



Middle schools glimpse into future at UConn

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STAMFORD - It's never too late to graduate -- or too early.

Stamford and Norwalk middle school students graduated Friday from the University of Connecticut's University Pals program.

University Pals, or UPals, gives seventh-graders a first-hand glimpse at college. After three weeks of college-level classes with teachers from the school, 95 students from Rippowan, Cloonan, Ponus Ridge, Nathan Hale, West Rocks and other area schools received diplomas Friday. They even had graduation caps.

Michael Ego, UConn Stamford's associate vice provost who led the ceremony, told the assembly at UConn's Rich Concourse about the program, which began four years ago. He said he and others saw a need to start a "college readiness" initiative for seventh graders.

Sabrina Hussain of Turn of River School in Stamford and Kayla Kessler of Nathan Hale School in Norwalk, both said they were glad they attended summer classes, and plan to return next year. Hussain, who described herself as a "quiet person," said the program opened her up.

"They want us to make something of ourselves, I enjoyed this program, I wish in never ended," Hussain said.

Kessler said she liked "picking her own classes," "feeling independent" and playing foosball with her classmates.

The ceremony included an address by Ronald Mallet, professor of physics at UConn at Storrs and author of "Time Traveler: A Scientist's Personal Mission to Make Time Travel a Reality."

"I offer you a challenge: Find a dream that really excites you and turns you on. That will be your engine. Your fuel for that dream will be education," Mallett said.

Garry Joseph, a student of Nathan Hale Middle School, said he took problem-solving and shadow puppetry classes in addition to the mandatory college prep and academic writing courses.

"It's a wonderful program. It's a nice way to give guidance to kids for college and to give them this experience. I was a teacher in India, but never had an experience like this," said John Charles, Garry's father.

Ashley Joseph of Ponus Ridge Middle School in Norwalk said she plans to return next year.

"I liked the internships; being able to experience things that interest me. We visited Stamford Hospital," said Ashley, who expressed an interest in becoming a doctor or a lawyer.

The commencement ended with Ego asking the students to put on their caps and flip their tassels.

"I expect you to follow your dreams. This is the first step, you have several years to go to reach your objective," Ego said.

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