

Jumping In, Volunteer Spotlight: Eric Gonzalez

Mr. Eric Gonzalez volunteers with Colorado Youth for a Change's ninth grade Dropout Intervention Program at North High School (NHS) with Educational Intervention Coordinator, Allison Hollander. Two of Eric's children graduated from North HS, and one is still attending. Eric immigrated to Colorado from Mexico 25 years ago to support his father. He left Mexico three months before finishing high school. He wasn't planning to do so until 20 years later when he was denied a job because of a lack of a diploma.

In 2010, Eric applied for a local government job and was offered the position. However, after his future employer found out that he did not have a diploma or GED, they withdrew their offer. This motivated Eric to take and pass his GED test on the first try. Eric's achievement made him very content, and he went back to focusing on his children, especially his oldest daughter who was graduating school and looking into college. During this process, his daughter began to encourage Eric to go to college especially since he had a passion for kids and education. He took his daughter's advice and enrolled into the Community College of Denver while she headed off to the University of New Mexico. While taking classes towards an education degree, Eric was instructed to get some experience in his education field.

He reached out to the advisor at North High School who helped both him and his daughter with enrolling into college. The advisor connected Eric with Allison Hollander for the ninth grade tutoring program. He was very excited and a little scared about this opportunity. All of his fear went away on his first day of tutoring. Eric talked about how nice and grateful the kids were to him. He especially connected with the ones whose first language was Spanish. Eric too had a language barrier when he first started college, as he could not read or write in English. That deficiency has drastically changed in the past two years. Eric also feels that some of the kids that are undocumented feel that their dreams are limited to only graduating from high school. He could definitely relate to that issue since he is a permanent resident who is currently working on his own citizenship.

Eric uses his own life to show the students that they have the opportunity to receive a higher education and to give back to their community as well. The students in the tutoring program are truly appreciative and really admire him. They gave Eric the nickname, "Professor". Volunteering at North High School has definitely confirmed Eric's career goals of becoming a math teacher. He plans to finish his degree at Metropolitan State College.