

Tuesday, Jun 30, 2009

Posted on Tue, Jun. 30, 2009

Thanks to a neighbors group, Arlington kids get to attend a Tarrant County College summer school program for free

By TRACI SHURLEY
tshurley@star-telegram.com

Megan Lopez says she's learned "bunches of things" at Tarrant County College this summer. And if given the chance, the third-grader at Arlington's South Davis Elementary can prove how much her College for Kids class has covered.

"We talked about bones, broken bones, and then we talked about the heart and the lungs, all those kind of things," the 8-year-old said. "We also talked about the brain."

For the past two weeks, 23 South Davis students have studied everything from biology to basketball at TCC's Southeast Campus. The funding for their foray into higher education came from a \$10,000 grant the South Davis Neighbors Association gave to the school. The money was part of a donation to the neighborhood group from Chesapeake Energy and Dale Resources.

The neighborhood association asked that the money be spent on something educational and beneficial, said Michelle Harris, school counselor at South Davis. School officials felt that TCC's 27-year-old summer enrichment program fit the bill.

Besides the "emergency room" course, the program features classes on computer strategy, craft-making, geometry, time management, sports like basketball and soccer, and other subjects. Each child attends four hourlong classes, Monday through Thursday for three weeks. Children in first through sixth grades attended.

"Our goal in Arlington is to build and develop lifelong learners, so when I heard the name 'College for Kids,' it fits right into our goal," Harris said. She said school personnel try to instill in students the belief that a college degree is attainable, even if they would be the first in their family to pursue one.

With 91 percent of its population qualifying for free and reduced-rate lunches, South Davis has one of the highest percentages of low-income students in Arlington. Harris said many of the students involved in College for Kids would have had trouble attending the day camp without the grant, either because their parents couldn't afford the \$160 tuition, they didn't have transportation, or their parents couldn't take off work to get them there.

The school is using part of its grant money to pay for a school bus to transport the children to TCC and back from South Davis each day. The crew that loaded the bus Monday about noon looked a little like college students, with their backpacks slung over their shoulders. Each backpack was emblazoned with Transformer-looking robots and the camp's theme: "Transform Your Future."

Raquel De Leon, the parent of a first-grader at South Davis, was also onboard the bus as a volunteer chaperone. She said her son loves the his classes, including one on acting and another on insects.

De Leon is pursuing a master's degree in accounting, and her family of five has just her husband's income for now. So, the camp grant came along at a great time.

"Because of his interest, we would have made a sacrifice" so he could attend, De Leon said of her son. "The help the school has given is tremendous."



Chelsea Padron, 7, runs a basketball drill at College for Kids on Monday. Special to the S-T/Brandon Wade



Zachery Staton, 8, makes a tangram puzzle. He is one of 23 South Davis Elementary students in the summer program at Tarrant County College.