22nd ANNIVERSARY
2020 Youth Awards
Presented by: Hispanic Heritage Foundation and its Sponsors

TEAL REGION – Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming
MARCH 2, 2021
MESSAGE FROM
JOSE ANTONIO TIJERINO
PRESIDENT & CEO
HISPANIC HERITAGE FOUNDATION

We are thrilled to honor yet another outstanding class of Youth Awardees who will carry on the tradition of vision, commitment, social impact, and “ganas” from past recipients. There is no shortage of Latinx talent across the United States, and our Youth Awardees are all living proof. We are grateful to our dedicated sponsors who understand the importance of investing in the youngest and most dynamic segment of our population. We are in good hands with these outstanding young leaders going forward and believe these are the young leaders of today, not tomorrow. We can’t afford to wait. Following their lead, we will help meet America’s priorities in education, the community and the workforce.

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Jose Antonio Tijerino
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pepco
Major: International Business  
GPA: 3.99  
High School: Academy for Math, Engineering & Science  
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.
Major: Business  
GPA: 4.00  
High School: Weiser High School  
Heritage: Mexican

Giselle’s crystal-clear goals for her future and her innate leadership skills are just the ingredients for a career as the manager of an international business in a big city, which is exactly where she is heading. After completing her job shadow at Hewlett Packard, she has already been offered an internship at that prestigious company, which says a lot about her potential. She has been certified in Microsoft Office and Excel to assist in readying her for a future in business and finance, and she is also taking Calculus II and AP Statistics to further improve her mathematical skills, which are already very strong. Her GPA is no less than 3.98, and she has consistently been on the honor roll throughout high school. Add to this her National Presidential Award of Academics and her dedicated involvement in groups such as the Future Hispanic Leaders of America and National Honor Society, and it becomes plain to see her impressive mix of academic excellence with diverse interests and extra-curricular activities. On the topic of leadership, Giselle served as the freshmen class secretary which gave her the power to change her school for the good of her classmates. This experience helped develop the leadership skills which will ultimately serve her in her goal to become a business financial manager. Being a volunteer at community services is also important to her and allows her to fulfill a purpose in her life, which is to help others. This blends into her acute awareness of the challenges facing many Hispanic/Latino students to access college, for which she has practical ideas on how to tackle such a critical issue. Giselle plans to continue her studying at Idaho State University, the University of Idaho or the College of Western Idaho, with a major in Business and a minor in Finance.
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.
Merging an acute sense and pursuit of social justice, an unlimited ability with technology and computer coding/programming, and academic excellence, Kathleen Julca is already a game changer. She has already created her own non-profit organization, Chicas of Technology, to empower and mentor young Latina girls in computer science, and has started various girls’ computer coding clubs. She invented an app, “Women of Color Code”, in MIT’s exclusive Online Science Technology and Engineering Course which will help women of color find mentors and coding courses. Kathleen lives her Peruvian heritage every day and is aware both of its ancestral foundations of equity and shared wealth, but also of the current challenges that Peru’s people have been cornered into. Her drive stems from this, along with experiences which are even more personal: from having been isolated and discriminated as the only Latinx person in a robotics program, to selflessly supporting her family, to being the trailblazing example for her younger siblings and cousins in being the first in her family to go college. All of this has only propelled her forward as stronger, more resilient and more innovative. She creates for people like her younger siblings and other women of color to be supported and positively impacted. All of this with a GPA of 3.98, various AP courses and a constant academic excellence, thriving in particularly complex problems. Kathleen plans to study computation and cognition at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Washington, or Stanford University. The only question is, will they be ready for her?
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.
Major: Elementary Education; Dual Language Instruction
GPA: 4.00
High School: Omaha Central School
Heritage: Argentine

Encouraging wonder, joy and fascination in children’s learning is what inspires Mila Herszbaum-Harding to want to become an educator. She is set already on her path to becoming a teacher who cares deeply about the happiness and learning of her students, whose work reflects her own identity, and who accompanies her students on their journeys. She hopes to use this to uplift future generations, something which motivates her to give back to her community. Mila’s identity and its formation are linked intimately to her community. Her pride in the Latino community and the richness of its cultural vibrancy is deep, as is her awareness of the need of that culture to embrace all of its members. Her cultural side is well represented in her artistic endeavors: from music, to choir, to drama. She is no less than a section leader in her choir, an Allstate singer and a Nebraska Young Artist Award Winner. Her artistic strength, her bilingualism, her varied AP courses (from Spanish Literature and Culture to Chemistry to World History and Language and Composition) and her stellar academic performance with a GPA of 4.00, all show the full breadth of her diverse talents, and of the skills and love of life that she can impart to young children and students in the future. Moreover, she has grown into being a leader, and learned that quality leadership is about being willing to listen to the needs and struggles of the group and supporting them encouragingly. Mila plans to study Elementary Education at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, or the College of Charleston.
SARA LÓPEZ
GOLD

Major: Mechanical Engineering
GPA: 3.91
High School: Skyline High School
Heritage: Mexican

The true value of being human can be measured by what we give to others. This beautifully profound statement from Sara López encapsulates her keen understanding of the value of community service. Talented, caring, intuitive, and dedicated are some of the adjectives used to describe her. Her inquisitive mind is what she feels has shaped her and urged her onto this path towards Engineering. Sara has already had experience in this field, from engineering camp with the National Student Leadership Conference held at Yale, to an Architectural, Construction & Engineering (ACE) Mentorship, to being named the world champion at Robotics - unsurprisingly, Robotics has become an increasing love of hers. During the ACE Mentorship program, Sara had the opportunity to see what it takes to construct a building and was able to lead the architectural floor-plan team. This experience also molded her as a leader and gave her valuable experience in terms of leadership, coaching and conflict resolution skills. Sporting an incredibly healthy GPA of 3.91, Sara combines her academic prowess with artistic interests as well, focusing on writing and theater, and exploring the human condition. She is also learning Spanish, which though challenging, is a tribute to the shared heritage of Latinos, a wonderful way of embracing her culture and its amazing language. She plans to study Mechanical Engineering at Colorado School of Mines, Vanderbilt, or the University of California San Diego.
Major: Aerospace Engineering  
GPA: 4.00  
High School: Idaho Fine Arts Academy  
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.
Major: Architecture
GPA: 4.00
High School: Sunnyside High School
Heritage: Mexican

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.
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.
Some people know what they want out of life early on, and Grace Lobato is one of those people. She has wanted to be an entrepreneur and open her own business since she was in second grade. And she is well on her way. According to Grace, “business creates community in a single place, bringing people together for the greater good.” She wants to do just that and offer a means through which others can gain meaningful employment. Fortunately, Grace has already taken her first steps toward her future goals, having joined Future Business Leaders of America to expand her knowledge in the business field. An important quality for entrepreneurship, one which comes naturally to her, is leadership, a skill she honed as part of the Antonio Youth Advisory Council. To her, leadership means not only taking responsibility for your team’s work, but also encouraging and inspiring others to take the lead, too. Grace’s entrepreneurial spirit is also visible in her role helping to start a nonprofit organization called Soul Players of the Valley, which plans to build a new community center for youth. Community is clearly very important to her, which is why she has dedicated her time to giving back to her community in as many ways as possible. Grace enjoys being part of something bigger than herself, and community service offers her a means to do that. Grace is also proud of her Hispanic/Latino community and heritage and hopes to empower it and its members by encouraging honesty, integrity and cultural pride. Academically gifted, with a GPA of 4.00, she has also taken myriad AP courses, from Advancement Placement Calculus, Development of Civilization, Academic Writing and Computer Applications. She is ready to take the next step in her rich journey by studying entrepreneurship at Colorado Christian University, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, or Regis University.
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.
Brandon Sosa lives his pride for his heritage and his Hispanic/Latino community through one of the most vibrant of the arts: dance. As a folkloric dancer of dances from different Hispanic countries, Brandon is able to showcase the fun, energy and strength of his community. Surprisingly, it was a knee injury from dancing in Mexico that inadvertently lead him to discover his love of the study of medicine. The recovery and rehabilitation process made him realize that bringing joy to others by helping them with physical therapy is the career he wants to pursue. Brandon embodies many of the qualities that are necessary for a career as a physical therapist: he has strong leadership skills, an enduring sense of empathy, and a strong academic background. As a mentor for Provo Youth Court, Brandon showcased his leadership skills, serving as an example to teenagers and younger people to learn from their mistakes and to lead them away from a path of crime and become better global citizens. Over the four years of his involvement, Brandon has had the most mentees and the highest graduation rate of anyone in Provo Youth Court – no small feat. He has also been actively involved in his school’s government, in Latinos in Action and Link Crew, lifting up and encouraging those around him. His patience, desire and willingness to help people are critical parts of the service of healthcare and medicine, and he is well on his way along this enriching path. He plans to study Exercise Science at the University of Utah, Brigham Young University or Utah Valley University.
NANCY RUBIO
SILVER

Major: Nursing
GPA: 3.71
High School: Borah High School
Heritage: Mexican

Nancy Rubio believes that the medical field needs more people who are determined and willing to care for the vulnerable at whatever cost. This profound sense of empathy is what informs and drives her interest and love to pursue a career in arguably the most humane component of all medicine: nursing. Nancy discovered nursing and her passion for helping others while volunteering at Saint Alphonsus Hospital, where she was given the chance to interact with patients and witnessed first-hand what life was like for the many healthcare workers. Nancy further cemented her desire to become a nurse when she enrolled in CNA at her high school, a course that allowed her to practice real-life scenarios that a certified nursing assistant would experience in the work field, as well as shadow healthcare professionals. She has also been part of her school’s blood drive managed by the Red Cross of America, where she learned the value of feedback, communication and collaboration, and how these can alleviate and resolve conflict. Through nursing, Nancy hopes to use her abilities and advantages to serve and help others, especially the less fortunate. She is genuinely grateful for her parents’ hard work and the sacrifices they made for her to have the childhood and upbringing that she has, and she hopes her achievements will help undo the prejudices that so many hold against hard-working Latino families like hers, who contribute towards making the United States what it is. Nancy’s academic record also speaks for itself, as she has been taking a wide variety of AP courses, from Human Geography, to English Literature, and maintains a strong GPA of 3.71. She plans to continue her path by studying Nursing at Idaho State University, Pacific Lutheran University, Portland University.
Major: Nursing  
GPA: 4.00  
High School: Frederick High School  
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.
Major: Theatre (Acting)
GPA: 3.89
High School: Ballard High School
Heritage: Mexican and Filipino

Gavin Bradler found his calling for theatre in elementary school and recalls arriving at the first rehearsal for the school musical and feeling like his true, uninhibited self for the first time. It’s no surprise then, that he continued acting, and in the summer of 2017, he was cast in a student production of Ragtime. While personalizing the cries of their characters through the production, Gavin realized that art is inherently political and a tool he could use for the rest of his life. Since then, his calling has been clear. To continue his pursuit of theatre as a career, Gavin has served on the board of 14/48 H.S., a theater festival for young artists from the Seattle area with the goal of “Art for All,” for three years. In doing so, he’s learned that creating a space of community and collaboration delivers better artists and higher quality work, with a backdrop of fun and new relationships. His involvement in theatre has also enriched his leadership skills, and he revealed his true character as a leader when his teacher asked him to assist with leading a classroom space on complex issues around reducing racial tension. His earlier experiences with theater, particularly in the show Ragtime, which portrayed racial tension among Immigrant, Black and White Americans, had exposed him to heavy and relevant subject material, and he was able to sustain a non-hostile environment where learning could be facilitated. The perfect blend of artistic talent, leadership, and a quest for social justice, Gavin has always sought experiences that make an impact on the community around him and facilitate a relationship with those he’s serving. Gavin believes confidently that the Latinx/Hispanx community has proven time and time again its value through its industry, ingenuity and entrepreneurship. In addition to his artistic calling, he is an academically gifted student, with a GPA of 3.89 and a wide range AP courses, from Spanish to US History to Language and Composition. He plans to study Theatre at the Julliard School, Pace University, or Boston University.
Josemaria Azcui Gonzalez’s love of fundamentally good stories is what drew him to the world of media and entertainment, in particular: screenwriting. Already the author of three short screenplays, one of which was recognized with an Honorable Mention Award at the Ocean Awareness Contest, he believes storytelling can bring the issues of a community to light in ways that enhance understanding and awareness. The Hispanic/Latino community is extremely diverse, exploding in creativity and innovation – and Josemaria’s wandering imagination and commitment to telling gorgeous stories plays its own small part. In addition to his commitment to his art, Josemaria is also heavily involved in community service and helping others. His experience volunteering at a preschool that helps low-income families and special-needs children enlightened him to the hard work teachers commit to every day in service to their students, and he saw first-hand the effect his presence had on the children. In fact, when it comes to community service, he has come to see how helping others should be everyone’s priority. Josemaria’s resume is as well-rounded as they come – in addition to community service and his involvement in artistic endeavors, he was also invited to become manager of a new JV team at his school, where he learned essential leadership skills: quiet leadership, emotional perception, and knowing when to be firm or lenient. Josemaria’s academic caliber and sense of excellence is reflected in his GPA of 4.00 and his diverse AP courses, from US Government and Politics to English Literature and Composition and Spanish Literature and Culture. He plans to get his BA in Screenwriting or Film and Television at the University of Southern California, Columbia University, or the University of California Los Angeles.
Major: Double major Musical Theater, Human Physiology  
GPA: 4.00  
High School: South Eugene High School  
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 the University of Arizona, the University of Oregon, or Wright State University.
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 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 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, led 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 or social justice at Brown University, University of Pennsylvania, or the University of Idaho.
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.
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’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.
XITLALI CRUZ
GOLD

Major: Computer Science / Computer Engineering
GPA: 4.00
High School: Chelan High School
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.
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.
According to Davian Sandoval, the hardest part about loving science is deciding which ones to choose. Since he was little, he recalls playing with LEGO\textregistered s and drawing up designs for houses, constantly curious about the world around him and how it worked. A lover of science and mathematics, he has already completed an internship at DT Swiss, a bicycle company, where he took on engineering projects disassembling production machines and ordering new parts to construct new ones. He is also the president of Mu Alpha Theta, a mathematics club at his high school, where they participate in competitions and real-world engineering projects. Though still not 100% sure on the specific track or program, Davian’s propensity for STEM subjects and his commitment to learning ensure that he will certainly excel in any program geared toward technology. In addition to his technological endeavors, Davian also volunteers at local wrestling practices for younger students. The experience has taught him many things, but most importantly that his role as a leader hinges on his ability to create inclusive spaces for everyone and continue to connect people. Davian’s philosophy in life is to grow a little bit more each and every day, and whether that means saying hello to an extra person, or starting his own tutoring program, it’s certainly a philosophy he lives out. He strongly believes that education is the foundation for life, and he wants to make sure that everyone receives an equal chance to pursue their dreams. His tutoring program, which now boasts an additional 11 tutors, has allowed him to give back to his school community but has also offered him a keen sense of belonging and granted him insight into the perspectives of other students, qualities that are sure to serve him well in his future. With a 4.00 GPA, and having received the College Board’s National Hispanic Recognition Award, Davian is clearly an excellent academic student. He plans to continue his path by studying Engineering Physics or Mechanical Engineering at Colorado School of Mines, University of Colorado Boulder, or Colorado State University.