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Press release : 2013 : 07 : 25 : First College of Education Bridge to Success science camp a big success

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More than 30 students from Fairmount Park Elementary School in St. Petersburg are wrapping up a six-week science camp at USF St. Petersburg this week that grew out of a partnership between the school and the College of Education.
The students peered into microscopes in a biology lab, toured a marine science research vessel, learned about shells during a trip to Fort De Soto Park, went kayaking and sailing from the USFSP Waterfront, snorkeled at Lassing Park and had a close encounter with birds of prey courtesy of the Audubon Society.

They also took swimming lessons, wrote in their journals, spent two hours a day working on math and science lessons and had fun along the way.

Many of them had never been on a boat before and most were not proficient swimmers. “The camp allows these students to have hands-on experiences they wouldn’t get at school or at home,” said Tiffani Vinson, Fairmount Park’s science coach, who earned a master’s degree at USFSP.

USFSP students worked as camp counselors and Fairmount Park teachers joined them as coaches.

The goal of the “Bridge to Success” camp is to keep the rising fourth and fifth grade students’ minds engaged with science and math during the long summer break so they will be ready when the fall semester begins next month.

It also showed the students what a university is like, said camp director Fred Bennett.

“It gives them the idea that college is possible, it’s not too far-fetched,” said Bennett.

Many of the students’ families have little experience with higher education. “They’re not necessarily thinking about college,” said Khana Riley, a Fairmount Park fourth-grade teacher. “I think this is doing a real good job of putting it in their minds.”

It also teaches the students leadership skills, including how to speak in public and behave in ways that set examples for other students, said Casey Maker, a 2012 USFSP graduate and third grade teacher at Fairmount Park. “We hope we are making some academic leaders here,” he said.

The USFSP education students who work as camp counselors also benefit, said Nikita Shivers, a fifth grade teacher at Fairmount who graduated from USFSP in 2008. “I think it’s a great collaboration,” she said.

And the Fairmount Park teachers benefit, too.
“These college students remind me of why I went into teaching in the first place,” said Sam Mincey, a fifth-grade Fairmount teacher. “It re-energizes me.”

Fairmount Park Elementary is considered one of Pinellas County’s most challenging schools because of high poverty rates and low FCAT scores. The USFSP College of Education worked closely with teachers and administrators at the school this year, sending faculty, staff and students to volunteer as tutors and coaches.

“We have become part of the Fairmount Park Elementary School family and look forward to continuing our collaborative partnership with the school during the forthcoming year as well as subsequent years,” said College of Education Dean Bill Heller “The partnership has really been very beneficial to both sides and it has been particularly great for our teacher education students and other students across the university as well.”
Fairmount Park Elementary students having fun during the Bridge to Success science camp.

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