Kids learn to network

The Living the American Dream conference encourages students to start making career connections early.

BY YVONNE CAREY
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It's never too early to start networking.

That's the message Ellen Albano, Broward County Public Schools Curriculum Specialist for the Academy Program, imparted to high school students recently.

At the second Broward County student conference, Living the American Dream, Albano and more than 86 presenters and 39 exhibitors from corporations in the community sponsored a power breakfast with more than 1,000 high school students to show them how to land a job in their particular industry.

Sponsors for the conference at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale included Citigroup, American Express and State Farm.

“We want high school students to be more prepared for their career and higher education. We're hoping through this event we can come up with 550 paid internships for the summer, too,” Albano said.

Students from the Academy of Finance, Hospitality and Tourism, Information Technology, and Institute for Business and Entrepreneurship at 17 high schools throughout Broward asked questions about entry-level options and career preparation.

Louisa Mendoza, 21, who is working on a master's degree in business administration at Florida International University and works for the Renaissance Plantation Hotel in sales and catering, was in the Academy of Hospitality and Tourism program while she attended Plantation High.

“I want to inspire students to be confident,” she said.

Brian Buchana, 18, of Piper High in Sunrise, said his dream is to become a broadcast journalist, but he is also interested in travel. That's why Buchana joined the Academy of Hospitality and Tourism program.

“I found out how to incorporate international travel with journalism and how both aspects could make me more valuable as an employee,” he said.

The academy program, part of the National Academy Foundation, began in Broward in 1985 and is privately financed by Citigroup Foundation, American Express, DeVry University and State Farm.

The event takes place annually, Albano said, but moving it from the fall to the spring shifted its focus from being more of a social event to one with more community involvement.

“Guiding Light: MBA candidate Louisa Mendoza counsels students at the American Dream conference.”

“It's more effective because of all the teamwork and collaboration,” Albano said.

For information on the academy programs, call 754-321-2633.