

Perfect scorer on the ACT offers a crash course

By DIANA REESE
Special to The Star

BLUE SPRINGS DISTRICT

Be sure to bring an apple and a bottle of water along when taking the ACT test, advises Kaitlyn July.

She should know.

The Blue Springs High School senior scored a perfect 36 on the ACT in December, a feat achieved by only one in 3,300 students who took the exam in 2008.

But Kaitlyn has taken her success one step further: She's created what she calls the ACT Crash Course to help her fellow students score higher.

Last year, as a junior, she scored 35 — far above the national average of 21.1. That's

when people started seeking her advice. "They'd ask if they could borrow my 'lucky' calculator or if I could lend them some brain cells," she said.

Encouraged by Nancy Stevens, a counselor at Blue Springs High, Kaitlyn put together a packet of practice problems along with tips and strategies. She offered the course the night before each ACT test.

About 10 students attended each session, which lasted about an hour.

"What Kaitlyn is doing fulfilled a need," said Stevens. "It gave students a chance to review at the last minute."

Some tips addressed the practical. Take a sweatshirt along, for example, because the testing rooms are often cold. "And if you're cold, that distracts you," Kaitlyn said.

The snack? "Apples contain natural caffeine," Kaitlyn said, and provide "a pick-me-up" during the break.

She programmed students'

graphing calculators to include necessary math formulas. And she also pointed out strategies she had found useful.

For example, read the first and last paragraphs to get the main ideas and skim the middle in the reading section to save time. Watch for verb agreement and the differences between words such as "its" and "it's" in the English section.

First instincts are usually best, she said. "Research shows girls are more likely to second-guess than guys."

But students should read graphs, tables and charts carefully in the science section, and be sure of what math problems are asking.

"Don't spend a lot of time on one question," said Sarah Trosen, who's been friends with Kaitlyn since kindergarten and who raised her score a point after Kaitlyn's course. She took the ACT again in April and is waiting for her latest score.

Kaitlyn believes that taking

the test more than once often improves performance.

After earning a 35 last year, the straight-A student felt satisfied. Her parents, Mike, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service, and Kathy, a math teacher at Blue Springs High, had always encouraged her to pursue academics. And she couldn't help but wonder if she could achieve that perfect score, so she tried one more time.

Joe Schur, her counselor at Blue Springs, wasn't surprised she made it. He calls her one of the most "remarkable" students he's met in his 13 years in education.

Kaitlyn has been active in theater, choir, cross country and the softball mentoring program and is a member of the National Honor Society. She is active in her church and gives credit to God for blessing her with "so much."

After receiving a full-ride scholarship from Truman State University, she'll head there next year to study pre-med or something health-related. She's considering optometry or orthopedics. "I want to help others get better," she said.

Stevens said Kaitlyn is working to see that the program continues after her departure.



Kaitlyn July