



Students ready to kick-start classes

Early College provides fast track into health industry

FLINT

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FLINT - Shelby Plamondon held tight to the swaying ladder, some 20-plus-feet above the floor. She clenched the rope until her knuckles were red but did not stop until she'd made her way safely across to the next wooden platform at the Genesee Area Skill Center Base Camp.

"It felt scary, but it was fun because I like heights and I have good balance," said Shelby, 16, of Davison. "It tests my skills."

Shelby was there to bond with her new classmates, roughly 49 other students from around the county who will make up the pilot class for the Genesee Early College, a new program that gives students early entry into careers in the health industry and college life.

"We thought it was important to get as many kids as possible oriented to college life," said Gary Weisserman, director of Early College and K-16 Initiatives at the University of Michigan-Flint.

In these last weeks before fall classes begin at the end of the month, Weisserman and Early College administrators have hosted a series of orientation sessions and field trips to help students get acclimated to the campus, where the new high school is located, and to get to know one another.

"Up until now, they've gone to school with the same kids since kindergarten, and now they're attending school with kids from all over the county, from different backgrounds," Weisserman said. "We also thought it was important to get them oriented to college life and the campus."

Shelby admits she has last-minute jitters. She knew the ropes in her old school and excelled academically. She ran varsity cross country and track and was a member of the National Honor Society.

"I'm a little nervous about going to school with college students that could be any age, and everybody here (in the program) is from a different school in the county," she said. "I do like the (UM-Flint) campus. It's small and not so big I'll get lost. Although, I'm sure I will at least once."

The Early College is a partnership between the Genesee Intermediate School District and UM-Flint.

The head start on college courses in the medical field was the selling point for Yasmin Traini, 16.

"I'm planning on going to school for a long time - medical school is eight years," said Yasmin, a former Carman-Ainsworth student. "To start (college) early made it attractive. I'm completely terrified, but the thing that reassures me is we do have support, and they wouldn't have picked us if they didn't think we

QUICK TAKE

Openings remain

The Genesee Early College program is still taking applications for fall classes. For details, call Principal Sandra Morgan Jones at (810) 591-2498 or log on to www.geneseearlycollege.org.

were capable."

Only one other such program exists in the county: Mott Middle College on Mott Community College's Flint campus.

A typical day for the Early College students could include an early morning at Genesys Medical Center, shadowing doctors on rounds, then over to the White Building on the UM-Flint campus for a first advisory period - part home room and part academic advising.

"It's also the chance to have a consultation with an adult who knows what's going on in your life," Weisserman said. "The idea this year is to have half the classes at high school level and half at college level."

Extracurricular classes could range from softball to robotics teams, based on student interest and faculty skill level.

"We'll never have a football team," Weisserman said. "But we could do things such as the Model United Nations."

The social sacrifice is worth it to Shelby Plamondon.

"I can still go to football games in Davison with my friends," she said. "This might help me get into veterinarian school and maybe help me mature a little bit."

The program is still accepting applications. Organizers set a goal of 80 students, and only 50 spots have been filled.

There is no cost to parents. The GISD will use per-pupil funding from the state to cover expenses.

Parent Amy Al-armanazi of Grand Blanc just found out about the program. Son Noah, 16, wants to study naturopathic medicine - the study of natural and alternative medicine.

"It was a big decision," she said while waiting for Noah to complete the Base Camp session. "I couldn't sleep last night. You wonder about how this decision will impact his future."

In the three days since she learned of the program from a friend, Al-armanazi is warming up to the program.

"I think it's great that classes are small compared to the 700-plus students in his class at Grand Blanc," she said. "My younger son is in the ninth grade, and he's interested now. If his brother likes it, he wants come next year."

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