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## Bennett College science majors work with high school students

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GREENSBORO — Their experiment worked perfectly. Cristina Moreira held up the test tube, showing the class a white cloud of chromosomes floating above a blob of pulverized strawberry cells.

“They extracted a lot of DNA,” said Moreira, an assistant professor of biology at Bennett College. “This is amazing. So you should be excited or pretend you are.”

Then Sharneice Kenley, a Bennett junior, divided the DNA into smaller storage tubes, giving high school students Kiana Rushdan and Sarah Agyapong souvenirs of their first college lab.

“How many people can say, 'I have DNA'?” asked Kenley, who keeps her own glob of it, called “Renee the DNA,” on her dorm room dresser.

For the past two months, Bennett’s top science majors shared emails, telephone conversations and meals with a dozen students attending the Middle College at Bennett, a small, all-female high school based on the campus.

This week, the students, who call themselves Sisters in Science, shared the first of many lab experiments, research sessions and community service activities.

Faculty hope the mentors will encourage the younger students to pursue careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math.

The Bennett College students, who are participating in a national scholars program for minorities, came up with the idea last year to supplement what the high school students learn in their science classes.

“In terms of plans, we are really just going with the flow because this is so new,” said Moreira, who coordinates the scholars program at the college.

On Thursday, the middle college students, most of them with little lab experience, paired up with their mentors



Nelson Kepley

Jessica Jones (far right), a sophomore at Bennett College, shows Angelica Toledo (far left), a junior at Bennett Middle College and Chyna Johnson (center), a sophomore at the middle college, a sample of DNA taken from strawberries viewed through a microsc...

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to learn the process of DNA extraction. They filtered the juice from cultivated strawberries into beakers and used detergent, salt and ice-cold alcohol to break down the cell walls and separate the eight sets of chromosomes.

Kenley chatted with Rushdan and Agyapong, telling them that she wants to become a forensic biologist and analyze evidence from crime scenes. Then the three watched as the building blocks of the popular summer fruit emerged.

"We're in high school, so we can only do so much," Agyapong said. "This is very interesting. I have something to show my parents and sisters when I go home."

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