Six girls from the TORCH program in Northfield Public Schools are getting a taste of welding, interior design, medical exams and even railroad conducting at a technical education camp.

And the best part? No boys allowed.

The Teens eXperiencing Technical education camp at Dakota County Technical College is a way for DCTC to show off the majors and programs they offer. The Monday through Friday camp tackles a different aspect of technical education, complete with projects and guest speakers for the girls in grades five through eight attending the camp.

“We learn in classrooms, but in one class we go outside and we did experiments out there,” said Destiny Rojas.

A journey into transportation had girls operating backhoes and inspecting cars and practicing their railroad conducting. Health Day will put the girls in medical labs learning to perform clinical exams and take vital signs. During technical day, the girls will learn welding, civil engineering and technology, like computer science. The last day is dedicated to design, such as interior design and landscape.

The learning experience is partially a traditional classroom combined with hands-on activities.

“It’s hands-on workshops right with our faculty,” said Linda Foster, coordinator of the program. “Science Theater will be coming in doing suitcase science. On Friday, Comcast is coming in. It’s kind of a big mix of lots of things.”

The first day of camp had a special attraction: robots.

“We’ve been learning about mechanic stuff and how to work with it, and robots and how to control them,” Giselle Barojas Valezquez. “I liked working with the robots because we got to drive them anywhere.”
Destiny also had some good things to say about the layout of the program, which allowed the girls to meet others who had similar interests.

“Each day we get a wristband with a different color, and we get to meet more people,” she said. “I’m excited to meet more people.”

During the time outside, Destiny said the girls also identified different plant species.

“I guess I like seeing all the different kinds of plants,” Destiny said.

Foster, a director of technology at DCTC, created the TXT program last year.

“Part of it was because I have daughters,” Foster said. “They see that all the boys are signing up for those and it looks like a place that girls shouldn’t go. I wanted girls to get that opportunity.”

Susan Sanderson, the coordinator of the middle school TORCH program, heard about the opportunity from Foster.

“Linda Foster, who coordinates this DCTC program called me to say there were openings for these girls and if I thought I could recruit some girls,” Sanderson said. “This year we had more advanced warning and notice and Linda and I had been communicating with each other.”

Foster said she grew up on a farm and became more familiar with fixing a truck than baking a pie. She wanted to give girls the chance to see technical education as an option when considering future plans.

“I think they’re just being exposed to a lot of different educational vocational experience firsthand,” Sanderson said. “I think it’s very firsthand, it’s different than reading about a vocational program in a brochure. It’s just a prime opportunity and age to capture them and expose them to the variety of jobs and vocations that are out there.”

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