



# Internship program a career pipeline at Reading High School

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The Reading School District hopes to make it easier for students to transition from high school to college or careers.

The school board last week heard from high school students involved in an internship program at Reading Hospital that allows them to spend part of each school day learning about life in the medical field.

Then the board heard from Hans Meeder, the president of the National Center for College and Career Transitions, NC3T, that helps schools create a system to encourage student achievement following graduation.

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According to Meeder, partnerships like the Reading Hospital internship program are key to giving students a leg up in their careers.

Meeder and his staff have been working with district administrators for the past year and a half to develop a series of pathways for students that will guide them into classes, electives and extracurricular activities based on their career interests.

In February 2015, the board approved a contract with the organization for \$61,010 to establish the program.

The presentation last week was a chance for Meeder to show the board what it will look like when fully implemented, which he said will likely take another year and a half.

According to the initial proposal, a large part of the implementation process will involve connecting the district with community partners, including local businesses, colleges and career training programs.

The main goal is to give students the tools they need to pursue their passions without overlooking the importance of having a backup plan, Meeder said.

Though success in college generally leads to success in the workforce and college degrees are more common now than ever, that doesn't mean college is for everyone.

"A college-for-all message isn't necessarily going to work," he said. "So we're suggesting a broader message.

"The pathway program (seeks) to organize high school so that it's more of an experience and not just abstract knowledge."

Meeder also acknowledged that most students would be unable or unwilling to choose a career as high school freshmen.

"There are a few 15-year-olds who know what they want to do and are focused on that, but most of them don't," he said. "So what we like to suggest is that you're not making a career decision; you're making a career exploration decision."

The Reading students working as paid interns at the hospital have done that and now are exploring the medical field.

They're working in the hospital's intensive care unit, sleep center and administration offices, among other areas.

And they're treated as hospital employees, according to Desha Dickson, director of community health and engagement at the Reading Health System.

"The idea of this program was twofold," she said. "One, to increase the number of diverse health care workers. We know that patient outcomes are better when their caregivers mirror their culture, and so we wanted to reach back into the community and encourage more kids, especially kids who are underrepresented, to take career paths into health care.

"And two, we wanted to break down some of those barriers. A lot of kids may not have access to workplace experiences."

Now in its third year, the internship program typically employs about six students at a time.

Many of those students go to college and then come back to work at the hospital after graduation and most end up working in the medical field, Dickson said.

Through the program, participants receive a stipend as well as uniforms and a bus pass to cover transportation costs.

Dr. Khalid Mumin, district superintendent, recently went to the hospital to observe the interns and said he was impressed by what he saw.

"Continue on the path," he told the interns present at the meeting last week.

"From what I saw, you got it. You got what it takes.

"Your diversity is necessary, and you have a career right in front of you.

Take it. Grab it because you will be able to motivate and inspire other young people in the high school community to do the same."

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