

Coachella Valley Unified School District

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS & MEDIA RELATIONS



Press Release

Desert Mirage High School Senior Erika Negrete Awarded Full Four-Year Scholarship through QuestBridge National College Match to Study at University of Notre Dame



Thermal, CA – January 9, 2025 – Desert Mirage High School senior Erika Negrete has been selected as a recipient of a full four-year scholarship from QuestBridge’s National College Match program. This prestigious award will allow Erika to pursue her dream of becoming a neurosurgeon, with plans to attend the University of Notre Dame in fall 2025.

Erika is one of 2,627 high school seniors nationwide to receive the QuestBridge Match Scholarship, marking a record number of recipients for the program. Out of more than 25,500 applicants, 7,288 were selected as finalists, and 2,627 were matched with top-tier colleges and universities through QuestBridge, each receiving a full scholarship.

QuestBridge, a non-profit organization dedicated to connecting high-achieving, low-income students with top colleges and universities, provides these students with not only a full scholarship but also a supportive community to help them thrive throughout their college journey.

Erika’s academic excellence is exemplified by her maintaining a 4.0 GPA throughout all four years of high school. She has also dedicated herself to community service, leadership, and extracurricular involvement, including serving as President of the Puente Program, participating in the Medio Ambiente Club, and serving as the Desert Town Hall Ambassador for Desert Mirage High School. These experiences have not only contributed to her education but have also shaped her as a compassionate leader.

Erika’s journey to success began as an English Learner (EL) student. She quickly gained recognition for her academic achievements, receiving reading awards and winning the Spelling Bee in 4th grade. "I live by the motto, ‘Don’t settle for anything less,’” Erika shared. She credits this mindset for much of her success and hopes to share her determination with her younger brother and other students.

When asked why she chose the University of Notre Dame, Erika explained, "I am Catholic, and Notre Dame aligns with my faith and values. My religion will support me while I am away from my family." This connection to her faith was a significant factor in her decision to apply, and she believes it will continue to guide her throughout her college journey.

Mr. Espejo, Erika’s Friday Night Club Advisor, praised her exceptional work ethic: “Erika is an awesome student. She is the type of student that when you say, ‘I need this to be done,’ she makes it happen. I’m very proud of everything Erika has accomplished.”

Mr. Gonzalez, DMHS Puente Program Coordinator, shared, “We, the educators of the Puente Program at DMHS, are super proud of Erika and all of her accomplishments. Highlighted by becoming the second Puentista to receive the prestigious QuestBridge Scholarship in as many years. She exemplifies the limitless possibilities that all of our students have within themselves. She is resilient, caring, critical, and joyful. We know that Erika will continue to thrive academically at the University of Notre Dame, and we want her to

know that although she will be miles away from home - she carries all the strength of her family and community with her."

Desert Mirage High School Principal Elizabeth Sotelo echoed that sentiment, calling Erika a true representation of Desert Mirage students. "Erika's hard work, dedication, and potential have paid off, and we are incredibly proud of her," Principal Sotelo said.

In December, Dr. Esparza, Superintendent of CVUSD, presented Erika with the Riverside County Office of Education Student of the Month award. She emphasized, "teachers are dedicated to helping students become CHAMPIONS, unlocking their full potential — just as Erika has done."

When asked what she is most proud of, Erika shared, "Receiving the QuestBridge Scholarship was one of the most important things that could have happened to me because it's such a huge accomplishment. I urge you all to apply for as many scholarships as possible." Erika is also a semi-finalist for the Gates Scholarship and will complete her interview in March.

Erika expressed deep gratitude for the mentorship and support she has received along the way. "I want to thank Mr. Gonzalez, my Puente Coordinator, for always encouraging students like me to believe that nothing is out of our reach and to always work for our goals," she said.

The QuestBridge scholarship provides a full financial package covering tuition, housing, meals, books, supplies, and travel expenses. This generous package ensures that Erika can focus on her studies and personal growth without financial barriers. Over the course of four years, the scholarship will total approximately \$360,000, an invaluable opportunity for Erika and her family.

For Erika, this achievement is not only a personal triumph but also a family milestone. As the first in her family to attend college—and to do so at the prestigious University of Notre Dame—Erika is fulfilling her dream and setting an inspiring example for others.

"This scholarship is a life-changing opportunity," Erika added. "I'm incredibly thankful for all the support I've received from my family, teachers, and mentors, and I'm excited to give back to my community in the future."

QuestBridge's National College Match scholarship is one of the most competitive college admissions programs in the country, offering full tuition, room, board, and other expenses, ensuring that scholars like Erika can focus on their academic and personal development without financial constraints.