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**El Camino College | Public Relations & Marketing Department**  
16007 Crenshaw Blvd., Torrance, CA 90506  
Contact: Ann M. Garten, Director, Community Relations  
Telephone: (310) 660-3406 | E-Mail: [agarten@elcamino.edu](mailto:agarten@elcamino.edu)

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## **El Camino College Student Enhancement Team Helps Tutor Math/Science Students in Area High Schools**

Finding help with his high school physics class was a top priority for Jacob Melgar. Through friends at this high school, he heard about the El Camino College Student Enhancement Team (SET), a free program that places ECC students as math and science leaders at area high schools. He decided to try it out and not only did his physics grade improve, but so did his algebra grade.

“Physics was really hard for me, but my tutor Dennis knows a lot and he really helped me with so many equations that I didn’t know anything about,” said Jacob, a junior at Lennox Math, Science & Technology Academy. “I am fortunate to have this opportunity to work with the SET tutors. I have improved my grades and I’m more comfortable with the material.”

SET tutor Dennis Viveros is just one of the many student success stories from the program; he will graduate from ECC on May 16 and will transfer this fall to California State University, Los Angeles to major in electrical engineering.

SET is funded by a STEM (Science Technology Engineering Math) grant, and is designed to provide El Camino College students with the opportunity to develop leadership skills by offering a collaborative near-peer teaching environment. The goal of the program is to reinforce instruction, increase positive student interaction, and improve the educational climate of mathematics and science for high school students.

The program launched in 2010 with two South Bay high schools and a handful of students. It has since grown to include eight area high schools, serving a total of 4,481 students, said ECC SET coordinator Josefina Bedolla.

“A reason why this program really works is that the tutors sit with the younger students one-on-one and they review the lesson and explain the ‘why’ for each problem,” said Graciela Jimenez, a teacher at Lennox Math, Science & Technology Academy. “The tutors have such a wide variety of knowledge on so many topics – and it is all free to our students. It is such a great program.”

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Jean Shankweiler, dean of the El Camino College Natural Sciences Division, said a major benefit of the SET program is that it gives ECC students the chance to investigate career choices and learn about their academic subjects in greater detail.

“By working with other students through this program, our El Camino College students have the opportunity to grow and transfer – some already have,” Shankweiler added. “In addition, the SET program will fit well into the college’s new STEM Center as part of our outreach program in our community, especially in high schools and middle schools.”

ECC student Sandy Cerna was looking for a career path when she became a SET tutor two years ago. She had volunteered at other schools before and decided that she would like to try teaching. When she interviewed for a SET tutor position, she wasn’t hired due to budget cuts, so she offered to volunteer. When funds became available, she was officially hired.

“Getting to know the students is amazing – everyone is different and it is my job to help them and mentor them,” said Sandy, who graduated from ECC in 2012 and transferred to Cal State Long Beach as a math major. “I never thought I could be a math teacher, but the SET program was the tool I needed to open my mind and see all the possibilities available to science majors.

“When I help repeat students, I can see them becoming more motivated and I can tell them, ‘Hey, I’m a student too, I know how it is, we all have homework and it’s tough, but you can do it.’ It makes me want to become a teacher. Through the SET Program, I feel more confident in my teaching and I’m improving in my own schoolwork too.”

Lennox Academy senior Rocio Lima joined tutoring sessions earlier this year, looking for help on a pre-calculus test. After seeing her grades improve, she continued the sessions a couple times a week. Though she was previously struggling in math, she reports that she likes the subject now, and understands it better after the initial tutoring appointments.

“I hope to go to UC Riverside to work on a degree in business administration,” she said. “I’m not pursuing a math or science degree, but knowing math is helpful no matter what you do. The best part about the tutors is that they are so friendly and don’t get distracted easily. I see the same tutor each time, so we can build on the work day to day.”

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