

## La Opinion

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### A Very Special Graduation

The dysfunctional families in which Maria Colindres and Amaris Olguin lived led to their involvement in the foster care system, under the supervision of the Department of Children and Family Services. Maria's mother died when she was 10 years old, and her father was incarcerated. Amaris was forced to leave her home due to her abusive step-father. Regardless of their family difficulties, Maria and Amaris overcame many obstacles growing up.

Yesterday, both Maria and Amaris were among 183 foster youth that were recognized for their academic achievement. The graduation ceremony took place at the Disney Concert Hall. More than \$700,000 in scholarships were awarded to outstanding students.

Eighteen-year-old Maria, who attended El Rancho High School in Pico Rivera, stated that it would have been very difficult to continue her education without the support of her biological parents. "I was fortunate that my foster parents are great and they motivated me to study and be someone in life".

Next fall, Maria will be studying nursing and political science classes at UCLA. She has not decided if she wants to be a doctor or an attorney.

Maria comments that many of her high school classmates chose the path of gangs and drugs, but Maria considers her education to be the most important path for her.

Among the 738 high school students in Maria's graduating class, she ranked 9<sup>th</sup> due to her excellent grade point average. She concludes by saying that "there is nothing more important than your education because no one can take it from you, and it allows you to be someone in life"

Amaris is an 18-year-old Bell High School student with excellent grades who has been accepted to the prestigious Yale University. Amaris plans to study political science and law.

Since the age of 12, Amaris became involved with the James Monroe Law and Government School. She would get up every morning at 4:30 am and take two or more

buses from Bell to Northridge. While at the James Monroe Law and Government School, Amaris took government classes. She would like to be involved with a civil rights organization that assists the community.

With tears in her eyes, Amaris recalls the early morning she left her house to report her abusive step-father to the police. Her strength and willingness to get ahead awarded her the opportunity to be a recipient of several scholarships. Amaris comments that some day she would like to assist dysfunctional families like hers. Before the graduation, she stated that she feels very happy because she never gave up, she fought for her education, and nothing made her regress. "I was raised to believe in myself".