

Mentoring program encourages girls to look ahead, set goals

Program shows ‘young ladies to the life they want’ principal says

by Peggy McEwan, Staff Writer



Peggy McEwan/The Gazette

Astrid Hernandez, 13, an eight-grader at Gaithersburg Middle School, talks about the value of the school's Goals for Girls program at the end of year celebration. Goals for Girl's is a mentoring program in its tenth year at the school.

Goals for Girls, a mentoring program for eighth-grade girls at Gaithersburg Middle School, celebrated 10 years of encouraging students to start planning now for their future with a Final Celebration Tea on May 17.

The program matches girls, this year there were 34, with professional women. The groups meet twice monthly at the school for learning, discussion and planning ahead.

“Goals for Girls got me thinking about getting started in high school and going on to college,” **Brianna Boswell**, 14, said. “I learned that you can make a plan for high school, I didn’t know you could do that.”

Goals for Girls is a partnership between the school, the American Association of University Women and the Gaithersburg business community, said Carol Johnson, eighth-grade counselor and Goals for Girls coordinator.

Johnson said it was 10 years ago that members of the Gaithersburg Branch of the AAUW reached out to the school with an idea for the program.

“The branch wanted to do something to help in the community. Our focus is on education because we believe that education is the key to women’s economic security,” said Elizabeth Clark Hessel, an original mentor.

During the school year, the mentors share experiences and how their choices helped them achieve professional goals.

They work with the students to develop a four-year plan for high school, discuss budgets, career choices, cyber security, obstacles to success and visit the campuses of Montgomery College and Hood College in Frederick, Johnson said.

Astrid Hernandez, 13, spoke to the gathering about what the program meant to her.

“I liked the section on peer pressure and bullying,” she said. “I got to understand that I could stop bullying if I said something.”

Brianna’s mother, Kristin Boswell, said she thought the program was valuable for her daughter.

“She has just blossomed. [Before] she didn’t talk at all about her future, now that’s all she talks about,” she said.

Carol Goddard, Gaithersburg Middle School principal, said she supports the program.

“It’s a fabulous program. You are exposing young ladies to the life they want,” she said.