

Students tour UNF, get taste of college life

Middle-schoolers are urged to continue their education.

By [Tophers Sanders](#) | Story updated at 8:54 AM on Saturday, Jan. 17, 2009

Kayla Orr, 12, is already thinking about college. In fact, she's narrowed her choice down to two schools.

"Either Yale or UNF, because I really want to be a pediatrician," she said with confidence Friday.

Getting Kayla to start thinking about college and her future opportunities is the aim of Jacksonville Commitment's PreCollegiate Reach-Out Program.

Kayla and about 60 other sixth- and seventh-graders from Paxon and Eugene Butler middle schools took a tour of the University of North Florida to get an introduction to college.

The field trip is an annual event for the program, which brings college students and middle-school students together for weekly learning sessions.

The program encourages students to go to college and makes connections between their class work and their future. The ultimate goal is to increase the number of local high school graduates attending college.

On Friday, the students ate lunch at UNF, visited the medical simulation lab, biology lab, fine arts center, dormitories and the school's library.

"I think it's very interesting," Kayla said during the tour. "They have the most beautiful library I've ever seen. I love to read. I just think this is amazing."

Hannah Fazio, a sophomore at UNF who visits weekly with the middle-school students, said she hopes the program expands the students' thoughts about their future.

"I'm really passionate about going to college and scholarship," Fazio said. "I just think it's really important for kids to know that it doesn't matter what your background is ... I just want to show them that there is opportunity out there."

Former Jacksonville Sheriff Nat Glover, special adviser to UNF's president and a co-creator of the Jacksonville Commitment, said the exposure was important for the middle-school students.

"Earlier exposure to higher education is a perspective that will give them a goal," he said. "And seeing how nice the college environment is causes them to look beyond their high school graduation, which generally these kids would see as a highlight."

According to Jasmyne Below, a sixth-grader at Paxon, the visit to UNF was already taking effect.

"I think it's pretty cool," she said, "I would really like to go here for college."