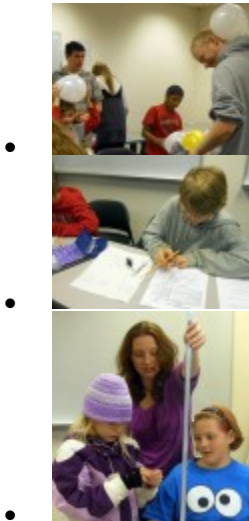


Help Yourself Academy growing - Kids see themselves as college students

[By Christina Schmidt, Casper Journal](#) | Posted: Friday, August 31, 2012 4:34 pm | [\(0\) Comments](#)



Courtesy photo Help Yourself Academy mentors and students experimenting with static electricity.



“We have a long waiting list this year and I hate that,” said Jennifer Grooms, director of the local John Wold Help Yourself Academy.

Despite Groom’s frustration, the waiting list is a result of the increasing popularity of the Help Yourself program, which is just in its fourth year of operation in Casper. This year, 85 students are enrolled in the program, compared to 67 last year. There are 31 waiting to enter the program this year, while fewer than 10 were on the waiting list last year. All students who were on last year’s waiting list were able to get in to the academy this year.

The program is designed to inspire and encourage young students to pursue higher education and attend college after high school graduation. Students in 3rd-6th grades in any local Natrona County school are eligible to enter the program, if nominated by their teachers. They attend the academy on the Casper College campus on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons. There's no cost for students to attend the academy and the Natrona County School District provides busing from local schools to the college campus.

The program offers science and math activities and projects in an after-school setting, but isn't affiliated with local school district curriculum. Instead, the program is unique in that it offers learning for young students in a college environment featuring four teachers and an administrative assistant, as well as mentors who themselves are college students.

"The main part of this program is to have it on a college campus and have college students be mentors," explained Grooms. "We try to have as many mentors as we possibly can. The mentors are really important because they visit with kids about college and their experiences. They help them with their projects and help them stay on track. It would change the program quite a bit if it wasn't held on a college campus and if it didn't have college mentors."

Mentors don't receive monetary reimbursement for their time, but do receive college credit for their participation. Some of the mentors are pursuing degrees in education, but others are pursuing other areas of study and simply enjoy working with and supporting the students. Grooms noted that several mentors have so enjoyed their time with the program that they signed up for repeated mentoring sessions, even after they received their initial college credit.

"We're wanting to encourage the kids to see themselves as college students, since there are some factors out there that may prevent them from realizing that college could be in their future" said Grooms, who noted that the mentors not only assist with teaching, but serve as positive role models and examples.

"It's really early yet to see too much, but one of our long range goals is to see how many will go into college preparatory courses in high school and then go on to college," said Grooms, about how successful the program has been so far. "I guess it's anecdotal, but the teachers who've come really enjoy working with the kids and the program. The mentors have really positive things to say about the program and how much they got out of it themselves. And parents and children seem to really like the program."

This year's program will begin Oct. 2 and continue through mid-December, resuming again in February.

Funding for the program has come from Casper residents John and Jane Wold, as well as other individuals and one grant.

"Money is used for stipends, for snacks and we also use it for supplies," explained Grooms, about how donations are used. "Supplies are one of our biggest expenses. It's a real hands-on program so it takes quite a bit of materials."

Anyone interested in making a donation to the John Wold Help Yourself Academy can call the Casper College Foundation at 268-2256.

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