

IWIL begins annual mentoring for local middle schoolers

By Mary Lewe
Staff Writer

First-year members of the Institute for Women in Leadership have been spending their Tuesday afternoons this semester with a group of sixth-grade girls at Brevard Middle School. By leading games and activities, IWIL aims to teach the girls a lesson each week.

The IWIL women have signed up in groups of two or three to lead activities and games for each Tuesday of the program. Although this is only the third week of active mentoring for

this group, the women of IWIL have already had some meaningful experiences with the girls.

“My favorite thing about mentoring these girls is the chance to watch them branch out and meet new people,” IWIL member Amber Blanton said. “They’re so excited about getting to know the other girls, and I’m excited to watch them continue to grow stronger as they grow older.”

The IWIL women are learning a lot about what it means to be caretakers and leaders for kids in a school setting. Some of those lessons turn out to be quite practical. IWIL member Abi Fuesler, for

example, explained one thing the women learned early on about their mentees: the power of food.

“The first week we were struggling because the girls were antsy and having trouble focusing,” Fuesler said. “Afterwards it dawned on us that it was because it was three o’clock and they needed a snack, so the second week we brought Goldfish and everything went a lot smoother. We learned the importance of meeting basic needs before advancing to more consuming topics.

“I hope the girls are learning to be goobers,” Fuesler added. “I’m so excited to witness the girls as they grow through the program. It’s awesome to take skills I’ve learned in IWIL and then create a mini-IWIL for these sixth graders.”

In addition to meeting the needs of the girls, the women are seeking to foster connections with them. “My favorite part about mentoring is connecting with the girls in different ways, such as loving crazy socks as much as Madison or having the same awesome name as Hannah,” IWIL member Hannah Weatherall said. “I think our biggest challenge is offering games and topics that are interesting to everyone in the group.”

Alessandra “Le” Tavoloni teaches the first-year IWIL class this semester and supervises the Tuesday afternoon mentoring sessions. Put another way, she is the mentors’ mentor.

“The IWIL mentoring program is a unique experience and a great opportunity not only for the middle school sixth graders to learn more about important topics such as social skills, self-image, self-confidence, but also for us mentors to grow as leaders,” Tavoloni said.

“As a professor, getting to know amazing women and their personalities through the IWIL program, to see them growing and teaching these young girls, and sharing their experiences and knowledge is something absolutely amazing,” Tavoloni said. “I look forward each week to seeing my girls—a strong group of student leaders—growing, learning, teaching, overcoming challenges, mentoring, and most importantly, having a great time.”



Photo by Alessandra “Le” Tavoloni

IWIL mentors and Brevard Middle School students play a game that demonstrates connection in a community. The first year IWIL students have committed their Tuesday afternoons this semester to spending time with the sixth grade girls, teaching them life lessons in the process.