

Marching toward college

By **RODD CAYTON** The Daily News | Posted: **Thursday, April 3, 2014 11:41 pm**

BULLHEAD CITY — The madness of March has yielded the names of this year's Final Four: Wisconsin, Connecticut, Kentucky and Florida.

The future of the current crop of Fox Creek Junior High School students hasn't been determined yet, but it's clear that school leaders want them all to think of college as a possibility, if not an expectation.

The student body recently attended a March Madness assembly designed to promote that line of thinking.

At the center of the event, which ended a weeklong celebration, the 23 first-period classes worked on banners showing support for different universities, including Michigan, Villanova, Arizona and Tennessee.

The students were asked to look up facts on their chosen schools, including enrollment, founding dates and tuition costs.

Many students and faculty wore college and university apparel during the assembly.

Gear Up coordinator Amber Parker-DeWitt said the purpose of the event was to make the students aware of the choices available to them after high school.

"College is not a dream," she told the students. "It is the plan."

Donna Davis of Expect More Arizona, a statewide education advocacy group, pulled a group of students from the bleachers to show how education is tied to job security.

The volunteers became employees of a hypothetical medical practice. The medical receptionist — the least-educated member — the students learned, was the most expendable in case of financial difficulties. Also employed were a phlebotomist, a paramedic, a nurse and a physician, each more educated than the last and each able, in a crunch, to take on the roles of those below. A doctor who has been laid off, she said, can also apply for other jobs in the field.



COLLEGE MADNESS:

Fox Creek Junior High School students parade their banner through the school gymnasium during a recent March Madness assembly. The event, timed to coincide with the NCAA men's Division I basketball tournament, had students research colleges and universities and make banners showing what they learned. The winning banner represented the University of Iowa and was cut to look like a map of that state.

Davis said it is important that Arizona produce more college-educated workers, because that will make the state more attractive to businesses that need them.

She also linked greater educational progress to higher salaries, better health, better neighborhoods and more stable marriages.

Of course, higher education costs money, but Davis said a determined student can save up for college, work and take out loans.

“If you want college bad enough,” she said, “there will be a way for you to get there.”

Riley Frei, superintendent of the Bullhead City Elementary School District, said the March Madness project did what it was supposed to — increase students’ enthusiasm for colleges and universities and awareness of what opportunities are on the horizon.

At the end of the assembly, the Falcons’ basketball teams took on squads of staff members.

“I think it was a success,” Parker-DeWitt said of the celebration. “It got the students thinking about their opportunities and gave them exposure to a lot of schools they’d never heard of.”