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Career academy students get early taste of the real world

By Tom Marshall, Times Staff Writer
In print: Sunday, September 14, 2008



Students learn how to make a proper Cuban sandwich from chef Peter Iulio. They will all work in the student-run cafeteria and must know how to prepare menu items.

[RON THOMPSON | Times]

BROOKSVILLE — For those who say high school is nothing like the real world, take a look at the Hernando County schools.

Told by the state to open at least one job-oriented career academy by this fall, the district has opened four — one for each high school.

"All four are up and running," said curriculum specialist David Schoelles.

There's a health sciences academy at Nature Coast Tech, Web design at Springstead High, international business and marketing at Central High, and veterinary and agricultural science at Hernando High. Several other academies in professions such as the culinary arts will soon be added to the list.

Career academies are designed to be far more than traditional vocational programs. By state law, each academy must include both college preparatory and career-oriented classes. Teachers must hold certification not just from the state, but from the industries for which they're preparing workers. And students must graduate with industry certification as well as diplomas.

Superintendent Wayne Alexander has described the programs as a key element in his dropout prevention efforts. He envisions adding more programs and allowing high school students to follow their interests, regardless of

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where they live.

Initial research by the state Office of Program Analysis and Government Accountability suggests career academy graduates are more likely to score at grade level and graduate than other students. And their starting salaries are higher than other students who don't attend college.

None of the programs at Hernando's four high schools are new, but each has been fortified with extra requirements and benefits under the state program, Schoelles said.

"I think it has added some courses to each school," he added. "It has certainly added some certifications for teachers."

At Nature Coast Technical High, all 187 students in the school's health sciences program can now become certified nurse's assistants. At Springstead, about 20 students are working to become Adobe certified associates for Web design.

The business program at Central High is weighing different options for about a dozen students, including Microsoft certification, and nearly 20 Hernando High students will benefit from a pending veterinary technician agreement with St. Petersburg College.

Those certifications and partnerships are still a "work in progress" at some schools, Schoelles said. "Some have higher enrollments, and some are better organized than others."

Cooking for work

For Peter Iulio's culinary arts program at Nature Coast, this fall is show time.

His program already offers industry certification from ProStart, a license offered by the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation. And last month, the School Board signed its first articulation agreement with Johnson & Wales University, under which Nature Coast graduates can earn up to nine quarter credits toward a four-year degree.

"We're all ready to rock and roll," Iulio said Monday, as a class of would-be chefs ambled into his room. Up on the wall, a Johnson & Wales banner shared space with signs on food safety and the proper chopping of onions.

It was a demonstration day, and the class lined up in the kitchen as Iulio schooled them in the fine art of sandwich-making: Cubans, ham and cheese, and turkey. If students thought it was a simple matter of bread and cold cuts, they were quickly corrected.

"People eat with their eyes, you must remember that," Iulio said, wielding two buttered slices of Texas toast. "To me, it's all eye appeal."

His students needed little persuading. Most, like 14-year-old Jacquelyn Losurdo, are lifelong foodies.

"I did a lot of cooking when I was little," she said, adding that she hopes to learn all she can before heading to a culinary school like Johnson & Wales.

Last weekend, she was practicing egg flipping. Her classmate, Robbie Wadsworth, who hopes to open his own chain of restaurants one day, was practicing his own speciality. Like his teacher, he wants things to be just right.

"My ribs are hard to beat," he said.

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Career academies in county schools	
Nature Coast Tech	Health sciences
Central High	International business and marketing
Springstead High	Web design
Hernando High	Veterinary and agricultural science

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