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Clarissa Tenorio, a Bayside High senior, has a future teaching contract with Virginia Beach schools after she graduates college. In the fall, she'll attend Tidewater Community College, and she hopes to transfer to Longwood University and double major in elementary and special education.

DAVID B. HOLLINGSWORTH PHOTOS | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

“When I’m working with kids, I’m in my comfort zone. Time just goes by really fast.”

Clarissa Tenorio, a graduating senior from Bayside High School and the first student awarded the early childhood education award through the Virginia Teachers for Tomorrow program

Virginia Teachers for Tomorrow

STUDENT’S VOCATION, DEDICATION REWARDED

VIRGINIA BEACH

WHEN CLARISSA TENORIO FELL ILL with a stomach flu last year, she refused to let it stop her from seeing her students. Her doctor told her it wasn’t contagious, and she had a lesson to teach. Aching and fatigued, she joined her colleagues to lead that day’s lesson at the preschool at the Virginia Beach Technical and Career Education Center. “I was in pain, but once I started, the kids were like my medication,” Tenorio said.

The 17-year-old Bayside High School senior graduating Wednesday is a student teacher at the Tech Center’s preschool. In May, she was awarded a future teaching contract through Virginia Teachers for Tomorrow, and she is the first student to earn the program’s early childhood education award.

The statewide program aims to recruit high school students into the profession and entice them to stay in-state, said Linda Spruill, a school division coordinator. The program went citywide last fall after a pilot year at four high schools.

“To get a teaching contract is tough due to the current economy,” said Theresa Cole, Tenorio’s early childhood education teacher. “But Clarissa is passionate about teaching kids, and she took advantage of the opportunities.”

Tenorio has attended the early childhood education program at the Tech Center for the past two years. Five mornings a week, Tenorio taught preschool

at the center with seven other student teachers. Afterward, she commuted 13 miles to Bayside.

“Ever since I was little, I liked playing with kids,” she said. “I used to play with my little sister, and when I heard about the program at the Tech Center, I applied right away.”

In the fall, she will attend Tidewater Community College, and she hopes to transfer to Longwood University and double major in elementary and special education.

Tenorio’s daily schedule during the year resembled that of a working adult. She woke up at 6 a.m. to be at the center on time. By 10:15 a.m., she left the preschool to attend classes at Bayside. After school, she worked part time until 6 p.m. at a day care center where she was hired in February after she’d interned there for just one day.

“When I’m working with kids, I’m in my comfort zone,” she said. “Time just



Theresa Cole, left, a teacher at the Virginia Beach Technical and Career Education Center, walks with student and future teacher Clarissa Tenorio on Friday. For two years, Tenorio taught preschool five mornings a week at the center before going to her high school classes.

goes by really fast.”

Friday, Tenorio’s last day at the center, was an emotional one. Thinking about it caused Cole’s eyes to well up.

“I don’t want to cry like a blubbing idiot,” Cole said, holding back tears.

“It’s OK, Ms. Cole,” Tenorio said. “It’s the last day. I’ll stay longer and have my mom pick me up.”

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