



NEWS

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El Camino College Students and Staff Help with Community Reading Program

One of the first things El Camino College student Carolina Gonzalez learned about teaching is how much she actually learned herself.

Gonzalez is one of several ECC students who work with elementary school children through Reading Partners, a national education nonprofit organization dedicated to improving students' reading skills. Since she started as a tutor at the beginning of the academic year, she has already noticed her students improving.

“By working with the students, I have noticed my own fluency in reading has improved as well,” said Gonzalez, who works three to four days a week at Anderson Elementary in Lawndale. “One thing I would never do is read out loud in class – I was shy and this was something I didn’t like to do. With so much daily practice with the children – not only helping them, but hearing myself out loud – I’m breaking the shyness.”

Gonzalez plans to transfer to a university next year and is considering pursuing a degree in teaching. She said the work study position at Anderson Elementary is giving her valuable insight into this potential career.

Reading Partners works in area elementary schools to support students from low-income communities who are reading six months to two and a half years below grade level. There are 11 centers in the Los Angeles area. In the South Bay, Reading Partners sites are located at Anderson Elementary, Roosevelt Elementary and William Green Elementary, all in Lawndale; there is also a site at John Muir Elementary School in Santa Monica. Volunteers and work study students are assigned to help students on a one-on-one basis.

ECC Facilities Planning and Services Senior Clerical Assistant Debbie Turano has been a Reading Partners volunteer for two years. She was looking for an opportunity to help out in the community and she found this to be the perfect fit. Once she got involved as a Reading Partners volunteer, she sent ECC English instructors information about the program, explaining how it could be a great way for students to develop their own skills while helping others. Soon, volunteers and work study students like Gonzalez came on board.

Turano has been working with the same student for two years at Roosevelt Elementary, helping the fourth-grader become a better, more confident reader.

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“I feel like I’m doing something positive and preparing a student to succeed,” said Turano, who volunteers twice a week for an hour each session. “I can see her improving each day. She was very sensitive at first, afraid I’d be upset with her if she made a mistake, but over time she has come to trust me. We are now learning together; we are a team.”

Reading skills are crucial to student success, and by fourth grade, students are expected to transition from learning to read to reading to learn. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2011, just 34% of the nation’s fourth graders in public school could read proficiently. Programs such as Reading Partners can provide the extra help students need.

Reading Partners Roosevelt Elementary site coordinator Karla Moreno also has ties to El Camino College. She is a 2011 ECC graduate and earned a bachelor’s degree this past spring from the University of California at Berkeley. Through her first job right after earning her degree, Moreno has observed students succeed after just a few weeks of tutoring. A teacher recently told her that one of her students earned a 100 percent on a reading test and credited the tutoring for the success.

“Hearing stories like that – to hear that a student is now really motivated to do well – that makes my day,” Moreno said. “We work with all kinds of volunteers from adults to high school students. Many volunteers were students at Roosevelt, and now they are back to help. It is all coming full circle. It is great to see that.

“We are always looking for more volunteers and would love to expand to help even more students.”

For more information about Reading Partners, go to readingpartners.org/los-angeles/about/.

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