



West Valley VIEW

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From 3rd grade to college *Lattie Coor pupils enroll at EMCC for reading camp*

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COLLEGE STUDENT ARIANA HORTON works with Lattie Coor Elementary School pupil Adam Sierra, 10, during a summer reading camp July 1 at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale.

When future teachers who aren't sure if they chose the right profession meet up with future fourth-graders who don't know if they want to go to college, it's a "win-win" situation.

That's what took place last week when a group of education majors at Estrella Mountain Community College and pupils from Lattie Coor School in Avondale took part in a summer reading camp.

It was started and organized by Gay Romack, deacon at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Litchfield Park, after she got the idea from another church and approached the community college.

It just so happened, EMCC education faculty member Pete Turner had been looking for a way to get his students practice in a classroom.

"I can't imagine a better experience for my students, and you can see these children grow daily," he said. "This has been win-win, it really has."

Before the camp, EMCC student Hilda Godina wondered if teaching was really right for her, she said. It was her first experience interacting with pupils.

"I really like it, because it gives you the chance to have a hands-on experience," she said. "It gives you that want to keep on going and say, 'Yes, this is for me and I want to do this for the rest of my life.'"

Third-grade teachers at Lattie Coor submitted names of pupils who needed extra help with reading, and 16 were selected for the camp.

"That's an absolutely critical year," Turner said. "These students were chosen because the teachers felt they could most benefit from this type of fun, but intensive, reading opportunity."

If pupils aren't on grade level for reading by the end of third grade, their chances of dropping out in high school increase significantly, Turner said.

"From a developmental standpoint, the end of third grade is where you have stopped learning to read and now you're starting to read to learn," he said.

Promising progress

In the past, Michell Guevara, 9, would get distracted while reading, but has since learned to pay attention and stay focused, she said.

"I think what we're reading is interesting and I love this camp; I wish it was forever," she said.

The four-day program focused mainly on reading, but also incorporated math, arts and crafts and physical activity at the college's fitness center. Volunteers from the church handled the food and fun.

Through a variety of hands-on activities including partner reading, drop everything and read, journal writing and creating a dream board, the Estrella Mountain students gave the younger pupils a little boost.

EMCC student Glen Smith said he was surprised with the amount of growth he saw in the pupils over such a short time.

"I honestly didn't think they would make this much progress," he said. "A lot of them have really been able to comprehend a lot of the questions we've been asking."

"If these kids aren't at grade level, they're very close," Turner said. "We're trying to nurture that love for reading and the vision of them being in college."

That idea was further cultivated by having the 8- and 9-year-olds actually enroll as students at the community college. They signed up for a free, non-credit course and received certificates of completion at the end.

"It's really nice that some schools are looking to have these programs, because it's kind of like an eye-opener for kids who aren't thinking about going to college," Godina said.

During the program, one Lattie Coor pupil even said she wants to attend Yale, Harvard or Estrella Mountain Community College, Turner said.

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