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Eighth graders explore Yavapai College

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Staff Reporter

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Future high school freshmen are already thinking about college financial aid, said Heather Mulcaire, academic adviser at [Yavapai College](#) and coordinator of the Early College Program.

Mulcaire said she and COCSD's Heather Wacker are bringing 200 eighth graders to explore Yavapai College, go on a scavenger hunt, and talk about what they need to do in high school to set them up for college.

"The number one question that we were asked by these students was about financial aid," Mulcaire said.

These Cottonwood-Oak Creek School District eighth graders are the first class to follow the Gear Up program.

Gear Up was installed at COCSD through a grant program to follow a cohort of students from middle to high school. Program director Gretchen Wesbrock helped students start talking about college and career paths early, and facilitated a number of college campus visits.

When Wesbrock left COCSD to stay with her cohort of students as Mingus freshmen this academic year, Wacker stepped in and continued many of the practices the grant had put in place.

This includes the COCSD eighth grade college visit, which brings students on campus in groups of about 85 at a time, Mulcaire said. The next group of COCSD eighth graders is coming through on Feb. 11.

"The Cottonwood-Oak Creek district has done a really good job preparing these students to take these campus tours," she said. "They've armed them with the right information, and they understand how it applies to them."

By the end of the visits, the COCSD will have brought 200 students to the campus from Cottonwood Middle School, Oak Creek School and Mountain View Preparatory.

"The students are pretty comfortable asking about how many classes they can take, what their schedules will look like, and whether they can work while in school," she said.

The hour-and-a-half program is tailored for the middle school age bracket. They talk about what college options they're going to be exposed to while in high school, Mulcaire said, like dual



Eight-grade students from Oak Creek School visited Yavapai College last week for a scavenger hunt and tour to learn what they need to know to be prepared for college. They toured the nursing department, greenhouse, wine center and classrooms. VVN/Vyto Starinkas

enrollment and Advanced Placement courses.

Students learn how to research careers, degree programs and colleges.

"This is really to lay the groundwork for Yavapai County youth, especially first generation college students, by establishing early relationships with the college," she said. "We really want to demystify the pathway to Arizona four-year universities."

The long-term goal for the program is to reach elementary students as well as middle and high schoolers, bringing them in to see more than the Prescott Performing Art Center.

"We want to bring them on a tour as an elementary student so they can really, truly start talking about college as an elementary student," she said.

Then the students can come back as eighth graders, and already have the knowledge about dual enrollment by the time they get to high school.

"We're hoping that we can continue that connection through high school curriculum, and have them stay with us to complete that degree," she said.

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