

Jessie Clark principal guides kids to ‘treasure’

At Jessie Clark Middle School, Principal Lisa Goodin invited all her eighth-graders for a fireside chat before state testing – sort of a combination motivational talk and mini pep rally.

“Eighth-graders are the leaders of the school. They have to set the precedent,” Goodin said after a week of 15-minute, small-group gatherings.

A conference room near the front office was transformed to match the theme “Guiding you to do your best ...” Scattered amid fold-out camping chairs were fish nets, conch shells, a rod and reel, and a lantern. A map spanning two walls featured such stops as the Vocabulary Marina, the Reading Wildlife Refuge and the Math Maritime Museum.

“The significance of the treasure chest is our goal to become a century school,” Goodin said. “We want to have a banner down in Norsworthy Auditorium.” (Fayette County schools that reach a score of 100 on the state accountability system are honored as “Century Schools” with a banner that hangs in the auditorium where the school board meets each month.)

The eighth-graders met with their principal in groups of six to eight. Gathered around a faux campfire, they snacked on Little Debbie S’Mores as Goodin shared positive vibes. A couple of students who notched all “distinguished” marks last year were confident, but realistic, too.

“You know you can do well, but there will be harder stuff,” Zach Young noted. (Social studies and on-demand writing are new testing components for eighth-graders.)

It’s the first time Jessie Clark has tried such coaching before spring testing.

“This is a heck of an idea,” said Steve York, a longtime school volunteer, who sat in on Goodin’s chats. “She’s trying everything she can to motivate these kids to do their best.”

One means was asking the students to write down their goals, including strategies for improving on last year’s scores. Goodin also encouraged the kids to consider the whole of their time at Jessie Clark. “I asked them to think back on someone who has helped guide them in their academic careers,” she said.

The effort continued with a weeklong scavenger hunt featuring daily testing tips, capped by a schoolwide assembly and pep rally.