

Exceptional Oakland Student Earns PG&E Scholarship, a 'Life Changing Investment'

By Tamar Sarkissian | Posted June 3, 2016

OAKLAND — Oakland has something to cheer for, and it's not just the Golden State Warriors.

PG&E dramatically changed the life of an exceptional East Oakland student, surprising him with one of the 10 coveted PG&E Better Together scholarships, focused on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education.

On May 25, high school senior Jorge Avelar-Lopez walked down the hall at Oakland's Aspire Lionel Wilson College Preparatory Academy, unaware that his life was about to change for the better. When the top student, reached the principal's office, he was met with a crowd from his school, PG&E and local media.



PG&E's Vitaly Tyurin, left, and Lionel Wilson Academy Principal Michelle Cortez congratulate Jorge Avelar-Lopez, one of 10 big scholarship winners for PG&E.

Vitaly Tyurin, senior manager of PG&E's East Bay division, held up a giant check and announced that Avelar-Lopez had won the scholarship, worth up to \$20,000 a year, for up to five years.

"We're making a life-changing investment into the future of these young people so they don't have to worry as much about financing college," Tyurin said. "They can focus their attention on going to school and developing themselves."

Tyurin called it a "pay-it-forward" process.

"We hope the scholarship winners return to their communities after college and continue the cycle of investment," said Tyurin.

"Jorge is an exceptional student, a trail-blazer and a role model," said Michelle Cortez, principal of Lionel Wilson Academy.

Avelar-Lopez, who leaves high school with a 4.8 GPA, was selected for more than just his undeniable smarts. His principal called him positive and humble with an impressive work ethic. Despite keeping busy with college courses, internships and even his own businesses, Avelar-Lopez still makes time to volunteer at the Food Bank of Alameda.

"We have studied the choices Jorge made throughout his middle school and high school career in establishing a cohesive and rigorous pathway for himself. But we can't replicate his success. It takes a special blend of Jorge's initiative, willpower, intelligence and creativity to accomplish all that he has achieved," said Cortez.

In fact, Avelar-Lopez has been working toward his goals for years. How does he do it?

"Taking community college courses since the ninth grade, attending extracurricular activities outside of the school on my own, doing research," said Avelar-Lopez.

Avelar-Lopez seized every opportunity, explained his principal, such as participating in an app-building challenge that sent him to Washington, D.C., to work with other student leaders. His work was even highlighted on the national news.

Avelar-Lopez said he admires Elon Musk, CEO of SpaceX and Tesla, and plans to design software for driverless cars. He will attend Stanford in the fall to study computer programming.

Since the program's inception in 2012, the PG&E Better Together Scholarship program has committed nearly \$4 million in scholarships ranging from \$2,000 to \$30,000 to 500 students throughout Northern and Central California. The PG&E Better Together Scholarship program is part of the company's larger commitment to STEM education.

PG&E has a long history of supporting local educational initiatives, providing more than \$75 million over the last decade.