

# Mentoring program helps Tribal students

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

In a course called "Latino Mentoring," sophomore Tahnae Baker asked her professor, "How come there is no Native American Mentoring class? Native Americans have one of the highest dropout rates, and they really could use this help."

Baker saw a way to improve educational opportunities for Native American students and went about making it happen. Baker is now a junior at Western Oregon University in Monmouth and recently joined the Tribal Youth Education Department as an administrative assistant.

Her professor encouraged her to pursue the idea. She brought it to Chemawa Indian School in Salem, she said, where they embraced it, but did not follow through.

"When I came to work here, I knew this was the place for the project," Baker said.

Today, thanks to her persistence, the program is in its second year and Youth Education students now have go-to college students available on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday after school to find the help they need.

A group snack before mentoring included an anti-obesity menu of horchata, a rice milk with sugar, water and cinnamon, and wheat thins.

During this time, students spoke about their half of the mentoring experience.

For Alexandria Thorsgard, an eighth-grader at Willamina Middle School, the hardest subject is algebra, she said, with eyebrows going up, indicating how difficult algebraic equations can really be.

"I want to make sure I'm getting it right," said Thorsgard.

Algebra is a subject that also demands respect from mentors, too, said Melinda Torres, a Western Oregon University senior. She joined the program as a volunteer mentor this year.



Photos by Michelle Alaimo



Tahnae Baker

**Melinda Torres, a senior at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, teaches Wynter LaChance and Isaiah Holmes, back, how to write a résumé as she works with Tribal youth in the computer room at the Adult Education building on Tuesday, Feb. 5. Torres volunteers in the mentoring program that fellow student Tahnae Baker started and brought to the Tribe.**

When she recalled requests for algebra help, Torres said with a smile, "I was excited I could still do it."

On another day, Willamina eighth-graders Raven Harmon and SuSun Fisher sought mentoring help for their science class. "Transcription, translation, replication," said Harmon.

"The cell process," said Fisher. "They're really nice, too," Fisher added about the mentors. "They were encouraging even if we didn't want to work."

Willamina sixth-grader Dakota Ross received mentoring help for a technology class. He learned how to download images from the Internet and use them to make

posters and fliers.

On the first Tuesday in February, Torres was mentor du jour at Youth Education. Before the session, she recalled her many mentoring jobs, starting in high school, and the benefits that have kept her coming back for more.

"If I could change one person's attitude in a more positive way to help them better themselves, that's all I need," she said.

Torres said she worked at the Bandon Youth Center after school in her high school years and remembered one particular success story.

"I was very proud of him. I knew him as an elementary and high school student," she said, "and he was all about finishing high school because his brothers didn't and he saw what was becoming of them."

"He was super smart," she said, and is going to be a junior in high school. "He still has the support he needs to be successful. It's very encouraging."

Later, down in the computer room at the Adult Education building, Torres and Baker taught Fisher, Harmon, Isaiah Holmes and Wynter LaChance about writing résumés.

"If you're involved in sports, that means you are a team player," Torres told Harmon, pointing to the part of the résumé devoted to personal assets like skills and abilities. "Obviously, you have dedication. You go to all the practices."

"Well, not all," admitted Harmon.

"But you go to all the games," said Torres. "That's dedication."

School mentoring sessions serve anywhere from five to 15 sixth- to 12th-graders.

They offer educational tutoring, encouragement and advice about pursuing higher education, and help with application and scholarship materials.

After passing out a list of tips for writing good essays on that first Tuesday in February, Baker gave this piece of advice to students: "Speak well of yourself." ■

## Parents Night: Facts about Sexual Health

*Have you ever been asked a question by your youth that you just couldn't answer??*

Please join us for an evening filled with sexual health facts! Tami Martin, FNP will be on site discussing current sexual health information and contraception. There will also be a question and answer period at the end of the evening.

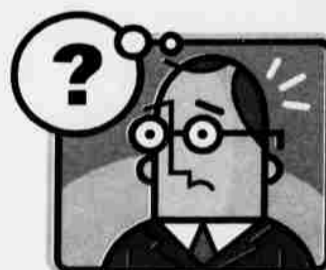
**Date:** February 20

**Time:** 5:30 p.m.

**Place:** CTGR Community Center

A light dinner will be provided

**Door prizes!!!**



If you have any questions you may contact Amber Mercier (503) 879-2162

Thank you for respecting Grand Ronde Community & Culture by not displaying gang affiliation and by not bringing drugs, alcohol, or weapons to this event.

### T3nas Intervention

Services to be provided to babies & moms-to-be:

- Checkups
- Cleanings, if applicable
- Injection-free fillings, if needed and appropriate
- Cavity prevention treatment
- Age-appropriate goodie bags
- Raffle ticket for one of two blankets to be raffled every six months

**Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Dental Clinic**



### Pregnant women and babies under 2

Tribal members: pregnant women or 0-2 year olds (teeth or no teeth!) who come in for a scheduled dental checkup or other appointment will be entered in a raffle for a baby Pendleton Blanket!



To schedule call: 503-879-2020

