

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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'iMentor' program has successful start at CMS

The uncomfortable silence between members of the Canyon High Key Club and students in Vanessa Brown's English as a Second Language (ESL) class at Canyon Middle lasted all of a few seconds.



It soon became very clear that a new program called "iMentor" was going to be a success.

"There was that initial period of awkwardness, but pretty soon they were acting like they'd known each other for years," Brown said. "Seeing my students interact with high school mentors made me glow. They open up so much faster when they are talking to other kids."

Students in the Key Club, a community service group sponsored by CHS teachers Marsha Hammond and Bonnie Weed, will meet with Canyon Middle ESL students once every month this school year.

The timing was perfect as late last month students in Comal ISD's middle schools received iPod touch portable media players to use in both the classroom and at home.

Thanks to funding from Bond 2008, Comal ISD has given nearly 150 iPods to students who began their lives speaking a language other than English through a program that's one of the first of its kind in the country.

CHS and CMS students spent part of their time together on Oct. 13 listening to podcasts like "CNN Student News." Afterward, Brown's students discussed what they listened to with their mentor.

"I think we're going to be able to learn a lot from our mentors because any time you talk to an older kid they can teach you something meaningful," said CMS student Melanie Juarez. "It's great to be able to ask them questions."

Brown's goal is to have the high school and middle school students e-mail back and fourth on a regular basis and to even have the group start a blog about what they are learning.

"Any time I can get my students thinking and writing in English it's a huge benefit to them," Brown said. "A lot of them speak Spanish as soon as they get on the bus and when they get home. With the mentors in place, as well as the many teaching tools the iPod gives us, we're going to bring English into their homes."

Brown's ESL students are beginning to use their iPods, which have apps such as English Building and translation dictionaries, to read books and record their own voices while speaking English.

"We are reading books these high school students read while they were in middle school," Brown said. "They are going to be able to interact with their mentors and ask them what they thought about the books."

CHS student Emily Mathis said she's excited about working with the CMS students this school year.

"While they are learning English, we get to learn about their lives," Mathis said. "Helping people is what Key Club is all about. I really look forward to coming back here."

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IN PHOTOS:

Canyon High Key Club member Natasha Pacilio and Canyon Middle student Jacqueline Garcia listen to "CNN Student News" together on iPods provided to Comal ISD English as a Second Language (ESL) middle school students through funding from Bond 2008. It's part of a new "iMentor" program in which CHS students will meet with CMS ESL students each month this school year.

Canyon High junior Jacquelyn Willis and Canyon Middle ESL student Daisy Trejo discuss a podcast in the CMS library. CMS ESL students met with their mentors from Canyon High School's Key Club for the first time on Oct. 13.

Canyon High School Key Club members and students in Vanessa Brown's English as a Second Language (ESL) class at Canyon Middle get all tangled up in a team-building exercise as part of the new "iMentor" program.

