

Project Aims to Help Students Fall in Love with Math

By LAUREN MCDONALD The Brunswick News

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College of Coastal Georgia teacher candidates Karsyn Rowell, center, and Erika Woodward, right, work with student in the after-school program at the Roosevelt Lawrence Community Center on a math matching game while their instructor, Coastal Georgia Assistant Professor of Mathematics Courtenay Miller, left, looks on. The Coastal Georgia students work elementary school students two days a week at the center as a service-learning project. (Photo by Bobby Haven/The Brunswick News)

Controlled chaos reigned outside the makeshift classroom in the Roosevelt Lawrence Community Center, where a small group of fourth-graders were focused intently on a math lesson.

Throughout the center Monday afternoon, students played games and let out some of the pent-up energy from the school day. In the center's reading room, though, a group of elementary school students put their brain power to work. They answered math formula questions and matched math terms to pictures and definitions.

The activities were led by two College of Coastal Georgia students and their instructor Courtenay Miller, an assistant professor of mathematics.

Miller has been bringing the nearly 30 students in her service-learning course to the center since February. The college students, who are teacher candidates, come to the center in pairs to teach pre-planned lessons to participants in the center's after-school program.

The overall goal, Miller said, is to help the young students fall in love with math.

"My purpose is to champion and fight for the underserved minority students and give them a chance," Miller said. "I wanted my teacher candidates to be exposed to this population, so they can see that this population of students matters and that they can learn and they can achieve, when given the opportunity to do so."

To bring the project to the center, Miller partnered with Delores Polite, who runs Windward of Georgia, Inc., a local organization that works to help at-risk individuals and families.

Polite offers daily homework support to the students at the center.

"I just felt the need to help the community that I live in and give back," Polite said.

The lessons taught by the college students focused on math and reading. Miller randomly assigned her students to specific grade levels and asked them to use the Georgia Standards of Excellence to craft lessons for the center's students.

"I gave them a list of questions that they had to include in their lesson plan, and their lessons had to be hands-on, interactive lessons," Miller said.

Miller said she relates on a personal level to the students at the center.

"I was one of these students — low income, African American," she said. "... It just so happened that I fell in love with math. And if I can help somebody else fall in love with math, it's all good."

Members of minority groups are underrepresented in STEM fields, she said. But a quality education can help students discover their interests and pursue their passions.

"I wanted my teacher candidates to work with this population of students, so that they can see that this population of students, they are intelligent and they can achieve," she said. "... A lot of times, they don't get the individual attention, so I wanted to bring my teachers here so that they could know that these students matter too."

Service-learning projects aim to allow the college students to apply what they have learned in class to real-world situations and to help address community needs.

The college will host a Service-Learning Symposium on April 22 from 3-5 p.m. at the Southeast Georgia Conference Center to showcase the wide range of service-learning projects completed this year.

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