

Greater Lowell Tech freshmen learn 'Healthy Lifestyle'

The Lowell Sun

UPDATED: 09/16/2018 06:35:35 AM EDT

TYNGSBORO -- Greater Lowell Technical High School managed, yet again, to draw incoming freshmen to school during the dog days, away from sun, sand and sleeping in to kick off their first year of high school.

This year, the Summer Service Learning Program was thematically focused on "Living a Healthy Lifestyle." Program director Stacey O'Keefe and student leader liaison Bryanna Hawkins Beradi designed an itinerary ensuring that having fun and sharing findings with the community would be an integral part of this year's program.

The program, featuring a team of teachers with diverse curriculum expertise, took a holistic approach to learning in which the acquisition of academic skills was integrated with student-driven inquiry and volunteering with community partners; all while keeping a focus on improving the health of body, mind and spirit.

Janet S. Eyler, winner of the 2003 Thomas Ehrlich Faculty Award for Service Learning, and Dwight E. Giles Jr., have defined community service learning as "a form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students ... seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves. In the process, students link personal and social development with academic and cognitive development. ... Experience enhances understanding; understanding leads to more effective action."

The 103 participants in the program split into four teams, covering topics as varied as sports as motivation for physical fitness; various mental-health challenges and resources for help with them; eating healthy; and the importance of sleep and rest.

Families and friends were invited for the final day to view the culminating student presentations, skits, videos, and even a cookbook titled "Lettuce Eat."

Throughout the three-week program, students participated in numerous field trips and volunteering sessions in the community. Herbalist Lynn Iverson of Lowell's Eir's Garden escorted students around the Greater Lowell Tech campus on a plant-identification walk, then toured the Fresh Roots hydroponic greenhouse with owner Bill Evans as guide.

Students also participated in a kempo karate class led by Ellis Hynson of Ellis' Martial Arts Center in Nashua, N.H., and gym manager Dave Mansfield led them through a physical-fitness routine at Chelmsford's Choice Fitness.

Finally, Mill City Grows' Youth Education program manager, Maggie Notopoulos, guided students on a scavenger hunt through the non-profit agency's urban garden, and assisted staff at the Merrimack Valley Food Bank.

At the end of the three weeks, it was evident that all of the freshmen, who participated in the Summer Service Learning Program, were well on their path to realizing their individual potential as they begin to prepare for career, college and citizenship in the 21st century.