



# START RIO...GO ANYWHERE

## MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
RELEASE DATE: **May 10, 2022**

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### ***Río Hondo College Increases Tesla START Program Enrollment Numbers Thanks to New Pathway Involvement***

**WHITTIER** – Río Hondo College is meeting the high demand for more electric vehicle technicians by joining Tesla’s Pathway to START Program – an intensive training course that prepares new high school graduates to enter the College’s Tesla’s START program.

Launched in 2021, the Pathway to START Program places recent high school graduates into an eight-week online program to work with Southern California Tesla service centers, during which they learn the basics of servicing electric vehicles.

The highest-performing students are then recruited into Tesla’s START program, where they gain hands-on experience and are hired directly by Tesla upon completion of the program. The current class, which has 13 students in total – four of whom are female, is the 10th cohort of the Tesla START program at the College.

“The Pathway Program was a really good chance for me to see how I like working on cars because I’ve never had this opportunity before,” Lysander Zepeda said. “After the first section of the program, I was a lot more excited. I think the START program is a really great opportunity because I’m making a lot of new connections, learning the basics and the more I learn, the most I realize that Tesla is the right place to work.”

Liliana Miguel Ojeda said learning virtually through the Pathway program was a great introduction to Tesla and it prepared her for the hands-on work expected at the START program at the Río Hondo College campus.

Professor of Alternative Fuels/Electric and Fuel Cell Vehicles John Frala said the Pathway to START Program is providing a shorter learning curve to teach students about servicing Tesla vehicles. Frala also said this program will enable more students to be accepted into the Tesla START program, creating new job opportunities to countless individuals in the future.

To date, 125 students have graduated from Río Hondo College’s Tesla START program, gaining employment with the prominent automotive company.

**MORE**

*Río Hondo College is an educational and community partner committed to advancing social justice and equity as an antiracist institution that collectively invests in all students’ academic and career pathways that lead to attainment of degree, certificate, transfer, and lifelong-learning goals. For information on the College or its programs, please call 562-692-0921 or visit [www.riohondo.edu](http://www.riohondo.edu).*

According to Frala, the Tesla START program is a major employer of female technicians, who account for roughly nine percent of graduates from Río Hondo College's program.

The current class of Tesla START students is expected to graduate on May 26, 2022.

"The new Tesla Pathway to START Program will produce many more students who are equipped to enter and succeed in the automotive job field and we are very proud to be working with Tesla to make this happen," Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said. "We celebrate every single one of our Tesla START graduates, knowing that they have a bright career ahead of them."

#### **PHOTO CAPTIONS:**

**TESLA1:** Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss meets with the current cohort of Tesla START program students and its professor. (Left to right) Bottom row: Sayeg Hernandez-Poblete, Lysander Zepeda, Justin Chen, Jessica Justiniano. Middle Row: Anthony Hong, Emily Tomimatsu, Professor John Frala, Superintendent/President Dreyfuss, Liliana Miguel Ojeda, Ramon Garcia Mendoza, Ramon Garcia Mendoza. Top Row: Selina Gallegos, Daniel Gutierrez, Antonio Perez, Mario Ramirez.

**TESLA2:** Liliana Miguel Ojeda disassembles and reassembles the wiring of the passenger side door of a Tesla Model 3 car, at Río Hondo College's garage. Miguel is part of Tesla's Pathway to START Program, which provides her with virtual and hands-on training to become a Tesla service technician.

**TESLA3:** Lysander Zepeda checks the brake pads on a Tesla Model 3 car, using the knowledge he gained through Tesla's Pathway to START Program. Zepeda and 12 others are learning how to become electric vehicle service technicians while enrolled in the program at Río Hondo College.

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