**Books and Blankies**

**Connecting Educators to Resources with ECCLA**

Mark Gozonsky, fourth-grade teacher at Westmore Elementary, learned of ECCLA when a colleague was honored with an ECCLA teacher award nomination. When he needed books for the Don Quijote Book Club he had started with his class, he remembered that ECCLA’s mission is “connecting educators with resources.” ECCLA connected Mr. Gozonsky to USC’s ongoing activities celebrating Don Quijote’s 400th anniversary and with a video adaptation of part of the book. Most important, though, was introducing him to 22-year-old non-profit entrepreneur Robyn Strumpf, founder and director of Project Books and Blankies.

Like many children, young Robyn had had trouble learning to read at first. But, she says, “I stuck with it, and with the help of family members who encouraged me and patiently sat and read with me—snuggled up in a cozy quilt—I finally got it! [B]ecause I didn’t give up, I saw a [student] out on the yard wearing a tiara one day— you could just tell she liked the way she looked in a tiara— so I gave her a copy of The Princes Academy [from Robyn] to review. Sure enough, next week she showed up for the book club.”

ECCLA’s partnership with Books and Blankies works both ways. Ms. Strumpf sometimes receives so many book donations from publishers that she needs help finding good homes for them. Last spring she asked ECCLA to help place over 300 copies of My First Dictionary by DK Publishing. ECCLA director Jacqueline Hamilton found willing users at two of ECCLA’s target schools, Ricardo Lanzaraga Elementary School and the Dr. Theodore T. Alexander Science Magnet.

ECCLA executive director Jacqueline Hamilton with Robyn Strumpf, founder and director of Project Books and Blankies.

Robyn has raised more than $170,000, which has supported not only donations of over 18,000 books, but the creation of dozens of hand-made quilts, which she makes to accompany most donations to classrooms, libraries and community groups. When Ms. Strumpf heard Mr. Gozonsky’s passion for sharing the adventures of Miguel Cervantes’ famous knight-errant with his students, she gladly donated a large assortment of books related to knights, medieval times, castles, Spain, and Don Quijote, as well as twelve editions of the book itself in both English and Spanish.

“Robyn gave us three baskets full of children’s books about adventures, knights and magic.” Afterward, Mr. Gozonsky reports, “I saw a [student] laughing in her teacher’s chair.”

**ECCLA’s Annual Essay Contests Celebrate Diversity Once More**

*EVERYDAY CARING INSPIRES LOCAL WINNERS*

Since 1997, ECCLA has offered essay contests as a tool for teachers to encourage their students to practice and Excel at writing personal narratives.  

Since 1997, ECCLA has offered essay contests as a tool for teachers to encourage their students to practice and excel at writing personal narratives. Where else can a student have the chance of winning up to $100 just for completing a home-work assignment? All entrants receive a certificate of participation and winners receive cash prizes, usually awarded at a school assembly or in-class presentation to call attention to the achievement.  

Honoring Latinos in the fall and African Americans in the spring, teachers and students at ECCLA-area schools have responded to the question “who do I admire the most?” Reflecting on their personal heroes, the winners of the 2008-09 contests wrote about the everyday and the extraordinary, about people young and old, about family and relative strangers.

**LATINOS INFLUENCE ON LOS ANGELES YOUTH**

For the fall essay contest, 20 middle and high school teachers from 14 different schools submitted 336 student essays on the prompt “The Latino/a I Know That I Most Admire.” In the middle school category, students tied for both second and third place, making for five winners. Middle school winners Luis Vargas wrote about his neighbor: “He takes examples in life, and he clearly shows how behavior and consequences are connected to choices. In the future, I hope to become an engineer, and Jesus has kept me on the right path.” Luis Romeros, first place winner at the high school level, chose to write about a man he met at work who taught him some important lessons.

“Before I met David I wasn’t really thinking about a U.S. [college] of any kind. I felt I wasn’t good enough. [He] motivated me to try my best and get the best education I can, and taught me that there’s no shame in transferring from a community college like he did,” wrote Romeros. Other stories demonstrated the tough times facing many students in South Los Angeles.

“My older brother became the head of our household when he was 10 years old and had to give up the remainder of his childhood for us,” wrote Jose Gaspar, who won second place in the high school category. Yet

**EIGHTH GRADERS PREPARE FOR COLLEGE**

**SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS LEARN APPLICATION PROCESS**

Applying for scholarships and college admissions can feel confusing and complicated to those who have never done it before. ECCLA created its annual Eighth Grade Higher Education Scholarship Laboratories in part to introduce students to the process. ECCLA also hopes that the scholarships will inspire students to begin thinking about college, and to reach high school graduation. Each autumn, eighth graders from all ECCLA target schools can apply. The current contest deadline is November 6th, 2009.

The 2008-09 scholarships went to two outstanding eighth graders selected from all of ECCLA’s target schools, and to an eighth grader from Carver Middle School for the Ernestine Turner Memorial Prize.

The last issue of The Chalkboard featured the creation of the Turner Prize. Magdelena Barrientos won the very first scholarship awarded in honor of this long-time teacher. “She has an extraordinary, positive attitude which is infectious. I know that she will go far in life,” said Thomas Turner, Magdelena’s teacher and the son of Ernestine Turner. Should Magdelena not claim the prize for any reason, the alternate for this scholarship was Ariana Rodriguez. Isabella Lloyd-Dammann of 33rd Street School won the first of the other two prizes made possible by the USC Regina Hunter Bloom Fund. Ms. Rita Collins recommended Isabella for the scholarship noting her outstanding command of verbal communication and [proof] teaching.

High school winners of ECCLA’s African American Essay Contest. Left to Right: Bree’ana Monroe, James Nolasco, Cesar Sanchez.
Two things, however, finally convinced me to form the partnership and to start this year. First, MIND’s intelligent, thorough implementation and support program: it makes success for students, teachers and schools probable rather than just possible. Second (and more important), I believed that this program could actually make central Los Angeles a leader in math education in the district over the next five years. Making that happen could take hard work, but I found myself unexpectedly excited about the coming school year.

So we invited principals to a breakfast briefing about the program on September 1, and we gave them only 10 days notice. Amazingly, nearly half of the eligible schools attended, and fully one-quarter decided to turn around the grant application quickly and were accepted into the program. At the time of printing, teachers had begun training and a few schools have the program up and running. Our Spring issue of The Chalkboard will describe MIND and the math initiative in greater detail. Hopefully it will inspire more ECCLA schools to join next year!

Until soon,
Jasminne Hamilton, ECCLA Executive Director
ECCLA’s Annual Essay Contests continued

that same brother “became the second person in my family to graduate from high school and the first to attend a four-year university.”

While the essays received were often filled with rough times and tough decisions, all of them demonstrated how one person, whether parent, friend, or someone completely outside the family, can dramatically affect the course of a child’s life.

RECOGNIZING AFRICAN AMERICAN MENTORS
Fifteen teachers entered a total of 185 student essays in the spring contest, “The African American Who I Know That I Most Admire.” Winners again wrote movingly about those who had served as guides, mentors, or inspirations to them. Janet Lopez, first place winner in the middle school category, wrote of her deceased stepfather with grace. “Over the years that I was able to spend with him, he made me appreciate aspects of his culture, such as soul food. I will always remember the way that he did not...” 

For the high school category, first place winner James Nolasco told of a middle school friend that he “both literally and metaphorically looked up to,” a gifted athlete who “stayed focused and knew that he did not want to waste his time... His knowledge of academics was great, and with his help I ended up surpassing him... and he was someone who could make me laugh.”

ECCLA congratulates all of these winners, and extends its gratitude to the teachers who took the time to include this contest in their course work. “ECCLA Corner” describes the new prompts for our essay contests this year. Deadline for the current fall essay contest is October 23, 2009, with winners to be announced in mid-November. Information about the spring contest will be mailed and posted on www.eccla.org in early December.

ECCLA’s Annual Hispanic Heritage Essay Contest 2008 Winners
Middle School: 1st Prize: Lina Vergas, St. Olalla Catholic School, Mr. Montecillo.
2nd Prize: Tünde Arende, Adams Middle School, Mr. Tor Astavudraein.
3rd Prize: Francisco Moreno, St. Olalla Catholic School, Mr. Montecillo.

High School: 1st Prize: Luis Romero, Jefferson High School, Mrs. Lutto-Farros.
2nd Prize: Jose Grisner, Jefferson High School, Mrs. Lutto-Farros.
3rd Prize: Victor Ilas, Manual Arts High School, Ms. Conce.

ECCLA’s Annual African American Essay Contest 2009 Winners
Middle School: 1st Prize: Janet Lopez, Audubon Middle School, Mr. Blume.
2nd Prize: Ronaldo Garcia, 32nd Street Magnet School, Mrs. Smith.
3rd Prize: Taylor Mercado, Holy Name of Jesus School, Mrs. Smith.

High School: 1st Prize: James Nolasco, Jefferson Early College at LATTC, Mr. Dean.
2nd Prize: Briana Monroy, Jefferson Early College at LATTC, Mr. Dean.
3rd Prize: Edgar Sanchez, Jefferson Early College at LATTC, Mr. Dean.

A middle school essay winner, Taylor Mercado from Holy Name of Jesus School.

Eighth Graders Prepare for College continued

Eighth Graders Prepare for College continued

skills in the classroom. Ms. Collins also cited Isabella’s ability to “create scaffolds for learning, bridging the gap between prior knowledge and new textbook material.”

“Very little time passed before Magdalena Barrientos, winner of the very first Ernestine Turner Memorial Prize.
Center School. “Descriptive writing is a second-grade standard, and we’ve used the dictionaries to add adjectives to our writing,” said Jano De La Torre, one of the sixth-grade teachers from the Science Center School whose students benefitted from the classroom sets of the books.

ECCLA also played matchmaker when a friend of Ms. Strumpf had a book donation drive among her ele-

mentary students in Northridge and needed to find an interested teacher at a cash-strapped school to accept the gift. Ms. Strumpf asked for help and ECCLA paired them up with Trinity Street Elementary, where the children could hardly wait to discover the delights chosen for them by their counterparts in another school.

Like ECCLA Books and Blankles works to connect teachers to the materials they need to create a suc-

cessful learning experience. And when teachers find help once, they often return. Mr. Gozonsky’s son with the Don Quijote Book Club
gave him another idea. Following the presidential inauguration, he wanted to hear what high school teachers would think of Barack Obama’s Dream from My Father: A Story of Race and

fulness. With a set of the autobi-

graphics in hand from Books and Blankles he found a colleague who connected him with some students at Trinity Street High School. “I don’t think we could have done the book club without [Robyn].” [Having a
dozen copies of the books gave me credibility, too,” said Mr. Gozonsky. “It was such a show of faith.” “As a result of the donation the book club did meet over several weeks, and Mr. Gozonsky reports: “We had a

vibrant experience of connecting with the book using video, art and music—and most important, the students’ frank and intelligent assess-

ment of the text.”

Ms. Strumpf, who now is an engineering graduate student at USC, plans to continue to operate Project Books and Blankles well into the future. “Every time that I make a delivery of ‘books and blankies,” I see the excitement in the kids’ faces as they sort through the baskets. Their appreciation for someone who is inter-

ested in their success—that’s all the reward that I need,” she says.

For more information about con-

necting to ECCLA or Project Books and Blankles, visit the ECCLA web-

site at www.eccla.org.