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Ed Power participants worked on PowerPoint presentations on carbon foot-printing.

July 2009

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Education Power Workshops give local children pre-college experience

The middle-schoolers attending this year's 12-day Education Power Workshops are not only thrilled to be on a college campus, they're teaching their advisors a thing or two as well.

Bola Delano-Oriaran (Education) oversees the program and already this summer she's had kids offering her tips on how to save the environment – it's this year's theme.

"It's impressive for children to be telling me these things," she says. "It's a result of what they learn through the workshops. The kids are very enthusiastic."

Providing access to higher education and closing achievement gaps are two of the main goals behind the Education Power Workshops, which this year ran June 15-July 1.

The multicultural enrichment program, funded by the State of Wisconsin Bureau of Precollege Programs, is designed to serve middle-school students at no charge. About 70 to 80 percent of the students are from minority backgrounds.

In the past, Delano-Oriaran says the workshops have drawn about 60 students. This year, the college welcomes 80 middle-schoolers from about a dozen area public schools. Delano-Oriaran credits the increase to the recession – more families want to expose their children to future growth and education opportunities. That's especially important, she says, for low-income families involved.

"If we're going to break the cycle of poverty," she says, "we have to start somewhere. We need to start with the young ones, and expose them to a college campus so they have that mindset. It's providing that access."

"Our expectation is that every student will succeed past middle school, graduate from high school and go to college."

The structured workshops – this year all centered on eco-consciousness and preserving the environment – offer "adventures" that emphasize fun,

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cooperation and creative-thinking stimulation through courses in computers, science, physical education, language arts and leadership. Classes are taught by teachers from local school districts; in fact, this year, three teachers are St. Norbert alums.

At the close of the workshop, students are recognized for academic achievement, improvement and perfect attendance. An even bigger reward, though, may be the opportunity they have been given to expand their educational horizons, says Delano-Oriaran: "My satisfaction is knowing that I can influence a significant number of kids."

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