



California State University, Dominguez Hills

# CSI<sup>3</sup> NEWS

CA STEM Institute for Innovation & Improvement, CSI<sup>3</sup>



## CSI<sup>3</sup> 2018 Credential Celebration Dinner: Collaborating for an Outstanding Future



**"HELP US PREPARE THE NEXT GENERATION."**

-LAURA AVENDANO, CSI<sup>3</sup> STEM Lab School Administrator

Aesop once told a fable of Hercules, the demi-god with overwhelming talent and might, wherein he derided a mortal man for not having the personal strength to push himself and his possessions from a marshy swamp.

However, truly herculean challenges, like educating and improving the lives of the youth of our schools, demand the time, camaraderie, and support of colleagues and administrators: A lesson that the new teachers of the accelerated programs Transition to Teaching (TTT), STEM Teachers in Advanced Residency (STAR), and Secondary Special Education Teachers Intervention Project (SSETI) now fully appreciate and understand. Contrary to the sophomoric wisdom of Hercules, the teachers instead had embraced the collaborative spirit of education and had survived the taxing programs that sought to compress many years of training into one. They had made it.

Congratulating them, Sarah Kwon, CSI<sup>3</sup>'s Science Education Specialist, spoke to the teachers gently with a warm smile: "I've seen you all grow so much - personally and professionally." The event commenced, awash with cheering and glowing happiness.

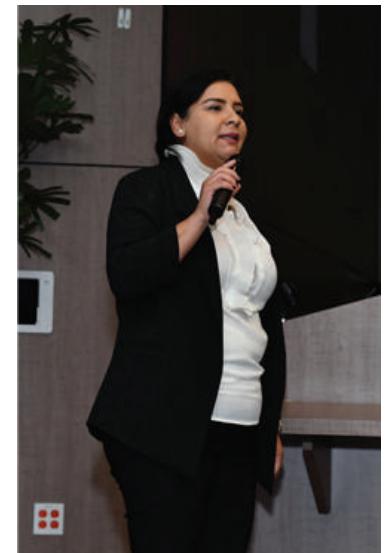
All three groups of teachers gathered together in the ballroom for their CSI<sup>3</sup> 2018 Credential Celebration Dinner. They ate,



TTT candidates.

drank, and delighted in their triumphs that could only have been won through sweat, tears, and the irrevocable trust that each individual shared with each other and with the programs. Looking back on their life-altering journeys, the atmosphere was brimming with introspection, laughter, tears, and joyful exhaustion.

Amidst the friends, program administrators, and support networks that had formed the foundation for the teachers' success, Laura Avendano, CSI<sup>3</sup>'s STEM Lab School Administrator, spoke solemnly and vehemently to the new teachers: "What you do matters; you change students' lives... and even through the small things, educators encouraged me [throughout my life] to pursue college and higher education." She charged the new teachers with a similar duty to remember how they, too, would be called upon to influence and to direct hesitant young minds and students wracked with doubt, saying, "Help us prepare the next generation."



Laura Avendano, CSI<sup>3</sup>'s STEM Lab School Administrator.



**"GO IN KNOWING YOU HAVE THE SUPPORT IF THINGS DON'T GO WELL."**  
**-STEPHEN YARDLEY, STAR Candidate**

The new teachers understood well that their academic success arose from a soulful combination of the program, the genuinely enthusiastic program staff, their professors, and their individual skills. The new teachers, with their stark applause, also indicated that they knew that they would have to impart and embody the lessons they had themselves studied: Everyone can learn so long as they have the right lessons, caring instructors, and communal support structures that would not allow them to falter.

Speaking fondly of those support structures and how they helped her to overcome the struggles of compressing two years of study into one, Monique Landeros, STAR candidate, commented, "I could communicate with the cohort. I formed a new family that was my backbone. They gave us coaching and classroom management tutorials. It was all very hands-on." And, when asked to discuss what her program helped her to realize, Landeros added, "Everyone has different talents. You need to build relationships [when teaching]," she concluded triumphantly.

Indeed, even a casual observer would see the time, attention, and organization that informed every nuance of the programs' support structures. The TTT, STAR, and SSETI programs live and breathe collaboration, and they similarly engage and exhort their candidates to do the same. Even as the candidates queued to receive their certificates of completion, their conversations shifted radically between close friends and respected colleagues. As they gathered for their group photographs, all of the new teachers participated in several simultaneous heartfelt exchanges, never restricting themselves to the confines of merely one discussion: Everyone knew everyone, and they could rely on each other.



STAR candidates.



SSETI program candidates.

But the program adjusted and kept me on track with clear steps. I felt like I could express genuine concerns to my support structures and my professors, Dr. Anderson, Dr. Duenas, Dr. Brockman – and have them answered." Through steepled fingers, he added for posterity, "For newcomers: Be prepared. Be on task. The program will go faster than you imagine," and, with his face shifting to an enthusiastic grin, "But go in knowing you have the support if things don't go well."

**"WE TREAT THEM LIKE FAMILY SO AS TO  
FOSTER THE SUCCESS OF THESE EXCEPTIONAL  
STUDENTS." -DR. CECILIA DUENAS**



Dr. Cecilia Duenas

The event wound down shortly thereafter. The new teachers were surely exhausted from their hurried race to the finish line. They hurriedly packed and saddled their possessions, ready to leave. But, curiously, they all exited the CSI<sup>3</sup> 2018 Credential Celebration Dinner together, laughing and joking as they did. Just as with the TTT, STAR, and SSETI programs, they had individually entered as a cohort, but they left as a family, a network of collaborative teachers that had learned to strengthen one another and push each other to succeed.

The secret to uniting and building a community of teacher candidates so that they, too, will one day enhance the lives of their students? Dr. Cecilia Duenas happily shared it: "We keep them together in the same schools and with the same instructors; We want them to see that there is a unified message in the program. We treat them like family so as to foster the success of these truly exceptional students."

It would seem that, despite his overwhelming talent and might, Hercules would be utterly daunted by the challenges of becoming a great teacher that educates students. Outstanding teachers instead rely on the skills, talents, and strength of others that unite their efforts all towards a single goal: Preparing the next generation to collaborate, to learn, and to lead great lives.