



# Lab employee makes a difference in area schools

September 1, 2016

## Helping students reach for the future

Melissa Montoya of the Laboratory's Policy Office is not at work, she is at Tony E. Quintana Elementary in Sombrillo, where her son is a student. The children there have come to think of her as part of the staff. "I've known some of them so long that they're like my own kids," she says.

Montoya's time at the school is part of her mission to show Northern New Mexico students the future they could have and help them reach for it. In the elementary school, her mission starts with little things—making copies, bringing cupcakes—and expands to include the more-serious work of inspiring students with her own talks and enriching the curriculum with outside sources.

One group she brought to the school is Cornerstones Community Partnerships, which restores historical Northern New Mexico structures. In one Cornerstones session, students got hands-on math and science experience by making adobe bricks. That particular day was cold, so instead of working outside, "we took over a classroom," Montoya remembers. "We put tarps on the floor, but the classroom still ended up covered in mud."

Melissa Montoya wants area students to be courageous about their own futures.

## Supporting the Lab's student outreach

Earlier in her career, while with the Laboratory's Community Partnerships Office, Montoya became involved with the Lab's initiatives for education in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) subjects. She helped CPO staff organize the local RoboRave Rally.

This year, Montoya coached an Española RoboRave team and plans to continue in that role. "The rally engages kids in so many ways, not just in creating the robot but in learning to work in a team," she says. "And it's wonderful to see the kids' happiness when they get the job done."

## Showing kids the path

Montoya began reaching out to students while pursuing her own studies at Northern Arizona University. There, she coordinated the Hispanic Mother-Daughter program, which mentors Hispanic middle and high school girls, improving their self-image, preparing them for college, and teaching them about opportunities for financial aid. She is now developing a similar program for Española Middle School. "I'm going to change some of the core requirements of the program," she says. "One big change will be to have boys incorporated to the program, change the name of the program, and specialize the guidelines to meet the needs of Northern New Mexico students."

[Read a longer version of this profile here.](#)

Cornerstones Community Partnerships visited Tony E. Quintana Elementary. Students got hands-on math and science experience by making adobe bricks.

**Los Alamos National Laboratory**

[www.lanl.gov](http://www.lanl.gov)

**(505) 667-7000**

**Los Alamos, NM**

Managed by Triad National Security, LLC for the U.S Department of Energy's NNSA

