



Still 50¢

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Photo/Ernest A. Brown

Melissa Arias, 10, of Pawtucket, left, and Sabrina Gosselin, 12, of Woonsocket, go over study materials while discussing learning styles in class at CCRI's Liston Campus in Providence Tuesday.

## Kids make 'Ways to A's'

By JON BAKER

PROVIDENCE — Sabrina Gosselin celebrated her 12th birthday not at the beach or in a pool frolicking with friends. She instead spent Tuesday morning and afternoon learning the proper way to write an essay, how to improve her memory and manage her classroom schedule better.

The soon-to-be sixth-grader at Woonsocket's Hamlet Middle School didn't mind missing typical summer fun with pals.

"I don't mind missing that stuff;

I like to learn, and I like it here," she said of her involvement in The College Crusade of Rhode Island's "Ways to A's" study-skills program at the Community College of Rhode Island's Liston Campus downtown.

"It's a blast learning this stuff. We've learned the three parts of an essay - the introduction, body and conclusion, and also the three main bodies of a paragraph," she continued. "This is all going to help me be a College Crusader; I want to be one because I think it's really cool. Being a College Crusader is really

important to me. It helps you get to college by helping you learn how to study in middle school and high school."

This is the fourth summer that College Crusade officials have conducted this four-day "Ways to A's" program, and - over the next four weeks - nearly 400 sixth-graders from Pawtucket, Woonsocket, Central Falls and Providence will take part. This week? The number is 103, and the students who reported hail from Pawtucket, Woonsocket and Providence.

See LEARNING, Page A-6

# Learning

Continued from Page A-1

Actually, it's mandatory to attend if they want to call themselves - officially - a Crusader, as gaining membership is a college-like application process.

The curriculum, custom-made for The College Crusade of Rhode Island, introduces sixth-graders to the academic, social and personal challenges of middle school. The coursework includes exercises in active listening, note taking, reading and writing.

It also addresses memory improvement, test taking, learning styles and time and classroom management. Via this program, students acquire a host of new skills they can apply daily during their classes.

"A lot of research was done by John Matson, who is our curriculum development specialist, and he researched how middle schoolers study; he found children needed certain skill areas to prepare them for such a change (from elementary to middle school)," stated Laurel Shepard, the Crusade's Admissions Manager. "Simply put, this just gives the kids a head start into middle school.

"The things we focus on: How to prepare to study, and actively listen in the classroom - that is, we give them skills on how to pay attention, and strategies with note-taking, and how to truly listen to what the teacher is saying," she added. "There's also read-

ing for success, which is achieved through the 'SQ3R' method. That's taught in every middle school, so we're educating them on how even before they attend their first day."

Adam Tarczuk, the "Ways to A's" program coordinator, offered an example from his previous experience working as a Crusade Advisor at Tolman High.

"I know that, in Pawtucket, there will be some students who will go with their families to Colombia or Dominican Republic during the school year, and they'll miss a huge chunk of it," he explained. "Obviously, teachers won't go over that material so as not to hold back the ones who attended. What we do is help fill in those gaps.

"As for the 'SQ3R' method, it means, 'Survey, Question, Read, Write and Review it - that is, a book or something else they're reading. It's a strategy to help them comprehend what they're reading. We actually have them read a passage from 'Freak the Mighty,' a popular book written by Rodman Philbrick at the sixth-grade reading level.

"When that's done, (the students) must answer those questions using the 'SQ3R' method," he added.

Tarczuk laughed when asked if teachers must wean youngsters off such "E-mailese" abbreviations such as "ur" for "your" or "OMG" for "Oh, my God," etc.

"I explain to the kids that, when you're writing anything, spell each word properly, and use punctuation the right way," he grinned. "It's tough on the kids, but I say, 'Look, guys, I'm going through the same thing, and I'm a social studies teacher (at Grafton, Mass. Middle School)! I tell them they can't write the way they text. In fact, that's one of the things they're working on (Tuesday)."

According to Shepard, these sixth-graders also will discover what learning style best suits them: Auditory (where listening is their favorite pathway to understanding material); Visual (where one needs to see the material); or Kinesthetic (when a learner wants to write and re-write notes on what's being studied).

"If you're an auditory learner, you should have your parents read you the material to stamp it on your mind," Tarczuk noted. "I'm previously a Crusade Advisor at Tolman, and I was looking for a job in education, naturally as a teacher. I had just finished receiving my certificate in education from Providence College, and I found out the College Crusade was looking for someone to work with this ('Ways to A's') program.

"Again, this sets them up for a great jump start into middle school."

Should these 103 pass this unique "Ways to A's" program (they must complete a 'post-program test' to measure gains achieved during the

four days), their parents must then report to a College Crusade membership orientation, which introduces them to helping their children succeed in academia.

"This isn't a program for gifted students, but instead for those who really have a passion about doing well in middle and high school in order to move on to college," Tarczuk said. "This isn't a summer school, not even close, though some of the kids may say that. The instruction is always hands-on. They get to work in groups, with more engaging banter.

"If I was a kid again - obviously I'm not - I'd want to be a College Crusader because I would have my own advisor in my school who would provide guidance and support me to help prepare me for college," he continued. "See, this all starts now, not as a high school junior or senior. Students not only have advisors but also access to all types of services and programs from Grade 6 to graduation day."

So, what does being accepted into The College Crusade mean? Advisors will help Crusaders prepare for their SATs and other tests; set up college visits; help students attain college scholarships to institutions statewide; and offers them guest speakers.

Those in the past who have revealed their tips about excelling scholastically have included police officers, journalists, even Sen. Jack

Reed.

"I want desperately to get a head start for school, but also college, because that's my dream," offered Jamila Dias, 11, of Pawtucket. "I want to be a veterinarian someday, as I love animals. I decided that when I was younger. I saw animals dying for no reason; and I've also seen the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico. That makes me sad, that innocent animals have died. I want to help."

Stated Haidar Holloway, another Pawtucketer who will attend Curvin-McCabe Elementary School in late August: "I'm going to be a mechanical engineer, but I also want to be a gaming engineer, so I can create computer games. When I was little, they always fascinated me, and I want to help build and design them.

Another key ingredient: The "Ways to A's" program instructors are all former Crusaders themselves, and three of the six represent the Blackstone Valley area.

Among them: Sarah Vanover of Pawtucket, a Rhode Island College fifth-year senior pursuing her Bachelor's in business management; Kathy Toro, another Pawtucketer who graduated from the University of Rhode Island in 2009 with a Bachelor's in psychology; and Rahja Laster of East Providence, who in June gleaned a Bachelor's in human development/family studies from URI.