot of doors for me, understanding the importance of sponsors in marketing, being on track of how much money we need or spend financially, and having the right amount and distribution of all the products,” she explains. Her event did not just open doors for Victoria. It helped her community, brought her school together for a cause, and inspired her fellow schoolmates to look for more ways to give back. Victoria enjoys taking on a challenge and does so with aplomb. She has challenged herself through high school by signing up for university classes, numerous extracurricular activities, and holding various leadership positions. She currently serves as the President of her school’s Student Council, President of its Entrepreneurship Club, Vice-President of its Orientation Club, Secretary of its chapter of the National Honor Society, and member of its Psychology Club. Community service has been vital to Victoria’s high school experience. She has volunteered cleaning school grounds after hurricane María, helping at a local nursing home, at Centro Criollo de Ciencia y Tecnología del Caribe (C3Tec), and Relay for Life, to name a few. Victoria wants to make a difference and vows to continue her commitment to serving her community wherever she goes. Her definition of being Latino is “being perseverant and always striving to give your all for your future self, family, and community.” That is what she plans on doing as she attends Bryant University, George Washington University, or Temple University, where she will major in International Business and minor in Economics or Marketing.
Siena Ashdown  
Major: International Business  
Heritage: Argentine

Siena’s intellect, diligence, outgoing personality and worldly experience for someone of her age combine to give her a near perfect foundation for a career in International Business, which she plans to study in college. A Utah DECA State Champion in Business Law and Ethic, she was the only woman sitting in the room the year she won, in 2019. This was after she had been told a couple of years prior that she should not be studying Business Law but rather something more “feminine.” Thankfully, Siena ignored that piece of ill-considered advice! She now wants to serve as a leader and an inspiration for others, opening doors for young girls who also want to pursue business, and hoping to change and improve the industry for women. She completed an internship for Total Immersion Experience, where she was responsible for the advertisement, marketing and networking of the company and was able to gain valuable insight into the market in China, a country with which she has strong ties. When she was younger, she and her family lived abroad in China, and it was there that they decided to adopt her little sister. Siena’s life has been changed by her little sister, who today is her inspiration for helping others, and who she feels will continue to be her inspiration for the rest of her life. China is not her only international connection; Siena’s Argentine and Latina heritage is very important to her, and she hopes to serve as an example to others that you can co-exist in two cultures and still stay true to each of them. To top it all off, she is incredibly strong academically, with a GPA of 3.99. She plans to study International Business with a minor in Dance or Spanish at New York University, the University of Washington, or the University of Utah.
Sarai López  
Major: Finance  
Heritage: Mexican  

In her future, Sarai plans to be leading the financial side of a business or major corporation, and with her emphasis on the personal qualities of empathy, determination and accountability, all of which she shows in her daily life as a leader, it’s not hard to imagine her becoming a successful leader that other people will look up to. As part of the Future Business Leaders of America club (FBLA), she has been exposed to many business categories such as marketing, sales, web design, and many others, and she has also been given the opportunity to compete in projects at the regional, state and national level. This exposure has given her a positive perspective on the business world. The source of inspiration for her interest in business in the first place? Her very own parents, who are on their way to opening their own businesses. Community service is also very important to Sarai, and as part of the National Honors Society, she had the opportunity to make Thanksgiving cards along with baskets for elders in the local retirement home, who were not in their own homes or who were unable to be with their families. And with a GPA of 3.73, along with a Presidential Award and a hefty course load including Honors English 2 and Pre-Calculus for College in the High School, it is easy to see her academic strength, and how this will greatly assist her in her journey into the business world. Not surprisingly, Sarai plans to study Finance at Washington State University, the University of Washington Bothell or Whitworth University.
Eugenia Trakal  
Major: Finance and International Business with a minor in Spanish  
Heritage: Argentine

First-generation American with Argentine roots, Eugenia, is characterized by her desire and willingness to explore as many opportunities as she can to expand her vision of the community and world in which she lives. Last June, she attended Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business Young Women’s Institute, where she took on the role of Chief Finance Officer for her team as they competed by preparing a real-world business case project. Her team received 1st place out of 30 teams in the final case competition, with a perfect score on the financial statements. Captivated by the thrill of strategizing to solve a problem under time constraints, Eugenia participated in several other summer business projects last summer, including Grand Canyon University’s Business Institute and Arizona State University’s Fleischer Scholars Program. “[These experiences] made me realize how Finance goes beyond analysis and is truly about teamwork, decision-making, and defending and challenging viewpoints,” she says. Eugenia wants to pursue a career in Finance and International Business in order to better understand Latin America’s economic complexities. Her ultimate mission is to work for the United Nations Global Compact, to work against corruption and establish transparency in the global economy. She has demonstrated her leadership skills in many ways at her school, including as Founder and President of its Spanish Club. She has a 4.0 GPA and is ranked 1st in her class. Eugenia will double major in Finance and International Business and minor in Spanish at the University of Pennsylvania, Santa Clara University, or Indiana University Bloomington.
Gabriela Flores Díaz  
Major: Business Administration with a minor in Management  
Heritage: Guatemalan and Salvadoran  

Goal-oriented, resilient, creative, outgoing, and focused, Gabriela has character traits that will help her succeed in the Business field. The idea of one day running her own business motivated her to take business classes all throughout high school. “I have learned that business is not only a diverse and collected community, but that it is also an inspirational one. The routes one can take in business are endless,” she says. She has explored some of these routes through her involvement in various student organizations. Gabriela has been part of her school’s student council for the last four years. She currently serves as student body president and leads with poise, compassion, presence, and maturity. She has interacted and worked with many business-women and men in her community through her role as an officer in her school’s chapter of the National Honor Society. Gabriela’s greatest passion is giving back to her community. Her biggest inspiration to be active and to be a positive presence for those around her is her mother, with whom she ran a food bank donation and delivery service that helped provide for 200 families in the outskirts of Arizona. Gabriela wants to major in Business Administration and minor in Management. She is applying for consideration at Northern Arizona University, Arizona State University, and Grand Canyon University.
EDUCATION

Lourdes Arteaga Baeza
Major: Secondary Education with a specialization in English or Speech Hearing and Language
Heritage: Mexican

Lourdes learned English through songs. “Party in the USA” was the first song Mrs. Dabbs, her ESL teacher, taught her when she first moved to the US. Though initially overwhelmed by the speed of the words as they blended into the melody, Mrs. Dabbs put her at ease. She kneeled next to Lourdes and walked her through the lyrics as she sang, pointing to the words and highlighting them as Lourdes added them to her vocabulary. As the list of highlighted words grew, the verses in the song revealed their meaning. “The character in the song had moved, just like me. She was okay, and I knew I would be too,” recalls Lourdes. With her patience, Mrs. Dabbs had opened a new world for her and, in doing so, had inspired her to do the same for others. Lourdes now helps adults who have recently moved to the US learn to communicate effectively in English by working as a Beginning Literacy Level ESL teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Bethesda, Maryland.

At her school, she mentors and tutors students embarking on the journey to learn Spanish as part of their Peer Partner system. She also helps students in their journey to learn French as a member of her school’s French Honor Society. “In all of my students, I see myself, someone who has stories to tell but doesn’t have the words yet,” she says. So she does as Mrs. Dabbs did, turns to music as a teaching tool, and guides her students as they learn new words through songs. Serving her community is central to Lourdes’s high school experience. As a volunteer at the Leaders Institute, she visits different high schools daily to give presentations empowering students to become leaders in their communities. With a host of IB classes in her schedule and a 4.0 GPA, Lourdes stands among the top in her class. She wants to study Secondary Education with a specialization in English or Speech Hearing and Language. She will attend the University of Maryland, Loyola University Maryland, or Fordham University.
Catherine Contreras
Major: Special Education
Heritage: Venezuelan and Colombian

Though education has always been an important part of Catherine’s life, she had never considered becoming a teacher until she had the opportunity to intern in a special education class as a freshman. “This educational internship really helped me find who I truly am, and what I want to do in life, which is helping others,” she says. Now a senior, she has interned with the special education program at her school throughout her high school career and has become passionate about advocating for the inclusion of special needs students. On behalf of her school’s special education program, she has spoken to the Maryland Board of Education about the need for renovations at her school due to non-compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. She currently serves as Co-President of her school’s Best Buddies club and has organized several events to help all members of her school establish meaningful friendships, feel included and welcome. It was through her involvement with the club that she originally had the opportunity to work with her school’s special education program. Best Buddies has impacted Catherine in ways she never imagined. It helped her learn about herself and about friendship and happiness. Her advocacy and her commitment to promoting the inclusion of students with disabilities have garnered Catherine several recognitions, including the Montgomery County Council of PTAs Special Education Outstanding Student Award, the City of Rockville Martin Luther King Jr. Award for helping advance the goals and dreams of Dr. King, and her induction into her school’s Hall of Fame, making her the first Latina in the history of her high school to earn this recognition. This inspiring young leader will attend West Virginia University, Syracuse University, or the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she plans to pursue a degree in Special Education.
**Julie Serrano**  
Major: Environmental Science with a minor in Education  
Heritage: Mexican

It was in the eighth grade that Julie Serrano chose to join Ready, Set, Teach!, a program for future educators. Since then, her passion for teaching has exponentially grown, and she has become increasingly interested in learning various teaching styles, in particular those that accommodate children with different needs. More recently, Julie joined her school’s TAFE (Texas Association of Future Educator’s) chapter and has since become its president. Being TAFE president has presented her with a series of challenges: having to prepare events, managing the members of her team, and ensuring all deadlines were met. But these challenges also helped her mature and gain invaluable experience. Julie’s passion for education has also emphasized the importance of volunteerism, where she has had the opportunity to meet new people, make new friends, and of course help uplift those in her community who are in need. For Julie, helping people always comes first. Every opportunity to help the community, she says, must be seized. But it is only within the context of the issues historically faced by the Hispanic community that her motivation for education first and foremost arises. It is first a matter of learning about and preserving her own heritage, and second of helping others understand it. The youth, she declares, have a responsibility to fight the prejudices against Hispanic and Latino people. Education is an invaluable weapon in this struggle. Because it is through education, she believes, that one can teach others about who you are, what you are capable of doing and growing to be. Education is also vital for peoples of the Hispanic and Latino community, for it provides people with an important sense of unity and pride. Julie plans to continue on her path toward becoming an educator and instilling in her future students a love of learning by studying Environmental Science with a minor in Education at University of Texas at San Antonio or Stephen F. Austin State University.
Leslie Hernández  
Major: Elementary Education  
Heritage: Mexican

So committed is Leslie Hernández to her education that she attended a dual enrollment college and will be awarded with an Associate of Arts in Teaching by the time she graduates from high school. These past two years have allowed her to experience a vast amount of personal growth as well as inherit an abundance of knowledge that will have a significant impact on the kind of person she will become. Ultimately, she says, these experiences will have served as an important stepping-stone on her journey towards achieving her dreams. One significant component of this dream is volunteerism, with Leslie currently serving as secretary of the Interact Club at her school. An unforgettable highlight of her time in the Club was the chance to interact with diverse peoples and provide them with a sense of motivation to achieve their own goals – something which, she affirms, will suit her well in her future as an educator. Fundamentally, she says, she has a vision of empowering those around her. But she is also committed to empowering herself. During her time as Club secretary, she has had the honor of working and growing as a person in an environment of supportive and hard-working members. Both her leadership and interpersonal skills have been put to the test and have ultimately improved during this time, giving her a greater sense of the importance of giving back to the community, realizing that empowering oneself is inseparable from empowering those around you. This sense of the importance of empowerment, she says, comes from her experience and appreciation of her Hispanic heritage. The people of community always demonstrate their triumph over adversity, displaying a determination to be successful regardless of their circumstances. Ultimately, for Leslie, her generation must continue empowering themselves and those around them to work in a united way and continue to value and preserve their deep roots. And a career in education is the perfect vehicle to accomplish exactly that. Leslie plans to study Elementary Education at the University of Texas at Austin, the University of the Rio Grande Valley, or Texas State University to prepare her for a long career inspiring young students.
Dangelo Barbecho
Major: Mathematics Major with a minor in Math Education
Heritage: Ecuadorian and Cuban

Dangelo Barbecho fell in love with math at a very young age. Something about the universality of math as a language called out for him, and solving a difficult problem was as satisfying to him as beating a particularly challenging level of a video game. In the eighth grade, he was chosen along with a handful of other students to teach sections of geometry in preparation for an upcoming exam. Although brief, and lacking some of the more complicated aspects of a teachers job, it was there that his passion to become a math educator was born. Since then, his commitment hasn’t wavered, and he is determined to get a degree in mathematics, attain his teaching license, and go on to inspire young minds. Dangelo’s commitment to serving others can also be seen in his service to his community. Coming from a family of immigrants, who had to leave everything behind to start a better life, inspires him to give back to others. Among other experiences, he regularly volunteered at a courier service called Angels Xpress, where his primary responsibility was dispatching medicine to hospices. The impact he had on the families and patients themselves was important to him, having previously had a family member pass away to cancer. In many ways, his service felt like his own personal way of giving back and understanding the situation so many face. Apart from being caring and considerate, Dangelo is also an impressive leader, and he understands the importance of building connections. He is very proud of his Hispanic heritage, and lives this even in simple acts like playing dominoes with elders in a hospital, or with his teachers and friends. He is academically gifted, not just in math, with a near-perfect GPA of 3.97. He has also completed a wide variety of AP courses as well, from Calculus to English Literature, to Human Geography, United States Government and Environmental Science. He plans to continue his journey to becoming an educator by studying Mathematics with a minor in Math Education at University of Florida, Texas A&M University, or the University of South Florida.
Cristal González-Valdez  
Major: Mathematics Education  
Heritage: Mexican  

“My math teachers from high school instilled in me a love for all things related to numbers,” says Cristal, who wants to become a high school math teacher herself in order to do for her students what her teachers did for her: “teach [them] to enjoy math, remove [their] math associated anxiety,” and “put an end to [thinking they are] not smart enough or the theory is too difficult.” Cristal confirmed she wanted to dedicate her life to giving back to her community through teaching, while working with AmeriCorps. She completed AmeriCorps’ Partners in Learning Success and STEM-Corps East programs and also volunteered as a tutor for her local Boys and Girls Club, thanks to their partnership with AmeriCorps. Her dedication to her community is such, that throughout her high school career and beyond her work with AmeriCorps, Cristal has completed over 600 hours of community service. She will undoubtedly continue to enrich those around her as an educator and as a devoted community member while she pursues a degree in Mathematics Education at Appalachian State University, East Carolina University, or North Carolina State University.
To complete her community service requirement as a member of her middle school’s Junior Beta Club, Brenda decided to tutor students after school at her local YMCA. Little did she know this experience would lead her to discover how much she enjoyed teaching young students, getting to know them, and assisting them in any school subject in which they may be struggling. Once in high school, Brenda participated in the Upward Bound Program at the University of North Carolina and took advantage of the opportunities offered by the program to reach out and speak to professors from the education departments at a number of colleges and learn more about the field of education. Brenda is an asset to her school and her community and is steadfast in her commitment to serve them, even during these challenging and ever-evolving times. Through her work with her school’s chapter of SkillsUSA, she is responsible for organizing the solicitation, collection, and disbursement of over 2000 pounds of food to date. Her hard work and diligent service have garnered her top recognitions and honors, including at National Career and Technical Education Student Organizations’ competitive events. She is an active member of her school’s National Beta Club and National Technical Honor Society and currently serves as president of its GoRED! culinary club. She plans to study Middle School Education at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, or East Carolina University in order to become a middle school Social Studies teacher.
Hannia Amaro-Zambrano  
Major: Early Childhood Education  
Heritage: Mexican

For Hannia, the way to empower, inspire, and guide this and future generations of Latinos is by serving our communities and working to become role models. Since 2018, she has been working as a Teen Leader for the Children’s Hands-On Museum of Tuscaloosa after being selected from a competitive pool of applicants. She credits her career choice to her work at the museum. “It helped me realize that I want to work with children,” she says. As a reward for her diligence, commitment, and the countless hours she has dedicated, the museum awarded Hannia with the highest recognition they offer to Teen Leaders, the “Tim Parker Leadership Award.” She has been involved with the Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America since her freshman year and has represented her school at their competitions at the state level, where her team earned gold for their work on a child development project focused on children in Hispanic households. Hannia has a 3.9 GPA and is applying to the University of Alabama at Birmingham, the University of Alabama, and the University of Mobile, where she will study Early Childhood Education.
Zion Trinidad
Major: History, Latin American Studies, or Latino/a Studies
Heritage: Puerto Rican

For Zion Trinidad, teaching is all about giving back to one’s community. This, and his propensity for leading others has informed his interest in education. In fact, Zion has worked to find ways to hone and practice his teaching skills whenever he can – whether as leader of his classroom during his sophomore year, or as part of a summer apprenticeship program where he taught hands-on skills to his coworkers. Even now, as a leader in his Naval Junior Reserves Officer Training Corps program, he finds opportunities to guide struggling cadets and peers. Zion’s love of community service extends beyond teaching as well. Perhaps one of the most impactful events he took part in was a local park clean-up. The intervention extended beyond a simple clean-up exercise and represented the destigmatizing of an area often thought to be unsafe or unclean by local community members. For Zion, community service has also pushed him to become a better leader, as he has had to take action in order to get the job done. Zion is passionate about his Puerto Rican heritage. He believes that education holds the key to dispelling ignorance and fear of the unknown, both of which underpin the stereotyping that so many in the Hispanic/Latino community suffer from. With a GPA of 3.76, Zion is academically gifted, and with a wealth of AP and IB classes, he plans to further his path of education by studying History, Latin American Studies, or Latino/a Studies at Northwestern University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, or the University of Illinois at Chicago.
Aksel Juárez Mejia  
Major: Secondary Education and Spanish  
Heritage: Mexican

Helping others has always been a passion for Aksel Juárez Mejia, and his love of education was born from his own experiences of receiving help from tutors when he was much younger. As someone who understands the importance of academic guidance, he now wants to give back in the same way. As part of the Big Brothers and Sisters club, he has tutored and mentored younger students. His commitment to helping and educating others extends to his own community, as well, where he has helped younger students with Spanish schoolwork. This has now become Aksel’s main purpose: to help as many students as possible by becoming a teacher. This commitment to education is also deeply rooted in his sense of giving back. This year, as part of various community service initiatives, he collected canned food items, sealed hygiene products, and clothing items, taking them to a community organization near his house called The Bloc. He also organized food drives through his high school, using the proceeds to donate to various organizations that support families in need on a daily basis. These experiences have gifted Aksel various leadership qualities, and in doing so, he has learned the importance of keeping an open mind, ensuring others’ autonomy, and sharing ideas. Aksel is also deeply proud of his Mexican heritage, and he believes the Latino/Hispanic community has become more open-minded to people and communities of diverse backgrounds. As a student, Aksel displays a very strong 3.55 GPA, and he plans to continue his journey by studying Secondary Education and Spanish at Knox College, Macalester College, or Lake Forest College.
Jessica Ramos  
Major: Education with a minor in Psychology  
Heritage: Mexican

“I inherited my love for teaching children from my mother,” says Oakland, California resident Jessica, who comes from a long line of educators. To prepare for her future career, Jessica is pursuing her school’s Education and Community Health pathway. After completing a number of classes in Child Development and Psychology, she began volunteering at a local elementary school. Beyond a career as an educator, Jessica wants to influence change in our educational system and write policies and legislation to help all students realize and achieve their dreams. Her commitment to education is evidenced in her role as Student Director of her district’s School Board. She is one of two students representing all of Oakland’s student population. Jessica was also one of twelve students selected from her state for consideration for the Student Director position at the California State Board of Education. She has served as Commissioner and Government Affairs Officer for the City of Oakland Youth Advisory Commission. Most recently, she partnered with the Office of the Mayor of Oakland and Twitter’s CEO, Jack Dorsey, to launch the #OaklandUndivided campaign to ensure every student in need has access to a computer, internet, and tech support. Her testimony at an #OaklandUndivided event inspired donors and her community to join the movement to close Oakland’s technological gap. Thanks to her contributions, over 26,000 computers and hotspots were donated to students in her district. Jessica is co-founder and Director of Communications of the Moving Forward Project, an organization dedicated to empowering underserved communities that aims to connect those in need with information about resources and opportunities. This inspiring Latina will attend Stanford University, Swarthmore College, or the University of California, Los Angeles, where she will major in Education and minor in Psychology.
Kellie Fernández  
Major: Public Policy with a minor in Child Development  
Heritage: Cuban

From playing classroom with her cousins when she was little to serving as her school’s Educators Rising club President as a junior and a senior, Kellie has been forging her way towards becoming a teacher for years. She is enrolled in her school’s Teacher Track, a pathway for students interested in pursuing careers in education through which she has learned about teaching methodologies and the psychology of learning. Before school went virtual, Kellie served as a student teacher every Monday and Tuesday at her local elementary school, working directly with students, and experiencing first-hand how teaching can impact their lives. Kellie is the founder and President of her school’s Latino club, Latinos Unidos. Wanting to increase representation and recognizing a need, she applied to create the club and fought with her fellow club members after an initial rejection to ensure her school’s Latino community had a space for them to connect and a club to represent them. As her school adapted to new settings throughout last year, Kellie worked to maintain Latinos Unidos active and engaging. Her club hosted an online conference with members of the Latino Chamber of Commerce, a virtual tour of the Latin American Museum of Art, and a workshop on mental health support, among other events. Kellie is also a member of her school’s Model United Nations club and its cross country and track and field teams. She is a dedicated leader, student, and athlete. She plans on majoring in Public Policy and minoring in Child Development at the University of Southern California, Claremont McKenna College, or the University of California, Irvine.
Natalie Villacres  
Major: Music Education  
Heritage: Colombian and Ecuadorian

If Natalie Villacres, fondly called Squidward for the last ten years and counting thanks to her avid clarinet-playing, is passionate about one thing, it’s music. Since the first grade, she has been a member of marching bands, ensembles, pep bands, and parades, always immersing herself fully in what she calls “a channel to emotional expression”. In addition to clarinet, she is also a stunning piano and violin player, and hopes to continue pursuing her passion through college and beyond. Her goal? To make sure every student in her home city and beyond have access to the beautiful and lifechanging art of music, which in many small ways has offered her a haven throughout her life. Natalie’s interest in becoming a music teacher is in part due to her passion for the art form, but also her commitment to making a difference in her community and wider society. In 2018, she began volunteering at Delve Bright Education, a nonprofit organization that provides tutors to schools in underserved communities. At first, Natalie noticed her team of 10 second-graders were struggling. Worksheets were unanswered, the students were disengaged, and she knew she had to do something. Soon, she had abandoned the worksheets in favor of captivating lessons on the chalkboard, using cookies, spaceships and at one point, even the members of One Direction to map out math problems. The shift was palpable, and soon they were tackling the worksheets with newfound confidence. At the conclusion of her volunteer stint, Natalie’s supervisor pulled her aside and handed her a two-dollar bill. “These are uncommon nowadays, but when we find them, we cherish them. That’s how we feel about you.” High praise, but exactly what Natalie needed – this is what she was meant to do. Since then, Natalie has thrown herself into other community service activities and her studies. With a perfect 4.00 GPA and a schedule packed with AP classes, she is well on her way to achieving her goals. She hopes to study Music Education at Columbia University, New York University, or University of Southern California and continue to inspire the next generation of music lovers.
Cecilia Sánchez
Major: Education
Heritage: Puerto Rican

Cecilia Sánchez is a dedicated, hard-working and well-loved individual. And if anyone knows how kind and dedicated she truly is, it’s the children she teaches in the inner cities of Springfield as part of the summer impact clubs hosted by Hope for Kids. All summer, Cecilia spends her days preparing skits, teaching lessons, playing games, and providing them the love and support they need to thrive. For the past four years, she has also volunteered as an assistant teacher for Summer Strings, a program that offers music lessons to children. These experiences have not only strengthened her resolve to continue pursuing a career in education, but also genuinely prepared her for one, as she honed her leadership and communication skills. Community service is incredibly important to Cecilia, and she credits her volunteer experiences for pushing her out of her comfort zone and into challenging new situations. It has also enhanced her awareness of the needs of others within her community. According to her teacher, Cecilia is a driven and organized student undaunted by new challenges – traits that will serve her well as a future educator. Her patience and understanding for others have helped her succeed in the tutoring program at her high school, where she played an important role in assisting, tutoring, and teaching her peers in various subjects, always with a smile and a positive and encouraging attitude. She maintains an impressive 4.00 GPA amid a consistently challenging course schedule that boasts various AP classes, including AP US History, AP World History, AP English, and Honors courses. Cecilia is a committed, well-rounded student and has been recognized as a member of the National Honors Society, as a Rising Star, and for High Honors, and she hopes to continue her academic career by majoring in Education at Elms College, Amherst College, or Western New England.
Linda Meléndez
Major: Adolescent Math Education 7-12
Heritage: Puerto Rican and Peruvian

Linda Meléndez is an intelligent, mature, and dedicated young woman, deeply committed to serving her community and peers. She sees community service as being important not only for one’s future opportunities, but also for the reward of knowing you have made an impact in even one person’s life. One of Linda’s main means of giving back is tutoring, which she has been involved with since she was in middle school. Though she started out tutoring math to her peers, when she entered high school, she expanded her subject matter as part of the peer tutoring program. Linda is also heavily involved in two high school service clubs: Compassion Connection and the Italian Club. With her classmates, she has made sandwiches for families in need, hosted food drives, and written letters to senior citizens, among other activities to benefit her community. For Linda, the hard work is well worth the effort. In addition to her range of extracurricular activities, Linda is also an exceptional student. She has shown tremendous achievement in languages, earning a total 11 college credits for both Spanish and Italian language classes she completed throughout her high school career. She will also be the first graduate of her high school’s Native Spanish Speaker in Italian Program, and is a candidate for two Seals of Biliteracy. Clearly adept at communication, a skill that will serve her extremely well as an educator. Linda is well-liked by her peers, committed, compassionate, and persevering, and her teacher calls her “the backbone of the Honor Society” – we’re certain her success is imminent. With a 4.00 GPA as well as a range of AP courses ranging from Calculus to Art, she is well prepared for her future endeavors studying Adolescent Math Education (7-12) at Iona College or St. John’s University.
Julia García Galindo  
Major: Comparative Literature, considering a minor in Latin American Studies  
Heritage: Puerto Rican  

When Julia heard that the kids at the elementary school next to her school did not have a library, she organized book collection efforts at her school, asking her community to donate any children’s books they no longer needed. After amassing a good quantity of books, they delivered their donation and made it a mission to return to their neighboring school to read to the kids every two weeks. This ignited a passion in Julia, which she continued to nurture through various activities. At Model United Nations, she debated on the educational policies of different countries, which allowed her to analyze how our own educational system could be altered to truly motivate and inspire students to remain in school. Through classes in literature, she studied the journeys of different characters and evaluated how their access to education had helped or hindered their development. These experiences led her to see and understand the impact lack of access to quality education has had on Puerto Rico. They led her to her current goal of further fostering her skills through education so that she may be better equipped to ensure more Puerto Rican students have access to quality education in the future. For Julia, community service is a way to make certain others have access to opportunities for advancement. One way she has given back is through her involvement with her school’s Student Council. As part of the council, she has led efforts to amend her school’s dress code, organized events with guest speakers, created competitions involving picking up trash to encourage cleanliness, among others. Yet, for Julia, nothing can quite compare to the work she has done to help close the technology gap at her school. When her school switched to virtual learning last year, she conducted a survey to get an idea of her peers’ access to a personal device. She found that over 70 students, out of 490, did not have access to a personal device. After meeting with her school’s administration to disappointing results, she established the UHS Computer Project (UCP), an initiative through which both students and alumni of her school can donate computers to help those who cannot afford one. So far, UCP has helped over 50 students gain access to a device. Julia is not only a remarkable leader; she is also an academically gifted student and maintains a perfect 4.0 GPA. She plans on majoring in Comparative Literature and is considering a minor in Latin American Studies at Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania, or Columbia University.
Pennelope Alers
Major: Special Education
Heritage: Puerto Rican

Pennelope’s favorite games growing up always involved her dressing up and pretending she was a teacher. Since elementary school, whenever she has had any free time at school, she has looked for ways to help her teachers, asking them for leadership roles and requesting their feedback and guidance as she performed her duties. Becoming an educator has always been part of Pennelope’s plans. “Having the opportunity to help others grow in the foundation of knowledge has been a goal of mine. I strongly believe that every person has the right to a good education and being part of that process motivates me,” she shares. She enjoys teaching and helping children and looks for every opportunity available to get involved in their learning. Back in 2018, Pennelope worked as a co-teacher for a 3rd grade Spanish and Social Studies teacher. Throughout the completion of the school year, she helped students with their homework, showed them new skills, and assisted the teacher with reviews, projects, and assignments for two-and-a-half hours daily after school. She has worked at a church’s summer camp for two years, serving as a camp counselor and as an art teacher’s assistant on separate occasions. Her church promoted her to serve as a teacher after she demonstrated her teaching abilities while serving as a teacher’s assistant in their after school tutoring sessions. Pennelope feels a sense of satisfaction every time she is able to help her community. Seeing how she can make a difference inspires her, whether it be through teaching, through coastal cleanups, collecting and distributing food, or providing support to families damnified by the natural disasters that devastated Puerto Rico in recent history. At school, Pennelope is a standout student. She has been recognized for her academic performance many times over the years and is currently ranked among the top 10% of students in her class. She will attend the Universidad de Puerto Rico, Universidad Ana G. Mendez, or the Universidad Interamericana, where she will pursue a degree in Special Education.
Jazzell Tovar
Major: Education
Heritage: Mexican

Jazzell Tovar is aware of the selfless nature of true community service, and that any level of service is never in vain. She has seen firsthand the challenges for migrant communities, and has emerged as a leader in her particular community. Her love for education and desire to become an educator was born from her volunteer work where she helped run small groups at elementary schools to inspire students about learning. She tutors children on how to read, write and do math, and loves seeing how others grow with confidence as they learn. This is what drives her to want to help students of all backgrounds, especially Hispanic and other minorities, and encourage them to realize that their diversity and culture is their strength. As she says, being Hispanic is not a threat or a disadvantage, but a superpower. Jazzell channeled all of this when she was challenged as a leader during the interview process for the United States Youth Senate Program, where she met opposing opinions on the topics of immigration and discrimination. She demonstrated professionalism, patience and respect, and that a true leader stands up and speaks for those who are unable to speak for themselves. With a perfect 4.0 GPA and a wide variety of commitments inside and outside of school. She plans to continue her academic journey at Seattle Pacific University, Whitworth University, or Seattle University, majoring in Education and continuing to shine in her community.
Samantha Gonzales
Major: Elementary Education
Heritage: Mexican

Growing up, Samantha witnessed how fulfilling being a teacher could be from watching her father. “I saw how much my dad enjoyed being a teacher and the impact of his profession on others,” she says. Being an educator gave her dad a greater sense of purpose and satisfaction. She understood then, as she does now, the profound impact that teachers have on their students and their ability to succeed, both in and out of the classroom. “[My teachers] helped me become who I am today, and I want to be able to leave that mark on [my] student,” proclaims Samantha. She wants to support her students in academics and other parts of their lives so she can help them learn, grow, and succeed. Samantha understands the value of community service. Every week, she visits her local Senior Citizens Center and donates her time by lending a hand with any task needed and providing company and warm conversations to the guests. She is at the top of her class and maintains a 4.0 GPA. She will pursue a degree in Elementary Education at Western New Mexico University, Northern Arizona University, or Arizona State University.
Miranda Lowe
Major: Education Studies or Secondary Education with a minor in Sociology
Heritage: Mexican and Salvadoran

Education has always been a focus in the life of Questbridge National College Match Finalist, Miranda. There is a list of educators that have made an impact in her life. As a way of honoring their influence, guidance, enthusiasm, and motivation, she wants to do the same for students in the future. “My teachers have always been my mentors,” she says. The impact they have had on Miranda goes beyond letter grades and textbooks. “They have taught me what it means to be a leader, to have self-confidence, to communicate, to listen and not just speak,” she explains. Like those that inspired her, she wants to be more than an educator. She also wants to be a mentor, a motivator, an advocate. Despite having had such great role models and guides in school, Miranda is aware of the disparity in resources and access to opportunities that affects schools in her district. “Where I grew up, education resources were not readily available in comparison to other parts of the city. Because of this, I want to create the needed change when it comes to the educational futures of kids, like me,” she asserts. To contribute to lessening the gap, she has invested her time volunteering as a tutor and fighting to provide more opportunities for her fellow schoolmates as part of her high school’s Student Government. Top of her class, Miranda has a 4.0 GPA. She will attend Columbia University, American University, or Arizona State University and major in Education Studies or Secondary Education and minor in Sociology.
ENGINEERING

Kathrine Cowart
Major: Mechanical Engineering with a minor in Bioengineering
Heritage: Spanish

“Attached to my house is a twenty by thirty room where magic happens,” says Kathrine. What to others may be an unassuming, ordinary garage from the outside is her creative sanctuary and workspace, where she grew up making her own furniture and creating and fixing all sorts of things with her father. With lathes, drills, welders and steel tables along its perimeter and larger pieces of equipment like planers and workstations in the middle of the room, this is where she learned to use all the machines she loves. “This is where my love for engineering started,” she declares. Kathrine knows that knowledge of advanced math and science is often necessary during the design and implementation of an engineering project. To help develop her skills, she has taken multiple advanced placement classes, including AP Calculus and Physics. She has also taken courses in Engineering/CAD Drafting and Wood and Metal Technology. What Kathrine enjoys the most about working on an engineering project is the problem-solving involved. “The complexity of those problems is a struggle and a fascination for me. I derive great satisfaction out of creating solutions to seemingly unsolvable mechanical situations,” she says. She has been putting her problem-solving skills to test and developing ingenious solutions by working as a part-time truck mechanic since 2015. Kathrine gives back to her community through her work at Creekside Preserve. Creekside Preserve came to life as an effort to save over 70 acres of land from deforestations in Big Elk Creek, Chester County, Pennsylvania. In 2016, Kathrine formed a team to plant a 2-acre fruit and nut trees orchard in the Preserve. Harvest from this orchard now supplies fruits and nuts to local populations in need through the Kennett Area Community Services Food Cupboard. Kathrine wants to major in Mechanical Engineering and minor in Bioengineering. She will be attending Carnegie Mellon University, Cornell University, or the University of Pittsburgh.
Sara Elkilany
Major: Biomedical Engineering
Heritage: Colombian and Brazilian

Last year, Sara took on the role as a medical interpreter for her family when one of her cousins had to undergo multiple surgeries to treat a subdural hematoma. Of Colombian and Brazilian descent, she would take the English words from the doctors and turn them into Spanish and Portuguese to keep her family informed on her cousin’s status and progress. The terminology was complex, so she spent hours studying vocabulary and treatment methods to learn all she could to help her family as much as possible. After being exposed to the biomedical engineering field, she applied for a hands-on bioengineering course at a local college. “As I held a scalpel during the first lab, I felt the irresistible tug of possibility,” remembers Sara. “As paradoxical as it may seem, there is something undeniably humane about an artificial heart. Sculpted by human ingenuity, the inanimate device gives life to another being,” she explains. Sara experienced that same feeling of possibility when she worked at Sharma Lab at the Stevens Institute of Technology. With a 4.0 GPA, Sara’s scholastic achievements are indisputable. She has received several academic awards and recognitions, including being recognized as a National Hispanic Program Scholar by the College Board, being named an AP Scholar with Distinction, and being a QuestBridge National College Match Finalist. Sara’s outstanding academics only tell part of her story. She also has an unwavering commitment to advocating for tolerance, equality, and justice through her everyday life. She strives to fight against inequalities in her community by getting involved and serving in any way she can. Sara wants to dedicate her life to developing safer treatments and techniques to help patients like her cousin. She will attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rutgers University, or Columbia University, where she will study Biomedical Engineering.
Daniel Heitz  
Major: Aerospace or Aeronautical Engineering  
Heritage: Venezuelan

Daniel began his work in aeronautics in the 8th grade, when he designed the “Super Phantom,” a 3D model of a transonic unmanned aerial vehicle. He has since continued to expand both his knowledge and his curiosity. Daniel excels in all academic areas, be they in traditional learning environments or independent settings. He has a wide range of STEM interests, from automobiles to military aviation, from fluid dynamics to artificial intelligence. Throughout his high school career, Daniel has followed a rigorous course of study that has included seven AP STEM classes and intensive coursework in the humanities. Besides being academically gifted, he is also a caring and dependable person and makes impactful contributions at school, home, and in his community. He enjoys tutoring his classmates and helping clear up any problems or questions they may have with concepts or material covered in class. He is responsible for his grandfather’s care at home, looking out for his well-being and physical health. “I enjoy trying to make him happy because he loves me very much,” explains Daniel.  

At church, he offers to help the Director of Youth Minister every opportunity he can, whether it be leading retreats or participating in biblical reenactments. Daniel has been working as a technical intern with systems and software engineers at Northrop Grumman since the summer of 2019. To be a better asset, he taught himself C++, HTML, and BASH scripting. He is the first high school student to have interned in his capacity and is paving the way for additional high school student interns thanks to his attitude and contributions. Daniel stops at nothing to pursue his curiosities. He has taught himself blacksmithing, the mechanics of short-selling, fluid dynamics, and Japanese, among others. He is not afraid of embracing challenges and is creative, attentive, dedicated, and enthusiastic about learning. This exceptional Latino has a 4.0 GPA and has been recognized numerous times for his achievements. Some of his recognitions include earning 1st place at the American Mathematics Competition AMC-12 level, placing him among the top 10% of competitors worldwide, being recognized as an AP Scholar with Distinction, and being a National Merit Scholarship Semifinalist. He will attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Virginia, or Pennsylvania State University and pursue an Aerospace or Aeronautical Engineering degree.
Eva Nance
Major: Electrical and Computer Engineering
Heritage: Mexican

Surely, a young Eva Nance asked, there was more behind the colorful screen of the computer than what immediately meets the eye? It was this yearning desire to peer behind the screen and to take control over and command the processes of the technology she found around her that first motivated her to get into robotics. Eva initially joined the robotics program in her freshman year, and to this day is perpetually fascinated by the subject. Watching a piece of robotics come to life, she says, continues to fill her with excitement and amazement. Her dedication has resulted in outstanding academic achievements. In addition to having an impressive GPA of 4.00, Eva has also been Texas Best Robotics state finalist every year since her freshman year, as well as a state qualifier for HOSA, and top of the class in TAMIU TexPrep for three years. Her achievements are certainly remarkable, but when you couple those with her unwavering determination and proven leadership you have, as her teachers have attested, the makings of a model for her generation. Eva admits that it is her parents that have instilled within her the importance of giving back to the community and propelling forward the project of humanity. This drive to contribute and give back to those around her have influenced her in significant ways, motivating her to participate in recycling programs at school, and spend weekends volunteering through her church. Additionally, the importance of upliftment has given her an important sense of the need for equality. Although, she says, much progress has been made in how Latinx people have been accepted in the United States, her generation of Hispanic Americans must continue to empower themselves and those of their community and realize their potential and value. Eva is fast on her way to becoming a role model, and her plans to study Electrical and Computer Engineering at the University of Texas at Austin are sure to get her there even faster.
Agustin Valdés Martínez
Major: Electrical Engineering and Computer Science
Heritage: Mexican

Childlike curiosity is a marvelous thing – and it is also what led Agustin Valdés Martínez down the engineering rabbit hole. It began with a radio, which he dissembled into its individual parts. Since then, he has built calculators, speakers, and a multimeter for reading circuit data. During his time in high school, Agustin has consistently distinguished himself as an outstanding, committed, and kind class leader, with sharp academic ability and a strong work ethic. His teachers have admired his ability to perform at an unbelievable level for someone his age, which has resulted in his impressive GPA of 4.00, as well as being recognized as a College Board National Hispanic Scholar and a National Merit Scholar and achieving first 1st place in both the Think Award FIRST Tech Challenge Robot and the Economics Academic Decathlon in 2020. But besides these individual accomplishments, it is his sense of the importance of community that sets him apart. The awards and the passion with which they have been pursued, Agustin explains, is always linked to a common ‘we’. His excitement for robotics, and his participation in their planning and building is always done as part of a collective ‘we’ and for a common goal. Agustin imagines an exciting future at university working with a diverse and talented group of students all dedicated to tackling and solving the world’s most daunting problems. The commitment to a common goal, he says, stems from a gratitude for the blessings that one has, and an acknowledgement for the innate responsibility each one of us have for helping others. This sense of responsibility is also linked to an appreciation for his own heritage. He hopes to be a role model of kids in his community, who may see that the future is bright and theirs for the taking. Agustin’s future is certainly bright, and he plans to study Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Carnegie Mellon University, or the University of Texas at Austin.
Cristian Gualy
Major: Mechanical Engineering
Heritage: Colombian

For Cristian Gualy, mechanical engineering is fascinating because of its combination and balance between mathematics and applied science, between mechanical processes and creative and innovative thinking. An appreciation for these practices has served him well while participating in his school’s Robotics Club, the NASA Texas High School Aerospace Program, and the Distinguished Scholars Program. In each he has been afforded the chance to hone and improve upon skills relating to the design, research, composition, and manufacturing phases of engineering. His motivation to improve has led him to be acknowledged with a number of outstanding awards, including AP Scholar with Honor Award, the Betty Butler Distinguished Scholar Award, as well as being recognized as a National Merit Scholar, a NASA Texas High School Aerospace Scholar, and a Senior Distinguished Scholar. Despite these achievements, Cristian always remains aware of just how fortunate he is. He laments the fact that access to technology and STEM-related materials continues to be the biggest impediment in low-income communities. While efforts have been made to rectify this issue, Cristian believes he has a responsibility to do something as well. In response, he ran a service project for two and a half years through the Houston Christian chapter of the National Honor Society in partnership with a local community center called Spring Spirit, where he helped educate children and teenagers from underprivileged families. He believes that his sense of the importance of giving back to others stems from his Hispanic heritage and the strong sense of family that has been instilled in him. Education, he declares, especially in innovative fields like engineering, plays a crucial role in healing societal issues, by reducing racial and class disparities. Engineering not only improves the economic conditions of those who pursue it as a career, but also improves the lives of all members of one’s community. It’s no surprise that Cristian is on a brightly lit path, and his future as an engineer will only make the world and his community better. He plans to study Mechanical Engineering at Princeton University, the University of Pennsylvania, or the University of Texas at Austin.
Julianne Rodriguez
Major: Mechanical Engineering
Heritage: Cuban

Julianne Rodriguez has always loved to build and create. Since she was a child, she would play with Lego pieces, enthralled by how the pieces of plastic when put together, could form something incredible. That fascination naturally led her to engineering, a field dedicated to finding solutions to problems vexing our society. The last year, with COVID-19 raging across the globe has been a particularly salient reminder of how much we need engineers and scientists. Julianne saw this, and quickly got to work by putting her building and programming skills to the test to protect the health and wellbeing of our elderly. She created a telepresence robot called “Empathy”, which can be remotely maneuvered into Assisted Living Facilities and provide the virtual interaction needed to communicate. With programmed controls, hi-res cameras and microphones, this innovative technology has reunited many families in South Florida and will continue to safely bring people closer together during this time. This very example highlights how important giving back and community service are to Julianne. She believes that giving back to one’s community is so important because the world needs people who are willing to volunteer their time to better the world and people’s lives. She is proud of her Cuban heritage, and feels that the Hispanic/Latino community, and her family have instilled qualities such as perseverance and humility that have helped her become the person she is today. Academically, she is an excellent student, with a GPA of 4.00, various AP courses from Calculus to Psychology, to Biology to Human Geography, along with being a Yale Young Global Scholar in 2020. She plans to pursue a degree in Mechanical Engineering.
Gianni Tipan
Major: Electrical Engineering
Heritage: Colombian and Ecuadorian

Gianni Tipan developed his passion for engineering from watching those around him – self-taught, immigrant engineers without bachelor’s degrees, who innovated whatever their hearts desired: a bubblegum machine for the neighborhood, makeshift protectors for hurricanes, or even fixing a little boy’s broken bicycle. Those engineers and the projects he watched them work on form a large part of Gianni’s foundation and interest in engineering. In the summer between his sophomore and junior year, he used these influences for his engineering research project presented by the US Army focused on providing prosthetics for a community of amputees. As part of a bilingual team, he and his peers developed a safety bracelet prototype called Alert Now that emitted a 90 decibel sound when the wearer pulled a pin. Designed to protect vulnerable populations in dangerous situations, it is just one of many ideas that Gianni has and is capable of unleashing on the world. Gianni is committed to giving back and supporting others, as well. He created a mentorship for a group of students to design their own engineering science project to present at the science fair, later expanding this project when he was his school’s Science Club President. His interest in engineering has extended into electrical and software engineering as well, creating mobile applications which saw him win first prize in Florida for a mobile application competition. He has also attained a software engineering internship where he maintained his own coding project. In terms of community service, Gianni started “College Corner”, a resource that helps students with the college process and graduating. For the Spanish-speaking students in his school, he hosted presentational nights in Spanish, prioritizing accessibility and developing a mobile application. He is also part of a volunteer team at a local hospital, always dedicated to giving back. On top of all of this, Gianni maintains a brilliant GPA of 3.99 amid challenging coursework. He is set to continue his bright path by studying electrical engineering at MIT, Stanford University, or the University of Florida.
Fabiola Fabian Plascencia
Major: Mechanical Engineering with a minor in Electrical Engineering or Computer Programming
Heritage: Mexican

Ever since middle school, when Fabiola was a member of her school’s STEM club and her team placed second in her school’s Sumo Robotics tournament, she has been certain that she wanted to study Engineering. She is the head of her high school’s STEM club and has led her peers through the design and execution of several projects. Seeing the effects caused by the passing of Hurricane Florence inspired her proudest project to date: designing a flood-proof house. “It emphasized for me how engineering can be used to improve the lives of others, and helping others is my main concern when thinking about my possible career,” she says. In the 21-year history of the IB program at her school, Fabiola is the ONLY student that has managed to balance the rigorous demands of her IB courses while also playing in her school’s marching band, competing in two varsity sports, participating in a number of other extracurricular activities, and working a job. She also spends a great deal of time tutoring and helping her peers, sometimes even at the expense of sleep, because she has a sense of duty when it comes to serving others and derives great pleasure from doing so. With a 4.0 GPA, Fabiola is ranked number one out of 265 students in her senior class. She will be attending North Carolina State University, Duke University, or the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and will major in Mechanical Engineering and minor in Electrical Engineering or Computer Programming.
Christian Nazario-Quirindongo  
Major: Architecture and Civil Engineering  
Heritage: Puerto Rican

As part of his school's Project Lead the Way Engineering Program, Christian has taken multiple engineering classes throughout his high school career. These have included Introduction to Engineering Design, Principles of Engineering, and Engineering Design and Development. His experience with Project Lead the Way has offered Christian an introduction to the rigor, discipline, and scope of the field of engineering. It has also allowed him to investigate other careers in STEM, all while teaching him about the design process and helping him develop strong teamwork, communication, organizational, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. During the last few summers, he has enrolled in the Architecture curriculum at Duke University's Talent Identification Program, a program designed with gifted students in mind. Christian is an active member of his community and enjoys volunteering at his local Humane Society and through organizations like Trees Upstate, a nonprofit with the mission to plant, promote, and protect trees in South Carolina’s Upstate region. An athlete and an academic, Christian has a 3.96 GPA and is captain of his school's varsity basketball team. He will pursue degrees in Architecture and Civil Engineering at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Georgia Institute of Technology, or the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
Elizabeth Miller  
Major: Biomedical Engineering with a minor in Mechanical Engineering  
Heritage: Honduran and American

Elizabeth wants to dedicate her life to improving the lives of cancer patients by researching, developing, and contributing to the advancement of the medical devices and procedures implemented in their treatment and care. She has been exploring STEM fields since middle school, beginning with the construction of her first remotely operated submersible robot at the age of 12. For the past three years, she has attended STEM camps, seminars, and programs organized by the U.S. Naval Academy, Oregon State University, the Society of American Military Engineers, and the Ochsner Health System in Louisiana. Elizabeth gives back to her community, both in school and at large. She has served as Class President since her freshman year. She is a Life Group Leader at her church, which has allowed her to serve as a role model to many 7th grade students at her church. She is a member of High Impact at her school, a Christian-based club that aims to help teens incorporate faith into their daily lives. She is also a member of Bulldog Buddies, a club that provides opportunities for all students to be included and participate socially at her school by assigning peers to students with special needs. She is a member of the National Honor Society, the National Hispanic Honor Society, and Mu Alpha Theta, the national mathematics honor society for high school and two-year college students. Elizabeth is licensed as an Emergency Medical Responder and as a Student Pilot. She will continue her education at the University of Mississippi, Louisiana State University, or Texas A&M University, where she will major in Biomedical Engineering and minor in Mechanical Engineering.
Pablo Buitrago
Major: Mechanical Engineering
Heritage: Colombian

Pablo Buitrago fell in love with engineering in the fourth grade, when he went to see the FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) world competition. Amazed by the complexity of the robots and the knowledge of the competitors, it inspired him to strive to reach the same level of confidence and knowledge. It seems his fourth grade-self would be proud today. Pablo has since decided to pursue STEM activities in school and co-founded the Science Olympiad (SO) team. He has specialized in physics and engineering events, building bridges, towers, cars, levers, hovercrafts, and much more. One of the things he loves most about SO? Its emphasis on teamwork. Pablo is a strong believer that we’re stronger together and strives for a future career in engineering that will allow him to collaborate on big projects and effect meaningful change. Pablo is also deeply proud of his Colombian roots and Latino heritage. This is evident in his establishment of established the Latin American Culture Club at his school. There, he and his peers have created a space where Hispanic students can share their culture with the larger school community and highlight the cultural diversity that exists and forms such an integral part of the world and nation. In terms of community service, Pablo is a staunch believer that the “self-made man” is a myth. Nobody gets anywhere without the guidance, support, or belief of their community, which is one of the reasons he works to give back, as well. Academically, Pablo is an excellent student, with a perfect GPA of 4.00, and various AP courses on his resume. He plans to continue his academic endeavors by studying Mechanical Engineering at the California Institute of Technology or Columbia University.
Mayahuel Malik
Major: Bio Engineering
Heritage: Mexican

When Mayahuel Malik was eight years old, she learned about the Axolotl and its regenerative powers – a tiny salamander able to regrow limbs and parts of its heart. It left her in awe – what if we could replicate this somehow? Spider’s silk, stronger than five times its weight in steel, yet elastic as a rubber band. What if we could engineer tendons and muscles to mimic this silk, transforming care for athletes, the elderly, even the average person? These are questions Mayahuel has been asking herself for years. In fact, she credits her Chicanx/Rarámuri upbringing and the recognition of her ancestors as land and all living beings, for her vast and probing interest in science and the natural environment. Mayahuel has further honed her interest throughout her academic career, taking an advanced bug biology course, as well as a host of Honors science and mathematics courses, including Organismal Biology and Field Biology. Mayahuel’s passion for science intersects with a desire to give back that comes straight from her family: her grandmother fought alongside Dolores Huerta for farmworkers’ rights and her mother campaigns for teachers’ and students’ rights in education. Mayahuel herself founded a group called Paign to Peace, where, among other activities, they convene meetings with community organizers and city officials about racism in education, police brutality and queer rights. As President of the Latinx Black Coalition, she presented the experiences of students of color at the school to the school principal, resulting in the school taking on board various initiatives. Mayahuel also has a brilliant 4.00 GPA, and she plans to study Bio Engineering at Stanford University, University of Minnesota Twin Cities, or the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign.
Mario Carrillo-Bello
Major: Mechanical Engineering
Heritage: Mexican

For Mario, engineering is the avenue through which he can combine his passions for physics and math to turn his thoughts into reality. For the last three years, he has been taking a series of robotics and engineering design and development courses as part of his school’s Engineering Academy. While working to prepare for a career as a mechanical engineer, he has also taken the highest math and physics courses offered at his school. Mario is involved in a number of extracurricular activities at his high school. Not fully satisfied with all the options available and wanting to learn more about his interests, this driven Latino leader founded his school’s Mathletics club and Robotics Remotely Operated Vehicle team. Most notably, in an effort to help students at his school struggling with distance learning, last year, Mario and a group of his peers founded Alisal Tutoring Service, a nonprofit tutorial program providing free live tutoring to his fellow schoolmates on an array of academic subjects. The proud son of a farmworker, Mario has faced many challenges in his journey but has sacrificed and worked arduously not to let anything get in his way towards rising to become one of the top students at his school. He is guided by an immense hunger for learning, fierce curiosity, and a resolute desire to forge a better future for him and his family. This fall, he will make his way to New York City to attend Columbia University and study Mechanical Engineering on a full-ride as a QuestBridge National College Match Scholarship recipient.
Erick Torres
Major: Aerospace Engineering with a minor in Finance
Heritage: Mexican

Growing up in Salinas, California, known as "The Salad Bowl of the World" for its vast and bountiful agricultural industry, has shown Erick the scarcity of engineering opportunities in rural low-income regions across America. Yet, it has also led him to understand how valuable these opportunities are and has inspired his commitment to maximizing his school's community exposure to STEM by creating these opportunities himself. Erick started his school's Physics Club and organized its first trips to science and engineering laboratories. He ensured costs were covered for all so that there were no economic barriers stopping anyone from participating. He has advocated for the addition of new STEM courses at his high school by collecting signatures, garnering student interest, finding appropriate teachers, and organizing school-wide meetings with his school's principal to allow his peers to further explore their potential and interests. Erick also serves as President of his school's Calculus Club and is a Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America (LEDA) Scholar. LEDA's mission is to increase the representation of diverse voices at the tables where decisions are made by identifying and developing the academic and leadership potential of exceptional students from under-resourced backgrounds. With a 4.0 GPA and ranking at number one out of 501 students in his class, Erick is a model of academic excellence. During nightfall, he often goes out to the lettuce fields in his town, fields that have employed his family and fed him his entire life. "Not to look down to check for healthy lettuce or the critters within the soil, but to look up at the night sky. With no light pollution, I stare in awe while thinking of the limitless possibilities for space exploration… I [have] realized that I want to travel the stars," he tells us. In pursuit of his dreams, Erick will attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, or Princeton University, where he will major in Aerospace Engineering and minor in Finance.
Eduardo Cienfuegos de Paz  
Major: Engineering and Business  
Heritage: Spanish

All life depends on water – it is one of life’s most basic needs – and Eduardo Cienfuegos de Paz is particularly aware of this. In the summer of his sophomore year of high school, he attended an environmental engineering course through the UCONN Engineering Summer Program. For the final project, he and his peers were instructed to find cost-effective means of extracting water from humid air. The experience gave him a hefty dose of the realities and challenges facing environmental engineers dedicated to finding feasible solutions to water scarcity. Ever since, Eduardo has been fascinated by water – its abundance and scarcity around the world – and hopes to continue his pursuit of improving the planet by studying Engineering and Business. Engineering is a technical profession and one that requires a strong understanding of mathematical and scientific concepts. Eduardo has proven his adeptness by enrolling and excelling in various AP STEM classes, including AP Physics, AP Chemistry, AP Calculus AB, and self-studying for AP Calculus BC. Outside of the classroom, he is a member of his school’s math team of which he is now the captain and where, as a sophomore, he was one of only five students to qualify for the state tournament. His leadership skills shine through in many of Eduardo’s extracurriculars, including his role as the captain of his soccer team, and his commitment to community service. As a member of the Latino/Hispanic community, who is intent on pursuing higher education, he has worked hard for his achievements and started mentoring Hispanic and Latino children, many of whom struggle in school. The Hispanic/Latino community has tons of brilliant minds, says Eduardo, but too often, they aren’t offered the resources and support needed for success. That’s why, aside from tutoring, he works as a junior counselor at LEAP for Kids a nonprofit dedicated to mentoring elementary school kids from underserved communities. Eduardo’s future is clearly bright, and with an impressive 3.90 GPA, he hopes to attend Northwestern University, Johns Hopkins University, or Yale University to study Engineering and Business.
Viviana Alatorre
Major: Architecture
Heritage: Mexican

Unlike many people her age, Viviana Alatorre knows exactly what she wants out of life: to become an architect. In fact, that is one of the things that made her stand out most to her mentor in the ACE mentor program, combined with her unfailing optimism, self-assuredness, and confidence. In a male-dominated profession like architecture, Viviana is unafraid and perfectly capable of holding her own. The ACE mentor program offered her valuable experiences and understanding that prepare her well for her future as an architect – for example, as part of an off-the-grid housing project, she learned about a variety of solutions, such as radiant heating floor systems and solar panels. Viviana has also worked hard to master all the skills necessary to earn her CTE certification in AutoCAD this year. After completing her internship, she was offered a position to stay on and work with the RGL Building Env. Consultants firm, as a draftsperson, something that only solidifies the notion that she is primed for success in the field. Apart from her commitment to architecture, Viviana is also actively involved in various extracurricular activities. She has been a member of the youth community of the Calpulli Mexican Dance Company since the age of four, an experience she values greatly as she feels it allows her to connect to her cultural roots, as well as those of her father. Viviana’s academic record also speaks for itself: she has a 3.90 GPA and is an active member of the Honor Society, where she tutors students, sets up after-school events, and helps out at events such as bake sales. She has challenged herself repeatedly throughout her tenure at Art and Design High School, enrolling in various AP classes, and she has been recognized for a variety of awards – several of which are specific to achievements in architecture. Viviana hopes to study Architecture at City College of New York, Cornell University, or Drexel University.
Michael Chumbay
Major: Mechanical Engineering
Heritage: Ecuadoran

Michael Chumbay’s interest in Mechanical Engineering stems from his childhood, where he recalls standing alongside his father at six years-old, watching him fix the family car. Michael knew nothing about cars or its components at the time, but he was immediately fascinated by the way it worked, and this curiosity has only compounded over time. In fact, Michael has started his journey already – he applied for, and was accepted, into Aviation High School, where he has had the opportunity to work under the supervision of the Federal Aviation Administration. As a student pursuing his Airframe and Powerplant Maintenance Technician license, Michael’s understanding has expanded rapidly to include electrical systems, avionics, engines, schematics, and more. He is also a cadet in his high school’s Air Force JROTC and has participated in various walks, parades, and community service activities dedicated to raising awareness about a variety of causes. When asked what he would tell his younger self about community service if given the chance? He said, “Taking part never feels like work.” In addition to his extracurricular activities, Michael is also an impressive student. Even with a host of AP and Honors courses ranging from Physics to Calculus under his belt, he still manages to maintain a perfect 4.00 GPA. According to his teachers, he is one of the brightest, most hard-working students in his class, always eager to master new material and tackle new challenges. A mature, respectful, and well-liked young man, Michael hopes to study Mechanical Engineering at City College of New York, New York University Tandon School of Engineering, or Cornell University, and if his future academic career is anything like high school – he is bound to succeed.
Vanderlei Carvalho
Major: Civil and Environmental Engineering
Heritage: Puerto Rican and American Samoan

Vanderlei, of Puerto Rican and American Samoan descent, attends the West Hawaii Explorations Academy (WHEA) in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. At WHEA, students follow a project-based curriculum. They choose a topic of their interest and generate long-term projects based on real-world problems they would like to explore. “I found my passion three years ago while searching on Google Scholar,” tells us Vanderlei. “Within moments of reading a 2016 paper on mealworms and their novel ability to degrade plastics, I was astounded and motivated,” he recalls. The paper was a research paper written by Dr. Wei-Min Wu, a senior research engineer at Stanford University’s Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, on the biodegradation of plastic waste by mealworms. Thus began his environmental engineering project, a journey into the global issue of plastic pollution and how we could use mealworms to combat it. He now leads a team of six of his peers in collaboration with researchers from around the world, including Dr. Wu himself, to study mealworm plastic degradation as the President of the Bioremediation Project. Vanderlei sees his project as a way to help make the world a better place. “Think globally, act locally” is his motto as he conducts research locally that may one day have profound positive global implications.

Besides the work he does with the Bioremediation Project, Vanderlei has also worked with an ecologist at the National Park Service to restore and manage multiple sites of Hawaiian historic and cultural importance, like the Aimakapa Fishpond. He has also worked at the Amy B. H. Greenwell Ethnobotanical Garden, helping with the study and preservation of native plants. Vanderlei plans on continuing his research into finding a solution to our plastic pollution problems at Stanford University, Harvey Mudd College, or Northern Arizona University. He will pursue degrees in Civil and Environmental Engineering.
Kimberly Burgos
Major: Chemical Engineering with a minor in International Engineering
Heritage: Puerto Rican

Aguadilla, Puerto Rico resident, Kimberly aspires to become a chemical engineer. Although her school has limited resources and opportunities and does not offer any AP or IB courses, she has looked for ways outside of school to set herself up for success in her future career as an engineer. She has participated in the Science and Technology Academies Reinforcing Basic Aviation and Space Exploration (STARBASE) Youth Program, a United States Department of Defense program that provides students with a hands-on approach to STEM education through fun learning activities that teach them real-world applications of STEM concepts. In the summer of 2019, Kimberly attended the Camp Kennedy Space Center. At this week-long camp experience, she further explored her interest in STEM through NASA-based challenges, labs, and simulations. Last year, she was the only Hispanic student selected to take the Introduction to Engineering Design course at Tulane University’s Pre-College Program. While enrolled in the course, she learned about the phases of the engineering design process, developed 3D printing skills, and created a microphone boom-arm prototype from scratch. Over her high school career, Kimberly has given back to her community in a multitude of ways. Some examples of how she has been of service include organizing a fundraiser for the American Cancer Society, volunteering at her afterschool’s daycare center and local nursing homes, offering free tutoring services, and donating to local organizations in need. For Kimberly, the rewards of community service have come in the manner of personal growth. Community service has also opened her eyes to socio-economic inequality and income gaps and which has underscored for her the importance of carrying on with the duty of contributing to her community. An example of academic excellence, Kimberly has a 4.0 cumulative GPA and is ranked among the top 5 students in her class. She also serves as President of her school’s chapter of the National Honor Society. She will major in Chemical Engineering and minor in International Engineering at the University of Michigan, New York University, or the Georgia Institute of Technology.
**Gabriella Arriaga**  
Major: Aerospace Engineering  
Heritage: Guatemalan

Gabriella Arriaga is already well on her way to becoming an aerospace engineer. She was accepted into the Idaho Aerospace Scholars program, where she studied jet propulsion systems, aerodynamics, advanced physics, and created advance CAD models using computer technology. Recently she was accepted into the Idaho Science and Aerospace Engineering Summer Academy where she learned how to build and code an Arduino Uno Robot, construct 3D Protein Synthesis models, and collaborate to organize an entire manned mission to Mars. Gabriella is very academically strong as well – in science, but also generally, with a GPA of 4.00. On top of this, she is Vice President of her school’s community outreach program called Interact Club, where her mission is to support four girls in Kenya through the Caring Hearts Association every year through countless fundraising and volunteering events. She knows that the hardest things in life are the things worth doing and that by using one’s passions to brighten life for another, one illuminates one’s own life too. She feels strongly about her heritage as well, and says that by allowing Hispanic/Latino students to define their roots, they can discover who they are and what they want to become. Not surprisingly, she plans to study Aerospace Engineering at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, University of Maryland, or Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.
The son of immigrant parents, Fabián Garcia embodies many of the qualities they taught him – resilience, resourcefulness, kindness – and he has fast grown into a confident individual and leader, dedicated to making the world a better place. Engineering and science are clearly Fabián’s passions and strong suits: for the past three years, he has participated and placed in science and engineering fair competitions throughout Washington state, winning first place in 2019 and 2020. In an attempt to replace one of the world’s worst pollutants – plastic – he began engineering bioplastic found in the starches of locally bought fruits and vegetables. Fabián is also the president of his high school’s science club and the chairman of his church youth council, where his experiences, particularly in the realm of fundraising, have taught him valuable conflict resolution skills. Community service is a significant part of his life, and he has led over twenty service projects for four different institutions, accumulating over 500 hours of community service. Each experience has been irreplaceable, and they have all exposed him to new situations and allowed him to embrace his own identity in his community. A straight-A student, Fabián boasts a fantastic 4.00 GPA and a diverse set of AP courses ranging from World History to Calculus. He hopes to continue his academic and professional endeavors by studying architecture at Arizona State University, University of Washington, or the University of California-Berkley.
**Ryan Sánchez**
Major: Nuclear Engineering
Heritage: Spanish

Albuquerque, New Mexico resident Ryan, has wanted to be an engineer since he first started learning how to draw and make dimension parts in AutoCAD his freshman year. Since then, he has worked on a number of design problems, including the creation of a functioning Bluetooth controlled hovercraft for his junior year independent project. Last summer, Ryan was one of 12 top students from his state to be accepted into the elite Sandia National Labs Summer Intern Program. Currently, he is working on a paper on particle effects theory with his mentor, a Doctor of Nuclear Engineering. Through this mentorship, Ryan has learned to code in Python. It has allowed him to apply his theoretical advanced math and physics knowledge and gain valuable insight into his future career. Beyond academics, Ryan is an active member of his school’s National English Honor Society, National Math Honor Society, Model UN, and Speech and Debate Club. He frequently gives back to his community by volunteering through several organizations like the Roadrunner Food Bank, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, and Best Buddies. Ryan is a National Merit Scholar Finalist and an AP Scholar with Distinction. He has a 4.0 GPA and stands among the top 1% of his class. He wants to study Nuclear Engineering at Texas A&M University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, or Purdue University.
Joan Serrano  
Major: Mechanical or Electrical Engineering  
Heritage: Mexican

In Joan’s earliest memories, he always wanted to know how things around him worked. Everyday objects, like mechanical pens, would catch his eye and curiosity. He would study them, examine their components and imagine how he could put them together and improve what there was to start. Then, he learned about physics. “I was ecstatic that there was an entire branch of science devoted to understanding the complex inner-machinations of the universe,” he says. Though it was not until his junior year in high school that he took a formal class in physics, he began teaching himself everything he could about the subject from the moment he learned about the field. His outlook on the world changed through the lessons in his IB physics class. “All the questions I had posed myself as a young child suddenly had answers. From simple questions about the functionality of pens and straws to deeper subjects such as the interplay of various fields of science to create a magnificent, seamless result,” recalls Ryan. He wants to become an engineer to delve deeper into his pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the world and use his skills to build a better society. He is involved with our IB Club, Spanish Honors Society, Key Club, and Jazz Band; furthermore, he is deeply invested in charitable organizations that aim to raise funds for cancer research. His commitment to charity and community service is exemplified by his extensive volunteering track record as he has volunteered in countless programs both in and out of school. Ryan maintains a 4.0 GPA. He has a schedule full of IB courses and has earned multiple awards and recognitions for his outstanding academic performance. He will attend Arizona State University, the University of Arizona, or the University of California, Berkeley, where he will major in Mechanical or Electrical Engineering.
Agustín León-Sáenz  
Major: Environmental Engineering  
Heritage: Ecuadorian

Of Ecuadorian descent, Agustin gets excited about applying science and mathematics to solve real-world problems. He has been exploring his curiosities and learning about engineering since the fifth grade through programs at the University of New Mexico School of Engineering. Through his work as an Environmental Engineering Research Lab Assistant under Dr. Jose Cerrato of the University of New Mexico, he has worked with Navajo researchers to investigate downstream plant contamination on Indigenous land soil resulting from abandoned mine waste. As he realized how the work he was doing could serve as an instrument of advocacy, he learned of the intersection between engineering research and social justice. He wants to be an engineer to use his education and research to contribute to the advancement and protection of marginalized communities. He wants to do this while implementing ethical engineering practices and methods that promote sustainability and environmental justice. Agustin is no stranger to serving his community. For him, giving back means helping the community that has helped him. A member of his school's National Honors Society and Spanish National Honors Society, he takes the time to help his community and inspire those around him to do the same. Agustin also serves in his district's Superintendent's Student Advisory Council. He is a National Hispanic Scholar, a National Merit Scholar Finalist, and an AP Scholar with Distinction. With a 4.0 GPA, he will pursue a degree in Environmental Engineering at Harvard College.
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Albert Lacaze
Major: Business, Technology and Entrepreneurship
Heritage: Filipino and Uruguayan

First-generation American with Uruguayan and Filipino roots, Albert took on his first endeavor as an entrepreneur during a snowy middle school winter season. He and his brother had already been making money for a few years by shoveling snow out of their neighbors’ driveways and sidewalks. Thinking of a way to increase their profits and aware that they could only work on a few houses per day before the sun came down, Albert proposed they pool their money to buy a snow blower. He knew they could work faster and that working with a snow blower would add credibility to their endeavor and make them look more professional, ensuring they could gain more clients. Though it took some convincing, his brother got on board with his idea. That winter, they almost quadrupled their previous seasons’ average profits. His leadership and his entrepreneurial spirit have guided him since. For the last seven years, Albert has been captain of his robotics team. He has guided his team from its humble beginnings, before they competed at all, onto representing the US in international competitions. His team invented and owns the patent to an ecosystem for methane conversion and emissions reductions. They propose their invention as a low-cost solution to aid with the global problem of atmospheric methane accumulation. Albert’s latest project is a bitcoin-like cryptocurrency, which he is currently in the process of patenting. He plans to have his cryptocurrency used by students everywhere to make purchases on school grounds and intends on donating a percentage of each exchange transaction from crypto to fiat to the endowment of each student’s respective school. A leader among his peers, Albert enjoys helping those around him succeed and often seeks opportunities to mentor other robotics teams as they prepare to compete, even if they are his own team’s contenders. “By reaching out to give a helping hand, we all win at the end,” says Albert. He plans on studying Business, Technology and Entrepreneurship and will attend Indiana University Bloomington, New York University, or the University of Maryland.
Eric Robles  
Major: Entrepreneurship  
Heritage: Salvadoran

“For as long as I can remember, I have enjoyed learning about immigrants that came to the United States and succeeded in business,” says Eric, a first-generation American of Salvadoran descent. The idea of starting small and taking risks to grow a successful business from scratch inspires him. Eric’s favorite book is The Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie. Learning about the hardships Carnegie while growing up and how he overcame obstacles in order to help his family and his community grow motivated Eric. “Carnegie was able to show his love and admiration for his community by employing his financial resources to provide jobs for thousands of Americans and creating community buildings for everyone to use,” he tells us. His goal is to one day do for his own family and community the equivalent of what Carnegie did generations ago. He is eager to learn what it takes to become an entrepreneur and open up an innovative business. Eric is a model student. He maintains a 3.95 GPA and has challenged himself throughout his high school career by enrolling in demanding AP courses and getting involved in a number of extracurricular activities. One of his missions is to always seek new opportunities to get involved and help his community. For the last couple of years, he has been volunteering at a local food bank. He is a devoted and responsible son and helps support his family financially by working up to 30 hours at a restaurant every week. When new regulations were set at the beginning of the pandemic and his job faced the possibility of closing down, Eric played an important role in coming up with solutions and a plan of action to ensure they remained open and that they saved as many jobs as they could. Eric plans on pursuing an Entrepreneurship degree. He will be attending the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University, or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
Vanessa Baquerizo
Major: Business Management
Heritage: Ecuadorian

The greatest achievement for an entrepreneur, says Vanessa Baquerizo, is to achieve something bigger than oneself, to have the chance to do something to make the world a better place. This is her own goal: to connect with people around the world and provide creative and innovate solutions to humanity’s greatest problems. Vanessa has already participated in countless community service projects. She has raised money for the project "Silla Roja" to help underprivileged children gain access to quality education; she has visited and volunteered at schools in poorer neighborhoods in Ecuador; and more recently, she organized a GoFundMe which raised $3080 for Romina, a young girl who needed a liver transplant. Her latest project was MUNiacs, an organization that aimed to provide Model UN delegates from around the world with free online training. It was here that Vanessa faced her most significant challenges and simultaneously learned some of the most important lessons. Leading MUNiacs, says Vanessa, taught her the importance of perseverance no matter how many difficulties one may face. In addition, it helped her realize the importance of teamwork and that the best quality of a leader was to know when to ask for help. These qualities are what have led to Vanessa achieving an outstanding GPA of 4.00 and being recognized as a National Hispanic Scholar and CORPEDUCAR Model UN Best Delegate. Beyond that, she has also received the highest honor a student at Delta School can obtain: The San Josemaria award for her outstanding character reflecting the main values of the school: joyfulness, creativity, courage, freedom, caring and service. Vanessa always demonstrates a positive attitude. Although sometimes assumed to seem shy and introvertive, she is widely regarded as an outstanding, secure, and reliable young women who is on a clear path to achieving her goals in the future. Those goals also include her pursuing a degree in Business Management at Notre Dame University, Rice University, or the University of Texas at Austin.
Isabella Jiménez
Major: Business
Heritage: Mexican

As a Mayor’s Fitness Council ambassador, Isabella Jiménez was motivated to create something that would not only teach the importance of nutrition but would also be fun and stimulating for kids. In response, she developed the app MY FUN FOOD, which exposed her to and taught her invaluable lessons about the world of business. What has been most rewarding through this process, she says, are the relationships she was able to build with her colleagues and the wider community, each of whom contributed to the app’s development and success. Just as an app’s value cannot be associated with a single person or component but is instead always communal, so too she has learned that a leader’s best qualities are linked to their ability for patience and empathy. Always motivated to help others, Isabella has volunteered in her community with several agencies, serving in a diverse number of areas such as animal services, healthcare, and hunger and poverty alleviation. She says that what inspires her most to give back is feeling a sense of pride and purpose within her community. When developing her app, for example, she faced several significant challenges: where to start, how to develop, how to distribute. She was young and unaware of the necessary processes behind app building, but the community provided her with an immense amount of support, offering feedback on how her app could be beneficial for them, as well as sharing healthy family recipes that would be included in it. Additionally, an important part of her motivation for building the app came from learning the health statistics within the Latino community. Her hope is that by sharing her story with younger kids, it will not only motivate them to eat healthier but also to encourage and empower a generation to pursue their ideas and realize their dreams. Her advice is unwavering: stick to your vision, and don’t be afraid of asking your community for input and support. And she takes the same advice herself. Isabella plans to continue on her professional and academic journey by studying Business at Southern Methodist University, the University of Texas, or Stanford University.
Itzel De León
Major: Business Management or Business Administration
Heritage: Mexican

Itzel De León’s passion for entrepreneurship fully blossomed during her Human Resources internship with the City of San Antonio. There she was given the opportunity to manage and organize an event where employees could improve upon their current resumes and better their future careers with coaching and mock interviews. It was a resounding success! Itzel managed to assist over 50 people in improving their career materials and becoming better prepared for their futures. But it is business management where Itzel’s true passion lies. Known for her kindness, compassion, and integrity, she has a natural aptitude for taking responsibility and thriving under pressure. As a freshman Itzel wanted to learn about the different organizations available on campus that she could involve herself in, and she approached each new challenge with grace, learning more about herself in the process. She loves the opportunity to collaborate with others in order to achieve a common goal and aims to devote her life to the well-being of people, as she feels most fulfilled being the person people turn to when needing guidance, comfort, or help. A born leader, Itzel has the perfect qualities to realize her dreams. On her journey in Business Management, Itzel has actively participated in Future Business Leaders of America and served as the vice president for the organization. As a member and Vice President, she has participated in numerous competitions that have further advanced her skills in communication. She has also received several awards and commendations along the way, including ranking first in business communications competitions and being granted the EnCORE Award for Human Resources. Her volunteer work has also taught her the importance of planning and perseverance, as well as honing her business skills. Coordinating community events is one of her biggest passions and it has given her a strong base from which to pursue a successful career in business management. Itzel’s next steps – and her future success – are clear: pursue a degree in Business Management or Business Administration at the University of Southern California (USC), the University of Texas at Austin, or the University of Pennsylvania.
Maria Taylor  
Major: Psychology and Business/Entrepreneurship  
Heritage: Honduran

At only sixteen years-old, Maria Taylor had already started her own business: a clothing and accessories boutique with the sole purpose of empowering women. Though daunted at first, the decision is the best she has ever made, and has allowed her to gain confidence and improve her financial literacy. To further illustrate her capacity and commitment to business, she has also participated in internships expanding her experience and knowledge on business management and marketing. Her internships included working alongside school board employees at the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and Grants Administration of her school district, as well as the Kingdom K.E.Y.S. mentoring program where she networked with young entrepreneurs. She even started selling snacks to her peers at school as a way of finding an additional source of income. As is the case for many entrepreneurs, giving back is important to Maria, and community service is something that she holds dear to her heart. She completed a Life Skills Training, in which she gained problem solving skills and could also educate others on what healthy relationships look like. She also joined the nonprofit organization Sister Society, later becoming the vice president, where she was able to mentor younger girls and advocate for those in need. Maria feels passionate about empowering women and girls, and this is clear in so much of her extracurricular activity. In addition to mentoring, she has also been involved with Women of Tomorrow, Project IMPACT and Peer Forward. Through these experiences, she learned to pin-point problems in the community and find ways of helping out – skills that serve her well as a future entrepreneur. Maria is a firm believer that education is power. “Education breeds confidence. Confidence breeds hope. Hope breeds peace” said by Chinese philosopher Confucius says it all, and Maria is the perfect embodiment of that. Academically she excels, with a GPA of 3.80 and various AP courses ranging from Psychology to Biology to English Language and Composition. She plans to continue her educational journey and study Psychology and Business/Entrepreneurship at New York University, Syracuse University, or Stanford University.
Bryan Otero-Garcia
Major: Aerospace Engineering or Physics with a minor Business
Heritage: Mexican

Bryan Otero-Garcia has witnessed the many challenges that Hispanics have had to endure, and while some people may approach this knowledge with pessimism, he sees an opportunity to look for solutions. Because of this understanding, Bryan felt called to pursue 3DE by Junior Achievement, a program whose main goal is to guide young people into the entrepreneurial and business mindset. Through this program, he was able to develop his own business mindset and work with companies like NCR, Arby’s and Delta. However, the most impactful experience was when he had the chance to work with a small business called Wander North Georgia, where he was able to learn the most effective way of giving back. Suddenly, he understood how a business could practically help Hispanic families in need. Bryan’s commitment, dedication, and drive are reflected in so much of what he does. When his family suffered a difficult time last year, he showed resilience and adaptability, working 40 hours a week to help support his family, and demonstrating exceptional leadership capabilities. His willingness to give back is also clearly reflected in the time that he has spent volunteering to clean up his local church, instilling in him the value of his heritage and how one of its most prominent pillars is that of hard work. Bryan’s generosity and leadership are also evident in his position as a role model for his younger cousins and the Hispanic community at large. He wants to show them and others that he has the capacity to achieve the same heights as those from more resourced circumstances and that hard work, diligence and a commitment to one’s family and heritage pays off. To be fair, Bryan already shows this in his exceptional academic record, his wide range of course offerings, and his diverse extracurricular background. He plans to continue on his journey by pursuing a degree in Aerospace Engineering or Physics with a minor in Business at Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia State, or Emory University.
Stephanie Matos  
Major: Marketing  
Heritage: Cuban

Some experiences shape us as individuals and change the trajectory of our lives. For Stephanie Matos, that experience came in the form of her first Speech and Debate class, where as a young, impressionable student, she stood in front of her class terrified but surging with adrenaline. Speech and Debate gave Stephanie the confidence and rush that she was looking for, and soon after, she joined the Future Business Leaders of America, where she became an officer, competed, and placed at a national level. This gave her invaluable business and leadership skills, and with her exceptional academic talent, she has gained valuable insights into the world of business. In fact, despite still being in high school, Stephanie already as an Associate’s Degree in Business Administration, an admirable feat for someone her age. The foundation she has developed through this experience helped her learn about the core of Business and Entrepreneurship, and she hopes to continue learning and growing throughout her academic and professional career. Stephanie is also a firm believer that everyone should have access to the same resources regardless of socioeconomic status. In her free time, she has been involved in fundraising for March of Dimes, a leading committee for Breast Cancer Organization, and collecting canned goods for Feeding South Florida. She feels her most meaningful engagement was helping to organize the Full STEAM Ahead project. This was a school wide initiative that promoted lifelong learning in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics. As a female Hispanic minority, she recognized that her counterparts were being left behind and this inspired her to help bridge the gap. Stephanie’s leadership skills are also enviable. As Creative Director for a fundraising committee, she proved a male peer wrong when he doubted her abilities to plan and execute a fundraising event, demonstrating her resilience and tenacity even in the face of doubt. Success is certain for Stephanie, and she plans to continue on her bright path by studying marketing at Florida International University, University of Tampa, or University of Miami.
**Raul López Torres**  
Major: Industrial Design or Graphic Design  
Heritage: Mexican

Through graphic and industrial design, Raul has found a way to merge his computer savvy and his interest in the arts. Art has permeated throughout his academic career. He has completed art course after art course, including Honors courses in fine arts and dual-enrollment classes in graphic design. These have provided him with a unique perspective on the field and have allowed him to develop a personal style. Besides the art assignments he is given in class, Raul always makes time to work on projects of his own, submitting designs and sketches to online forums and requesting feedback to improve his work and technical skills. In the summer of 2019, Raul opened up his own design business, Lopz_Arts, through which he offers high-quality services as a freelance illustrator, fulfilling a wide variety of client requests and giving detailed artistic form to his client’s ideas for robots, gadgets, logos, and others. “I feel very fortunate to have discovered how my skills can translate into a rewarding career,” says Raul. He will continue expanding his knowledge base and fine-tuning his skills by pursuing a degree in Industrial or Graphic Design at North Carolina State University, Appalachian State University, or the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.
Connor Avila  
Major: Pre-Entrepreneurship with a minor in Communication  
Heritage: Mexican

On a good weekend, Connor is at work. His office is a driveway. His job? Cleaning and detailing cars. This past summer, he launched Precision Details, his own car detailing service. Running a business has taught him the inner workings of managing a successful operation. While his business is doing well and growing, and he has already learned plenty, Connor recognizes his limitations: “I found out very quickly I did not know how to grow [my business] from a small one-man operation,” he says. In order to grow his venture and start the many others he has in mind, Connor wants to pursue a career in business. Aside from contributing to his community through the work he does in his business, Connor also gives back by volunteering and donating his time to help raise money for a myriad of causes. Most notably, he played an important role in helping his school’s student council raise over $360,000 to help fund charities in his town. He will be attending the University of Southern Florida, Florida Atlantic University, or the University of Central Florida, where he will study Pre-Entrepreneurship and may minor in Communication.
Of Guatemalan heritage, Tyler is certified as an advanced open water rescue and SCUBA diver. He serves as a volunteer SCUBA diver and touch pool interpreter at the North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island. "The aquarium's purpose is to improve people's knowledge of biodiversity and conservation issues. It provides educational programs encouraging people to engage in more sustainable lifestyles," explains Tyler. He makes a difference by supporting the aquarium's mission and teaching and inspiring others about the oceans and the importance of protecting and redeveloping them. Tyler's main goals for the future are to become a leader in his community and a successful entrepreneur and to open up his own aquarium and dive business. To help with the latter, he is currently working to earn certification as a Master Diver. To develop leadership and business skills, he has participated in several activities and programs, including completing the Shelton Leadership Challenge Camp at North Carolina State University and volunteering as a counselor in training at the East Carolina University Coastal Studies Institute Camps. Tyler has challenged himself throughout his high school career by enrolling in his school's most rigorous courses. He is a quick thinker who often is the leader in class discussions and participation. His teachers describe him as a conscientious, persistent, and motivated student, eager to learn and always striving for excellence. He will attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he will major in Business and Marine Biology.
Elena Pauker
Major: Business and Entrepreneurship
Heritage: Colombian

Elena Pauker has always been interested in entrepreneurship. For the past six years, she has run an eBay vintage car slot store with inventory from her grandfather’s old store, handling marketing, sales and operations. She plans to expand her entrepreneurial ideas, incorporating her Latina heritage and exploring opportunities with green coffee, sourced from Latin America, which has no flavor, and more caffeine than regular coffee. Her theory is that for all those who aren’t fans of the taste of coffee, a product like this could deliver the same energy-boosting effects added to, say, smoothies. Ideas are not something in short supply when it comes to Elena, and to supplement that, she has taken courses and participated in programs to further hone her entrepreneurial skills and spirit. During the summer, she assisted Steelike, a start-up mixing ultra-high-performance concrete, with their market expansion strategy. She has also enrolled in high school courses such as Honors Accounting, AP Economics, Business Law, and Marketing to build a strong foundation for her understanding of business success and dynamics. Elena also believes in giving back, and as an avid gymnast, she has volunteered with the Illinois Special Olympics gymnastics organization for several years. She is also a founding member and vice-president of the North Suburban Legal Aid Clinic (NSLAC) Student Regional Board, where she raises awareness within her local community about the clinic’s pro-bono legal services for people struggling to receive fair treatment from their landlords. Putting her bilingualism to good use, she also offers Spanish translation services to assist non-English speakers in applying for affordable housing and understanding their leases. On top of all of that, Elena excels academically, with a GPA of 3.97. She plans to study Business and Entrepreneurship at University of Pennsylvania, University of Michigan, or Brown University.
Lidia Orta
Major: Business and Environmental Studies
Heritage: Cuban

Lidia Orta wanted to bring some positivity into the world when the pandemic started, so she put her entrepreneurial skills to great use, launching her own shop on Etsy, where she sold her art in the form of greeting cards and stickers. Building a business is no small feat, and Lidia tackled every aspect: designing her own products, stocking inventory, and working out the specifics of a business plan. Entrepreneurship is risky business, but that’s one of the things she enjoys most – risk-taking and experimenting with different tactics to build her brand and increase her exposure. Eventually, Lidia’s cards were best-sellers and became one of Etsy’s top ten search results for “Thank You” cards, an impressive accomplishment for someone so young. Lidia saw her cards as more than a business strategy – they were a creative solution for increasing desperate times. A way to spread happiness amid a global pandemic. And that she did. If that’s any indication of Lidia’s future ambition, she is well on her way to success. Lidia’s talents extend beyond the creative, she is also an excellent athlete. Since early childhood she has played baseball in an all-boys baseball league and used her skills to coach a development camp in baseball for girls around her state, wanting to increase gender equality in the sport. As the elected leader of her school’s Environmental Club, she learned that leadership requires adaptability and an open mind, two things she prides herself on. With a GPA of 3.85, Lidia is an academically strong student as well, and maintains a range of AP and upper-level courses in various subjects. She plans to study business and environmental science at Northwestern University, Claremont McKenna College, or Santa Clara University.
Carolina Remond
Major: Supply Chain Management
Heritage: Cuban

Since Carolina Remond was young, she has always toyed with the idea of starting her own business. Her ideas included, among others, a guacamole food truck – yum! – and a dog walking business. Already, she has had a taste of the entrepreneurial and business world, having worked various jobs since she was 14. In fact, she is currently employed at a restaurant that has been running for almost 50 years. A valued member of their staff and team, she often spends her days talking to the owner and learning as much as she can about his success as a business owner. Building a brand through leadership and loyalty is important and something Carolina has learned thanks to her experiences outside the classroom. However, she is equally as committed to academics, as well. Through her APPSCO business class, Carolina has learned the building blocks of a strong business, crafting business plans and recognizing the strategies for success. Business leaders tend to be community leaders, as well, and Carolina believes that communities are strongest when people work together to achieve a common goal. A perfect example of her commitment to others is her role as a staff member at the Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership Illinois seminar, where she was tasked with coming up with an engaging, interactive seminar for participants. With her team, they were able to organize a transformational experience for participants, involving celebrity speakers and Zoom dance parties. Carolina is proud of her Cuban heritage and believes that being a Latina is about confidently carrying her culture wherever she goes. She hopes to unite her passions for business and Hispanic culture by joining the Hispanic Women Business Association and studying Supply Chain Management at the University of Tennessee, Michigan State University, or University of Arkansas.
Belen took her first dive into entrepreneurship last year when she began furthering her interest in photography and posting her work online. She expanded her reach by uploading her pictures to social media, where her profile became her online photography portfolio. As more people in her community began to follow her, view her work, and recognize her talent, they began to reach out to her to book photography sessions, including many of her classmates who chose Belen to take their senior portraits. Having gained experience through her photography business and learning about how she could use social media to market and grow a venture, she launched a new project, BellesClay, an eco-friendly jewelry shop through which she sells personally handcrafted clay earrings. Aside from running two successful small businesses, Belen takes on an active role in her school and her community. She is the founder and President of her school’s Earth Friendly Club, which she established to raise awareness of the environmental impact of our day-to-day choices. Belen has led fundraising efforts for her local animal shelter and asked her school to help by donating pet toys, blankets, food, and other necessities so that the animals at the shelter could have a better environment. She also worked to increase adoption rates to reduce the chances of overcrowding by helping to lower the population of animals at the shelter. Belen has devoted approximately 300 hours of community service throughout her high school career. It is evident she recognizes the importance of being of service and how she can directly influence positive impact in her community, one hour at a time. She will continue growing her businesses and carry on with her community work while attending Sacramento State University, California Polytechnic State University, or the University of California, Riverside. She plans to study Business Administration.
Julitza Álvarez
Major: Business Administration with a minor in Economics
Heritage: Mexican

“Entrepreneurship is like taking a leap of faith,” says Brawley, California resident Julitza. After enrolling in a marketing class last summer, she took her own leap of faith, merging her creativity, sewing skills, passion for sustainable fabrics, and her vision into the creation of a small fashion business. This endeavor has inspired Julitza to pursue a business career. It has connected her with like-minded entrepreneurs and broadened her understanding of how small businesses can influence their communities and promote positive social change. She aims to use her business platform to raise awareness and initiate a change towards more sustainable fashion. Julitza enjoys being able to combine her interests and hobbies with opportunities to give back to her community. She dedicates a large portion of her time to running and training for meets as a member of her school’s Cross Country team and gets excited whenever she has the chance to participate in races that help bring awareness and raise funds for important causes. She ensures that she makes the time to be active in her community and has worked to inspire children in her town to also become involved by teaching them the importance of community service through the Brawley Boys and Girls Club. Committed to academic excellence, Julitza has a 4.0 cumulative GPA and stands at the top of her class, ranked 1st out of 402 students. She will attend the University of California, Berkeley, the University of California, Los Angeles, or the University of California, Riverside, where she plans to major in Business Administration and minor in Economics.
Nicholas Melillo
Major: Finance with a minor in Entrepreneurship
Heritage: Mexican

In addition to attending his traditional high school, Nicholas has been attending the Center for Advanced Research and Technology (CART) since his junior year to expand his knowledge of business and finance. Through classes at CART, like Digital Marketing and Entrepreneurship and Business and Finance, he has developed business skills through hands-on learning and has worked on creating business plans, financial statements, and personal financial budgets, among other projects. In 11th grade, he co-founded a small gig business, researching undervalued consumer goods, purchasing, and reselling them at higher values. His senior year, wanting to educate his peers on financial topics, he founded his school’s Finance Club. Nicholas’ financial literacy efforts go beyond school grounds. In 2018, to help his community grow, he started Financial Instruction for Student Triumph (FIST), a local nonprofit focused on educating underprivileged youth about finance. FIST has reached hundreds of children in his community and has expanded its efforts to also serve other underserved populations in his town by launching a campaign to educate the homeless on financial literacy. Nicholas serves as FIST’s President and is in charge of overseeing the daily operations and ensuring the organization makes strides towards achieving its mission. This remarkable Latino leader will attend Florida Gulf Coast University, California State University, Fresno, or Clovis Community College. He wants to major in Finance and minor in Entrepreneurship.
Sadalys Peña
Major: Business Administration and minor in Real Estate
Heritage: Dominican

Sadalys Peña first discovered her passion for business during an internship at a law firm, where she participated in mock contract negotiations between her client, a popular artist, and a record company. Though she took on opposing counsel excellently and agreed on a decision with her client, the experience taught her two things: first, that law was not for her, and second, that business definitely was. At the time, her high school did not offer any business electives, but what Sadalys learned didn’t come from a book – it came from the front desk at her mother’s small shop. She learned by observation, watching how her mother took inventory, managed the ladies with whom she worked, and networked with beauty product sellers. One could even say, she inherited her business potential from her mother. In her senior year, her high school offered a Business, Finance, and Marketing course, and Sadalys found herself infatuated by business and marketing. A career in entrepreneurship is no easy feat and requires dedication, leadership, and a hefty dose of fearlessness – all qualities Sadalys has. In addition to her business experience, she has shown her intelligence and leadership both inside and outside the classroom. Sadalys serves as her school’s Student Body President, a seat she secured with relative ease, as her work tends to speak for itself. She is also deeply committed to giving back and is a member of her neighborhood’s block association, the only teenager involved. Sadalys is a proud Dominican and believes, in her words, that “there will be no progress if we are not proud of sharing out culture with others. America is a melting pot, and it is our responsibility to bring the seasoning to the pot.” Already a role model, her academic record speaks for itself. With a GPA of 3.8, a slew of AP classes to her name, and various awards and recognitions, she is well on her way to success. The next step? A degree in Business Administration with a minor in Real Estate at University of Southern California, New York University, or Washington University in St. Louis.
Miranda Zanoni
Major: Economics-Political Science
Heritage: Colombian

Miranda Zanoni was not the average eighth grader. While other girls her age may have been watching whatever was popular on television, Miranda was glued to the screen watching Shark Tank. Entrepreneurship has been at the forefront of her thoughts ever since, and the summer before her junior year, she participated in the Bossgirls Bootcamp, a joint program with the City University of New York and Standard Chartered Bank. With guidance from experts, she immersed herself in the world of business and entrepreneurship, learning about powerful women who had built their businesses from the ground up. As part of the program, Miranda and her team had to design a new business ideas. Their solution? Globaloka, a product that connected consumers to authentic cultural restaurants and experiences in their own city. According to Miranda, it was the diversity of her group and the city of New York that inspired the idea, and well-inspired it was, as they ultimately won the final pitch competition. Apart from her innovation, Miranda is also dedicated to giving back. For over a year, she has tutored seventh and eighth grade students in her school’s Local Outreach Tutoring program, which prepares students for the Specialized High School Admissions Test. Miranda feels a special connection to the students she tutors because she was once one of them. A well-rounded individual, Miranda is also a member of her school’s track team and thanks to her leadership skills became an unofficial team captain with a handful of other people. According to her teacher, Miranda’s collaborative ability, her natural intelligence, and her diligence and commitment to her work are some of many traits that set her apart from her peers. This is clearly exemplified by her rigorous academic schedule and her perfect 4.00 GPA. In short, Miranda is a caring, conscientious young woman with bountiful energy and a deep desire to succeed. Her next step is a degree in Economics-Political Science from Columbia University, and after that? Well, we’ll just have to wait and see.
**Eduardo Garcia-Escobar**  
Major: International Business, Mathematics, or Linguistics  
Heritage: Salvadorian

Ever-willing to stand firm behind his decisions and what he knows to be right, and to take calculated risks, Eduardo Garcia-Escobar has the natural personality of a successful entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship can be a risky business that requires gumption, self-assurance, and dedication. Eduardo has all that, and he understands the hard work needed to see a business idea through. Incredibly gifted academically, with a GPA of 4.00, and referred to as one of the fastest learners out there, his capacity for problem-solving is one of the features that will ensure his success on his path to becoming an entrepreneur. Giving back is an important part of Eduardo’s life, as well. He has tutored other students to help them with their schoolwork and is actively involved in his local church. Whether he’s helping out with hosting spiritual retreats, connecting with students on a personal level, or helping plan a culture fair at his high school, he is content and confident in new situations. Eduardo has known adversity, and he has responded by becoming stronger and developing his own inclusive, progressive voice that allows him to speak on behalf of his own Latinx community. He passionately advocates for unity and diversity for the Latinx community, and to improve the world around him. Apart from his extracurricular achievements, Eduardo is a National Commended Student, a National Hispanic Recognition Scholar, and an AP Scholar with Distinction, whose AP courses cover everything from English Language and Composition, Spanish Language and Composition, World History, Psychology and Statistics. And all of this with a straight-A academic record. Eduardo is set to continue on his remarkable journey by studying International Business, Mathematics, or Linguistics at Stanford University, University of California Berkley, or University of Southern California.
Jasmine Ruales  
Major: Entrepreneur; Pediatric  
Heritage: Ecuadorian

Jasmine Ruales is many things: an impressive student, a leader and innovator, and a proud Latina. As president of Latinos in Action (LIA), a service-based organization with the goal of empowering Latino youth to lead and strengthen their communities, she has honed her leadership and communication skills, offering students confidence-building and mentorship to help them excel. Through LIA, she also acquired real-life relevant experience collaborating with school administration in creating a better environment for herself and her peers at her high school, experiences that will serve her well in her future academic and professional goals. Leadership is a necessary component for all entrepreneurs, and one that Jasmine embodies. She believes that being open to change, allows a leader to make the necessary changes in order for everyone to thrive. It is this understanding of that sets her up to make a big, positive impact in the entrepreneurial world. Jasmine is academically very strong, as seen in her GPA of 3.80, and has taken part in a variety of AP courses, from Financial Literacy and Statistics to English and Biotechnology. Combined with her growing leadership skills, this diversity of knowledge makes for the perfect ingredients to become a game-changing entrepreneur, and one whose compassion and empathy for others is at the forefront. In terms of community service, she has also assisted young students with language barriers, using her experience as a Latina and bilingual. Jasmine was able to show students that their language barrier could not prevent them from succeeding, and it cemented her conviction to keep serving others in her life. She plans to further study to be an entrepreneur at the University of Utah, Southern Utah University, or the University of California Los Angeles.
Vianca Ruíz  
Major: International Business  
Heritage: Mexican

Vianca is looking forward to one day running her own real estate firm. She has wanted to run a business ever since she was little and watched the confidence and dedication with which her grandparents ran their own business. Vianca has been preparing for her future as an entrepreneur by taking business classes and getting involved with business organizations at her school. Her classes have given her a peek into what her future career may entail through projects based on mock scenarios and simulations, like creating products for mock QVC shows, conducting mock pitch presentations, and learning about investing with stock market simulations. Vianca is a leader in her school’s DECA club. She has participated at DECA competitions, taking 1st place twice at the district level for projects on Human Resources and Buying and Merchandising. Her Buying and Merchandising project also took her to 1st place victory at the state level competition. Vianca is active in her community through her volunteering work as a member of the National Honor Society. She has completed over 300 hours of service during her high school career, most faithfully dedicating her time to work with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Arizona, a nonprofit that provides food and resources to those most in need. Vianca is committed to her academic success. She will attend the University of Southern California, the University of Texas at Austin, or Arizona State University, where she will work towards a degree in International Business.
Brooke Kirk  
Major: Undecided, considering Finance, Economy and Public Policy  
Heritage: Mexican

Brooke grew up learning about business topics like supply chain management and price disparity between name-brand and generic products from her dad, who worked as the director of sales for a non-profit organization. Fascinated by her dad’s job, she would soak up all the information he shared. Now, she spends her weekends debating with him about stock market predictions, potential business ventures, and business plans they write together for fun. Brooke serves as the Director of Finance for her state-wide GirlUp coalition, a United Nations non-profit that helps women around the world get access to education, health, and safety. She has used her skills to raise hundreds of dollars to go towards this effort. Currently, she is in the process of starting a non-profit focused on financial literacy and entrepreneurship, which will serve everyone regardless of age, background, or socioeconomic status. Brooke is outgoing, energetic, proactive, and is a leader in all her endeavors. In her school community, she participates in many clubs, including Spanish, Environmental, and Student Life. She is also a Varsity Cheerleader, Varsity Golfer, and an award-winning dancer. She hopes to pursue a degree in business to continue making a difference and connecting. She will attend Stanford University, Arizona State University, or the University of Pennsylvania, where she is considering studying Finance, Economy, or Public Policy.
Clarence Ramírez
Major: Biology or Biomedical Engineering
Heritage: Filipino

Clarence has been captivated by the human body from the moment he stuck his four-year-old ears into a stethoscope and heard his heartbeat. “I live and breathe the health sciences,” proclaims this Bristow, Virginia resident of Filipino descent. Much of his passion for medicine was born out of seeing many of his family members battle cancer and other diseases. “These are constant threats to all of us, and my instinctive nature to bring about change and solutions to these bearing issues we face has set me upon my academic path towards one day becoming a physician,” says Clarence. He knows he can make a positive impact as a doctor and works daily to manifest this dream. During his freshman year, Clarence applied for the Biotechnology Program at his school while simultaneously taking Project Lead the Way’s Principles of Biomedical Science courses. His sophomore year, he became Vice President of his school’s Health Occupations Students of America club. Clarence began working as a Novant Health Volunteer at the Prince William Medical Center and was accepted into Virginia’s Summer Residential Governor’s School for Medicine and Health Sciences during his junior year. Upon graduation, Clarence finds fulfillment by giving back to his community. He has helped organize school fundraisers and provide care packages for the homeless as Class Representative in his school’s Student Council Association. Serving as Secretary of his school’s chapter of Humanity First for the last almost three years, he has organized drives to raise money for Hurricane Dorian victims and Humanity First’s Water for Life Initiative, which provides clean water to some of the world’s most impoverished communities. Clarence is all-around exceptional. He is ranked 2nd out of 570 students in his class and has amassed a lengthy collection of accomplishments, including becoming a State Finalist in the Samsung Solve for Tomorrow Challenge, placing 1st in the Clear Air Partners Science Competition, and being inducted into the Youth Conservation Leadership Institute. He will attend Harvard University, Yale University, or Stanford University and pursue a Biology or Biomedical Engineering degree.
Isabella Serrano
Major: Chemical Engineering with a minor in Spanish
Heritage: Puerto Rican

Well before Isabella knew what she wanted to study in college, she was certain of one thing, her love for all things STEM. Math and science came almost naturally to her, and she always excelled in her courses. Isabella found her passion in her Honors Chemistry course her freshman year. “It explained the unexplainable,” she recalls. Because of the course’s level of difficulty, it is uncommon to have 9th graders taking Honors Chemistry at her high school. But Isabella had no problems with the material in the course. In fact, she achieved the highest average out of all the students enrolled in the class in her school that year. During the summer of 2019, Isabella explored sustainable living options and learned about the environmental impact of plastic and other non-renewable resources while on a research trip to Germany and Switzerland. Inspired to make a change, she helped pass the plastic bag ban in Jersey City just a few weeks after arriving from her trip. Isabella signed up to take AP Environmental Science her junior year and continued learning about the negative impact we have on the environment. “I realized how detrimental global warming is. That’s when I knew I had to do something about it. With so many non-renewable resources being exploited as a form of convenience and a way to gain wealth, there has to be a way to save our planet and make alternatives,” says Isabella. Her goal is to become a chemical engineer in order to find a way for us to solve our plastic waste problem. Isabella wants to share her passion for science with others and volunteers at Latinas in STEM conventions to inspire younger Latinas to pursue careers in STEM. She also helped promote positive change in her community through her work as a member of the Jersey City Youth Counsel, where she advocated for restorative justice, rehabilitation, and juvenile justice reform. Last year, Isabella was selected as a New Jersey Governor’s STEM Scholar, an honor reserved for her state’s most promising and accomplished high school and college students. With a 4.0 GPA, this outstanding Boricua plans on majoring in Chemical Engineering and minoring in Spanish at Northeastern University, the University of Michigan, or Rutgers University–New Brunswick.
Amiel Katz  
Major: Public Health or Statistics  
Heritage: Salvadorian  

During his internship in a pediatric clinic, Amiel Katz was exposed to the shortcomings in healthcare provision. She realized there and then that she did not want to be a physician if it meant refusing anyone’s right to healthcare. This concern for health inequality motivated her to begin volunteering with Partners in Health (PIH), a medical nonprofit organization that provides quality care to those living in poverty. Since joining PIH, Amiel has been a standout leader, with her team excelling in advocating with Members of Congress for effective health programs, fundraising for health care in impoverished countries, and educating her peers and the broader community about health inequalities. It is this first-hand experience with the shortcomings of healthcare and her involvement with PIH that has fueled her desire to study global health and medicine. Driven by a deep sense of responsibility for others, Amiel has consistently strived to better understand the issues relating to health care through ardent participation in health policy, public health debates, community organizing, legislative advocacy, and political-economic approaches to inequality. Additionally, it is her strong connection to and care for people in the Latino community that motivates her. Healthcare, she believes, must be accessible to all. Without it, people will not be able to have meaningful upward socioeconomic mobility. For Amiel, it is all of our duties to make healthcare affordable to all. Wanting to become an important voice in the Latino community, Amiel is committed to both demanding change and achieving it and thus creating the path for others to live better lives. Amiel’s exceptional interpersonal and relational skills, courage, and empathetic drive to serve her community and those most in need make her a most remarkable young woman. She plans to continue on her journey by studying Public Health or Statistics at Columbia University, Harvard University, or Yale University.
Eleanor Schoenbrun
Major: Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology
Heritage: Mexican

At eight years-old, Eleanor knew what she wanted to do with her life. She would spend it helping others. Ever since, she has thrown herself into the service of others, founding two nationally recognized service projects – Pennies FUR Pets and Kans for Kids – and establishing a sustainable food pantry. After being exposed to STEM through various programs and self-research, she found her way into medicine, and sees it as a rewarding career that she plans to see to fruition. Eleanor believes that the best way for her to make a difference in people’s lives is by caring for them, and she hopes to pursue a career in dermatology. To prepare, she has taken a range of AP classes, including AP Psychology, and is a member of the Health Occupation Students Association (HOSA). She has also read 20 medical novels that discuss theories, historical events, or people impacted in the medical field. In the not-so-distant future, she’ll be one of the people named in books just like the ones that inspired her. Eleanor’s interests span a wide range of activities, but community service is especially important. Apart from founding the two service projects, she is also a Make A Difference Day Winner, National Parent Teacher Association Outstanding Youth Advocate, Points of Light National Youth Advisory Council Member, and this year’s Student Council President and National Honor Society officer. According to Eleanor, giving back is like a phantom limb – though it may not be observable, it is an integral part of her. Eleanor is also staunchly proud of her Latina heritage and says that as Americans, we need to promote the idea that being American does not have a skin color, sexuality, gender, or socioeconomic prerequisite to be successful. Hard work pays off for Eleanor. In fact, her teachers claim that she is one of the best students to ever come through the halls of Franklin High School. Despite a brutal schedule, rigorous coursework, and a range of extracurricular activities, she maintains a cheerful outlook, optimistic demeanor, and intense diligence. Her future academic trajectory is steep, but no challenge is too large for someone of Eleanor’s determination. She plans to study Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology at Yale University.
Izumi Vázquez
Major: Human Biology or Health and Societies with a minor in Spanish or History
Heritage: Mexican

Izumi Vázquez’s interest in the field of medicine is deeply personal. After witnessing her sister trudge through health issues, she witnessed a duality within healthcare: the quality of care that medical professionals were capable of doling out, as well as the inaccessibility to care that so many people face. This has inspired her to pursue a career in medicine so that one day she may be able to bring the same quality of care her sister received to others, especially those in marginalized groups within her and other communities. To prepare for the rigors of a career in medicine, Izumi trained to champion the Medical Assisting category at HOSA internationals and shadowed physicians at two hospitals during clinical rotations in her junior year. Captivated by the way healthcare workers bridged medicine and humanity, she realized that while technical knowledge is essential, it is the ability to connect that makes an exceptional physician. And an exceptional physician, she is bound to make. In addition to her hands-on training, which also included earning her Basic Life Support Certification, completing 380 hours of hospital volunteer work, and enrolling in a course to become a Certified Clinical Medical Assistant, she is also an exceptional student and maintains a 3.95 GPA amid punishing coursework. Other people are one of Izumi’s primary motivations for joining the healthcare field, and her commitment to them can also be seen in her activity within the community. At nearby Rudder Middle School, she mentors younger students in STEM, and she works with the Hard Hats for Little Heads bicycle helmet giveaway program, as well as designing social media posts for Joey’s Wings, a nonprofit organization. Raising awareness is a large part of medical advocacy, and Izumi is no stranger to it. This past year, she and her sister hand-folded a 2,000-origami paper crane installation for University Hospital in honor of the approximate number of children and adolescents who pass away from cancer annually. Izumi’s future is bright. Teachers call her a model student with countless strengths, including unending generosity. She plans to study Human Biology or Health and Societies with a minor in Spanish or History at Rice University, Johns Hopkins University, or Cornell University.
Everest Maya-Tudor
Major: Health and Human Biology
Heritage: Cuban

Everest Maya-Tudor embodies all the qualities necessary for someone in health research. She is intelligent, committed, and curious, always keen for the next problem she can solve. After playing “disease detective” for a day at the History Miami Museum and investigating the 19th century Soho cholera outbreak, she was hooked. Determined to explore further, she interned at a cancer research lab, where she was responsible for maintaining various cell cultures, analysis, and assisting in data interpretation. The only high school student as an intern, her peers were Masters and PhD students, and according to her supervisor, she held her own easily and distinguished herself for her curiosity, leadership, and intelligence. Everest is currently working on a research project in collaboration with the Florida Health Department to design an algae toxin-detecting device. To better understand biostatistics, she took part in the University of Michigan’s MiRcore Computational Biology Research Camp, researching precision medicine and the role of genomics in disease. An incredible student, Everest also self-studied and passed the Biotechnician Assistant Credentialing Exam via the University of Florida, preparing her well for future employment in the biomedical and biotech industries. Everest is incredibly prepared for her career goals, and her future in academia looks bright. With a perfect 4.00 GPA and a slew of AP courses that range from English Language and Composition to Chemistry, her performance speaks for itself. But Everest’s interests go beyond the classroom as well. She is committed to giving back to others, and having seen a lack of diversity in many of her science classes, she launched a “STEM hour” at the homeless facility with which she has been volunteering since middle school. STEM Hour sees Everest lead kids in the community through the magic of scientific adventures, exploring optical illusions, rock-candy crystal formations, and conducting hands-on experiments. The opportunity lets Everest bring the joy of science to others, and with a new national grant from Riley’s Way Foundation’s Call for Kindness, she hopes to continue the journey of sharing the love of STEM subjects. Everest plans to continue her academic career by studying Health and Human Biology at Brown University.
Ana Jaramillo
Major: Biology with a minor in Environmental Studies
Heritage: Colombian

Ana Jaramillo’s dedication and commitment to health research stems from a personal experience she had when her father was diagnosed with skin cancer. The word “cancer” was a mystery to her in both her languages then, but her mother quickly described it – “when diseased cells divide uncontrollably, they can destroy those which are healthy. Think of them as the “bad guys’””. And since then, Ana has been intent on finding and eradicating those “bad guys” for herself. Ana’s fascination in cells hasn’t faded but rather grown more resolute and specialized. This past summer, she conducted a 6-month retroactive case study on the connection between environmental air pollution and COVID-19 cases, presenting her findings at two undergraduate state-wide symposiums, despite still being in high school. She is also incredibly dedicated to serving others, and participates as a mentor in Our Dream, a program helping students who have been left behind by an educational system that often overlooks the struggles of minority, low-income, and underserved youth. Ana is a well-rounded individual and embodies many different roles and personas in her life. To her mother, she’s the sous chef, always willing to chop vegetables for her famous hogao recipe. To her father, she is a passionate team-player who took on extra jobs throughout high school to help her family. To her brother, she’s just a little bit annoying in only the ways that siblings know how to be, who plays K-pop too loud, but who is always there: a shoulder to cry on, a guiding hand when times get tough. And to herself, Ana is a first-generation American, a leader who supports others in moments of difficulty, a daughter and sister, who loves her family endlessly. Her leadership shines through in the small moments when she is most needed, and Ana believes strongly in our responsibilities to one another, always willing to offer a hand, even if that means a heavier workload for herself. Ana’s commitment to her future is admirable, and she plans to study Biology with a minor in Environmental Studies at Pomona College, Yale University, or Harvard University.
Mariana Vásquez Gallardo
Major: Nursing
Heritage: Mexican

Born in Oaxaca, Mexico, Mariana is the proud daughter of two farm-workers. She has been volunteering at her local free clinic for the past three years. Wanting to help and be a voice for the underrepresented, she realized how important her work was once she learned that the clinic had no other Spanish-speaking volunteers when she first began to work there. So she taught herself everything, from medical terms, to how to fill prescriptions and run a pharmacy. She now serves as a Spanish interpreter and Pharmacy Technician at the clinic and advocates for patients, ensuring they receive the care they need. Mariana knows that people in the Latinx community deserve proper health care and treatment, regardless of their legal or socio-economic status, just like anyone else. In the future, she wants to open her own practice as a Nurse Practitioner or a doctor to cater to the needs of her community. Last year, she was selected to be on the list of LatinexEd’s “20 Under 20,” an honor reserved for the best and the brightest young Latino leaders in her state of North Carolina. Later this year, she will graduate with two associate degrees and an interpreter certificate in addition to her high school diploma. This dedicated Latina will study Nursing at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Wingate University, or Queens University of Charlotte.
Sydni Díaz
Major: Genetics and Genome Sciences
Heritage: Mexican

"I have always known I wanted to go into the medical field," says Sydni, who has been enrolled in her school's Health Science Pathway since her freshman year. Her involvement with this program has allowed her to explore an array of subjects and aspects involved in the medical field through courses like Foundations of Health Sciences, Human Body Structures and Functions, and Therapeutic Services. Last year, thanks to her outstanding achievements and performance in the courses offered through this Pathway, Sydni was selected by her school to serve as a medical intern at a local hospital. This would have given her the chance to work in a hospital setting, shadow healthcare professionals, and gain first-hand experience working with patients. However, due to COVID-19, her internship has been postponed for the time being. Hopeful the situation will improve soon, she is looking at the postponement as an opportunity to continue learning and perfecting her skills. Sydni serves on the executive board of her school's faith and service-based sorority, Delta Omega. With several awards for academic excellence, a full roster of AP courses, and a 3.96 GPA, she stands in the top 5 percent of her class. She plans on studying Genetics and Genome Sciences at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, the University of South Alabama, or Mississippi State University.
**Erica Pulido**  
Major: Nursing  
Heritage: Mexican

For some people, a calling in life comes early, and Erica Pulido’s path to nursing was exactly that. Though the days of carrying around her Little Tike’s doctor kit and “curing” her Abuelito Jesse after a triple bypass surgery might be over, her commitment to medicine and her future professional goals is unwavering. As part of Camp Cardiac, a summer camp held at Rush University Hospital in Chicago, she learned to suture a wound, take a patient’s medical history and vitals, and got CPR/AED-certified, all incredibly useful and pertinent skills for a future nurse. Erica’s commitment to medicine is also one of empathy, and she began volunteering in an Emergency Room. Though she’d had sneaking suspicions that this was the path for her, that’s when her calling became clear. Giving back to others is something that has shaped the very core of Erica’s identity. This is perhaps best encapsulated by the time she spent volunteering at the Timbers of Shorewood Christmas Posada Event with her Abuelita while she worked there. The experience furthered her empathetic skills and solidified her desire for a profession that contributed to the betterment of society. As Erica says, giving back to others is what makes our world go around, and she wants to be a part of that. The medical field requires diligence and a take-charge attitude, qualities Erica clearly exemplifies. With a perfect 4.00 and a host of AP courses ranging from Spanish to Biology, as well as various awards and recognitions, she clearly excels academically. She plans to further her academic and professional career by studying Nursing at University of Michigan Ann-Arbor, Loyola University Chicago, or Saint Louis University. With her attitude and commitment to others, any one of these programs will be lucky to have her.
Kayla Morán-Valle  
Major: Biology  
Heritage: Mexican

It’s not many people who can make a mentor’s job feel effortless, but that’s exactly what Kayla Morán-Valle’s mentor said of her. Never one to back down from a challenge, she has repeatedly pushed herself and hopes to one day become a pediatrician. In fact, Kayla has seemingly always been interested in healthcare and science, and her high school career has offered her various avenues to explore. For instance, during her sophomore year, she became a Clinical Laboratory Volunteer at Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center, gaining experience within the medical field. She has also taken science-focused classes, such as Accelerated Biology, Chemistry, Honors Anatomy, Physics and AP Biology to prepare herself for the pre-med academic path. On top of her academic prowess, she advocates for spreading awareness on the worldwide injustices committed against children through an Instagram project she created called “Recognizing Injustice,”, a clear example of her commitment to children and pediatric care. Kayla’s extracurricular activities are also admirable - she is the leader of a cultural club at her school called Furia Latina, which aims to spread Latin/Hispanic culture throughout the school and celebrate it. Community service is something which is very valuable to her, and this informs her desire to pursue a career in the medical field, as she wants to be able to help people – especially children – not only in her community, but around the world, who are victims of inadequate healthcare. With a GPA of 3.90, she is an excellent student academically, to go with AP courses ranging from Biology to History to English Language and Composition. She plans to study at Biology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Marquette University, or Saint Louis University.
Nolan Mejía  
Major: Biomedical Engineering with a minor in Business Administration  
Heritage: Colombian

One of Nolan’s guiding personal missions is to help others and improve their quality of life. Much of what he does is dedicated to fulfilling that mission. The summer of 2019, he interned at the Scripps Research Translational Institute, analyzing data from a clinical trial testing a portable blood pressure monitor. The following summer, he worked to evaluate data from a mobile app that provides users with a score that determines their genetic susceptibility to coronary artery disease and found that these risk scores influenced the app users to make more informed health decisions. Working with these medical innovations and seeing how cutting-edge technologies can positively impact people, which resonated with his mission, sparked his interest in healthcare and science.  

He is enrolled in his school’s four-year biomedical pathway. Through this program, he has learned about numerous diseases, scientific inventions, and laboratory techniques. His junior year, Nolan founded his school’s Latinos in STEM Club with the intent to inspire, educate, and motivate Latino youth to pursue careers in STEM. Through his club, he established a weekly after-school program at a local, predominantly Hispanic and low-income elementary school. At every meeting, members of his club teach foundational STEM concepts to children through engaging educational activities. Community service has played a crucial role in Nolan’s high school experience. Most remarkably, last year, Nolan launched Grocery Grab, a free grocery-shopping service, supported entirely by high school volunteers, that helps senior citizens and at-risk groups avoid unnecessary exposure to COVID-19. Nolan is an exemplary member of his community and an outstanding scholar. He maintains a 4.0 cumulative GPA, is a member of his school’s volleyball and swim teams and its National Honor Society chapter. By taking part in and creating various volunteering opportunities, Nolan has learned that entrepreneurship and high-impact philanthropy are intertwined: “both improve lives and help those in need,” he explains. His next major goal is to pioneer his own venture, one that creates medical technology and influences and transforms healthcare in the future. To do this, he plans on majoring in Biomedical Engineering and pursuing a minor in Business Administration. He will attend Stanford University, Duke University, or Vanderbilt University.
Leonardo Daniels
Major: Biological Sciences and Computer Science with a minor in French or Business
Heritage: Mexican

For the past three years, Leonardo has been involved with the Summer Math and Science Honors (SMASH) SMASH Academy, a yearly rigorous five-week summer academic program geared toward historically underrepresented students seeking to pursue STEM careers. Through SMASH, he has developed his critical thinking, leadership, and networking skills and learned to imagine, design, and build prototypes and inventions to give back to his community. This has fueled his mission: to close the American Healthcare's racial divide. Thanks to SMASH, Leonardo has also had the privilege of training at Stanford Hospital, learning about surgical techniques, learning with real cadavers, and becoming AED and CPR certified. Leonardo is a leader and pioneer at his high school. His sophomore year, he became the first Black and the first Latino Class President at his school. Later, he went on to become the first openly bisexual BIPOC student on his school's Executive Student Council. He wants to empower others to take pride in their identity, promote inclusivity, and advocate for marginalized voices. Looking for an internship that encapsulated his goals and his prospective career, Leonardo found Atlas Mental Health. Atlas is a wellness journaling app designed for students, by students, to improve their mental well-being. He now serves as an Atlas Ambassador and has been vital to getting his school's counseling department to promote the use of the app to his fellow schoolmates. First-generation, Afro-Latino Leonardo has faced many hardships throughout his high school career. Still, he has known how to turn obstacles into challenges for him to rise above. He maintains a 3.93 GPA, is a member of his school's volleyball and track and field teams, and serves as President of its French Club. He plans to attend the University of Southern California, Columbia University, or Stanford University, where he will major in Biological Sciences and Computer Science and minor in French or Business.
Raquel dos Santos
Major: Neuroscience
Heritage: Mexican and Portuguese

Raquel’s passion for healthcare and science is fueled by a genuine desire to positively impact the lives of those around her. This San Diego, California resident of Mexican and Portuguese descent, is a co-founder of Scientella, a nonprofit organization dedicated to decreasing the gender gap in STEM. Scientella connects high school girls with corporate sponsors to help them explore careers in STEM, gain valuable work experience, and build professional skills. To date, Raquel has helped dozens of high school girls through her work in Scientella, which has proudly matched them to sponsors from companies such as Microsoft, HP Inc., Vizer, and Kaiser Permanente. Raquel is also a co-founder of Rise Up Tutoring, a tutoring organization that uses all its profits to purchase school and personal care supplies, which they donate to aid under-resourced students from the San Diego school district. Raquel has worked as the Lead Student Consultant in a project for BrainLeap Technologies, a cognitive science company that designs gaze-driven video games to train attention skills in kids with attention deficit challenges. Her team was in charge of investigating the parent decision-making process as it pertained to the purchase of diverse types of solutions to assist children with the management of attention difficulties. She also worked as a consultant for medical equipment company ResMed and pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline to assess the utility of social robots in the management of pediatric asthma. Raquel is a stellar student. She maintains a 3.9 cumulative GPA and has further explored the medical field by getting involved with her school’s Young Leaders in Healthcare Club and Natural Medicine Club. She aspires to make a positive difference in the world by providing loving care to children and participating in groundbreaking medical research in her future career as a pediatrician. She will study Neuroscience while on the pre-medical track at the University of Chicago.
Dominique Gooden  
Major: Neurobiology or Cell/Molecular Biology  
Heritage: Panamanian

Dominique’s passion for healthcare was born from being on the patient-side of the interaction as a neurosurgery patient. The knowledge she acquired from the physicians and researchers who managed her treatment fueled her desire to help others like her. Since then, she has dived deeper into the STEM subjects to equip herself for a future career in healthcare, taking classes such as Biochemistry Techniques, which were offered at her high school. But Dominique has never been one to back away from a challenge, so she enrolled in the New York University Science Technology Entry Program (STEP), which helped expand her knowledge and pursue research along qualified mentors in the field. Every Saturday, she and her research team would discuss ideas, create health surveys, presentations, and abstracts, and their hard work paid off when they were able to present their findings at STEM expos across New York City. Part of what drives Dominique and so many others to careers in healthcare is the opportunity to give back. She has already shown this capacity in many ways, serving as a peer tutor and eventually co-leading her school’s National Honor Society peer tutoring program. She has also showcased exceptional leadership skills as the Junior Class President and a senior member of the Student Council. According to Dominique’s teacher, she is an insightful, articulate, and incredibly clever young woman, always willing to engage in meaningful discussion and lend a helping hand to her peers. Her growth throughout her high school career have shown confidence and maturity, and there is no doubt that she will meet her lofty goals. With a GPA of 3.78 and a wide range of AP and Honors courses under her belt, Dominique plans to study Neurobiology or Cell/Microbiology at Fisk University, Howard University, or University of Wisconsin-Madison.
Lusangelis Ramos  
Major: Neuroscience and minor in Political Science  
Heritage: Venezuelan

Lusangelis’s interest in neuroscience is an ironic “no-brainer” for her. As a member of the International Youth Neuroscience association, she has taken various summer introductory courses and delved into neuroscientific research. Absolutely fascinated by the way the brain works, she hopes to be able to contribute to the transformation of the world of medicine. Lusangelis’s research has spanned from Parkinson’s disease to the connection between the human microbiome and neurodegenerative disorders, in an attempt to reach beyond what is already known. However, her interest in healthcare goes beyond her love and curiosity for neuroscience. In fact, her proud Latina heritage plays a strong role. According to her, Latinas are largely underrepresented in healthcare and STEM fields, and she hopes to serve as a role model and inspiration to other young Latinas that may not have considered careers in these roles. According to Lusangelis’s chemistry teacher, she possesses a quiet confidence and a deeply ingrained motivation to always commit her best to everything she does. And that’s clearly evident in her academic record, as well. With a 4.00 GPA and a roster replete with AP and Honors classes, she has demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for learning, even in the midst of a pandemic. Lusangelis is also grateful for opportunities to give back to her community. In fact, she has further honed her leadership and collaboration skills by volunteering to be the student coordinator for her district’s Black History Month Event. Despite the difficulty of ensuring the event ran smoothly, Lusangelis was thrilled with the result, and it is this dedication that prepares her so well for her future academic and professional endeavors. Lusangelis plans to continue her academic trajectory and major in Neuroscience with a minor in Political Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Columbia University, or Yale University. Wherever she winds up, her positive attitude and dedication will certainly serve her well.
Arelis Palou
Major: Biology
Heritage: Puerto Rican

“Education is the first step to gain the knowledge, critical thinking, empowerment, and skills [we] need to create change and make this world a better place,” says Caguas, Puerto Rico resident Arelis. In her pursuit towards improving the world around her, she discovered her passion for medicine and has been looking for opportunities to learn all that she can about the field as she prepares for a future career in healthcare. She participated in a summer medical program for high school students hosted at the University of California, Berkeley, where she interacted with medical professionals and specialists and learned about their experiences and perspectives. She also completed the National Youth Leadership Forum (NYLF) on Advanced Medicine and Health Care held at Johns Hopkins University. At the NYLF, she learned about various specialized medical fields through interactive, hands-on activities and simulations. In 2019, she attended Bottega University’s Congress of Future Medical Leaders, where she took part in lectures given by medical students and eminent medical professionals and learned about cutting-edge advances in medicine. Upon completion of the congress, she was recognized with the Award for Excellence for her participation, leadership, and dedication to advancing her medical education. All through high school, Arelis has enjoyed helping her community in meaningful ways. One of the manners in which she has served is by volunteering at the Hospital HIMA in Caguas. Her most impactful work has been serving as a leader in the Hello Girl PR program. Through Hello Girl PR, she introduced girls from 4th to 6th grade to the world of computer programming, inspiring many to continue learning and expressing their creativity through coding. In recognition of her commitment to the program and promoting STEM in her community, Arelis has received the Aspirations in Computing Award from the National Center for Women and Information Technology for the last three years. This driven Boricua has an impressive academic record and a 4.0 GPA. She will attend Brown University, University of Rochester, Boston University, where she will major in Biology.
Amanda Morales
Major: Chemistry or Biochemistry, considering a minor in Biomedical Engineering
Heritage: Puerto Rican

The idea of being able to help others achieve a better quality of life is what attracted Amanda to want to become a doctor from a very young age. Though she had been exploring the field and learning on her own from a younger age, she got the opportunity to study medicine in a formal setting when she was fifteen, through an introductory medicine course she took at the University of Florida. Upon returning to her hometown of Caguas, Puerto Rico, Amanda continued her immersion into the field of medicine after joining her school’s Medical Science Club. In 2019, she attended the Medical School Intensive at Johns Hopkins University, a summer program where she took part in interactive lectures, learned about how scientific knowledge is applied to healthcare, and explored various careers in the medical field. Last summer, she was selected to participate in the Dr. Garcia Rinaldi Foundation’s Program for Talented Students in Medicine and Sciences. Though the pandemic limited the program to a virtual setting, Amanda gained valuable knowledge and experience as she carried out research, conducted presentations on a variety of health topics, and completed community service projects as part of the curriculum. “[Community service] has given me as a sense of purpose,” says Amanda. “It has shown me that people together can accomplish things that alone would be much harder. Seeing how I can help others provides me with a sense of peace and hope, and helping others feel the same inspires me to continue doing so,” she adds. She has served her community in numerous ways, including volunteering to clean up parks and breaches, visiting nursing homes, and distributing food and water to people in need. One experience that has been the most meaningful to Amanda while giving back was helping organize her school’s 5K run in honor of the CAP Foundation, a nonprofit organization that serves pediatric cancer patients at the Hospital Pediátrico Universitario Dr. Antonio Ortiz. Amanda participates in a diverse assortment of extracurricular activities at her school. She is a member of its volleyball and track and field teams, its Student Council, its chapter of the National Honor Society, and its Environmental Club “Soles Verdes,” to name a few. She is a stellar student and maintains a 3.95 GPA. She will attend the University of Connecticut, the University of Rochester, or Villanova University, where she intends to major in Chemistry or Biochemistry and may minor in Biomedical Engineering.
Aurora Rangel
Major: Nursing
Heritage: Mexican

Aurora’s passion for nursing was born from personal tragedy. Determined to never feel helpless again and to always be someone that could provide quality care to people in their most difficult times, she has seized every opportunity to prepare herself for a life and career in service of others. Aurora’s overwhelming sense of empathy, a quality so critical to nursing, shines through clearly: after seeing many students struggle with the transition to online learning during the pandemic, she founded the Frederick Free Tutoring Program, targeted at helping students in a nearby majority Hispanic middle school. This is where she learned that tutoring is far more than memorizing concepts and guiding students through practice problems. It’s about building strong, personal relationships that foster an atmosphere of trust and respect. Aurora serves her community in many ways: she is a counselor-in-training at Camp Kesem, a student-led organization that hosts camps for children whose parents are affected by cancer; she ran a clothing drive for local families displaced from their homes, after the summer wildfires; and she organized a fundraiser to help a young girl in Guatemala finish her education. Her sense of community service and its importance is endless and something that prepares her infinitely well for a career as a nurse. Aurora believes that the Hispanic/Latino community will demonstrate its true value as Americans by showing its inherent values of hard work, resilience and compassion, and wearing its culture with pride – all qualities that she clearly embodies. With a GPA of 4.00, and a range of AP courses from Chemistry to Literature, her academic prowess complements her strong sense of empathy and commitment to giving back. Aurora plans to continue her journey by studying Nursing at Regis University, Mount Saint Mary’s University, or the University of Colorado Boulder.
Gabrielle Roman  
Major: Biomedical Engineering  
Heritage: Mexican

Gabrielle is an intern at the Orthopedic Department of the Mayo Clinic in Arizona. She works under Dr. Adam Schwartz, with whom she co-authored a biomedical research podium presentation aiming to redefine the classification system of femoral bone loss. She is fascinated by all things science. “The realm of science continues to fascinate me because it explains how the world, life, and people around me work and I love discovering how life came to be,” says Gabrielle. She loves to learn and has an unwavering commitment to her academics. With a 3.97 GPA, she is a top student in her class, having taken the most challenging courses available at her school. She is the co-founder and president of Be the Change, one of her school’s most active and impactful clubs, which strives to help and serve Arizona’s most under-resourced populations. Gabrielle has an exceptional intrinsic desire to help others. She dedicates much of her free time to enrich the lives of those around her. Most impressive is the remarkable role she had in helping her community adapt through the challenges brought on this last year. Worried about students who may have been having difficulties learning from home, she set up a support program matching struggling students with mentor peers. This program extended beyond her school as she reached out to surrounding schools, checking if they had students who needed support. Gabrielle is an AP Scholar with Honor. She is a member of her school’s chapters of the Sociedad Honoraria Hispánica and the National Honor Society. She will major in Biomedical Engineering at Johns Hopkins University, Tufts University, or Stanford University.
Cipriano Childers  
Major: Biology or Biochemistry  
Heritage: Spanish  

Arizona resident Cipriano spent every summer of his childhood with his grandparents in Kentucky. Crossword puzzles and breakfast was the usual morning routine before his grandfather left for work as a pediatric physician. Cipriano would anxiously wait for the hours to go by until Grandpa Rick came back to tell him about his day. He also told him stories about his long hours studying in med school, his experience during residency, and about interesting old cases and how he had treated them. This is where his interest in medicine was born. Wanting to prepare himself for his future career, he participated in Grand Canyon University’s Medical Summer Program, where he had a week-long immersive campus experience while learning about the medical field. For Cipriano, pursuing a career in medicine is not only about pursuing his curiosity; it is also about helping those around him. His high school experience has been devoted to giving back to his community. Noticing a gap in his school and wanting to provide learning opportunities to his fellow schoolmates, he founded and now leads his school’s Robotics Club. The Robotics Team qualified for and made it up top 15 at the Arizona state competitions in its first year. He is also the founder of his school’s AP club, which works to organize and run AP study sessions as well as fundraisers to cover the costs of AP exams and study materials for its members. Cipriano serves as President of the National Honor Society at his school. He is looking forward to studying Biology or Biochemistry at the University of Arizona, Duke University, or Johns Hopkins University.
Passaic, New Jersey resident Melissa, became a storyteller as a way to take matters into her own hands upon seeing the lack of diversity in the media and the entertainment industry. “The fact that I can tell other people’s stories, struggles, and hopes through different forms of media is exhilarating,” she says. From writing articles to sharing information via video chyron, Melissa learned about the multitude of platforms she can use to express her ideas and share other people’s experiences in her journalism classes. As Editor-in-Chief of The Boulevard and The Boulevard Online, her school’s newspaper and its online media site, she is in charge of helping student reporters, guiding and mentoring them so they can reach their full potential as journalists. One of her missions as a journalist is to reduce media distrust by reporting events that interest and affect everyone in her community. Working as a journalist has given Melissa the opportunity to elevate voices and disseminate the stories of people and communities that might otherwise not be heard. Her freshman year, she interviewed Japanese-Americans who lived through the Japanese internment camps of World War II for her entry into her school’s National History Day competition. Her exhibit titled “Japanese Internment Camps: America Attacking Their Own” won her school’s competition. It then went on to win the state competition and on to represent New Jersey at the national level in Washington DC. Melissa is the first person to make a documentary on the life and work of Sandra Ramos, the founder of the first women’s shelter in the US. “I felt empowered as I was telling people about her life, helping bring recognition to her dedication to helping women fleeing from domestic violence,” shares Melissa. She serves as the Vice President of the Passaic Youth Council and continually advocates for other young people in her city to engage in political and social justice issues. Melissa is a QuestBridge Match Scholarship recipient. She will attend Dartmouth College on a full-ride scholarship. Melissa wants to major in Government and minor in Media Studies. She is the first student in her school to be admitted into an Ivy League University and will be the first in her family to attend college.
Arianna Mosqueda  
Major: Media Communications with a minor in Dance  
Heritage: Mexican

Arianna always volunteers to take on the role of editor and director whenever there is a video project assignment at her school. Her freshman year, she was in charge of editing a video on the bubonic plague for her World History class. In 10th grade, Arianna edited a video that introduced the chloroplasts of a cell as presidential candidates. Last year, she received commendations for an informational video she created for her AP Computer Science Principles class, where she highlighted the importance of coding and included student interviews where they talked about their experiences learning to code. For Arianna, making and editing videos is a creative outlet. “These projects have allowed me to express my creativity in creating media entertainment, and I’ve been able to use this creative outlet to establish aspirations for my future as a potential filmmaker,” she says. Besides video projects for school, she also enjoys just making videos for the sake of making videos. She is continuously coming up with new concepts and creating her own film projects. She likes exploring and recreating cinematography and concepts from major films and also working on varied skits. Her freshman year, Arianna took an Intro to Film class where she learned the basics of cinematography. Through the class, she studied filmmaking techniques, such as camera angles and movements and how these can influence the audience’s perception and understanding of a film. She realized she was instinctually already using many of the techniques she learned in class before formally learning about them. She had always had a knack for filmmaking, and the class served as confirmation. Arianna is a member of her school’s Beta Club chapter and loves giving back to her community. Thanks to her involvement with the club, she has volunteered at her local library and has tutored at elementary schools in her district. Arianna is a role model to her peers for her community involvement and her high academics. She has a 4.0 GPA and stands among the top 3% of students in her class. More important to Arianna, is being a role model to her six-year-old younger sister. She considers helping raise her to be her proudest accomplishment. Last year, when schools switched to virtual learning, Arianna took on the responsibility of helping her little sister with school as she adjusted to the changes. Thanks to her dedication, her sister won the Outstanding Virtual Learner Award for her class. Arianna’s own achievements provide something for her sister to aspire to, but the fact that she is willing to help her sister in her own endeavors says a great deal about her character. Arianna serves as the Social Media Specialist intern for the Charlottesville Initiative for Social Practice through the Arts Visual Arts. She will attend Swarthmore College, Pomona College, or the University of Virginia. She wants to major in Media Communications and minor in Dance.
Bryan Albarrán
Major: Radio-Television-Film (RTF) with a concentration in Cinematography
Heritage: Mexican

The language of visuals is everywhere. Bryan Albarrán knows this better than anyone. In fact, he’s been involved in visual arts since his screen debut taking his first shaky steps on an old home video recorded by his dad’s famous VHS camcorder, which accompanied any family activity. For Bryan, film’s power of stimulating unconventional thinking is what motivates him to major in Radio-Television-Film with a concentration in cinematography and editing. He is also a keen observer – as any quality artist should be – and after noticing advertisements about E-cigarettes on the rise, encouraging impressionable adolescent consumers to socialize outside their homes amid the pandemic, he felt compelled to do something. This summer, he directed a short vaping film in response – using potent imagery of fruit being swarmed by mosquitos to insinuate that the media has hidden agendas in advertising. His film was showcased on the various social media accounts of the Bay Area Council on Drugs & Alcohol. This is just one of many examples of Bryan’s tenacity and determination. According to his English teacher, Bryan ranks among the most talented, unique, and well-rounded students that have graced the halls of J. Frank Dobie High School. Artistically gifted, he was awarded a “4”, the highest possible score, for a sculpture he created for the Visual Arts Scholastic Event and placed 7th out of over 400 applicants at the Pasadena Livestock Show and Rodeo, auctioning off his piece for $460. Bryan’s academic record also speaks for itself. He ranks in the top 1% of his 1,000+ student graduating class and maintains a 4.00 GPA with a host of upper-level courses. On top of these achievements, he also dedicates himself to others and his community, serving as the Key Club’s Webmaster, the first sophomore to ever hold an officer’s position in his school’s history. Bryan has amassed hundreds of volunteer hours, speaks both English and Spanish fluently, and is attempting to master his third language by teaching himself Korean. Someone of this caliber is sure to succeed in whatever he sets his mind to. For Bryan, that’s studying Radio-Television-Film at the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Houston, or the University of Texas at San Antonio.
Paolo Cesti  
Major: Film  
Heritage: Cuban  

Some people have known who they want to be and what they want to do in life since childhood. Paolo Cesti is one of those people. Since the ripe old age of six years-old, he has known that filmmaking is his passion, pride, and joy. As a child, using his first ever camcorder, he would recreate dramatic novellas using Legos and action figures, walking his plastic actors through scenes of action, love, and tragedy. Since then, Paolo has done everything in his power to pursue his love of film, always giving his art that special Cuban sazón for which he will one day be widely known. On his own, he has created over 25 short films, amassing over 85 awards both in the cinematic arts and academically at international, national, state, and local levels. His is also an alumna of one of South Florida’s most prestigious film programs, the After School Film Institute, a nonprofit that brings established local filmmakers to underfunded communities and teaches students how to create a budgeted project. As a filmmaker, Paolo understands the capacity art has to give back, as well. Suitably named, he and a team of his peers created Operation Giveback, a documentary/reality web-series that tracked a group of students who volunteer their time at nonprofit and charity organizations throughout South Florida. The experience was eye-opening, and Paolo called it “perhaps one of the most fulfilling experiences he has ever had” and something he would do again and again. A passion for filmmaking and sharing his art with others is certainly something Paolo has, but that’s not all. He is an academically gifted individual, maintaining a 3.75 GPA amid a rigorous course load that includes various Dual Enrollment and AP classes. He also serves as the Junior Class President, a position that became much more difficult with the lockdown and COVID-19 pandemic blasting through. The only member of the cabinet remaining, Paolo took matters into his own hands, consistently sending out vital information via mass text, conducting surveys to identify safe activity options for the year, and holding meetings to address concerns related to community service hours and standardized testing. A proud Latino, Paolo stands out as a shining role model, and his dreams of studying Film at Florida State University, University of Southern California, or New York University, are well within reach.
Emma Huerta
Major: Philosophy and/or Human Rights with a Pre-Law Concentration
Heritage: Cuban

Emma Huerta is nothing if not committed. For the last 11 years, she has been a ballet and contemporary dancer, practicing 2-3 hours a day for up to 6 days a week. The experience has been a huge part of her life and intellectual growth, and to further spread her love of the craft, she founded a digital platform – Por Amor Al Arte Co. – to revitalize creativity in dance with student choreography. In addition to dance, Emma is also a fabulous writer. She joined her high school’s newspaper staff in 10th grade and is now the Online Editor-in-Chief of the publication, as well as President of the National English Honor Society. Emma thoroughly enjoys tying her hobbies and interests back to her community, and she has volunteered in various capacities to give back and hone her skills. Since June 2020, she has been the Public Relations Manager for the youth-led nonprofit organization Proyecto Manzana, which works to extend resources to Venezuelan women and children. Prior to the pandemic, she also volunteered as a nurse’s station aid, and later a laboratory aid at Memorial Hospital West. In addition to her work as Vice-President of Activities of her school’s National Honor Society chapter, she has participated in various projects, including volunteering at the journalism club of a local elementary school, an experience that helped refine her leadership and problem-solving skills. Emma is also a phenomenal student and maintains a perfect 4.00 GPA amid a schedule replete with AP courses. Immensely proud to be part of the Hispanic/Latino community, she feels strongly that we must stand together as a community, even amid the challenges we face. With a host of awards and recognitions to her name, including State Competition awards for her newspaper articles as well as dance awards, we’re all but certain Emma will succeed in her future endeavors. Committed to helping others, she plans to study Philosophy and/or Human Rights with a Pre-Law concentration at Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania, or Columbia University.
Jonathan Sarasa
Major: Biology – Ecology and Evolutionary Biology if applicable with a minor in Political Science
Heritage: Cuban

Jonathan Sarasa, more widely known by his YouTube channel name Jrasa, discovered his passion for video editing thanks to gaming. Though his gaming videos have come to a halt since high school, he has taken the skills he learned and expanded on them in film classes, where his creativity has flourished. Widely known throughout his school for jokes he incorporated into his short film, “Bananaman”, Jonathan is well-liked by both his teachers and peers. An advocate for spreading awareness, he worked with the Holocaust Impact Theatre and created the culminating video of a series designed to drum up awareness of the devastation wreaked during that time, which touched on the fights of people advocating for desegregation, anti-racism, women’s rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and more. In the reactions of his audience, Jonathan saw the potential that filmmaking has to impact and change public perception. In his words, “filmmaking is an untraditional means of community service, but its power to evoke emotions make it an empowering art form”. Jonathan further explored the educational side of filmmaking through the Miami-Dade Clean Up and Green Up Video competition, where he won first place after spending the day with a friend walking through the Everglades and filming the flora and fauna they encountered. In general, it’s the potential to touch people’s hearts and have a lasting impact on their lives that draws him to filmmaking. In addition to his clear passion for filmmaking, Jonathan is an impressive student. With a near-perfect 3.92 GPA, he has a host of AP classes ranging from US Government and Politics to Environmental Science under his belt. He has also been recognized for various awards and accomplishments, including an Academic Excellence Award for his district, as well as a Letter of Commendation – National Merit. Jonathan’s academic talents will suit him well on his future endeavors, and he hopes to study Biology – specifically Ecology and Evolutionary Biology if possible – with a minor in Political Science.
Anahis Luna  
Major: Visual Arts  
Heritage: Mexican

Beatles obsessed Anahis is a Questbridge Match Scholarship recipient. She is a watercolor artist whose work has been recognized nationwide. “I love watercolors,” says Anahis. “A single brush stroke can define an entire microcosm, crisp the edges of rugged earth, feather the softness of pale skin,” she adds. She has spent the last years of her life delving into watercolors, exploring their vast nuances and intricate techniques. She has exhibited her work at museums and airports and competed in a variety of local and national competitions. She is editor-in-chief of her high school’s literary magazine, as well as a contributor and editorial board coordinator for the online magazine KidSpirit. She is the founder and director of Undocufund Mid-South, a COVID-19 Relief Fund dedicated to raising funds for undocumented workers affected by the pandemic across the Mid-South. Anahis has served in her county’s Youth Council and its Juvenile Court. She has been President of her school’s Key Club and is the co-fundraising manager of her school’s recycling club, the Green Team. This extraordinary Latina has an impeccable 4.0 GPA and will study Visual Arts at Brown University.
Delaney Rodríguez
Major: Musical Theater with a minor in Hispanic Studies
Heritage: Mexican

Talented and charismatic, Delaney devotes much of her time to musical theater. She has been part of her school’s band and choir every year, beginning in middle school. She has taken dance lessons in styles ranging from ballet to Mexican folkloric. She discovered her niche the Spring semester of her freshman year. That is when she joined the dance ensemble and got a minor role in her school’s production of “Anything Goes.” Her growth as a performer became apparent when, the following year, Delaney became part of the lead dance group and the understudy to the lead in “Mamma Mia!” Continuing her upward trajectory, she took on the role as a solo dancer and dance captain for “The Wizard of Oz” her junior year. Most recently, she was selected to participate in the American Musical and Dramatic Academy’s Virtual Conservatory. In this exclusive online intensive and immersive performing arts training program, she learned Broadway-level singing, acting, and dancing techniques and gained more insight into processes that take place in the industry on and off stage. A model student, Delaney maintains a 4.0 GPA. She excels academically and continuously seeks additional and more challenging educational opportunities. She intends on majoring in Musical Theater and minoring in Hispanic Studies at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, or Western Carolina University.
Daniela Morales
Major: Filmmaking
Heritage: Colombian

Daniela Morales’s childhood was steeped in storytelling. Both her parents, adept in the art of crafting a tale, told her stories of their travel and experiences, reading books from the countries they visited. They nurtured this same passion in Daniela herself, and it is for this and many other reasons that she has chosen a career dedicated to doing the same. At her high school, ChiArts, Daniela has been able to learn and grow with her passion, engaging with all forms of writing every day. She participated in Northwestern’s NHSI Film Division as a playwright, where she crafted a play, which was later stage-read by a group of teen actors. The process quickly made her realize the capacity of filmmaking to tell a story. Even more importantly, when one of the actresses approached her later to tell her how much it meant that she had created a story that centered a lesbian character, she realized the impact she could have, and her fate was sealed. Since then, Daniela has worked hard to hone her craft and learned the value of communicating, delegating, and leadership. Her leadership skills also shine through in her commitment to community service, where in one particular instance, she had the opportunity to translate the words of young writers into Spanish. As someone who did not speak English when she first arrived in the US, Daniela personally understands the impact that multilingual and diverse stories can have on viewers. The result of this was a published anthology of their writing in both English and Spanish. Apart from her clear creative streak, Daniela is also an excellent student with a 4.00 GPA, a range of AP classes, and various awards and recognition for her achievements. She plans to study filmmaking at Northwestern University, Columbia College Chicago, or DePaul University, and it won’t be long until her films are on the big screen.
Liliana Pulido
Major: Sound recording technology/Audio engineer
Heritage: Mexican

Liliana Pulido was eight years old when she learned how to play the guitar. But that was only the beginning. Admiring her siblings’ interest in music, she diligently took to each new instrument with poise. Though her siblings have since stopped playing, Liliana has only dived deeper into music. Today she plays the guitar, the violin and the trumpet and views her surroundings and culture as all the inspiration for her craft. Extremely proud of her Mexican heritage, she often enjoys incorporating Latin music into her creations, singing in Spanish. Through the many ensembles and programs available at her school, Liliana has continued to expand her musical education. She currently performs in the All-City Performing Arts High School Modern Band, Orchestra, and Mariachi ensemble. These experiences have only furthered Liliana’s desire to pursue music professionally, and ultimately to study to become an audio engineer. Apart from her creative fluency, Liliana is also a stellar student and maintains a 4.00 GPA amid rigorous and competitive coursework. Competition and challenges are no barrier for her, as her experience as the Carver Military Academy’s Brigade Commander has shown. Despite unfortunate comments by her male peers that she might be “too emotional” for a top cadet ranking position, she defied expectation and was promptly promoted. Liliana hopes to be a role model for future female cadets, as well as girls in general, to demonstrate that gender does not constrain us by any means. With a host of awards and commendations, she is primed for success in her future Sound Recording Technology/Audio Engineering studies at DePaul University, Columbia College Chicago, or the University of Illinois at Chicago.
Itzel Luna
Major: Political Science and Journalism
Heritage: Mexican

Itzel is the Print Editor-in-chief of her school’s student news website and magazine, The Pearl Post. This Sylmar, California resident attends Daniel Pearl Magnet High School, a school with a focus on journalism and communications. That is where, in 9th grade, Itzel fell in love with journalism. Throughout her high school career, she has produced many hard-hitting news stories, with some of them being selected for publication on the Los Angeles Times High School Insider website. She has reported on numerous notable local stories, including writing about the arrest and subsequent court appearances of a lacrosse coach from a nearby school for sexual misconduct and covering the Los Angeles Unified School District’s teachers’ 2019 strike. Two of the stories she co-wrote with a classmate on the teachers’ strike were published on the Best of School Newspapers Online website, and last summer, one of her stories on the strike was a finalist in the Los Angeles Press Club, going up against stories written by college students. In March of 2019, the Southern California Journalism Education Association awarded Itzel the Jolene Combs Scholarship for her performance at their state write-off. That summer, she attended the University of Southern California’s Annenberg Youth Academy, a four-week program focused on civics, leadership, and media. She also participated in the GRAMMY Museum’s GRAMMY Camp, a week-long music industry program in which she focused on music journalism. In the fall of her junior year, Itzel was selected to attend the Chicano Youth Leadership Conferences camp. And last summer, she participated in the highly competitive Princeton University Summer Journalism Program. Itzel’s work is not limited to print journalism. Her school is part of the PBS NewsHour’s Student Reporting Labs, and Itzel has been involved with the videos her school produces, particularly this past December when she was selected to produce behind-the-scenes coverage of the final Democratic primary debate of 2019. This hard-working Latina has garnered national recognition for both her journalism and her academic performance. She is a recipient of the Excellent in News Writing award in the National Student Media Contests at the National High School Journalism Convention and is a QuestBridge National College Match Finalist. She plans to major in Political Science and Journalism at Stanford University, the University of Southern California, or Claremont McKenna College.
Natalie De La Cruz
Major: Illustration
Heritage: Ecuadorian, Puerto Rican, Dominican and Guatemalan

Natalie comes from a long line of innovators: her father makes illustrations and is a video editor in his free time, her maternal and paternal grandmothers were craftswomen, who made dolls, apparel and illustrations, and her great-grandmother used to knit and craft clothing. Needless to say, art has always been part of her heritage and life. It’s no surprise that even as young as a fifth grader, Natalie was taking leadership roles when it came to art. She founded and served as president of her middle school’s art club, collaborating with her teacher to organize events. In 7th and 8th grade, she held two art school exhibitions featuring student works and commissions. Her interest has only blossomed further since high school, where she has been able to dive headfirst into as many art classes as possible and has served as both Art Club President and Vice President at different times. These have pushed her outside her comfort zone and encouraged her to further hone her craft. Natalie is a natural leader, though this may also come from growing up the eldest of three siblings. When COVID-19 first hit, in addition to her own studies, she stepped up to tackle the extra responsibility of being her siblings’ at-home teacher, guiding them through their weekly topics and teaching them to use technology. Though stressful at times, Natalie refused to succumb to the pressure and has arisen from the experience even more suited to success. Her commitment to others is also apparent in her volunteering experience at Queen of the Rosary, where she occupied a temporary role as nursery teacher assistant. According to Natalie’s art teacher, she is an intellectually curious, vibrant, and witty young woman, destined for success and greatness. More than once, she has shown strong leadership and communication skills, traits necessary for a career in the art industry. With an equally strong academic record, Natalie maintains a 4.00 GPA and plans to study Illustration at St. John’s University.
Xavier Cintrón Muñiz  
Major: Contemporary Writing and Production  
Heritage: Puerto Rican

When Xavier was seven years old, he asked his parents for a guitar. Always supportive of his pursuits, his parents bought him a guitar and enrolled him in music lessons. “I can’t explain why I asked for a guitar,” he says. “I’m Puerto Rican, where we have our autochthonous national instrument, the Puerto Rican Cuatro,” he adds. Within a year, after having observed and appreciated it at the hands of his first music instructor, he asked his parents for a Puerto Rican Cuatro. From his beginnings in music and through cultural connections, Xavier began developing his mindset and worldview. He has had countless enriching performing and learning experiences over the years. He has performed as a soloist in concerts, including alongside the Orquesta Sinfónica de Puerto Rico in 2017, 2019, and 2020, and with the Midwest Young Artists Conservatory Symphony Orchestra at the Emmy Award-winning Annual National Cuatro Festival hosted in Chicago in 2019. He has participated in various musical internships, like Aceleración Musical of the Fundación Banco Popular in 2018 and 2020. In 2018 and 2019, he completed the Berklee in Puerto Rico program. Last year he took part in Berklee’s Aspire: Five-Week Music Performance Intensive, one of the best and most comprehensive summer music performance programs worldwide. In 2017, Xavier traveled to Cuba to perform with the Rondalla de Humacao de Puerto Rico. He has been performing with the Rondalla since 2010. Xavier has been involved in his community through civic, social, educational, and cultural activities. Among these activities, he has brought joy through music to local nursing homes, has used his talents while helping raise funds for organizations and people in need, and has shared his knowledge and love of the Puerto Rican Cuatro and the island’s folkloric music with elementary and middle school children through educational workshops. Xavier’s brilliance is not limited to his musical genius. He is also academically gifted and maintains a 4.0 GPA. He will pursue a Bachelor of Music in Contemporary Writing and Production on a scholarship at the Berklee College of Music.
María López
Major: Theater or Musical Theatre
Heritage: Puerto Rican

María grew up being taught to always go after the things that brought her joy. While she understood the words, it was not until she was in 7th grade that their true meaning resonated with her. “When I was in seventh grade, I stumbled into my high school’s Theatre Club and performed in my very first play. [That is] perhaps one of the best things I have ever done,” remembers María. Now, as a high school senior, getting ready for college and planning for her future, she cannot see herself dedicating her life to anything else. “Theatre has become my passion and the place where I feel completely at home. Through the ups and downs of these past years, it has remained with me and become an essential part of who I am,” she explains. She has cultivated her abilities in the performing arts through opportunities both in and out of school. Since discovering theater, María has been involved in every theatre and musical theatre production at her school, including through roles in Abelardo, Fiddler on the Roof, Sister Act, and A Night on Broadway. As evidence of her exceptional presentation and oratory skills, she has represented her school in national competitions of the Spanish Oratory League of Puerto Rico and the English Forensic League of Puerto Rico for the past four years. She has also dabbled in contemporary and modern dance, ballet, and singing, becoming part of Talleres Danza Teatro, a fine and performing arts school in her hometown of Caguas, Puerto Rico. She has also been part of the San Juan Art League and the Escuela Libre de Música Antonio Paoli. María sings soprano for “Coral Mare Mia,” her school’s choir. Singing and performing have given her the privilege and honor of giving back to her community through presentations at events all over her town. However, the acts of service that have left the biggest marks for her have been the ones that allowed her to provide support to families affected by the strongest hurricane to hit Puerto Rico in recent history. María is an extraordinary member of her community and straight-A student. She serves as President of her school’s Theatre Club and Captain of its Forensics Team. She will study Theatre or Musical Theatre while attending Syracuse University, Loyola University Maryland, or Pace University.
Leyra Rodríguez
Major: Advertising and Photography
Heritage: Puerto Rican

“Art has been passed down in my family from my father’s side,” says Leyra, who has a fraternal grandfather that exercised his creativity through his work in construction, an aunt that is a painter, and a brother who is pursuing a degree in Graphic Arts. Leyra’s art instrument of choice is a camera, her medium? Photography. She has been cultivating her creative and technical skills and building her lens-based portfolio through workshops and educational activities at Puro Enfoque since 2017. Puro Enfoque is a visual arts organization that promotes photography and digital image in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Last year, she also grew in her art by taking courses at the University of Notre Dame Pre-College Program. Leyra shares her original work with others through an Instagram photography blog. For Leyra, photography is how she freezes a moment in time, looking for ways to make a shot interesting and capture all its subtle nuances. Aesthetics is not the only focus of her images. Her work is about delivering a message, sharing her perspective, and encouraging her audience to want to figure out what she was thinking the instant a picture was taken. “The mix of having some pictures with bright colors and some with dark tones helps my viewers understand a little more of my perspective towards everything that surrounds me, just like navigating through every thought in my mind,” shares Leyra. Though community service was in the background of Leyra’s life for many years, everything changed for her after Hurricane María. Ever since, service has been a focus in her life. “After this natural disaster, my high school experience became ‘School on the week and weekends for giving back,’” she tells us. She started helping during the hurricane relief efforts, then continued by assisting with food distribution in different parts of the island, volunteering at summer camps and national parks, and donating her time at church. Of Dominican and Puerto Rican descent, this talented Latina is a remarkable student and maintains a perfect 4.0 GPA. She is a member of her school’s chapter of the National Honor Society and has been part of her graduating class’s Directive Committee since the 7th grade. She will study Advertising and Photography at Syracuse University, Marquette University, or New York University.
Adriana Ripley
Major: Double major Musical Theater, Human Physiology
Heritage: Guatemalan and Brazilian

Adriana Ripley says she and musical theater were first introduced in a summer carpool, when her mother was looking for a daytime activity for her daughter. Not yet onboard with the idea, Adriana opted out of lead role auditions that her peers were vying for and asked to be a shrub – completely hidden from view. Yet, from behind her “drooping shrub hat” that she wore on stage, she saw how much fun her peers were having, collaborating, laughing, and soaking up the spotlight. Her interest was piqued and so began her love of theater. Since then, Adriana has become a tour de force in musical theater, eventually choreographing and interning for the very same summer camp where her passion began. She has been awarded a superior ranking at the International Thespian Society (ITS) solo musical performance regional and international competitions for three years in a row, is the member of a radio theater company, Radio Redux, and has performed as guest soprano for the Salem Orchestra. In her advanced high school jazz choir, she learned the important arts of leadership, and helped reshape and change a toxic culture. She listened to each person’s individual voice and discovered that true leadership stems from social influence, and using that influence toward an articulated goal, creating a more cohesive, respectful, and creative environment. Adriana has also been involved in community service since the age of eight, and since then has worked with youth restorative justice, children’s theatre, and as a peer educator for female sexual health and consent. Through all of this, she has maintained a GPA of 4.00, demonstrating how strong she is academically. She is also very proud of her Latinx heritage, and wants to see the community grow and have further representation in the United States. She plans to study a Double Major of Musical Theater and Human Physiology, at Indiana University, the University of Arizona, or the University of Colorado Boulder.
Alexia Moreno  
Major: Music Education  
Heritage: Mexican  

It took a little for Alexia to figure out what it is she wanted to study. It was not an issue of not having any interests; rather, she has been so involved in several extracurricular activities that it was difficult to narrow down her options. It took an analysis of all the activities in which she had participated to get to the answer. Between Varsity Swim meets, there were Varsity Band practices. After Cross Country training, Wind Symphony practice. There were orchestra auditions between symphony auditions. “One thing was clear. Everything brought me back to what I was truly passionate about from the beginning: Music,” realized Alexia. She has been playing the clarinet since 4th grade and has received ratings of Excellent for her solo performance from the Arizona Music Educators Association more than once. She has participated with Phoenix Youth Symphony and currently serves as one of her school’s Drum Majors. Alexia is also very civic-minded and frequently works with service projects that she organizes as member of her school’s National Honor Society. She has also served as a member of her city’s Mayor’s Youth Advisory Commission. In a community known for high rates of homelessness, as Vice-Chair of the Youth Advisory Commission, she helped lead efforts for her town to start a commission specific to serving the needs of homeless teens in her community. Alexia has a record of academic excellence. She is an AP Scholar with Distinction and has a 3.95 GPA. She will be enrolling in Vanderbilt University, Arizona State University, or Carnegie Mellon University, where she intends on majoring in Music Education.
Marilyn García
Major: Design or Industrial Design
Heritage: Mexican

Marilyn embarks on a journey every time she starts a new art piece. She thinks beyond simple paint on canvas and studies her subjects to better portray the story in each of her pieces. “It brings more personal meaning and makes each piece a unique passage for the viewer to decipher and enjoy,” she explains. One of her pieces was selected to be published as part of the Art for the Binational Clean Air Calendar. She has shown her work at her city’s County Fair for the past few years and has received many “Outstanding” and “First” Place ribbons. In 2018, feeling the need to add her voice to the fight against family separation at the border, she painted “Déjà Vu.” “Déjà Vu” illustrates two children looking up into the blue sky with a sense of wonder and awe. “Through my piece, I wanted to convey the innocent perspective of children and their unawareness of the negative politics going on around them,” she says. This piece won the Congressional Art Competition for her congressional district. As a result, she got to visit Washington D.C. to attend a special recognition ceremony and had her work displayed in the Cannon Tunnel for an entire year. She currently serves in the Arizona Commission on the Arts Youth Council, a grant-based position that allows her to advocate for youth art programs around her state. “Art can be used as a door to rewarding opportunities and a powerful tool for expression and awareness,” says Marylin. She wants to continue using her art to highlight her culture and bring awareness to issues that affect the Latino community. She will attend Stanford University, Arizona State University, or the University of California, Berkeley, and major in Design or Industrial Design.
PUBLIC SERVICE

Sita Kottilil
Major: Biology with a minor in International Relations
Heritage: Venezuelan and Indian

“People want to be heard,” says Bethesda, Maryland resident Sita. “A striking problem—even in local politics—is that they are not,” she adds. For Sita, getting involved in politics was a way for her to become the intermediary between the people and those in charge. She dedicates her summers to volunteering for political candidates whose beliefs align with her own, canvassing, phone banking, and advocating alongside her peers for issues that matter to them. Her work has made her realize that political races are not just about winning, but also about providing citizens with the best representation to make their lives easier and their issues resolved. “I learned my first lesson in politics: it starts and ends with the constituent,” she says. One of the issues that concern Sita is school shootings, so two years ago, she created a user-friendly public online database where people can track school shootings along with the stance of the respective elected officials of each affected state on the matter of gun control. Another issue that matters to her is our nation’s drug addiction epidemic. To gain a better understanding of the problem and offer her support, Sita volunteers at the HIPS clinic in Washington, DC. HIPS is a non-profit organization that, among many much-needed community services, provides help to people suffering from substance abuse problems. Sita has also conducted independent medical research on topics relevant to our society today. Last year, she was selected to present her finding on Hepatitis C treatment, specifically as it refers to resource-limited countries, to top physicians and public health experts, at the Liver Meeting 2020 and Infectious Diseases Week 2020. Sita is a National AP Scholar and a National Hispanic Recognition Program Scholar. She has a 3.94 GPA and is member of her school’s chapter of the National Honor Society. She will attend the University of Maryland, Yale University, or Georgetown University, where she will major in Biology and minor in International Relations.
Alessandro Iaia  
Major: Government with a minor in Latin American Studies  
Heritage: Mexican and Italian

For Alessandro, passing laws that support ALL communities is how we can ensure we are working towards improving the lives of all people in the country. He is eager to be involved in the political process and has not allowed his young age to be an impediment for him in his efforts to create change. “I do believe that with organization, passion, and diligent self-will, we can set forward the machine of change; I believe that in our actions, speeches, and votes, we can protect the communities which have long been disenfranchised by the dangers of polarizing politics and ignorant racism,” proclaims Alessandro. As a first-generation American, son to a Mexican mother and an Italian father, Alessandro feels he has a duty, a moral obligation, to defend the rights of immigrants like his parents. By fighting for the disenfranchised and the underrepresented, he also feels like he is paying back a debt of gratitude to those that have fought for people like him to have a voice. Alessandro serves as the Volunteer Coordinator for the Prevention & Advocacy Department at the Latin American Community Center of Wilmington, Delaware. He is the founder and President of his school’s Hispanic Outreach Club, which he established to help his peers find opportunities to learn, volunteer, and be of service to the Latinx community of his city. He is also co-founder and co-director of the Asian Hispanic Empowerment Organization (AHEO), an international non-profit dedicated to ending racism by educating the youth about the importance of accepting and respecting diversity and all different cultures. Through AHEO, Alessandro has been able to reach and teach hundreds of children around the world about racism, with the hope that they may grow into young adults able to recognize and avoid the traps of normalized racism. This exceptional Latino leader has a 4.0 GPA. He is a member of his school’s chapter of the National Honor Society and has received several recognitions for his achievements, including being recognized as an AP Scholar with Distinctions, being a Coca-Cola Scholars Semifinalist, and a recipient of the One in a Million Award from Multiplying Good’s for his work with AHEO. He will major in Government and minor in Latin American Studies at one of our nation’s top universities.
Antonio Clemente
Major: Political Science with a minor in Spanish
Heritage: Cuban, Spanish, and Italian

Antonio wants to become an immigration lawyer. Last August, he joined a team of students in a virtual immersion program hosted by the Kino Border Initiative, a non-profit organization focused on humanitarian assistance, education, and advocacy as they relate to immigration. Inspired by their commitment to social advocacy, last fall, Antonio facilitated interviews with immigrants and set up letter-writing campaigns to representatives, calling for the protection of asylum seekers. He met with several immigration lawyers who explained to him the tough legal process, told him the stories that inspired them to defend immigrants, and what his organization at school could do to help. Antonio’s organization is his school’s Spanish and Latin American Cultural Society (SLACS). Wanting to increase Latino representation and visibility at his school, he took on the mission to revitalize SLACS. What started as a space where students could learn about Latino culture through food, music, and conversation, soon evolved into a place where students could learn about issues affecting the Latino community in the US and be inspired to become advocates. “The club took on a new life; we discussed poverty, lack of accessibility to medicine and education, and the inhumane nature of the US immigration system,” shares Antonio. His work to raise awareness through SLACS and his own family’s immigration story are what inspired this Cuban, Spanish, Italian American to want to dedicate his life to fighting for and defending immigrants. “In supporting others, I found purpose; I’m honoring my family’s sacrifice and defending the quality of life that all immigrants deserve,” he proclaims. Evidence of his commitment to hard work, Antonio has a stellar academic record and a 3.92 GPA. He is a member of his school’s Speech and Debate team, as well as of many of its clubs, including the Young Republicans and Democrats Club, Philosophy Club, Economics Club, and Heritage, its multicultural club. He plans on attending Vanderbilt University, Georgetown University, or Rice University, where he will major in Political Science and minor in Spanish.
Analys Barinaga
Major: International Relations and Industrial Engineering
Heritage: Cuban

As Analys Barinaga knows, public service can look different to different people. For her, the values of public service have guided her decisions, even if, at the time, she was left unaware. When she realized that it could be a viable career path, she leapt at the opportunity to test the proverbial waters, and since then she’s submerged herself completely. Already, Analys has taken a Duke Tip summer course on criminal trial advocacy, joined her school’s Varsity Debate Team, and explored the world of policy and law in coursework. To put her policy knowledge to the test, she joined Model United Nations, where she is now the team president, sharing her passion for analyzing world issues with others. Analys loved Model UN, but the fact that it was simply a simulation resonated with her, and she branched out to look for concrete ways to improve the world right now. To start with, she became Vice President and later President of Chair Club at her school, a club dedicated to advocating for and protecting the dignity of human life. She has also worked on election campaigns, doing phone banking and managing voter registration drives. In the summer before her senior year, she was accepted into the Yale Young Global Scholars program, where she was able to learn more about social issues and collaborate with other driven high school students. Analys believes firmly in giving back to her community, and she founded a nonprofit organization called Barrettes for Books, where she works to sew and sell hairbows from old school uniforms, using the profits to fund a library at Villa Guadalupe, as well as a women and children’s shelter. In addition to her wide array of extracurricular activities, Analys still manages to maintain a 4.00 GPA even with a schedule crammed with AP classes ranging from Calculus to Language and Composition. She has been recognized with various awards, including the US Congressional Certificate of Recognition, Junior Class Peer Award, and Wilson Foundation Scholarship. She plans to continue her mission of improving the world and engaging in world affairs by studying International Relations and Industrial Engineering at Georgetown University, Boston College, or the University of Michigan.
Gabriela Pérez
Major: Sociology with a minor in Neuroscience
Heritage: Mexican

For Gabriela Pérez, essay-writing is not necessarily her favorite part of academics, but enrolled in her first sociology class, she suddenly found the task exciting. Hours of research and writing would pass, almost without her noticing – in fact, the class felt more like leisure time than an academic commitment. For Gabriela, sociology offered a chance to broaden her understanding of the world we all live in and introduced her to advocacy. In response, she promptly joined the 2020 Youth Advocacy Summit, where she began to understand the influence corporations have on politics and social issues. For Gabriela, the best way to combat these issues are to improve education, and that’s exactly what she wants to do: tear down the cobwebs of social inequality and level the playing field. In the summer of 2019, Gabriela began her journey toward becoming an educator when she and a group of friends who all agreed education was necessary to ignite change, decided to create a youth leadership team. One Step Forward aims to improve the way youth communicate and advocate for themselves, and the initiative quickly kicked off, with Gabriela at the helm. Her commitment to education is laudable, but Gabriela’s hard work and dedication is as much the result of her own desires as it is an effort to make her parents proud. Family is important to her, and in her own words, “the human race is one big family. The empathy we ought to have with each other is in us; we just have to display it for others.” This is a dogma that Gabriela embodies every day and one of the resounding reasons that she hopes to go into a life of public service. A proud member of the Hispanic community, she believes strongly in supporting education for her and future generations, caring for her elders, and instilling strong cultural values into her daily actions. Clearly well on her way to success and becoming the role model that her parents will be proud of, Gabriela plans to study Sociology with a minor in Neuroscience at Occidental College, Swarthmore College, or Rice University.
Jacob Grindstaff
Major: Political Science and Digital and Broadcast Journalism
Heritage: Colombian

Growing up, Jacob Grindstaff lived in an environment that prioritized giving back. He recalls his mom and abuelo welcoming others into their home with open arms, even if resources were tight for themselves. Those experiences shaped him into who he is, and persuaded him to pursue a career dedicated to public service. Already, Jacob has made inroads in regard to his career aspirations. During his junior year, he conducted a research project that analyzed the effectiveness of the large magnet school initiative in the Miami Dade County Public School System, finding that the magnet schools gave students a more tailored and rigorous curriculum while failing to properly desegregate and eliminate educational disparities between socioeconomic classes. As a result, he gathered a group of friends to work on a project called Oportuniteen: a website that provides students with access to intern, employment, volunteer, tutoring, and summer program opportunities. Community service has shaped Jacob’s view of the world, and his experience in various groups on and off campus have only honed his commitment. Jacob is actively involved in his school’s newspaper, Model UN, the Palmetto Animal Welfare Society, and honors organizations that have offered him various opportunities for professional and personal growth. His school guidance counselor describes him as poised, articulate, charismatic, highly adaptable, and engaging – all qualities that are essential for a career in public service. Academically, he is incredibly gifted, participating in the magnet AP Capstone Program, as well as various other advanced courses, and he maintains a 3.67 GPA. Jacob hopes to continue his quality academic trajectory by studying Political Science and Digital and Broadcast Journalism and continuing to serve his community at Syracuse University, Boston University, or University of Wisconsin-Madison.
Verónica Famadas
Major: Public Service
Heritage: Puerto Rican

Verónica Famadas is passionate about promoting cultural and economic justice. Throughout her childhood, she has looked to strong female political figures as role models, and seeing the passion and strength emitted by women like former First Lady Michelle Obama or first female Secretary of State Madeleine Albright inspired her. As a Hispanic woman interested in politics, she truly believes that different ethnicities and genders provide a more modern inclusive illustration of government that truly represents the people, and that’s exactly what she hopes to do. Apart from her ideals, Verónica is also an extremely driven and capable young woman. She has been a member of her high school’s Model United Nations since her freshman year, and early in her sophomore year, established her own nonprofit MIAMUN Inc., which hosts local Model UN conferences and donates all proceeds to underprivileged elementary schools. This decision only further defines her desire to give back and her easy leadership skills. Her leadership and commitment to helping others is clear, but Verónica is also an outstanding and meticulous student. With a 3.70 GPA, she juggles commitment after commitment while also managing an AP-heavy course load. According to one teacher, “one description stands out for Veronica above all others: initiative”. She can always be counted on to exceed expectations because she hits the ground running in everything she does. Not one to wait around to be told what to do, she identifies problems, plans out solutions, and executes them thoroughly. A brilliant civil servant she will one day make, at any level she chooses. Verónica hopes to continue her academic career by studying Public Service at New York University, Fordham University, or Brown University, and we have no doubt success is on her horizon.
Astrid Salinas Reyes  
Major: Public Policy and Economics  
Heritage: Mexican and Colombian

"If I'm not given a seat at the table, I'll pull one up," says Astrid, a notable student leader in her community of Charlotte, North Carolina. Recognizing her leadership abilities, her high school's administration and faculty selected her to represent her school on her district's Superintendent's Student Advisory Board. Astrid advises the top educational leaders in her community on many student issues, including how best they can cope with these unprecedented times in education. Her sophomore year, she was the sole faculty-nominated student in her class to attend the Hugh O'Brian Leadership Summer Seminar. That summer, her participation at the Leadership Seminar on a local level in North Carolina led to her being selected to join the forum on an international level at the World Leadership Congress in Chicago. There, she expanded her knowledge on the true meaning of leadership and was awarded an internship opportunity with Mediator's Beyond Borders International. She is the youngest intern ever in the history of the non-profit. Astrid has a passion for public policy. With her work, she has created a legacy of positive change and impact in her community. She wants to continue being an instrument of change and a voice for the disenfranchised and bring change on a national level by influencing, writing, and co-sponsoring bills in Congress. "If lawmakers won't recognize our worth, then we get up there ourselves and pass legislation that benefits all of our communities," she proclaims. This remarkable Latina of Colombian and Mexican descent will study Public Policy and Economics at Columbia University, Georgetown University, or the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
Xavier Amaro
Major: Political Science and Race, Ethnicity and Migration
Heritage: Mexican

Xavier is the highest-ranking Latino student in his high school's 98-year history. He is President of his school's Mu Alpha Theta chapter. He is an AP Scholar and a member of the National Honor Society and the National English Honor Society. He serves in high-profile positions in his community and uses those platforms to impact change. For instance, he used his student government position to organize activities for and awareness of Hispanic Heritage month and started a campaign to normalize pronoun preferences at his school. Xavier constantly evaluates circumstances to determine who is being left out of the conversation and challenges others to evaluate their own understanding and privilege. "My position gives me a platform to create lasting social change and leave something more than myself… I want to not only make a difference now. I want to (and will) leave my legacy wherever I go," he declares. With a GPA of 3.98, Xavier is an exceptional student, but he is an even more exceptional human being. He will be a first-generation college student and hopes to pursue a career in immigration law. He will attend Yale University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, or North Carolina State University, where he will concentrate his studies on Political Science and Race, Ethnicity, and Migration.
Ariel Hernández Gil  
Major: Pre-Pediatric Dentistry track and Social Work  
Heritage: Mexican

As a woman, as a Latina, as the daughter of immigrants, Ariel feels it is her duty to advocate and fight for policy reform in the name of the underrepresented, the indigent, the forgotten, and the victims of abuse. She has spent the last year volunteering at a local women’s shelter. Interacting with the families at the shelter and with those working to support, defend, and uplift them, has inspired Ariel. Though she has grown up knowing she wants to be a pediatric dentist, her experience at the shelter has prompted her to also pursue a career in social work. She wants to influence policy reform in both fields, in order to fight for the protection and empowerment of women and children affected by domestic violence and ensure that all communities have access to appropriate and timely medical care, oral health included. She wants to study Social Work while pursuing the Pre-Pediatric Dentistry track at Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological University, or the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.
Alexa Camilleri
Major: Political Science
Heritage: Mexican

Alexa Camilleri has always known that she wants to make a difference in her future career, and what better way to serve the public than to serve in public office. She realized that politics would be the ideal fit for her future profession after helping her brother run for the Michigan House of Representatives, where she volunteered by making phone calls, passing out literature on Election Day, and helping at fundraisers. This process introduced her to the ins and outs of the election process and gave her the opportunity to meet people like her governor, senators, congresswomen and countless other state representatives. She now hopes to go into this field and advocate for women’s rights, immigrants’ rights, minority rights, climate change and much more. Too often people within our communities do not have the platform or voice to express real concerns. Alexa hopes to address this and act as the voice for those very people. Community service goes hand-in-hand with public service positions, and it is something close to her heart. Three years ago, she worked with Kids Against Hunger to package meals for children in need. She has also volunteered at a local food bank and packaged activity bags for kids at a children’s hospital. Alexa enjoys putting effort into the things that benefit others. She is very proud of her Hispanic/Latino heritage and feels that Latinos often go unnoticed and underappreciated. Everyone is certainly noticing her, and with an excellent 4.00 GPA, a host of advanced placement classes ranging from US Government to Calculus, and a range of commendations, it’s a matter of time before she’s on the Senate (or equivalent!) floor. Alexa’s immediate future involves a degree in Political Science from University of Michigan, Georgetown University, or Xavier University.
Kaitlynn Tran
Major: Political Science or Mathematics
Heritage: Mexican

According to Kaitlynn Trann, in today’s society, social justice is a controversial topic. With battle lines drawn and staunch advocates on both sides, it requires an inventive solution. The first step, in Kaitlynn’s opinion? Have difficult conversations. Though she recognizes this is easier said than done and will not resolve all of our social problems, it is a good – and necessary place to start. That’s what Kaitlynn is doing. A firm believer that diversity is what makes us strong, Kaitlynn has an enviable commitment to civil service and has had experiences both in and outside the classroom that strengthen her resilience and foundational knowledge. In her Government and Law course at school, she wrote a letter to an elected official identifying an issue with a sewer behind her house and suggesting a potential solution – redirect water toward the sewers away from the row of houses on the street. The alderman immediately took action, and Kaitlynn quickly learned the impact of being an active member of the community. Apart from her commitment to community service, Kaitlynn is also very active in her school community, as a member of the National Honor Society, Tri-M (Music) Honor Society, Spanish Honor Society and Freshmen Mentors. As part of Freshmen Mentors, she is a division leader and responsible for guiding other mentors, a task she completes with grace and ease. With a GPA of 3.99, she is academically talented, and a wide range of advanced placement courses prepare her well for her future in public service. Kaitlynn plans on studying either Political Science or Mathematics at the University of Manchester, University of Oregon, or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
Michelle Alas Molina  
Major: Urban Studies  
Heritage: Salvadoran

“My opinions and innovation are my greatest weapons,” says Bay Area resident Michelle. The daughter of two Salvadoran immigrants, she feels indebted to her community for accepting her family and building her into who she is today. As a result, service is a guiding pillar in Michelle’s life. She is the Statewide Policy Director for GENup, a student-led social justice organization focused on education advocacy. In her position as Policy Director, she collaborates with school districts and legislators to write proposals and synthesize information to present in the legislature in order to create tangible policy reform. Michelle has pioneered the conversation on adding Racial Equity Task Forces to every school district, recognizing the need for innovative solutions to better serve California’s diverse student population. Last year, she made history by becoming her school district’s first-ever Student Board Member. This young leader is a fierce advocate for student representation and education equity and reform. One of her missions is to ensure that every student in her state has equitable access to quality education. In recognition of her advocacy work, Michelle was selected as one of three finalists for Student Member on the California State Board of Education. She serves as the Region 4 President of the California Association of Student Councils, managing a cabinet of students as they work to provide leadership conferences and promote civic engagement. She is also a Commissioner of the Walnut Creek Youth Leadership Commission, where she has facilitated voter registration drives and undertaken a virtual Cultural Awareness series. Not limited to her policy and advocacy work, Michelle is also an extraordinary student and leader at her school. She maintains a 4.0 GPA and is Co-Captain of her school’s Debate, Cross Country, and Track and Field teams. She is also Co-President of its Model United Nations and National Honor Society chapters. Proud of her roots, Michelle strives to increase Latinx representation in local government. “We as the Latinx community have been silenced for far too long. Our books are placed on the backs of bookshelves, our politicians do not like us, and our celebrities are few and far between. To Hispanics, I say BE LOUD! TAKE UP SPACE! We have been pushed into a corner, and it is time to come out roaring with pride,” she proclaims. She will attend Brown University, Georgetown University, or the University of California, Berkeley, where she plans on pursuing a degree in Urban Studies.
Belén Gutiérrez
Major: Undecided, leaning towards Political Science, Economics, or Education
Heritage: Mexican

First-generation Mexican-American Belen first became interested in law and politics while learning about forensics and biotechnology. This Clovis, California resident has been attending the Center for Advanced Research and Technology (CART) since her junior year. At CART, she got the opportunity to expand her understanding of government and the American criminal justice system in her Forensic Research and Biotechnology Lab. Learning more about these topics influenced Belen to consider a career as a criminal defense attorney. Curious and determined to delve further into her newfound interests, she signed up for Law and Order and Policy Lab her senior year. Through this class, Belen has studied major aspects of constitutional, criminal, and civil law. She has worked on projects that have taught her about criminal procedure, how laws are made, and how to make legal arguments. This class has served to encourage Belen to engage in public policy and advocate for policy reform. Of particular interest to her has been advocating for immigration reform. Belen is devoted to being an active member of her community and continuously works to instill the importance of community service in others, encouraging them to get involved. Throughout her high school career, she has volunteered to help at various capacities around her city, including donating her time to help at the Central California Food Bank and the University of California, Davis Medical Center. Belen has been a member of the California Scholarship Federation since 2018. She plans on attending the University of California, Los Angeles, the University of California, Davis, or the University of California, Irvine. She is considering pursuing a degree in Political Science, Economics, or Education.
Lucas Dovarganes  
Major: Business Management  
Heritage: Mexican and Spanish

For Mexican-Spanish-American Lucas, social justice is about projecting our most positive values onto the laws and norms that govern our society. That is what he aims to do as he advocates for police and policing reform, raising his voice while marching in the middle of the towering financial institutions in downtown Los Angeles, surrounded by peers equally motivated, passionate, and unapologetic for their cause as he. Lucas is the leader of his school’s Sunrise Movement hub. The Sunrise Movement is a youth-led nonprofit that strives for increased youth engagement in environmental political action. As Hub Leader, he has led efforts to educate his community, spread climate change awareness, and organize marches and demonstrations to advocate for climate change policy reform. Last year, Lucas volunteered on a congressional campaign, phone banking, and connecting with many voters on a personal level while informing them about his candidate and discussing their concerns regarding the then upcoming elections. “Bringing politics to a personal level impacted me deeply during the campaign,” he says. “It exposed me to the human lives that are affected by the decisions that are made in our grand democratic institutions. I [have] vowed to stay grounded and mindful when it comes to political action,” declares Lucas. At his school, he serves as the Minister of Ecological Affairs for the Associated Student Body Council. He has been challenging himself throughout his high school career by following a rigorous academic curriculum. He maintains a 3.82 GPA and is on his way to graduating with an International Baccalaureate diploma. He will study Business Management at ESCP Business School.
Tiffany Rodríguez
Major: Political Science
Heritage: Colombian

Tiffany Rodríguez is many things: humble, conscientious, and committed, but it is her dedication to others that makes her truly stand out. In the summer before her junior year, she was offered the chance to participate in the Hispanic National Bar Foundation 2019 Future Latino Leaders Summer Law Institute, a prestigious program that let her interview and seek advice from different types of lawyers in Washington, DC. The experience was eye-opening for her, and she quickly realized that no matter the direction she chooses, what matters most is her dedication and the work she is willing to put in. As a proud Latina, Tiffany looks to role models like Alexandria Ocasio Cortez as inspiration for her future. She hopes to fulfill a similar role, first becoming a lawyer, and then using her platform to serve the public. Tiffany has given back to her community in various ways already – through her school, she has tutored her peers in Algebra, French and Spanish, and off campus, she reads to young children at her local library during the summer. One particularly exceptional example of her willingness to give back is her participation in the Peer Group program at her school where she serves as a Peer Group Leader, mentoring and counseling younger students at her school. Tiffany is an A+ student, with a 4.00 GPA, a wealth of upper-level coursework, and an NHS membership to boot. Bilingual in both English and Spanish, she also decided to take three years of French, and dedicated to this trend of “threes” squeezed three AP classes into her schedule (the maximum allowed) as both a junior and senior. When a tone-deaf social media post was published by the school in an attempt to express solidarity after the murder of George Floyd, Tiffany was one of the first selected to join a student group intended to advise the school. According to Tiffany, the Hispanic/Latinx community is one with an unbreakable bond, but they are tired. Fortunately, we have strong and capable youth leaders like Tiffany to help us move forward, take advantage of the opportunities she is given, and effect change on a global scale. Tiffany plans to continue on her journey into politics by studying Political Science at Boston University, Columbia University, or Fordham University.
Marlen Mendieta-Camarón  
Major: Political Science and International Relations and minor in Latino Studies  
Heritage: Mexican

Marlen’s career wish-list has changed and adapted over the years. At age 7, she wanted to be a teacher; at 12, she considered being a doctor; at 15, she thought she’d be a gynecologist; only a year later, she’d changed tack to pursue lobbying; and now she’s refined that goal and is focusing on becoming an education equity lobbyist. Though varying titles, the thread remains the same: she wants to empower others and support change for underserved communities. Activism and service to others is the driving force behind Marlen’s career goals, and she is deeply involved in her community. Through her work with Teens Take Charge, she and a team member helped plan a school strike to fight for educational equity. Amid chants of “Integrate NOW” and “Education is a right, not just for the rich and white”, she felt emotion overtake her – this is what she was meant to do. Public service can at times seem daunting, and Marlen is no stranger to feelings of hopelessness, but with steps both big and small comes change, and she is more committed than ever. As Operations Leader for Teens Take Charge, she continues to create spaces where social justice can take place and push for equitable opportunities of leadership for people of color. In addition to being a staunch activist, Marlen is also deeply proud of her Hispanic heritage and community. She has always been taught that family is everything – and they, and only they – are the ones she should rely on. While family is still a cornerstone of her life, her work in activism has proven that fighting to define and engage with a community of people from different backgrounds has incredible benefits. And in many ways, members should be able to rely on their wider community, as well. In addition to her exceptional extracurricular activities, Marlen maintains an outstanding 3.94 GPA amid a range of upper-level courses spanning AP English to AP Macroeconomics. She plans to continue her activism and study Political Science and International Relations with a minor in Latino Studies at Macalester College.
Mariana Rodríguez Rivera  
Major: Business Management, Finance, or Economics  
Heritage: Puerto Rican  

Whether it be as a community organizer or a lawyer, Mariana wants to dedicate her life to advocating for social justice. Thanks to her dad, she grew up involved in activism and social justice movements. “I remember my six-year-old self would sit on his shoulders yelling incoherent sentences while accompanying him to protests and demonstrations,” she recalls. Even though she could not yet fully understand the reasons behind the protests, she was already developing a sense and a spirit for fighting for a cause. As she got older, she began to comprehend the complexities of the social issues against which she had grown up protesting and developing her personal viewpoints on these matters. Soon enough, Mariana started to organize within her community. She became an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights and joined the directive board of her school’s Gay-Straight Alliance. Through the club, she has taken part in the creation of a gender-neutral bathroom on her school campus. Along with other club members, Mariana also advocated for and succeeded in having her school add a clause to their teacher manual requiring all instructors to ask students for their preferred names and pronouns at the beginning of each school year. Mariana has served her community in numerous ways all through her high school years. Last year, after her school transitioned to virtual learning and amid college application season, it became increasingly difficult for seniors to get the necessary one-on-one time with their counselors as they applied for college. Knowing they could help, Mariana and a friend came up with a solution. They established a new club at their school through which they could assist their fellow seniors, offering them peer mentorship and helping them navigate the college application process. They led meetings every other week, where they gave basic information on how to fill out applications, apply for federal student aid, write college and supplemental essays, and answered all their classmates’ concerns regarding the process. Multidimensional in her interests and pursuits, Mariana is a member of her school’s Student Council and its Model United Nations and English Forensics League chapters. She has earned honorable mention two years in a row for her performance at the Harvard Model Congress Conference. She will attend Simmons University, the University of Washington, or the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she plans to study Business Management, Finance, or Economics.
Génesis Rodríguez Toro
Major: International Affairs
Heritage: Puerto Rican

Génesis dreams of serving her country by supporting its prosperity, promoting peace, and protecting its people while advancing US interest aboard by becoming a diplomat. To prepare for her future career, she wants to pursue a degree in International Affairs. Génesis is interested in learning about the impacts of politics, culture, and economics on global affairs. She wants to study how governments interact with one another and how each country’s political system differs or aligns with that of others. She is interested in gaining a perspective and a deep understanding of politics on the world stage. In order to better equip herself to work in an increasingly multilingual field, Génesis also wants to add other languages to her repertoire. A well-rounded student, Génesis has continuously looked for ways to challenge herself through her high school career. She has been following a rigorous curriculum, with many AP-level courses, and has been recognized for her academic achievements over the years, including making Honor Roll and High Honor Roll on multiple occasions. Génesis knows the value of community service and has found ways to remain active in her community even through the pandemic. Her most meaningful experience giving back occurred early last year after a wave of powerful earthquakes hit Puerto Rico. As a member of her school’s National Honor Society chapter, Génesis helped organize relief efforts at her school and assisted with the gathering of supplies, food, clothing, and personal care items, which they delivered to care centers housing families displaced by the earthquakes. Génesis is committed to her success and is a responsible and dedicated student. She will study International Affairs at Georgetown University, William and Mary University, or American University.
Jonathan Balderas  
Major: Environmental Studies; Minor: Political Science  
Heritage: Mexican

Environmental activism is urgent, necessary, and pivotal, but for Jonathan Balderas, it’s also personal. Having watched his family’s livelihood be affected by the climate crisis, he knew it was time he took a stand, and he is already starting to change the world for the better. As the founder of KS Youth for Climate Justice, an organizational dedicated to environmental activism, he met with and pushed a senator to advocate for an intersectional environmental agenda rooted in climate justice. Sickened by the abuse of large companies on natural resources and indigenous lands for the sake of profit, Jonathan fought for legitimate reform that would directly impact not only environmental health but the well-being of vulnerable populations. Though he was met with resistance, this has only strengthened his resolve and when his patience is tested he thinks back on Benito Juarez’s saying “el respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz”. Jonathan’s commitment to the cause is engrained in many of his activities. He has established his school as part of the U.S. Climate Strike by opening a local chapter. This group, inspired by Congresswoman Omar’s daughter, has required that contact the national organization and submit applications to the state coordinator, all work that he has completed with gusto. He has also worked in his local voting precinct during the elections, learning the ins and outs of the process, connecting with community members, and identifying the subtleties of voter suppression he feels need to be addressed. Jonathan believes that our abilities are of no use if we keep them to only uplift ourselves, and that we must share our abilities with one another so that we advance our communities to a better future. He plans to do just that, and combined with his academic talent, a GPA of 3.97, and an impressive display of leadership and independence, he is well on his way. Jonathan plans to study Environmental Studies and Political Science at Yale University, Vassar College, or the University of Kansas.
Haniel Morquecho  
Major: Early Childhood Education and Psychology  
Heritage: Mexican

Haniel Morquecho knows that the power a teacher has in a child’s life is enormous, which is why he wants to be someone who sparks the light in a child’s mind and teaches them that with hard work, anything is possible. However, the more he has learned, the more Haniel has realized that effecting real change happens outside the classroom as well, which is why he also strives to be someone who sparks change in public policy in education. Advocating for change is his drive and main focus. As part of two vibrant communities, the Latinx community and the LGBTQ+ community, he is acutely aware that there is work to be done in the everyday world around us. But as he says, he will always be there advocating for change. And he has already done so much: working with Out Boulder County, to cultivate a more accepting community, serving as a panther pride leader at his school, and constantly pushing himself to do more. As a leader in Out Boulder County, he was able to foster a community of his own and help others find their “home away from home”. Whether he was planning LGBTQ+ summits, sharing his experience on panels, or connecting with his peers, Haniel quickly learned that one of the most important aspects of leadership is being accountable. He is also very much aware of the problems facing the Latinx community, both external and internal. However, he believes that the community is a diverse and beautiful group of people, and that through empowering themselves through education, they can break the glass ceiling together. With a GPA of 3.65, and AP courses ranging from World History to Psychology, he is certainly an academically strong student. He plans to study Early Childhood Education and Psychology at the University of Northern Colorado, Reed College, or the University of Southern California.
Monica Juárez Velasco
Major: Chemistry and Social Justice
Heritage: Mexican-Purepecha

Monica Juárez Velasco has spent a lot of her life trying to figure out how to change the world. It’s a daunting task, but according to her, it is made less so when one first focuses on a small piece: their communities. Monica has taken this to heart and has already done so much to that end. She has volunteered at her local humane society, participated in important social protests such as Boise’s Women’s March and BLM protests, assisted in retirement homes, and joined a nonprofit organization aimed at getting more women into the Idaho outdoors. She has also served on the Mayor’s Council for Youth and participated as a leader for Wild Hearts Idaho. According to her, if everyone set high standards for themselves and took the best possible care of their corner of the world, the capacity for changing the world would be endless. There’s no doubt that she’s well on her way to accomplishing that. Throughout her activities, Monica has honed many skills that will make her successful in future public service. With her leadership skills, she created the first AVID Leadership Committee at her school, where she worked to build community within the program, tutoring students, planning college visits and finding career advice for students. Monica is also an incredibly gifted student academically, with a GPA of 4.00 and a host of AP courses from Spanish Literature, to Psychology, Biology and Microeconomics. She feels that the tie she has to both the Hispanic/Latino community and the US as a whole is the most crucial intellectual part of her life and is what keeps her in touch with what she wants in her life. She plans to leave a legacy that will help others for years to come, and her first step is studying chemistry and social justice at Stanford University, Brown University, or the University of Pennsylvania.
One of Gabriela’s passions is being an advocate for those unable to advocate for themselves. A school walkout for climate change her junior year inspired her to want to study public policy and work towards becoming a human rights activist and lobbyist. Gabriela has an extraordinary commitment to community service and donates her time all over her city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, including at her local food bank and animal shelter. She also works as a math tutor to elementary school children and has interned with the Albuquerque Department of Family and Community Services, working to help with the homelessness crisis in her city. She is a member of her school’s BLISS club, an organization that focuses on Bettering Lives in Small Steps. Gabriela is part of her school’s Varsity Soccer and Varsity Tennis Teams. With all of these activities, she still maintains a 3.98 GPA and ranks 12th in a graduating class of 391 students. She will attend Fort Lewis College, where she will double major in Public Health and Borders and Languages while playing college soccer.
Kayleen Ruiz
Major: Kinesiology with a minor in Nutrition or Business
Heritage: Mexican

A few months short of being able to submit a ballot of her own, Kayleen still fulfilled a civic duty during last year’s presidential elections by serving as a Student Poll Worker. As poll worker, she got to participate in the democratic process by helping to provide the vital civic duty of ensuring that the right to vote is preserved. While serving, she expanded her knowledge of politics, learned more about how the election process works, and guided and helped hundreds of people in her role as greeter. Kayleen is no stranger to serving her community. She is a member of her school’s National Honor Society and Interact Club. Both organizations require scholastic leadership and significant dedication to community service of all their members. She currently serves as President of Panther Pride, her school’s athletic club. Due to pandemic regulations, her county has not allowed any team sports since March of last year. Worried that some of her peers would feel isolated, lonely, and unmotivated to stay active, Kayleen founded her school’s Health and Fitness club. Every morning she wakes up at 4:30 to get ready to demonstrate different ways in which her school community can remain active. Kayleen’s drive and commitment to her community set her apart from her peers. She excels academically and continuously challenges herself. She maintains a 4.0 GPA and plans on majoring in Kinesiology and minoring in Nutrition or Business at the University of Tennessee, San Diego State University, or the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.
Alejandra Hoy  
Major: Environmental Studies or Urban Studies  
Heritage: Peruvian  

Gaithersburg, Maryland resident of Peruvian descent, Alejandra balances out her demanding academic schedule to find the time to be an advocate for causes that matter to her. As Vice President of her school's Amnesty International Club chapter, she has been active in learning about and helping educate her peers on abuses of human rights happening worldwide and has been able to contribute to the movements that fight against such human rights violations through chapter-sponsored events. Alejandra serves as Co-President of her school's Peacemakers and Problem Solvers Club (PMPS). Through PMPS, she helps her peers develop their leadership and problem-solving abilities by connecting them to students in Colombia so they can work together to identify humanitarian issues and collaborate on solutions. Alejandra is actively involved in her local Girl Scouts chapter. She is also a member of her school's chapters of the National Spanish Honor Society and the Foundation for the International Medical Relief of Children, an organization that works to bring healthcare to medically underserved communities around the world. Alejandra wants to be a role model for other young Latinas. She believes the best way to empower the next generation is by leading and inspiring younger members of our community by example. "I think that the best way to inspire the younger generation is by pioneering and leading by example. Serving as role models for how people of Latino heritage can contribute to American society will encourage the younger generation and empower them to create positive, meaningful change," she asserts. Alejandra's proven service, leadership, and academic accomplishments are impressive. She maintains a 4.0 GPA and wants to pursue a degree in Environmental Studies or Urban Studies. She is a QuestBridge Match Scholarship recipient and will be attending Washington University in St. Louis on a full four-year scholarship.
Sofía Sepúlveda
Major: Political Science with a minor in History
Heritage: Colombian and Chilean

Proud of her heritage, Sofia has always referred to herself as a "Chilombamericana," in recognition of her Chilean, Colombian, and American roots. After a student at her school called her a derogatory term, Sofia sprung into action. To fight the problem of racism at her school, protect other Latinx students from experiencing it as she had, and provide them with a safe space, she founded her school's first Latinx Student Union. Throughout the years, her organization has grown and led assemblies to raise awareness about persistent social inequities and injustices faced by the Latinx community in the US. Aware of the importance of establishing clubs like hers in predominantly white institutions, Sofia and her classmates came together to create NExT, a collaboration with other independent schools to encourage diversity work. Last summer, when the Black Lives Matter movement was growing after the tragic murder of George Floyd, Sofia wanted her school to place a BLM banner in support. Knowing their history of not being proactive with race issues, Sofia purchased a banner herself. It now proudly and prominently hangs on her school's grounds. From volunteering at an arts center for kids to helping with food and clothing drives, serving others and being an active member of her community has been central to Sofia's high school experience. "[It] helped me step out of my comfort zone and gain new experiences that have shaped my meaning of life," she declares. For her involvement in organizing the NExT initiative, Sofia received her school's Community, Equity, and Justice Award. She was also recognized with the International Values Award for contributing to enriching her school's community by actively bringing people together. Sofia wants to major in Political Science and minor in History. She will attend Columbia University, Fordham University, or Temple University.
Francine Díaz
Major: Political Science and Human Rights
Heritage: Ecuadorian

Francine’s primary goal in life is to give a voice to those who may not be able to use their own. Last summer, she led a peaceful demonstration in Hoboken, New Jersey, to speak up and stand against police brutality episodes taking place across the nation. Francine is a passionate advocate for human rights and continuously works to empower her Latino community to fight for those that can’t. She is well aware of the need to champion the cause of those less fortunate and strives to highlight the voices of the disenfranchised. Committed to volunteerism, she is always the first to sign up and help in any way possible. She maintains herself occupied by fully immersing herself into working for her community. As part of her volunteer work, she teaches students from underserved populations at Saint James the Less in Philadelphia, packs lunches for children in need of extra nourishment in the Hagerstown, Maryland area, and oversees the bean bag toss through the Kisseman Children’s Foundation Easter Egg Hunt held at her school. Seeing the impact her time and effort had in her local community made Francine want to continue her work in her family’s community down in Ecuador. She set up donation bins in her dormitory at school. “Most of the girls at the end of the year would throw out clothing that would make an Ecuadorian girl leap with joy,” explains Francine. Once the school year was over, she spent countless hours sorting through donations, washing and allocating clothing. Prior to taking her trip to Ecuador, she shipped three hundred pounds of clothes for girls in many rural Ecuadorian villages. Once in Ecuador, she led English tutoring sessions for children in the Galápagos Islands. She plans on continuing to pursue her passion for service work by joining the Peace Corps after graduation. Francine is editor of her school’s student newspaper, captain of its Speech and Debate team, and member of its Model UN club. She also a member of its Varsity Lacrosse and Varsity Field Hockey teams. Francine is a distinguished student with an uncanny ability to balance her extracurricular responsibilities with a rigorous academic schedule. She will attend Barnard College, New York University, Seton Hall University. She plans on pursuing degrees in Political Science and Human Rights and eventually becoming an immigration lawyer.
Lensy Velásquez  
Major: Human Rights or Legal Studies with a minor in Psychology  
Heritage: Salvadoran and Honduran

The value of caring for and helping others has been instilled in Lensy Velásquez since childhood. Her parents, immigrants to the United States were sure to encourage Lensy and her brother to always look for ways to be kind, especially to those in the Hispanic community in the US, many of whom had faced hardships of their own. Caring for others is second nature, but when Lensy realized that she could build a profession from it, she knew she had found her calling. Since then, she has decided to pursue a career as a Human Rights Lawyer and has taken as many steps as possible toward realizing her dream. Currently, she is participating in the International Internship Program, a branch of the Leadership Initiative Organization, in which she and a team of her peers have been helping Nigerian law firms tackle human rights violations. She and her team chose to focus on the lack of education for many girls in Nigeria, an experience that helped her realize her own privilege and further enhanced her desire to help others. This wasn’t the only time Lensy has volunteered her time. In the summer of 2020, she also participated in the Purse Project meant to help women in shelters dealing with homelessness and domestic abuse. Seeing so many women come together to help each other inspired her and made her more hopeful for the world at large. Apart from her clear commitment to social justice in her extracurricular endeavors, Lensy is also an impressive student. With a wide range of AP and higher-level classes on her resume, she has a well-rounded education and maintains a 3.86 GPA. A proud member of the Hispanic community, she believes it is important to have cultural pride, but also to acknowledge the systemic issues in our communities. She hopes to continue empowering this and future generations to work together and continue the cycle of accountability and upliftment of oppressed communities. It’s certain that Lensy’s professional and academic future looks bright, and she plans to study Human Rights or Legal Studies with a minor in Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, Columbia University, or the University of Washington.
Lauren González
Major: Political Science with a Pre-Law track
Heritage: Mexican

Lauren González is one of those rare young individuals who has the ability and knowledge to take the initiative and make things happen, without constant supervision. According to her teachers, she is an exceptional leader and shows a constant willingness to assist others in any capacity that she can. No better example exists than Lauren’s effort to implement a sexual violence advocacy program for schools in San Antonio. She began the program this past summer as part of an internship with Girls Inc. of San Antonio. The project has since evolved into Teal Week, a sex education program geared toward learning about and preventing sexual violence. But Lauren’s impact is not limited to her local community – she has testified and presented Teal Week to the State Board of Education of Texas, as well as to local school district leaders. Already, social justice forms a part of her life. In addition to her advocacy program, Lauren is also a member of the San Antonio Police Corps Program, which has been especially critical in regard to the police reform protests and discussions that have taken place over the last summer. Lauren took the opportunity to be part of the solution and worked to improve police and community relations by asking questions and identifying issues facing the community to fellow members of her Police Corps Program. As a 4-year letterman and 2-year varsity captain of her high school golf team, Lauren exemplifies the many qualities of a well-rounded individual. On top of her extracurricular activities, she is a diligent student, always demonstrating a keen interest in bettering herself, and maintaining an impressive 3.89 GPA amid challenging coursework and commitments. Committed to improving the justice system, she hopes to study Political Science with a Pre-Law track at Ohio State University. If she is even a fraction as committed to her future goals as she has been to honing her academic and professional prowess in high school, Lauren’s lofty goals will certainly be attainable.
Madelyn Elizondo
Major: Political Science with a minor in Sustainability Studies
Heritage: Mexican

Madelyn Elizondo is a woman of indomitable spirit and impressive strength, two qualities necessary for a future in social justice. Two summers ago, she attended a program at Harvard that investigated race in politics throughout history. Her research focused on black youth and the discrimination they face in the education system ranging from underfunded schools to harsher disciplinary consequences. The experience urged her forward in her pursuit of knowledge, and in her junior year of high school, she decided to take charge, rallying her peers and starting Amnesty Club, a chapter of Amnesty International. As a high schooler, she is already contributing to the fight for social justice, writing letters, signing and drafting petitions, and educating herself and those around her. In the future, she hopes to apply this same rigorous perseverance by practicing law and fighting on behalf of those affected by human rights violations and injustices across the globe. As one might expect, giving back is important to Madelyn, and she frequently volunteers for a local organization called Special Reach, which works to serve children with special needs and their families. In addition, she serves as National Honor Society Vice President at her school, and launched the Buddy Program, where each member was paired with a special needs student. The result was heartening – even during virtual learning, it allowed students to form new relationships and offered an outlet during uncertain times. In addition to her extracurricular activities, Madelyn is also an impressive academic, maintaining a glowing 4.00 GPA amid an AP-charged schedule. Her teachers describe her as a warm presence in the classroom with a sense of humor, always willing to make her peers feel more comfortable. Equally comfortable getting the ball rolling or encouraging others to take the lead, Madelyn has a bright future ahead of her. She plans to study Political Science with a minor in Sustainability Studies at the University of Texas Austin, Georgetown University, or Duke University.
Nicole Lugo
Major: Political Science/Economics
Heritage: Cuban

Nicole Lugo is a motivated, determined, and hardworking young woman, who consistently pushes herself toward success both academically and otherwise. With a passion for law and aspirations of becoming an attorney, her diligence comes as no surprise. In fact, over the past four years, she has volunteered over 700 hours with the Miami-Dade Economic Advocacy Trust – Teen Court, serving as a Youth Prosecutor. She has also attended Youth Educational Summits that have granted her insights in how to help educate her peers on the consequences of disruptive behavior. In addition to her volunteering opportunities, Nicole also serves as the president and founder of her school’s Law Society, where she leads and facilitates informative Zoom meetings regarding legal fields, organizes the Law Careers Fair, and offers a direct outlet to her peers. Her insight and ability to look at a problem from multiple angles serves her well now, as a Youth Prosecutor, but also in her future endeavors. In addition to her law background, Nicole is an exceptional student with a 3.95 GPA and a weighted 5.33 GPA, thanks to her many AP and upper-level courses. She is also the two-year Captain of the varsity tennis team, two-year Captain of the Mock Trial team, four-year member of Mu Alpha Theta Club, where she currently serves as the Fundraising Chairperson, has served as Class of 2021 Historian, Beta Honor Society's Vice President, and is currently Student Government Treasurer. She has a life packed to the brim, and yet, she still finds the time and energy to remain organized and motivated, and to advocate for a better world. Nicole hopes to continue her journey by studying Political Science and Economics at Brown University, Yale University, or Columbia University, and if her tertiary experience is anything like high school, she is bound to thrive.
Arianna Peró
Major: Applied Physics or Computational Science and Government or Human Rights
Heritage: Venezuelan and Cuban

A passion for physics was not something Arianna Peró ever saw in herself – at least not until she discovered quantum mechanics. Though she had always like science, it hadn’t instilled in her a sense of wonder, but after a single CrashCourse video, she was hooked. After that, any free time she had was dedicated to analyzing the limits of human technology and dreaming up ways to surmount them. Despite all recent technological advancements, we’ve really only scratched the surface of true scientific understanding, and the application of quantum mechanics to technology is something that enthralls Arianna. However, despite her fascination, she is also deeply passionate and committed to giving back and making a difference for those around her. Because she is not yet old enough to vote, she works to effect change in other ways: helping found and leading Students Demand Action (SDA), a national nonprofit nonpartisan organization dedicated to ending gun violence across America. Since its formation, Arianna has had a genuine impact on her state and country’s legislators, organizing marches, meetings, and educational community events, and speaking at leadership and advocacy summits. Whether she’s writing letters, encouraging people to vote, diving into a textbook on applied physics, or serving as her Senior Class President, Arianna is nothing if not committed. Her mantra in life is “Pay it forward and pay it back” and that’s certainly something she embodies in her day-to-day life. Arianna is proud of her multi-cultural roots. A first-generation American born to Afro-Cuban and Indigenous Venezuelan parents, she grew up immersed in two cultures, an experience she credits for her pride in her diverse ancestry. She hopes to continue on her path to success and social justice and will certainly be a role model for other young people invested in making their communities more just and equitable. With a perfect 4.00 GPA, Arianna is academically gifted and plans to double major in Applied Physics or Computational Science and Government or Human Rights at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Columbia University, or University of Chicago.
Vanessa González
Major: Political Science with a double minor in International Affairs and Economics
Heritage: Venezuelan

As an immigrant herself, Vanessa González has personally witnessed the unjust behavior directed at minority groups. Justice for her is more than equal treatment, it is having an answer and solution to the many issues facing these groups that benefits everyone in the community. On top of her commitment and need to help others and uplift her own community, Vanessa is a diligent, hardworking, and rigorous student. Her dedication and enthusiasm permeate everything she does, from class discussions in her upper-level courses to participation in the Girls Who Code summer program. Vanessa has also been deeply committed to serving her academic community. This last year, she created a Model United Nations Club at her school, acquiring knowledge, demonstrating her impeccable leadership skills, and engaging in complex debate with her peers. As a former student in the ESOL program, dedicated to helping new students adapt to a new country, language, and culture, she soon realized that for many immigrants or children of immigrants, resources about accessing tertiary education opportunities were limited. In response, she founded College Readiness for ESOL and International Students, a group that provides information about graduation requirements, college preparation, and scholarship opportunities. This is who Vanessa is – she sees a problem, she finds a solution, and she moves to the next challenge. What better candidate for an advocate for social justice is there? Vanessa is also an impressive academic. She takes part in her high school’s rigorous International Baccalaureate program, and amid a hefty course load, still maintains a perfect 4.00 GPA. But according to her teacher, it’s not simply her commitment to the classroom, but her willingness to help others which truly makes her an outstanding student. Vanessa hopes to continue her academic trajectory by studying Political Science with a double minor in International Affairs and Economics at University of Chicago, Northeastern University, or Boston University.
Korina López
Major: Political Science
Heritage: Mexican

Korina believes that the best way to empower the Latino community is for us to stand together, show pride in our heritage, and help each other grow. And she leads by example. She is an active and valuable member of her community of Elkins, Arkansas, where she serves as State Vice President and as District President of the Future Business Leaders of America club. These positions put her in charge of planning and running her district’s Leadership Conferences. She uses her platform to be a voice and an advocate for the most underserved in her community. Most notably, she advocated for the creation of a mentorship program for elementary school children. Thus began the Guiding Elks through Mentorship Program, which pairs high school students with elementary school children who need support and guidance. “This program will always be one of the highlights of my high school experience because I had the chance to see the change I was making for these children,” says Korina. She wants to continue making a difference in the lives of others and hopes to one day have a hand in improving our nation’s immigration system. She wants to become an immigration lawyer and dedicate her life to advocating for and defending the rights of immigrants. “I want to be an immigration lawyer to empower the Latino community and help people have the opportunity to have a better life in [this country],” she says. At the top of her class with a 4.0 GPA, Korina will study Political Science at the University of Arkansas, the University of Central Arkansas, or the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith.
“A white man once told me ‘forget about politics, women do not make it far, and you are colored,’” recalls Yadira, who used those words as fuel. “Although the words stung, they didn’t bring me down. Rather, they encouraged me to act so other Latinas wouldn’t see themselves as worthless,” she explains. She wanted a solution; to stop racial injustice and for people of different genders, races, and ethnicities to allow their voices to be heard. Community service became a vehicle for her to motivate Latino students in her community. She took every opportunity she had to not only serve them, but to educate them about what they could also do for their communities through service projects and volunteering. The positions she has held as officials in her school’s Key Club, Beta Club, and Student Government Association and her involvement with migrant workers have provided Yadira with the opportunity to engage in issues of social justice. The more she learned about the issues surrounding her—poverty, xenophobia, discrimination—the more evident the failures of our system became. She wants to be a political champion for those that have been silenced in her community. Having witnessed and lived the discriminatory treatment of Latinos, she wants to fight so that no other human is treated unfairly. “The world expects us to lower our heads, but I will not,” says Yadira. “No man, no barrier, no obstacle [will] stop me from achieving equality in my community. They will know that being a successful brown woman is possible,” she declares. Yadira believes that the power to determine who we are and what we achieve as Latinos lies within ourselves. That it is we who must allow ourselves to be defined by the potential we possess rather than the barriers that try to hold us back. This exceptional Latina will be attending Duke University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, or the University of Michigan and majoring in Political Science and Economics.
Adeline Rios  
Major: Immigration Law  
Heritage: Spanish

Adeline wants to be an immigration lawyer. She wants to use her law degree to champion change and advocate to ensure everyone has a voice. In preparation for her career, she has become an AP Capstone Scholar. This program has helped Adeline develop her critical thinking, analytical research, communication, and problem-solving skills. It has also allowed her to immerse herself into topics in the realm of social justice, more specifically, systematic inequalities regarding race in the US. Adeline is driven and dedicated. Her teacher describes her as the perfect combination of strength, dedication, maturity, kindness, academic giftedness, hard work, and positivity. She is a class leader among her peers and a teacher advocate. With a 3.93 GPA, she is among the top 1% of her class. She stands out among similarly accomplished students because she intrinsically cares and is motivated by her own curiosities and drive to know and learn. She is a scholar-athlete and has served as captain of her school’s varsity soccer team. Adeline intends on studying Immigration Law at Harvard College, Emory University, or Cornell University.
Nataly España
Major: Criminal Law/Political Science/Pre-Law/Creative Writing
Heritage: Guatemalan

Nataly España comes from a family of immigrants – strong, resilient, and intelligent people, who have granted her opportunities to succeed. Her grandfather was an activist in Guatemala, and she credits him for her sense of determination and commitment to helping others. Nataly is actively involved in an organization called CAUSE, dedicated to helping students with their college applications, and she learned a lot of valuable information that could help undocumented students. As a member of her school’s DREAMers club, she helped put together a presentation about the struggles of immigrants, both with and without papers, spreading awareness of many of the trials facing people across the United States. A beautiful writer, she also contributes articles for a magazine about environmental awareness, focusing on topics relating to politics involving the environment such as the Green New Deal or the situation in the Amazon. There are many ways to contribute toward social justice, and clearly, Nataly works in her fair share. A diligent, kind, and well-liked young woman, she has grown confident over the last few years, learning to speak her mind and stand tall even in the face of fear. She is very proud of her Guatemalan heritage and believes that the key to promoting cultural pride and empowering this generation is to communicate and educate others. With a wealth of honors and AP-level classes under belt, she is academically gifted, as well, and she plans to study Criminal Law/Political Science/Pre-Law/Creative Writing at University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Chicago, or the Loyola University in Chicago.
Joselin Aguilar Gramajo  
Major: Journalism and Political Science  
Heritage: Guatemalan and Salvadoran

Social Justice has been an important topic for Joselin Aguilar Gramajo since middle school and it truly is a passion of hers to be able to advocate for people like her. For Joselin, growing up seeing the difficulties people face because of race, religion and gender in society was troubling, but it has helped her grow as an individual and greatly influenced her desire to be actively involved in social justice. She sees her role as an activist as someone who can offer information and insights – perhaps people don’t understand, or perhaps they have the privilege not to see racism, sexism, and other discrimination – and in turn help influence others’ views. These are exactly the reasons that she started her school’s first-ever diversity club and launched the Hispanic heritage month panels. Joselin feels she truly learned how to be an activist at the ACLU Summer Institute. Spending time in Washington DC, she learned to use her voice to empower others and saw the many ways in which she could start a change in the world. Her drive to be an activist is to change people’s lives for the better. Activism requires being able to command an audience, no matter how small, and Joselin’s leadership are a testament to her future success. Being her school’s Model UN President in her junior year, she learned that being a leader should bring one joy as much as it brings one work. A stunning writer, she has also been able to hone her writing skills, particularly poetry, in her school’s Creative Writing class. Poetry offers Joselin an avenue through which she can channel and share her experiences around social justice. Coupled with her moving performances, she is a force to be reckoned with, and she has since honed her skills even further. Joselin plans to use her talents, skills and dedication to continue on her academic path by studying Journalism and Political Science at Ohio University, American University, or Hofstra University.
Natalia Perez
Major: Political Science / Pre-Law track
Heritage: Mexican

Over the years, Natalia Perez has constructed a love and passion for political science and the US judicial system. As she explored and enriched her knowledge of the field, she was shocked to see so few attorneys that looked like her. As a Mexican-American woman, her newest ambition is to help diversify the field of law and politics. To prepare, Natalia has thrown herself into schoolwork focusing on law and government. In her junior year, she joined the Loyola Law School Law Program for high school students, which was a three-week program taught by the Graduate Students of the Law School. She learned about our rights as individuals, engaged in ethical decision activities, and participated in mock trials. A big part of Natalia’s interest in law stems from her passion for community service, which comes from her mother who always tried to take time out of her day to help others in any way she could. In 2019, when Natalia traveled to Costa Rica through a program called AMIGOS de las Americas, she fostered her passion for social justice. This nonprofit summer immersion program allows teens in the United States to travel to a Latin American country where they work alongside community leaders, children and family members in a project chosen by the community. During her stay, she painted the local school building and worked with teachers to organize a health day for the students of the community and neighboring communities. Working in another country taught Natalia the importance of inclusion. She is very proud of her Mexican heritage and wears the pride of a Chicana on her sleeve. With a GPA of 3.80, and wide range of AP courses, from United States History, to US Government and Politics, to Spanish Language and Culture, she is an excellent student academically. She plans to study Political Science / Pre-Law track at Northwestern University, University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign, or the American University.
Kaitlyn Sánchez  
Major: Environmental Science and Policy with a minor in Sustainability  
Heritage: Mexican

Kaitlyn serves as a member of the Riverside Youth Council, a delegation made up of student representatives from schools throughout her district that addresses issues of youth concern as advisory to the Riverside, California Mayor. Through her position in the Youth Council, she serves as a member of the Environmental Sustainability Committee, where she works to develop and support sustainability initiatives and advocates for policies and practices that promote sustainability and environmental justice. While her work in the committee is limited to advocating for sustainability only in her district, it has allowed Kaitlyn the opportunity to network and meet peers that share her same passion for environmental advocacy. Together, they want to promote awareness on social and environmental justice issues on a larger scale and are currently developing a Google site where they can educate the public and advance their advocacy efforts beyond the limits of their city. Kaitlyn has continuously demonstrated her commitment to leadership and hard work during her high school years through her academic success, rich extra-curricular record, and dedication to service. She is the founder and President of her school’s Teens Restoring Earth’s Environment Club and is a member of her school’s chapters of the National Honor Society, the National Society of High School Scholars, and Best Buddies. Last year, she was selected to be a Hispanic Scholarship Fund Scholar and had the opportunity to attend their Youth Leadership Institute. Kaitlyn maintains a 3.98 GPA and stands among the top 1% of her class. She is a National AP Scholar and a Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation Semifinalist. She plans on attending Duke University, Yale University, or the University of California, Berkeley, where she will major in Environmental Science and Policy and minor in Sustainability.
Natalia Rodríguez
Major: Psychology
Heritage: Mexican

Natalia’s most significant source of inspiration to be an advocate for social justice and to work towards her success and that of others like her is the story of her family. “My Mexican immigrant grandparents lived through the scars of racism in the Southwest, attended segregated Mexican-only schools, and only had a basic elementary school education. However, they still fought for access to a better life for their children,” tells us Natalia. Her parents were first-generation college students. They struggled financially and navigated the college system with no one to guide them. These are the stories passed down to Natalia that have instilled in her the value of hard work and have taught her to face challenges head-on and fight to empower her community. To promote social advocacy, discuss social justice issues, and help her peers get involved in her community and find ways to be advocates, she founded the Cubs for Social Justice Club at her school. She also serves as Co-head of her school’s Latinas Unidas Club and as a member of her school’s Student Diversity Council, through which she spearheads initiatives to promote justice, diversity, and inclusion at her school. As Latinas Unidas Co-head, Natalia works to create a safe space for Latina students in a school where they are an underrepresented minority. She also helps spread cultural awareness of the Latino culture through assemblies and special events. Natalia’s proudest high school moment occurred when she got the opportunity to interview the President of the United Farm Workers, Teresa Romero. “Working for immigrant rights is a passion of mine, and seeing her in this role made me proud as a young Latina,” she recalls. Natalia has excelled in all courses throughout her high school experience. She maintains a 3.91 GPA and has received awards for her academic performance in her classes, including the Theology I Award in 2018 and the Chemistry Award in 2019. She will attend Georgetown University, Boston College, or Fordham University, where she plans to study Psychology.
Sofía Orduña
Major: International Relations with a minor in Economics
Heritage: Mexican

Sofía wants to dedicate her life to human rights and social justice work. It all started when she volunteered as a youth attorney for the Centerforce Youth Court, a restorative justice program that provides an alternative to the traditional juvenile justice system. “Centerforce had community service and programs to help arrested kids expunge their records, but I noticed the majority of the kids arrested were youth of color,” remembers Sofía. This inspired her to get involved and look for ways in which she could offer support. She joined the Alliance for Girls (AFG), a coalition that brings together Bay Area organizations committed to improving the lives of local girls, as a youth board member and a youth researcher. As a researcher, Sofía’s first assignment led to the Together We Rise report. This report reflected the thoughts of youth of color in the Bay Area, focusing on their experiences and needs, and highlighted the importance of investing in the lives of young women of color to help make California a more just and equitable state. She has since continued working on several projects as an AFG youth board member and has represented AFG and her community on state and national advocacy initiatives, including the National Young Women’s Initiative, to advance state and federal policies. Her research and involvement have contributed to the passing of a resolution that will make Bay Area Rapid Transit safer for girls and gender-expansive youth. Sofía is also devoted to making an impact at her school and has served as Diversity Commissioner on her school’s Associated Student Body. Through this role, she organized her school’s first Women in STEAM panel when she was a freshman. This panel hosted a group of notable entrepreneurs in technology, engineering, movie production, and architecture to answer students’ questions and share perspectives. The event was so successful that she repeated it as a biannual event ever since, only stopping once pandemic regulations were set in place. “I specifically invited women of color in STEAM fields. I wanted to show students that everyone has a place in STEAM and give students the chance to meet entrepreneurs with similar backgrounds and experiences as them,” Sofía shares. This ardent Latina leader is deeply committed to championing the needs of her community. She plans to major in International Relations and minor in Economics at New York University, Columbia University, or the University of California, Berkeley.
**Ava Baeza**
Major: Women and Gender Studies and minor in Hispanic Studies
Heritage: Cuban and Chilean

If Ava Baeza is one thing, it’s committed. Committed to her studies, to giving back to her community, and to embracing and embodying her proud Latina heritage, all while cultivating an outstanding academic prowess. A passionate activist, Ava has explored her social responsibility through her work with the League of Women Voters of Maine, where she learned the ins and outs of voter engagement while co-moderating a candidate forum for a Maine U.S. Senate race. Soon after, she set up a voter registration and helped all eligible seniors register to vote. Her success got her an invitation to sit on a voter engagement panel at the Blaine House – Maine’s Governor’s Mansion – in Augusta, where she was the only student sitting alongside a Colby College professor and a city council member. These experiences introduced her to Maine’s political leaders and have served as a foundation for her to lead others in fighting for positive change in government. Ava also serves as Co-President of the Maine Teen Advocacy Coalition, which has enabled her to stay active and fight for social justice within her own community. For instance, when the realities of COVID-19 became stark and many of her extracurricular activities had been sidelined, she initiated a peaceful Black Lives Matter protest with over 150 students and community members joining in. Ava’s teachers are also extremely impressed with her resourcefulness and commitment to justice. The Gifted and Talented Program Coordinator at her high school says that Ava is naturally curious, especially about politics and civil rights issues, passionate, and meticulous. Her transcripts also reveal her drive and willingness to take on a challenge: with a perfect 4.00 GPA combined with extremely challenging coursework, including the AP Capstone series, she has shown time and again that success is well within her reach. Ava plans to continue her fight for equality and justice by studying Women and Gender Studies with a minor in Hispanic Studies at Wesleyan University, Bowdoin College, or Brown University.
Peyton Hall
Major: Biology and Chemistry
Heritage: Puerto Rican

Peyton Hall is a woman of action, integrity, and a commitment to justice, particularly when it comes to issues of racism in the United States. After reading about how Black women are up to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes, she dove into research regarding racism permeating women’s healthcare in the United States. But research in and of itself can only accomplish so much. Since she completed her study, she has continued to advocate for maternal health equity by sharing her findings with organizations such as Jack and Jill of Suffolk County and at various town halls through the Women’s Diversity Network. In addition to advocacy, she intends to become an OB-GYN, a profession where she can have a direct impact on the mental and physical well-being of Black women and other women of color and ensure equitable treatment. Women’s health isn’t her only passion – this past summer, in the height of the pandemic, the news of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and several others left Peyton feeling devastated and overwhelmed, like so many. She knew she couldn’t sit idly by and felt called to do something. So, she did. After initiating an email to the superintendent, Peyton developed and distributed surveys to BIPOC students and families in her district. After results showed a majority had encountered some form of discrimination in the school district, she devised a 5-point plan to address the issues, involving creating an inter-district committee to address implicit bias and foster disclosure. She presented her findings to the superintendent with smashing success, and she was invited to curriculum writing sessions with English teachers to diversify literature throughout the district. As if that weren’t impressive enough, Peyton is also the leader of two clubs – Women’s Empowerment Initiative and the African-American Student Organization – and regularly volunteers her time to the community. She is also an exceptional student with a 3.75 GPA and a course load filled with AP courses ranging from Biology to United States History. She plans to continue her academic endeavors by studying Biology and Chemistry at Georgetown University, University of Southern California, or University of Virginia.
According to her teacher, Génesis Márquez Campos is a supremely hard worker, always looking for ways to go above and beyond what is asked of her. Persistent and unfailing in her pursuit of excellence both inside the classroom and out, she refuses to settle for anything less than the best she is able to offer. Even more so than her undeniable work ethic, he says, he admires Génesis for her passion for others and her unending commitment to helping her classmates unprompted. Her commitment to others is clear in the work she has managed to accomplish even in the few short years of high school. In 2020, she and her peers started a nonprofit organization aimed at uplifting a local low-income community. Recognized as founder and president, she raised hundreds of dollars for homeless outreach in her community, also facilitating and organizing clothing and fresh produce drives for families in need. Founding a nonprofit is no easy task, and it’s clear that Génesis has remarkable leadership skills, but as she says, being a leader is not always easy. Fortunately, she seems more than up to the task. As a Hispanic immigrant, Génesis says she is constantly promoting her cultural pride – “no matter where you come from,” she says, “you should always try your best because you are not only representing yourself but an entire community”. In her case, she represents her proud Salvadoran heritage, and the best she can offer is absolutely exceptional. In addition to her extracurricular activities, Génesis maintains a perfect 4.00 GPA with a course load packed with AP classes ranging from Biology and Statistics to Research. Social justice and advocacy are clearly immensely important to her, and she hopes to continue helping those who need it most by pursuing a career in nursing, though she is considering a pre-med track. Génesis hopes to attend College of the Holy Cross, Harvard University, or Boston College to continue her path toward making the world a better place.
Sebastián Adriano
Major: Public Policy with a minor in Economics
Heritage: Puerto Rican and Mexican

San Juan, Puerto Rico native of Puerto Rican and Mexican descent, Sebastián sees every person as part of a giant puzzle called society. "Each piece is designed to fit effortlessly into the puzzle. However, the pieces of Latinx, LGBTQ+, and other communities struggle to fit because they are frequently torn or tampered with," he says. For him, activism and service fulfill two essential roles: help the pieces fit and prevent further damage. "Giving back is a statement against the status quo and an investment in human solidarity," declares Sebastián. He sees social justice as the only solution to human suffering. He has continuously looked for ways to practice social activism, joining organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America and serving as a youth advocate for the Pro-Bono "Enlace" Program of the University of Puerto Rico, School of Law. To expand his reach as a leader, he has participated in programs like the Toastmasters International's Youth Leadership Program and the Youth Empowered Action Camp, where he completed three sessions and expanded his knowledge on global issues, developed his skills as an activist, and advocated for racial equality while raising funds for organizations that work to preserve African American history and advance the fight against racism. Sebastián has a deep, unwavering commitment to his community and has performed extensive community service work. Among his proudest achievements is assembling a team of volunteers and construction workers in 2019 to renovate a school affected by Hurricane María. When the school board indicated that they lacked the funds to support the project, he jumped to action, raising a portion of the funds through donations and providing the remainder from his personal savings. At 16, Sebastián published his first book, "Cartas en Mano, Dosis de Tinta," which explores social injustice and encourages change through poetry. It will soon be incorporated into the official Spanish curriculum at his high school. This phenomenal leader and activist has excelled in all of his pursuits. He maintains a 4.0 GPA and has been recognized for his work and achievement on many occasions, including earning 1st place at the National Oratorical Contest on Access to Justice and at multiple Math Olympiads. He will major in Public Policy and minor in Economics at Brown University.
Kevin Acevedo
Major: Computer Science with a minor in Mathematics
Heritage: Puerto Rican

Kevin knew he wanted to pursue a career in STEM after he participated in MathROOTS at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2019. MathROOTS is a two-week mathematics and sciences summer residential program for promising high school students from underrepresented backgrounds. Upon returning from the program, he considered all his options, the many engineering branches, pure mathematics, numerous scientific fields, and landed on Computer Science and Mathematics. A problem-solver at heart, these fields of study best appealed to his interests and skills. “Studying Computer Science will complement math perfectly, allowing me to leverage technology to accomplish my goals of bettering Puerto Rico after graduation,” Kevin explains. Soon after he knew what he wanted to study in college, he completed a week-long after-school course on Python led by an MIT student and has since been teaching himself to code in order to prepare himself for his future course of study. Last summer, he took part in the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez summer camp, UPRM Hacks. At the camp, he learned how to use the MIT App Inventor, an online platform designed to teach computational thinking concepts through the development of mobile applications. Kevin is a member of his school’s science program, a rigorous and demanding program reserved for only the most talented students. He has excelled academically throughout his schooling, currently maintaining a 3.96 GPA, and has been showcasing his science and math knowledge and skills at competitions since middle school. He has won Regional Science Bowl Championships and has even represented Puerto Rico at national competitions. He is a member of his school’s Math Club, Chemistry Club, and its chapter of the National Honor Society. He is actively involved in his community, always looking for ways opportunities to give back. Last year, as part of his Eagle Scout service project, he coordinated and hosted a blood drive. Thanks to his efforts, 116 people donated and contributed a total of 111 pints to the Puerto Rico Blood Bank. Kevin will continue his academic and service pursuits as he attends the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Georgia Institute of Technology, or Stanford University, where he will major in Computer Science and minor in Mathematics.
Sophia Rodriguez
Major: Human Rights
Heritage: Costa Rican

Sophia Rodriguez’s passion for social justice stems from her mother’s career as a nonprofit attorney, and helping others is one of the most important things to her. She has always been taught that everyone deserves equal justice under the law, and that’s one of many reasons that her lifetime career goal is to work for an international human rights organization. As the leading attorney on her varsity Mock Trial team, and the only woman, she received the award for Most Outstanding Attorney both times that she competed, and went on to win second place at Regionals. Her experience participating in Mock Trial has allowed her to compete in front of a judge, and given her experience with courtroom social justice, all while teaching her about every aspect of an attorney’s job in the courtroom. These are experiences that prepare Sophia extremely well for her future academic and professional endeavors. Additionally, her quick planning skills and positive attitude are incredibly important characteristics that help her excel when faced with challenges of all kinds. For Sophia, loving others inspires her to give back every day. Her community service activities have ranged from singing in her church to joining new volunteer groups like the Food Bank. She feels strongly about her Hispanic/Latinx community, and feels that being able to share the traditions of all the various Latin American countries among the community and with people outside the community will not only bring everyone together, but also enrich lives. Together, the community can value its enriching culture, both in the countries of origin and America, by celebrating its diversity and working towards inclusiveness in everyday life. With a GPA of 4.0, and AP classes from English Literature to American Government, Sophia is set to continue her journey studying Human Rights at Columbia University, Notre Dame, or the University of Nebraska Lincoln.
Charleigh Romero-Rodriguez
Major: Political Science
Heritage: Spaniard and Mexican

The Chinese philosophical concept of Ren, defined as a humane principle rooted in empathy and feeling towards others, is what Charleigh Romero-Rodriguez feels best describes her feelings towards the world. Her strongest beliefs are equity and equality, and she feels firmly that everyone should be appreciated for who they are and who they choose to be. As part of the YWCA Junior Board, Charleigh has had the opportunity to help young women and those who struggle with violence and abuse to get a new start to a better life. She is also the vice-president of the Girls Cabinet at her school, which is an all-girls club whose work revolves around community service. Even through the pandemic, she has found ways to volunteer in her community that are completely online, like reading to children over their school Zoom calls or writing to residents of the local nursing homes. She feels that in order for us to be equal, the fortunate should help the less fortunate, which is exactly what she is trying to do. Charleigh wants to see everyone flourish, and she knows that in order to help and give to others, she has to improve herself. Though she feels the division in the world is upsetting, she is encouraged to have seen a lot more Hispanic/Latino youth come together to make a change in society, uplifting each other and fighting for equality. With a GPA of 4.00, she is an academically gifted student as well, able to balance her schoolwork with her community service, for which she has won the Community Service Award two years in a row in 2019 and 2020. She plans to continue her remarkable journey by studying Political Science at University of Southern California, Colorado State University- For Collins, or the University of San Diego.
Jessica Fuertes-De Arcos
Major: Statistician
Heritage: Mexican

Jessica Fuertes-De Arcos’s desire to impact the world in a positive way comes from her own mother’s unfortunate experiences of wage theft and labor exploitation, a situation which she knows is sadly not rare in the current immigration system. She wants to fight inequality by informing policy and the public through the lens of a statistician or political scientist. And she is already well on her way. In terms of community service, she has volunteered regularly at the Kroc Center, a camp which aims to improve children’s socialization and self-confidence. Sharing stories with the kids and hearing about their experiences and fears reminded her of her own struggles as a child and demonstrated not only how far she has come but also how much support she could offer those in similar circumstances. Jessica was also part of Character in Action in high school where she learned to become an active leader by giving back to her school and community. Her community service doesn’t end there - she has served as an Ambassador for the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy and she is an Executive Board Member for the National Honor Society. Jessica knows that communities where people are willing to look out for one another are much more stable, stronger and in general better places to live in, which is why she is so dedicated to serving her community and others and changing the world for the better. Jessica firmly believes that the leadership of Hispanic politicians is imperative and powerful to address the social injustices and systems of oppression affecting Hispanics and other minorities. As an academically strong student with a GPA of 3.89, she has completed a mix of AP courses from US Government & Politics to Human Geography and Spanish Language and Composition. She plans to continue her studies and become a statistician through the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Iowa State University, or Peru State College.
Joseph Sánchez  
Major: Sociology with a minor in Political Science  
Heritage: Spanish  

Social Justice is one of Joseph’s driving values. He has been involved with his school’s chapter of the New Mexico Dream Team, a student club that fights for immigration reform and empowers undocumented, LGBTQ+, and mixed-status families in his community. Last year, along with two other classmates, he started the first Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) at his school, a club for LGBTQ+ students and their allies that provides them with a safe and supportive space. The club focuses on activism and social justice issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community at his school and at large. For his senior project, Joseph has chosen to volunteer 100+ hours for the Albuquerque chapter of Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). PFLAG works to support the LGBTQ+ community, educating others, and providing advocacy to promote positive change. Joseph wants to become a lawyer and dedicate his career advocating for LGBTQ+ and other marginalized communities. He has a 4.0 GPA, is one of the highest-ranking seniors at his school, and will graduate with 15 college credits under his belt. He will continue his advocacy work and major in Sociology and minor in Political Science at Harvard College, Columbia University, the University of California, Los Angeles, or the University of California, San Diego.
Galicia Monforte
Major: Global Security and Intelligence
Heritage: British and Mexican

Politics has profoundly permeated Galicia’s high school experience. “Instead of worrying about application deadlines and which prom dress to wear, my generation traded Friday night football games with virtual classrooms. As we popped our high school bubble suddenly, who asks us to homecoming seems minuscule when we watch as fathers and brothers are killed due to the color of their skin,” she tells us. In response to what was happening, like in towns all over the nation, Galicia’s community of Rio Rancho, New Mexico, gathered, organized, protested, and marched. Over the summer, she attended several Black Lives Matter rallies, vigils, celebrations, and protests. While attending these events, Galicia and her classmates were made aware of the widespread presence of racism in their everyday lives. Wanting to change this, they began the Culture Awareness Club at her school. Through this organization, Galicia has coordinated classroom talks about cultural appropriation and integration, monthly heritage celebration events, and Friday movie nights showcasing movies and documentaries on topics relevant to social justice. Not old enough to make an impact with her vote in last year’s presidential elections, Galicia felt the need to make a difference with her voice. In a short time, she organized a voter registration and education drive targeting young voters. By reaching out to numerous organizations for support, she convened a voter education panel that included the New Mexico Secretary of State, Maggie Toulouse Oliver, no small feat for a high school student during a pandemic. Galicia makes no excuses to fight for what she wants and believes is right. “Like those who came before us who refused to remain silent, we must mimic the actions of our ancestors, and we must come together to empower this generation,” she asserts. This inspiring Latina leader will study Global Security and Intelligence at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Columbia University, or the University of Chicago.
Sophie López
Major: Undecided, considering Political Science with a minor in Environmental Science
Heritage: Mexican

The events that unfolded in our nation starting last year prompted Sophie to re-evaluate her life goals. BIPOC communities being disproportionately affected by the pandemic, the ever-increasing wealth gap, and inaccessible affordable healthcare are among the glaring injustices that compelled Sophie to want to pursue a career that will allow her to be directly involved with tackling issues affecting marginalized populations. Witnessing the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on people in lower socioeconomic brackets, Sophie, along with a group of friends, founded Serving the Tucson Community Through Help, Encouragement, and Support (STITCHES). STITCHES is a volunteer organization that provides three essential services completely free of charge: they make masks for healthcare workers and others in need, provide grocery shopping and delivery services for the elderly and people at high-risk, and provide tutoring services for students K-12. Last summer, Sophie attended many peaceful Black Lives Matter rallies and protests in an effort to gain a better understanding of the experience of black people in America. In addition to her activism and community work, Sophie is also an exemplary student and a scholar-athlete. As testament to her dedication and brilliance, she balances a full load of AP classes, the demands of being captain of her school’s tennis team, and volunteering while maintaining a 3.97 GPA. Sophie will attend the University of Arizona, Claremont McKenna College, or Vanderbilt University. She is considering a major in Political Science and a minor in Environmental Science.
TECHNOLOGY

Diego Valencia
Major: Mathematics and Biomedical Engineering
Heritage: Peruvian and Colombian

Diego’s interest lies in the intersection of math with technology and science, particularly in applied mathematics and artificial intelligence. As one of the students admitted into the highly competitive Aspiring Scientists Summer Internship Program hosted by George Mason University for the last two years, Diego has dedicated his last two summers to carry out research using mathematical modeling and artificial intelligence algorithms to develop a discrete wearable device for opioid rehabilitation patients. Designed to detect physiological indicators of imminent relapse and provide real-time notification to not only the patient but to a counselor or family friend, his device will provide the opportunity for timely intervention and prevention. With his device, Diego aims to not only reduce relapse incidences but also prevent opioid overdoses. “Relapse often leads to death due to loss of tolerance after initial treatment. An intervention when relapse is imminent will not only improve lives in my community, it will save lives,” elaborates Diego. In addition, he hopes his device will be a lower-cost alternative to intensive inpatient treatment, making it accessible to a broader population. Working on this project revealed to Diego the interdisciplinary nature of technology. Beginning with computational mathematics, he also had to learn the academic discipline of artificial intelligence and the application of machine learning to create computer algorithms that would provide his device the ability to access data and improve from experience. He also needed engineering and technology skills to create his device and had to learn about physiology and behavioral science to understand the need for and how to effectively use his device. He needed to learn about opioids and how they are misused, then had to learn about the effects of opioids on the brain, the heart, and behavior and about addiction and the triggers for relapses and overdose. Diego was one of the few high school students selected to give poster presentations and invited talks at mini-symposia on his research work at the 2019 Shenandoah Undergraduate Mathematics and Statistics Conference hosted by James Madison University, as well as the 2020 VII Workshop on Computational Data Analysis and Numerical Methods, an international conference traditionally held in Portugal. This remarkable young Latino scientist plans on pursuing degrees in Mathematics and Biomedical Engineering at the University of Chicago, the University of Texas at Austin, or the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
Emely Pozo-Lin
Major: Computer Science with a minor in Psychology
Heritage: Salvadoran and Chinese

Emely has been able to explore her interest in technology and other STEM fields throughout her high school career, thanks to her relentless curiosity and desire to learn. She has continuously sought opportunities to participate in activities and programs that have allowed her to expand her knowledge base and exposed her to new technologies. The summer of 2019, Emely participated in a Girls Who Code internship with PricewaterhouseCoopers. It was here that she first learned various programming languages and became interested in pursuing a career in technology. Last summer, she took part in the Exelon STEM Leadership Academy held at the University of Maryland. Participants of the Leadership Academy were challenged with creating a product to mitigate the effects of climate change. Emely worked with a group to create an app to inform the public of the effects of fast fashion on climate change and provide avenues for its users to support environmentally conscious and sustainable fashion brands. Through the Leadership Academy, Emely also participated in panels with women leaders in STEM, learned about the energy industry, and further explored how technology can be used to help with issues of sustainability, renewable energy, energy conservation, and climate change. Dedicated to her community, Emely commits much of her free time to tutor elementary school students. She even found a way to continue tutoring and offering support through the setting of distance learning. Last summer, she organized a tutoring program for elementary and middle school students and dedicated a minimum of 17 hours every week to guide them academically and offer emotional support. With many of her students feeling isolated due to lockdown measures, she served as a friend and their connection to the outside world. Emely serves as a Student Representative on her school’s Student Staff Advisory Committee. She is also a member of her school’s varsity volleyball team. She plans on majoring in Computer Science and minoring in Psychology at Yale University, Georgetown University, or Johns Hopkins University.
Adriana Delagarza  
Major: Physics/Astronomy/Engineering  
Heritage: Mexican  
The best students are not necessarily the ones that get perfect grades but those who commit themselves to learning material inside and out. Adriana Delagarza just so happens to be both of those things, and it’s no surprise that her teachers characterize her as being a passionate, dedicated, brilliant, and motivated young woman. Since July 2020, Adriana has been participating in MOSTEC, a prestigious MIT online program geared toward minorities in STEM. Through the program, she has been able to explore the bounds of universal, while addressing prejudicial weaknesses in the STEM industry. She is incredibly passionate about the theoretical side of physics, though she also participated in NASA’s Texas High School Aerospace Scholars program last year. By the time she had begun to seriously consider engineering as a career path, she had been accepted into the Columbia Engineering Experience, during which she dove into design-thinking lectures and networking events. However, Adriana says her most influential experience has been working one-on-one with her mentor, Dr. Frederic Allegrini, a Staff Researcher and Space Technologist at Southwest Research Institute in San Antonio. Never before had Adriana worked on research so direct and intense, but the experience has left her enthralled, and she hopes to have a published research paper on her findings related to radiation bands around Jupiter by the end of the school year. STEM is a major passion of Adriana’s, but it isn’t her only interest. She is also committed to serving others and every summer since 2012, she has looked forward to volunteering at her church’s weeklong Vacation Bible School. She also works part-time at Mathnasium Learning Center as a math tutor for kids of all ages and math levels, where she has learned to inspire young people. Too often, math and other STEM subjects are regarded as “dull”, but Adriana learned to connect with her students, nurture their innate intelligence and curiosity, and cultivate an interest in math. With a perfect 4.00 GPA and a host of AP classes, as well as awards and recognitions, she is sure to find success in her future studies of Physics, Astronomy, and/or Engineering at Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, or Columbia University.
César Meza  
Major: Mechanical Engineering and Aerospace Engineering  
Heritage: Mexican

Barely past his toddling phase, César watched Apollo footage of the astronauts walking down the loading aisle and called out “Ma, they waved at me!” His fascination was immediate and throughout his childhood, he recalls hoarding library books about space, pouring over rovers and space machinery. Space exploration is not just a longing for the past for César. It is the very impetus of his present and future. Now, as a young man, he is putting his passion to the test, and since his freshman year of high school, he has only been expanding his love of technology. In his first year, he worked in the school’s senior prototyping lab as part of the Technology Student Association. Amid chaos, the whirring of 3-D printers, the scent of burning acrylic, he was in heaven. He has since committed himself even further, participating in the NASA High School Aerospace Scholars and enrolling in as many AP and science classes as his schedule could handle. He has cruised through obstacles, maintaining a perfect 4.00 GPA. According to his teachers, César is a brilliant and determined young man, never one to choose the easy path, but always willing to commit himself to learning more. His incorporation of wit and humor entertains and educates those around him, and he is well-liked by both peers and superiors. Academics are not César’s only strong suit – he is a well-rounded individual involved in various extracurricular activities. When not studying or taking things apart to “see how they work”, you can find him on the red and blue mat of his masters’ dojang teaching Taekwondo. For six years he has challenged his students both physically and mentally, encouraging them to look at the world through different eyes and cultivating tenacity and determination. César’s best advice: “Remember what your mother told you: this world is a mirror. If you are kind, you’ll see kindness; if you are mean, you’ll see meanness. What would you rather see in the world?” Apart from kindness, we’re certain César will also be seeing success reflected back at him. He plans to study Mechanical Engineering and Aerospace Engineering at the California Institute of Technology, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, or Princeton University.
Alexia Rutledge
Major: Aerospace Engineering or Mechanical Engineering
Heritage: Mexican

A young Alexia Rutledge, seated beside her father, watched the launching of space shuttles on television and was entranced. As they hurtled into the sky, she couldn’t help but wonder: what made them go? How did they move so fast? How were they made? The final thought, and the one she has to this day: I want to do that! Though she didn’t yet know what the title or profession was, Alexia’s interest in technology was piqued, and she now plans to become an aerospace engineer. This year, she got her first taste of her future career by participating in NASA’s Texas High School Aerospace Scholars program, where she worked with NASA scientists to design her own satellites and discovery missions to explore deep space, the moon, and Mars. In aerospace engineering, the sky is not the limit. The boundaries of possibility can be as infinitely expansive as space itself, and Alexia’s future goals are just as boundless. She is no longer a little girl dreaming of space but a young woman, committed to making her dreams a reality. It’s no surprise that someone so dedicated is also an impressive academic student. With a 4.00 GPA, as well as a host of awards and recognitions, she consistently goes above and beyond. A highly motivated individual, academics are important to Alexia, but in the midst of the global pandemic and the chaos of the world around her, she learned to retrain her focus on things that she had previously taken for granted but which were equally critical for her success. Alexia threw herself into volunteering for and donating to food and donation drives, working with the Christ Child Society at her church. In addition to her commitment to others and her academic success, Alexia is also an avid equestrian, and riding horses has taught Alexia many skills, namely, to overcome obstacles, and when faced with adversity, to get right back on the horse – literally or metaphorically. Though small, she is not to be underestimated and her future prospects of studying Aerospace Engineering or Mechanical Engineering are bound to be colossal successes. She hopes to continue her pursuit of knowledge at Rice University, the University of Texas, or Texas A&M University.
Giuliana Cabrera
Major: Environmental Engineering and Computer Science
Heritage: Nicaraguan

“The winner’s edge is not in a gifted birth, a high IQ, or in talent. The winner’s edge is all in the attitude, not aptitude. Attitude is the criterion for success.” This quote by Dennis Waitley perfectly encapsulates Giuliana Cabrera, a bright, young, unassuming girl with a warm smile and willingness to learn. Giuliana has consistently shown her unending determination throughout her academic career. She was the only freshman from her cohort to join the elective research class through which the mostly juniors and seniors prepare for the team science competition Science Olympiad. Since her first event, investigating environmental equilibriums for the Water Quality event, she has only dived deeper, desperate to discover how we can maintain a careful balance between human activity and our natural surroundings. Always eager and incredibly creative, Giuliana wondered how she could create opportunities to provide renewable energy and better homes for under-developed villages, like the one she lived in, in Nicaragua. She searched for answers with Florida International University’s engineering department, building a renewable energy-powered autonomous vehicle. Giuliana’s commitment to technology comes from her desire to improve the world around her, whether that means helping under-resourced communities, preserving the nature we call home, or, if she has her way, both. Giving back is incredibly important to Giuliana, and she volunteers at the academic-enrichment program “Breakthrough Miami”, teaching kids how to code, build their own robots and games, and develop a passion for STEM subjects. Carl Sagan says that every child is a natural-born scientist, and though Giuliana sees it every day in the kids she tutors, she has also held onto it herself. Apart from her extracurricular activities, Giuliana is a gifted academic and maintains a perfect 4.00 GPA with a wealth of upper-level courses to her name. She hopes to continue her academic career studying Environmental Engineering and Computer Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Georgia Institute of Technology, or Stanford University.
Janet Arvizu Garcia  
Major: Physics with a minor in Nuclear or Industrial Engineering  
Heritage: Mexican

For Janet Arvizu Garcia, Sir Nikola Tesla embodies the extraordinary aspirations she has for technology and as a scientist herself. Her studies have been surrounded by his ideas of the universe— in fact, in her junior year, she utilized his principles of a Tesla Coil and combined it with microbial fuel cells to become an International Finalist in the Science and Engineering Fair. Despite limited resources, she showed the capacity that curiosity and intelligence can have on scientific discovery. Physics is certainly the field and major that Janet intends to pursue in her collegiate endeavors, with big dreams and goals. Some of those include developing technologies such as organic-fueled portable chargers or altering technologies operational systems. Whichever direction she chooses, she is bound to succeed. For Janet, science is fascinating, but it isn’t her only passion. She is also committed to giving back to her community and sees tutoring as a perfect avenue to do just that. As a Mexican-American, tutoring presented Janet with the fact that language barriers can have a profound impact on American students. Because she spoke Spanish, she helped her Spanish-speaking students learn English and worked to instill in them a confidence that would follow them throughout their schooling. Janet possesses all the necessary attributes for success in science and technology. She is devoted to the educational process, conscientious, motivated, respected, professional, and dedicated to making a difference in the world. Combine this with a near-perfect GPA of 3.98 a healthy dose of AP and accelerated coursework, and she is primed for success. Janet hopes to continue her academic endeavors by studying Physics with a minor in Nuclear or Industrial Engineering at Georgia Institute of Technology, Emory University, or Georgia State University. Keep an eye out for the next Tesla, because she’s fast on her way to making major scientific discoveries.
Jordi Castro  
Major: Computer Science  
Heritage: Spanish and Mexican  

Almost immediately after his first computer programming lesson, Jordi got his teacher’s signature to drop the class. That was his sophomore year. Now, a senior, he is thankful he waited and opted for giving the class another chance. “Computer science grew on me,” he says, adding that now computers captivate him and have given him the ability to write unique code to solve real-world problems. For the last three years, he has worked on a multitude of programs in C++ and Java. For Jordi, his most memorable has been a recreation of the game Battleship, on which he worked for a scholarship supplement. He is currently designing “Kraken,” an original board game he will translate to code in Game Design. When he is not working on a programming project, Jordi is actively involved in his community. He enjoys giving back and sees community service as integral to a functioning society. He is a member of five community service organizations at his school, including the National Honor Society and the League of United Latin American Citizens. With an impressive academic record, a schedule packed with AP courses, and a 4.0 GPA, Jordi will attend Rice University, Stanford University, or the University of Arkansas. He will major in Computer Science.
Sofía Arcos
Major: Computer Science and Business
Heritage: Colombian and Mexican

Sofía Arcos’ love affair with computer science started after learning the basics of Java and seeing her code run through a robot. How could it not? Since then, she has worked hard to accumulate knowledge and understanding of anything and everything tech. Through the Girls Who Code Summer Program, she created a website, an experience which helped her realize the impact she could have on a person’s daily life. With so few women in technology, Sofía’s introduction to Girls Who Code was monumental, and she is well on her way to becoming a role model for future girls interested in STEM. In addition to Girls Who Code, Sofía is also heavily involved with her high school’s robotics team, for which she designed a new website, and coded a desktop and mobile version. A diligent worker committed to academics, she has a variety of skills that will suit her well for a career in technology: namely, collaboration, project management, and a killer attention-to-detail. A natural leader, she plans and runs all the meetings of the Girls Who Code Club at her school and serves as Co-President. An ardent supporter of women in tech, she provides weekly Woman of the Week announcements, highlighting women who are offering groundbreaking work in computer science. With a GPA of 3.70, she is an excellent student, and has been described by her teachers as a model for other students. A well-rounded and beloved part of her high school community, she serves as a member of the National Honor Society, the Madrigals Choir, and the girls’ soccer team. She plans to use all of these skills and experiences to pursue a double major in Computer Science and Business at Michigan Technological University, University of Alabama, or Loyola University.
Julio Ramirez  
Major: Electrical Engineering or Computer Science  
Heritage: Mexican

Julio Ramirez is an exceptionally talented, enthusiastic, and hard-working student, which according to his teachers, is made clear in observing his classwork and interactions with students and teachers. Julio’s passion for technology has long been in the making, with his interest first having been sparked in middle school. From disassembling a desktop computer to learning about the engineering design process with his high school’s robotics team, to learning about the effects of evolving technology on society, he has forged ahead and defined a path for himself. As a research assistant at the University of Chicago Center for Data and Computing, he investigated how people perceive the fairness of machine learning models in the criminal justice system based on variables considered to determine whether someone is likely to commit a crime. This project opened his eyes to the social consequences when we get technology wrong, which is something he hopes to combat in his future career. As the computer-aided design sub-team leader for his school’s robotics team, Julio learned developed skills in resourcefulness and leadership, qualities that will serve him well in his future professional aspirations. He is strongly committed to community service too and hopes through his contributions to technology, that he will be able to contribute to a more just society. With a GPA of 3.95, Julio is exceptionally academically talented. His diligence in his schoolwork is admirable, and coupled with a propensity for mathematics, a dedication to helping others, and a take-charge attitude, he is primed for success. He plans to study Electrical Engineering or Computer Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, or the University of Chicago.
Yarency Avelar  
Major: Computer Science with a minor in Psychology, Communications, or Business  
Heritage: Mexican  

“Walking into the Intro to CS club of Aim High, an academic summer program I did back in 2015, I didn’t realize that I’d fall in love with the concept of computer science just within a few hours,” says Oakland, California resident Yarency. Her first coding creation was an interactive game where the character, a sprite, glided across the screen and changed colors every time the spacebar was pressed. Fascinated by what she had developed and the potential to continue creating, she set herself on a path to learn more about computer science. Although her school did not offer any programming courses or extracurricular activities, Yarency was determined. She looked for outside opportunities, took part in hackathons, and joined Google CodeNext her freshman year, a computer science education program for Black and Latinx high schoolers. For the past few summers, she has participated in the Summer Math and Science Honors (SMASH) Academy at Stanford University, a three-year intensive STEM-focused residential program. Last year, she also joined the Curie Academy at Cornell University, a 1-week residential program for women who excel in math and science. Serving her community is vital to Yarency’s high school experience. Determined to inspire empathy and create a sense of community, she founded the Student Community Service Ambassadors Club at her school. Through her club, she has led efforts to collect food for the Alameda Food Bank, beautify her school grounds and community through clean-ups, and tutor students. She has fiercely advocated to promote STEM education and bring more STEM opportunities and resources to her community. Because of her advocacy work, Yarency was invited to speak to the US House of Representatives on behalf of low-income Aspire Public schools and students nationwide. “I used this opportunity to express my concern for the lack of STEM resources in my community and expressed my perspective on how funding could create positive change in underserved communities and inspire new pathways for students like myself,” says Yarency. Thanks to her work, her school now offers an AP Computer Science class. A remarkable leader and student, Yarency has a 4.0 cumulative GPA. She will continue advocating for more access to STEM while studying at Stanford University, Harvey Mudd College, or Santa Clara University. She plans to major in Computer Science and minor in Psychology, Communications, or Business.
María Azcona Báez  
Major: Chemical Engineering and minoring in Computer Science  
Heritage: Dominican

María was introduced to computing and technology in fifth grade when her class had to complete one of the “Hour of Code” exercises, exposing her to block-based programming languages. Although interested in computer science when she was young, she fully immersed herself in the subject in ninth grade, when she took Foundations of Computer Science, and engaged with various topics including HTML and Python. With her new knowledge in Python, María made mini-games and expanded her knowledge in the coding language through Code Academy. Her interest in the field of computer science was further fueled through her participation in the MIT Beaver Works Summer Institute, where she had to use Python to program a racecar to autonomously complete an obstacle course, which helped her understand how object-oriented programming works. María’s dedication to learning more and helping others with their learning is evident from tutoring Algebra, as well as being a teacher’s assistant for an Honors Chemistry Class. Whether assisting with grading homework and tests, or setting up and supervising labs, María feels passionate about guiding younger children in their learning pursuit. Her academic achievements speak for themselves, with a perfect GPA of 4.00, as well as winning several academic awards including AP Scholar with Distinction, a National Merit Scholarship, a Certificate of Merit from the Society of Women Engineers and the Highest Honor Roll. With several AP classes to her name, María is well equipped to excel in her further studies of chemical engineering and computer science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, California Institute of Technology or University of Rochester.
Ashley Garcia Cervantes  
Major: Computer Engineering  
Heritage: Ecuadoran

Ashley Garcia Cervantes grew up in a developing country with limited access to technology. When she moved to the US, she was suddenly surrounded by it, and what began as curiosity has bloomed into a passion for knowledge, learning, and innovation. She started watching videos about algorithms and data science in her free time, and this past summer, she participated in the Girls Who Code immersion program, where she learned even more about different styles and coding languages. As a bilingual speaker, reading and writing in a foreign language is a skill she had long ago achieved, so tackling Python and other coding languages was a challenge she was primed for. In Ashley’s own words, technology is a field that is constantly and rapidly evolving, but she is dedicated to exploring and learning about it for the rest of her life. Ashley has demonstrated strong leadership skills as the Secretary of the National Honor Society at Uniondale High School, as well as her willingness to give back to her community. She has volunteered as a junior friend at the public library, where she has assisted in serving food for children and their families, reading to younger children, and teaching reading and writing to older children in the community. This experience has taught her patience, perseverance, and problem-solving skills, all necessary qualities for a successful engineering student. A straight-A student, Ashley has excelled academically with a GPA of 4.00, and participated in a host of AP classes, including Physics 1: Algebra-based, Research, Statistics, Spanish Language and Culture, Language and Composition, and Seminar. Ashley wants to continue pursuing her passion for technology, by studying computer engineering at Hofstra University, Stony Brook University or Farmingdale State College.
Valentina Bohórquez
Major: Aerospace Engineering with a minor in Political Science
Heritage: Panamanian and Colombian

When she was younger, Valentina discovered and became intrigued about aerodynamics while watching the Formula 1 Grand Prix for the first time. “I became fascinated after finding out that teams do not only rely on an efficient motor and an amazing driver to win but also on a design capable of combating air resistance as much as possible,” she recalls. This new interest and newfound fascination with aerodynamics eventually led her to find out about the field of aerospace engineering. Whether it be through the development of a new commercial plane model or the creation of a new helicopter rotor model, Valentina is engrossed with the idea of one day improving the aerial transportation industry through the implementation of more efficient aircraft designs. To work towards her goal, Valentina has continuously looked for opportunities to expand and develop her understanding of different STEM fields through her academics and extracurricular activities. She has taken dual-enrollment courses, including Computer Programming Fundamentals, and is taking the highest-level math class offered at her school, AP Calculus. Valentina has proven to be an exemplary student during her high school years, currently maintaining a cumulative GPA of 4.0. She has also demonstrated her abilities as a leader as President of her school’s junior chapter of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers and as class Secretary. She is an active member of her school’s Chemistry Club, its American Red Cross Club, and its National Honor Society chapter, and has also served as Captain of her school’s women’s basketball team. Valentina has been involved with the Girls Scouts since she was eight years old. Over the years, through volunteering activities like annual island-wide beach cleanups, local food drives, and nursing home visits, she has found ways to be of service and contribute to her community. This Caguas, Puerto Rico resident of Colombian and Panamanian descent, is ready and inspired to continue advancing in her studies and wants to use her knowledge to innovate and improve the lives of others in the future. She will major in Aerospace Engineering and minor in Political Science at Iowa State University.
Xitlali Cruz
Major: Computer Science / Computer Engineering
Heritage: Mexican

Xitlali Cruz’s long term goal is to inspire other Latinas to learn more about STEM careers, as currently, Latinas account for only 3% of the STEM industry. In her path to get there, she has already attended Stanford’s Carnegie Mellon’s AI4ALL summer programs, Microsoft DigiGirlz, and Western Aerospace Scholars. Bringing her love of tech and desire to share it home, she started a Girls Who Code chapter in her high school and participated in a Robotics club in another school district with the hope of starting a Robotics program in her school. She has also taken a challenging virtual Summer Science Program, which involved a combination of astronomy, physics, and computer science to conduct asteroid research. Additionally, she was the national winner with the NCWIT Award for Aspirations in Computing. Xitlali is not afraid to break the mold, and despite being the only high school student there, continues to volunteer at her local food bank. She is also an avid and beautiful violin player, and offers recitals at local nursing homes for the community. Music can have a profound impact on someone, and Xitlali’s dedication to serving others shines through in everything she does. Through studying Chicano studies, she has realized that if the Hispanic/Latino community want to be leader of their own communities, then they need to understand their roots and have a strong connection to their heritage. She believes that the values of respect, family, honesty and hard work are central to the Hispanic/Latino community, a community which can be empowered by encouraging young Latinos to pursue STEM fields, something she has already committed to doing. With a GPA of 4.00, Xitlali is an excellent academic and excels in mathematics and science. She plans to study computer science or computer engineering at University of Washington, Stanford, or Harvey Mudd, and there is certainly no doubt that her goals are well within arms’ reach.
Faith Baca
Major: Computer Science and Sociolinguistics
Heritage: Mexican

For Faith Baca, technology offers the perfect intersection between her passions: language and mathematics. As a long-time lover of language, she first discovered the underlying “grammar” of mathematics while tutoring a sixth grade student. For almost an hour, she had been wracking her brain to think of ways to explain multiplication. Despite employing both English and Spanish, he was stumped. But once Faith started writing, outlining, and drawing the problems out, the light bulb brightened. It transformed the way she thought about mathematics – as a means of communication and a way to convey complex information simply. The result? A desire to pursue a career in technology that would allow her to fuse her love of language and her mathematical determination. Faith is cruising down the path toward a career in computer science. Apart from her quick wit, curiosity, and tenacity, she is also deeply empathetic and committed to pursuing advocacy and systemic social change. As part of the Summer Institute at LEDA, she partnered with one of her peers’ community impact projects creating and selling bracelets, where for each one sold, a pair was sent to a detainee near the border. All proceeds went toward raising funds for legal representations of immigrants, and Faith quickly realized the mighty impact that even a small bracelet could have on creating change. Faith believes that true leadership cultivates diversity and often thinks of her mother’s words, “never forget where you came from, and never forget how it shapes you today.” She recognizes and understands that the beauty and depth that exists within the Latino community is profound and something that we should all be proud of. In addition to her extracurricular activities, Faith is academically very strong with a GPA of 4.00. She plans to continue her fascinating, enriching journey by studying Computer Science and Sociolinguistics at Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, or the Carnegie Mellon University.
Jordan Herrera  
Major: Neuroscience, Behavioral Science, and Computer Science  
Heritage: Mexican and Spanish

As a requirement for graduation at Jordan’s high school, every student must take Computer Programming Essentials. “It is there that I found my love for technology,” says Jordan, who took the class her sophomore year. She has continued expanding her programming knowledge since and is currently enrolled in AP Computer Science A. In 2019, Jordan became a founding member of her school’s Computer Science Honor Society (CSHS), the first honor society of its kind in her state of Arizona. As a CSHS member, she has enjoyed the opportunity to volunteer at various events and programs set up by the organization. One of these events is the Girls Have IT Camp, a summer program designed to engage, empower, and inspire middle school girls to pursue careers in STEM. Most recently, she has been volunteering for Elder Outreach, a CSHS initiative that matches Jordan’s high school’s senior alumni with volunteer pen pals and provides them with technical assistance in an effort to help them maintain communication and not feel isolated during these times. As evidence to Jordan’s commitment to her school and community, she was chosen to serve on the Arizona Governor’s Youth Commission. As a Commissioner, she advises her state’s Governor and helps uphold the Commission’s mission of identifying and addressing the greatest challenges facing Arizona’s youth through innovative community impact projects. Of particular interest to Jordan is addressing the technological gap in her state, which has become more pronounced due to the pandemic and the shift to virtual learning. As much as Jordan dedicates to her community, she is also committed to academic excellence. She follows a rigorous course schedule of AP and Honors classes, is a member of her school’s chapter of the National Honor Society and the Math Honor Society, and maintains a 3.86 GPA. She will attend the University of Arizona, Harvey Mudd College, or Emory University and is interested in studying Neuroscience, Behavioral Science, and Computer Science.
Angel Caoile
Major: Electrical Engineering
Heritage: Filipino

Angel sees himself as an engineer at heart. He loves math, technology, and scientific problem solving and sees engineering as the ideal union of all three. He has committed to pursuing an Electrical Engineering Degree at Arizona State University (ASU). To prepare for his future career, he has participated in several ASU programs. Last summer, he competed at the university’s The Challenge 2020, a virtual engineering design competition held by the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering. At The Challenge, Angel’s team worked alongside industry leaders to design solutions for reducing COVID-19 spread in schools. His team’s focus was school cafeterias. Their main solution was to replace lunch lines with an app-based food-pickup system in order to reduce crowding. Angel is also part of the ASU’s National Summer Transportation Institute Scholar’s Program, a 9-month program that engages students in transportation engineering and the various other engineering concentrations that work to plan and maintain Arizona’s systems of transportation. Academically gifted, Angel has taken all engineering classes offered by his school. He has also taken numerous college courses through the ASU Open Scale Program and is taking CLEP exams for these courses to receive proper college credit. This puts him on a path to complete a Master’s degree by the time he is 20. He serves as President of his school’s Spanish Culture Club and was selected by the US Department of State to serve as Youth Ambassador Representative for Costa Rica. Angel left the Philippines for the United States with his mother only six years ago. Together they faced many adversities. How far he has made it and all he has achieved are testaments to his dedication, persistence, and genius.
Camila Grubb  
Major: Computer Science with a minor in Cybersecurity  
Heritage: Mexican

Earlier in her high school career, Camila immersed herself in various activities and hobbies in an effort to discover her interests, talents and find a creative outlet. She tried archery, Art Club, Stage Crew, among others, but it was through programming that she discovered her passion. Camila has made it to her school’s Computer Science Advanced Topics course, the final Computer Science option available at her school for students who have completed the entire AP Computer Science course sequence. To supplement and strengthen her STEM knowledge, she has also signed up for a dual enrollment Introduction to Engineering course. Camila is a member of her school’s VEX Robotics club and played a critical role in her team’s qualification to State finals during her junior year. She has been involved with Girls Who Code and the National Center for Women and Information Technology, organizations dedicated to closing the gender gap in tech. Through her work with these organizations, Camila has had an impact inspiring younger girls to explore the field of Computer Science. To help with this effort, she has designed apps and fun coding walkthroughs that mimic the software of educational coding platforms with the intent of making coding education more enjoyable for young learners. Camila’s focus is on designing tools to help others grow and learn and experience the world more richly. She has an exemplary academic record and has won multiple awards for her performance at Science Olympiad competitions. She will attend the University of Arizona, where she will major in Computer Science and minor in Cybersecurity.