Students introduced to the ‘college experience’

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APTSO • By fourth grade, assigned reading books in- clude more words than pic- tures.
But the illustrations still carry some weight.
More than 3,300 fourth-graders from across Santa Cruz County had real-life demonstrations of the college experience in the 4th Annual Sanper Fourth Grade Experience. Instead of being told they can be doctors and lawyers and writers and teachers, groups of students criss- crossed the Cabrillo College cam- pus to see what taking certain classes translates to.
Dental students mixed chemicals, creating fluoride past, actors impro- vised a dishwashing scene and an illustrator create a one-page masterpiece from his “flying mermaid,” “Grumpy Bears” and “into the clouds” suggestions.
When Cabrillo College officials’ audience is sea of hundreds of fourth-graders from 33 schools, one impor- tant message to get across is “college can be fun,” said Kristin Fabos, Cabrillo di- rector of marketing and communications. Even more importantly, it plants the idea of going to college in elementary school stu- dents’ minds.
“It’s before middle school, and it’s still a good time for them to be able to develop their goals and to be able to focus on their studies and to do well and participate in high school,” Fabos said.
She noted that the first wave of fourth-graders filed down from the college’s stadium. “I think some research has shown that this is the right age to get kids on a pathway to college.”
The annual event, named in honor of Cabrillo’s largest donor Barbara Samper, is an initiative of Santa Cruz County College Com- mitment, which partners county school districts, Ca- brillo, CSU Monterey Bay, San Jose State University and UC Santa Cruz. Its goal is to encourage students to enroll in college and help them succeed once there.

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New this year was the opportunity for the fourth- graders to interact with college students themselves, and not just instructors.
Derrin Baker, Pajaro Valley Unified School District super- intendent said that the event has gained traction with not only the students, but with community mem- bers who cheer on partici- pants’ white T-shirts with “Future College Graduate” printed across the front. As part of a series, Santa Cruz County students also are given a second and third college exposure in 7th and 8th grade.
Friday, between com- menting on the good smells waiting through the stu- dent cafeteria and getting hugs from Cabrillo mas- cot Sammy the Seahawk, one large tour group of nine classes handled plas- tic skulls, asked questions about floral arranging, and eagerly watched as dancers deftly manipulated their bodies on demand. At the back of the winding trail of 270 kids, Ann Solde Ele- mentary School fourth grade teacher Erik John- son berated stragglers.
“With our school over in

Photo by Sam Conner • Santa Cruz Sentinel

Fourth-graders from around the county are excited to tour Cabrillo College on Friday. More than 3,300 students attended the 4th Annual Sanper Fourth Grade Experience.

Valencia School kids tour the Cabrillo College library on Friday.

Online: To see a video of Cabrillo College’s annual Sanper 4th Grade Experience, visit scsentinel.com and click on this story.

WATSONVILLE, the kids don’t always have a chance to come to a college campus and see what it is,” Johnson said. “For some of them, too, it’s to see all of the op- tions for them here. It’s not just math and reading and writing, like we focus on in ele- mentary. We know that students this age are al- ready doing things that are getting them on the track to become the person they want to be.”