

**Camp teaches skills for success in college**

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PHOTO BY DANIEL DREIFUSS

**All-Star campers**

Students learn lessons about college success

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# CAMP TEACHES SKILLS FOR SUCCESS IN COLLEGE

30 students learn valuable lessons in program at SDSU

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U-T

Students from South Bay and San Diego middle schools cheered, chanted and did the wave as they graduated from a weeklong program at San Diego State this past weekend.

Thirty students from three schools - Southwest Middle in Chula Vista, Integrity Charter in National City and Montgomery in San Diego - took part in CampUs, a six-day camp where they lived in the dorms and learned tools to help them succeed in high school, college and in their career.

"It's so appalling that there are so many kids that don't graduate," said Tyree Dillingham, executive director of San Diego After-School All-Stars, which ran the program, alongside SDSU's Office of Intercultural Relations and Cross Cultural Center.

According to the California Department of Education website, the most recent available countywide high school graduation rate was 79.4 percent, the lowest it's been in more than a decade.

The students at SDSU had a full schedule throughout the week. From 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., they sat in classes on careers, college preparation and resume building. In between, they took a campus tour, had a scavenger hunt and took part in daily sports activities with a Charger player and some former SDSU football players. The kids giggled their way through one relay race, which had them stuffing marshmallows in their mouths, leapfrogging over each other and giving the football players wheelbarrow rides.

For their final project, the



San Diego Charger Cam Thomas coaches Graciela and Consuelo Micheo (red shorts) as they play flag football at SDSU during After-School All-Stars weeklong camp. The camp teaches skills for success to middle school and high school teens. DANIEL DREIFUSS PHOTO

students were divided up into four groups and each group identified a community problem - they picked bullying, pollution, graffiti and racism - and came up with solutions on how to deal with it.

Sweetwater Middle School student Erica Basa, 13, discussed bullying with her group.

"It's one of the main problems in our schools and it's been hurting a lot of our students, emotionally and physically," Erica said.

Solutions included telling the bully to stop, ignoring the bully, and reporting the incident to an adult.

A favorite activity during the camp was called "Fish Bowl", where five students sat in a circle in the middle

of the rest and discussed personal obstacles in their lives. Students discussed everything from insecurities and social problems to thoughts of suicide.

"It was pretty intense, I think we all cried," said Isabel Gomez, program manager of San Diego After School All-Stars.

The students received two certificates upon completion of the program, one from the San Diego After School All-Stars and the other - a Cultural Competency Certificate - from the Intercultural Relations and Cross Cultural Center. Tanis Starck, director of the Office of Intercultural Relations, said learning about different cultures helps the kids understand how cul-

tural differences enrich rather than separate people.

"My favorite part was that all the cultures can be united," said 12-year-old David Chavarin, from Southwest Middle School. "We went to the Filipino center and we danced with them and they were so cool. I never knew."

Dillingham said the program exceeded all of her expectations.

"We all live for the day when we run into one of the kids and they say, 'You are the reason I am where I am,'" Dillingham said.

Southwest Middle School student Jeffrey Jasso, 13, began the week thinking he wanted to be a doctor "just in case something happens to my family." By the end of

the week, he had upgraded to wanting to be president of the United States.

"It just came to my mind," he said. "I would do lots of good stuff if I were president, like help more schools with after-school programs and materials."

Dillingham said she hopes to see that dream come true for Jeffrey some day.

"I'll be his campaign manager," she said.

Norma Gomez, a single mother of four whose daughter Erika Bonilla from Integrity attended the camp, said she was impressed with the program.

"It's one of the best things that's happened to (Erika) this year," she said, adding that her daughter wants to

work in forensics and will be attending Health Sciences High and Middle College in San Diego next year. "It's empowering. These kids are going to want to make a difference."

Heading home was bittersweet for some after their jampacked week, with some kids saying they'll miss the food, the camp counselors and staying up until as late as 4 in the morning with their new friends, listening to music and talking. Many said they'd love to come back again next year.

But 14-year-old Yara Pineda from Southwest Middle said she was happy to be going home for one simple reason: "I'm going to jump to my bed."