



GOING THE **_social_** DISTANCE




Meet West Mesa High School Alumni Gill and Stephanie

Their story will inspire you...from high school sweethearts, love for STEM, Selfless Senior, and overcoming adversity...

Learn more about their experiences with school, innovative programs, and passionate teachers... it will be worth your time.



Gilbert Carrillo and Stephanie Ledesma both attended **West Mesa High School**, but both took very different paths before they met in the school's Navy JROTC program.

Stephanie grew up in a home with a rule. Each child had to take at least two years of JROTC, as her mother had been in JROTC when she was in high school. Stephanie saw her older sister and brother participate and before she knew it, she was getting involved and there

was no question that she would be joining.

Gill had a different experience. He had no idea what he wanted to do. He decided to give the Navy JROTC a try, but things were challenging both at home and at school. Dealing with family issues and a move, his grades began to plummet and he had a lot of work to do to keep up. Like thousands of students across the district, Gill needed the right program and the right teachers so that he could learn to invest in himself and graduate from high school.

The Navy JROTC program and its projects are very demanding of students. From rocketry to cybersecurity to high altitude ballooning to underwater robotics and more, these STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) projects are year-round and take a huge commitment from students.

Stephanie felt that there is still a huge stereotype that women can't be smart enough or strong enough to take STEM-focused courses or go into a STEM-focused career, and that women don't have the guts to speak up when they have an idea.

Like all students, both needed support, but in different ways. Educators across the district must find those ways to reach out and provide customized support and instruction to students from various backgrounds who are facing various challenges. Many students do not have the resources at home that their peers do, leaving them at risk of falling behind academically. Many experience poverty and trauma. They come from grief and loss, confusion and hopelessness. On the other hand, many students come from supportive homes with many resources to help them plan for a successful future. Some do well in school, others fall behind. Students from pre-K to high school take all their experiences and bring them to class. How do educators make all these different experiences, learning levels, learning styles, and outlooks and teach content? How can they address the needs of such a diverse class of students?

Gill and Stephanie were about to encounter a program with instructors that pushed them and tested them. They represent the tens of thousands of students in APS schools. All have very different backgrounds and stories to tell. All, every single one, has a common underlying theme to their story. They each come to class with the potential to succeed.

Check your inbox tomorrow to read the next chapter of Gill and Stephanie's story!

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April 16-30

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