

Michael Collins -Ruben S. Ayala High School -Baldy View Regional Occupational

**Recommender Name:** Katrina Cancio

**Recommender Title:** Alumni- completed 4 years of Ayala Engineering Pathway

NSF Presidential Award Committee,

I am writing to offer my wholehearted recommendation for Mr. Michael Collins, whom I had the privilege of learning from for the duration of his first four years as a teacher. Beyond his impeccable instruction as an PLTW educator, Mr. Collins has imparted life-changing guidance, changing the trajectory of my future and remaining a crucial mentor of mine to this day, as I enter my senior year of college. For the seven years I have known Mr. Collins, he has demonstrated generosity— of his time, resources, and industry connections— and has shown commitment to bettering the lives of his students, surpassing any other high school teacher that I have known.

We both arrived at Ruben S. Ayala High School's campus for the first time in 2018. As a high school freshman, I was in the inaugural class of the 4 year PLTW Engineering Academy— Mr. Collins style. Students in the academy prior to Mr. Collins instructing reported that the previous instructor followed the PLTW curriculum in a cookie-cutter manner, and many students above me were disheartened to continue the program. His new STEM program was a high rigor spin on PLTW's engineering pathway, which Mr. Collins transformed by employing his real industry experience as an architect to task us with challenging and practical projects.

I can say with confidence that each year's PLTW engineering course was the favorite class of every student in the academy— excited by the non-traditional projects we were tasked with such as city planning made entirely of staples, reverse engineering everyday products, and designing and rendering affordable housing solutions. Nestled into each of these assignments were opportunities to hone our hard-skills, from CAD to breadboard circuits to crafting meticulous architecture models. As a direct result of being a student of Mr. Collins, my peers and I were well equipped with presentation, professional networking, and group project delivery by the time we graduated from his academy. These skills felt second-nature to us from our weekly presentations, consistent group work, and frequent introductions to professionals' industry-wide via guest lectures (through his personal connections). These were the skills which set us apart from our non-academy peers from the outset and set us up for

success post-graduation.

The day I first met Mr. Collins, I told him I hoped to become an aerospace engineer and that getting an Internship under my belt while in high school was my goal. He encouraged me, but exposed me to so many facets of engineering. Mr. Collins was my teacher for Civil Engineering and Architecture, in which he organized a guest lecture by Sunny Wang (Water Manager for City of Santa Monica and well known across the water industry). This shifted my gaze to Civil Engineering and set my sights on a Civil Engineering internship. Through his personal connections and willingness to market me, Mr. Collins found me an opportunity for an externship at CivilTec, a civil engineering consulting firm. Today, I am a junior at UC Berkeley studying Civil Engineering. The access he provided to world class professionals, the excitement that he incited through his creative projects, and genuine mentorship abilities gave me the insight necessary to navigate to the career I currently pursue and find to be my true passion. Many ordinary teachers would count that as a 'mentorship win' and not stay in touch after graduation. Mr. Collins raised the bar, by exposing me to the water industry as a college freshman and helping me to discover my true passion under the umbrella of Civil Engineering. Through his involvement in AWWA (American Water Works Association), he invited me to the ACE24 convention, to speak on an advice panel to high school students and meet top people in the industry. Mr. Collins has never stopped guiding me in my career and has irreversibly changed my life.

Mr. Collins has shown me that true mentorship consists of listening; he never failed to lend an ear to my peers' or my own rambles of our passions, goals, and visions during his lunch break. He truly got to know our respective affinities and personalities, thus offering informed insight and guidance. My peer, Rhoda Ayele, is now an Architecture student at Cornell and Brenda Chow is a Mechanical Engineering student at MIT, both excelling in their respective careers. I am enormously grateful to be on Mr. Collins' long list of success stories and assert that he is the best candidate for the PAEMST.

Sincerely,

Katrina Cancio