



We're changing the equation

PCEF Teacher Spotlight November 2019
Ecker Hill Middle School DLI/Spanish Teacher & Bright Futures Coordinator
Rebeca Gonzalez



For Rebeca Gonzalez, many things are the same as when she first walked the Ecker Hill Middle School halls as a student. Her million-watt smile for one. The earrings she wears, for another. She knows this is true because she unearthed her own 6th-grade yearbook in the library, showed it to her students, and had a great laugh with them when they pointed it out to her.

One thing though is pretty different. “I’ve worn multiple hats here,” says Rebeca, “and now I’m part of the faculty!”

She tells us, though, that she is still working on calling current colleagues - many of them her former teachers - by their first names.

Rebeca’s passion for education is one of those things that hasn’t changed. She tells us that, as a 23-year-old Latina, there are a lot of expectations to juggle. Working as a teacher, however, is

the perfect blend of her natural abilities - as a caretaker, a fixer, and, perhaps most importantly, as an advocate for the underserved.

“I want to be a role model for these young students. You can be a professional. You can complete college. You can make decisions for yourself – and be in a healthy relationship. I will shine a light on issues with you.”

We sat down with Rebeca Gonzalez, a teacher at EHMS and coordinator of Bright Futures, a PCEF program which provides tools and mentors for first-generation college students. The rest of the conversation with her was just as enlightening as her super-bright smile.

1) Where are you from?

I am a Park City native! However, because there was no hospital in Park City at that time, I was technically born in Salt Lake City.

2) How did you start as a teacher? Give us some background. Did you always know? Was it a roundabout realization?

From the time my own sister was teaching me how to speak English, teaching was a calling for me. My parents were born in Mexico, and we were raised in a Spanish-speaking household. English was definitely a challenge at first. When it was my turn to teach my younger brother, I used to use a chalkboard to teach him his ABCs in English.

I knew from a very young age that early childhood education was critical - I didn't want him to go through the same struggles that I did – I wanted him to start school with a strong grasp of the English language.

3) What/who inspired you to be a teacher?

Leadership at TMJH and Latinos in Action were my first chances to act like a leader - I loved reading to the kids at McPolin and I loved observing the teachers there: how they modeled for students and how they managed their classrooms. Ms. [Anna] Williams was a huge part of that for me. She helped me figure things out, even things like applying for jobs, and then acted as my biggest reference!

As I followed my path to teaching, starting with PCCAPs teaching (I was the first Latina to participate in PCCAPs!) at Trailside Elementary, I realized how important it was to have teachers of color. Having that representation of underserved populations **will** help close the achievement gap.

When I started college, I needed representation or a program, like [Bright Futures](#), to help *me* - but nothing existed. Having more teachers of color in schools will make the experiences for students of those underrepresented communities better: it will set higher expectations for them, improve their abilities to take AP classes, to have good grades, and to graduate.

When I was a participant in PCCAPs, we toured the University of Utah, which included a look at the College of Education, and that's where I came across my future mentor, the Assistant Dean of that College, Mary Burbank.

She started checking in with me - and kept at it! - and encouraged me to attend the U for teaching. She was my ally from day one, through a crisis of confidence (no one looked like me at the U! Mary connected me with Latinx students and professors, helped me apply for scholarships, to network, and to navigate.) - until the finish line. She gave me tough love, she made me feel nurtured - and encouraged me to speak out and use my voice. Mary really opened up a lot of opportunities for me.

4) What values guide your work?

My philosophy is that education is the key. It opens doors and builds bridges. Things that I never thought were possible - are possible - because of education. I had trouble understanding what that path would look like until I met all these other champions and believers - who were excited about public education, like me, and about helping the community.

That ties in with the legacy I want to leave - making sure all students have the opportunity to attend school and go through college - or whatever it is they want to do. I just don't want them to feel like they have any limitations – we are in the country of opportunity.

A few other points that I want to pass on: Never take no for an answer. Keep opening those doors, even if they end up closing on you. Always ask for help. Reach out. Don't be afraid to be vulnerable. And DON'T be afraid to own your identity.

5) How long have you been a teacher? How long in PCSD? What grades/classes have you taught?

This is my first year teaching, and I teach 6th grade DLI Social Studies & Lectura Spanish at Ecker Hill Middle School.

6) Why Park City?

It's home! I always wanted to contribute to Park City as a teacher, to add value to the district where I grew up - and where I will continue to learn and grow.

7) Best thing about teaching in Park City School District?

I love being able to work with students at this crucial age. They're learning about their own identities, about the values of life, friendships, and how to be studious students.

This age for kids can be so challenging. They're pulled into different directions, dealing with more responsibilities, and needing to be more organized. I can help them be set up for success! I can tell them what to expect - I have been in this exact system and I can help prepare them and show them all of the different pathways that are open to them.

The fact that I'm able to help and mentor my students at this age really makes me feel like I'm able to change their lives.

8) Best day or moment or part about teaching?

I love helping them take control of their own journey - and seeing those lightbulbs go off whenever I help them make a realization.

I also love connecting with my students on a personal level - they tell me their good and their bad, they care about me and I care about them.

9) What does PCEF mean to you?

Park City Education Foundation has really been a huge part of my life. When I was in high school, I didn't understand the behind the scenes of what it took for us to have programs like afterschool, arts, clubs. I just thought, "great programs" and signed up for them.

Then, I started to meet all of these people who came together for a good cause. The team itself is so united to make a difference in public education, which is a huge driver for me personally.

I know that in the state of Utah, we are the lowest funded in education - and I'm not ok with that. As my legacy, I want to contribute to public education. How can I change a life the way my life was changed? I work to talk about PCEF and our other wonderful community nonprofits with families so they can learn to trust them and apply for the programs they provide.

I love PCEF's mission and vision - and how they are able to manage different programs, provide long-term commitments, and to keep it all sustainable.

10) Kids/Family?

Here in Park City, I have my mom, Griselda, my Dad, Justo, and older sister Dalia, who works for the People's Health Clinic, along with my younger brother Oscar, and my little sister Valerie, who goes to Trailside.

I would love to get married and to have kids one day. If I were to have the opportunity to be a mom, I want my child to grow up in a caring, safe community like Park City. I want to pass down the values and traditions of both of my cultures.

11) Hobbies/Passions?

I love to ski - skiing is the sport that I love. I love to cook and to shop, I like to watch YouTube and I LOVE going to concerts to dance and sing - those are my big splurges!

I also like to read books that discuss current research on education. The topic has to be around social equity, women of color, underrepresented communities, empowering women.

And of course, I love being with my family. I love to take my parents out for dinner. Creating new experiences for my family is very important.

12) Degrees and credentials/endorsements

I graduated from the University of Utah with a Bachelor's in Spanish Teaching and my ESL endorsement. I'm also working on my DLI endorsement.



Rebeca Graduating from Preschool in Park City!