

Educator Spotlight

Bayard teacher raises support to take students on college visit



*Twenty-two sixth-graders from **Christina School District's Bayard Middle School** visited University of Delaware's campus after teacher Shaquona Meyers found financial support to help the children, who had never been to the Newark campus, go on the trip ([more photos](#)).*

The **Bayard Middle School** students in Shaquona Meyers' sixth grade class lived 20 minutes north of University of Delaware's campus, but not one had ever stepped foot on it.

Meyers teaches an Advanced Via Individual Determination (AVID) class, a program that aims to close the achievement gap by helping prepare students, especially those traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education, for college. Despite the short distance between their Wilmington homes and school and the university, the children had never been exposed to the Newark college campus.

"If they are not hearing about college from anyone other than me in the AVID course, how are they going to have this grand epiphany about colleges?" Meyers asked. "There

are certain social norms that exist in certain social spaces, but if I am never exposed to them, how am I going to unlock those social norms?

"I thought it was imperative that they have an experience, even if it is an introductory one," she said.

Typically eighth graders in AVID courses visit college campuses, but Meyers, who transferred to Bayard from Kirk Middle last year, learned that Bayard had discontinued those trips a few years ago.

"That broke my heart because that is one of the pillars (of the AVID program)," she said. "How are they going to have that college experience?"

Myers lacked the funding for a trip, but she didn't give up. She knew the cost would be relatively low – a few hundred dollars for a bus and to buy the students lunch on campus.

She reached out to her personal contacts at the Clarence Fraim Boys & Girls Club, which donated the bus, and her friends and family, who donated money to buy the 22 students a meal in the UD dining hall.

"Ms. Q, as we call her, has been involved with the club on and off over the past 10 years or so, and we really enjoy her enthusiasm and desire to empower our youth. Therefore, we were delighted to assist her in any way that we could to expose these young people to an initial college experience," said Rachel Kane, Fraim's executive director. "Many of her students are Wilmington residents and are or were members of the Boys & Girls Club. Given that we both have the same goal, to develop our teens into caring, productive, and responsible citizens, it was a no-brainer."

In March, the students spent a day on UD's campus, meeting with admissions counselors, touring the campus with student guides and seeing first-hand what their future could include.

"Our students had a fantastic time," Meyers said. "The kids were amazed at the endless choices in college."

Some of the new experiences were things others may take for granted – such as the first taste of sushi at lunch and the variety of career options available.

Meyers said one girl in particular was impressed by how many things she could major in.

"Her idea of making it was working a minimum wage job and working hard to work her way up," Meyers said. "When you are in sixth grade you need to not block yourself in ... because you don't know you have opportunities."

Seeing college students who looked like them also was important, Meyers said.

“UD was intentional about providing tour guides that can speak to some of the cultural things the students are looking for,” she said. “The students had two tour guides who really spoke to how they were able to live out their culture on the campus because that was a large concern for my students.”

Other students asked Meyers if they could make the trip next year, and now she is looking for ways to expand the opportunity to more classes as well as other college campuses. She hopes to start planning and fundraising in the fall so she can take students from all three grades.

“Even if the student is not in the AVID elective, they should have the opportunity to go and explore,” Meyers said. “Those kind of life skills are important and they help students to put into perspective what it takes to go to college.”

Those interested in supporting a Bayard college campus trip may contact Meyers at Shaquona.Meyers@Christina.k12.de.us.