

Insight Day gets students climbing

By Claudia Salvato
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Northeast High School students participated in the Philadelphia Outward Bound School's Insight Day on Friday at the Discovery Center in Fairmount Park.

The day included team-building activities such as an outdoor ropes course, where partners were challenged to climb to the top of a large structure in harnesses as their peers belayed.

"Climbing was really fun. At first you seem scared of it but once you get there you can see that you can do it," said Karly Jacques, a student participant. "Once you actually do it, it's easier than you thought it was."

That's exactly the purpose of Insight Day – for students to work together with their peers, communicate, challenge themselves, connect with the outdoors, and feel accomplished.

Lauren Stables, Director of Training and Programs at POBS, said they have two main goals for Insight Day.

"The idea is that these students are getting some insight on themselves and also some insight on what Outward Bound is and does," she said.

Students who really enjoy the day-long program are encouraged to sign up for a longer and more intensive expedition with POBS, which can include backpacking, canoeing, and rock climbing.

"Relationship building is always at the forefront. Beyond that I think there's a sense of feeling powerful and character development that is kind of inherent in doing challenging activities, whether their feet are off the ground, or whether they're asked to be vulnerable and speak about themselves and what they like," Stables said.

Andrew Adams, teacher at Northeast and Director of Project SPARC, leads expeditions for students and is an advocate for getting kids involved in adventure activities.

"It's awesome to see them realize that life is just one foot in front of the other. It's, 'You get yourself into a situation and get yourself out of it,' but you rely on your classmates, your friends, and you're part of that ecosystem," Adams said.

POBS has been in partnership with the School District of Philadelphia for about 30 years, with multiple schools in the district taking advantage of their programs. Later in April, Swenson students will participate in an Insight Day at the Discovery Center as well.

"It's just fantastic because it opens up so much potential that these kids have that they ordinarily wouldn't be able to express themselves without being outdoors or being challenged 30 feet up in the air," Adams said.

Jaslene Louis, a student who made it to the top, described the experience as hard but rewarding.

"It looks easy when someone else is doing it, but then when you actually do it, it's like a ladder. It shakes, it wobbles, and then you have to try pushing yourself up through it," she said.

"Then, it's also, you have to trust other people to keep you up. And then when you actually get up it's like, you feel so proud of yourself and excited that you got up," Louis said.

At least some of them will probably be back for full excursions.

"Since my partner was much more scared than me, I had to be there for her moral support and help her up and stuff," said Jacques. "But yeah, it was really fun. I would definitely try it again."