

## Business leaders, officials get pitch for business partnerships

Commitment is sought to help the Career Pathways program.

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NEWPORT NEWS -- Breakfast was free, sort of, for city business leaders and elected officials Thursday morning. While no money was collected, the high school students running the show wanted something from their guests: a commitment to help the district's year-old Career Pathways program.

A video explained the program, which weaves eight study areas representing career and work fields through elementary, middle and high school classes. Then 10 students made their sales pitch while diners sat around tables in a Marriott City Center conference room and noshed on bagels, muffins, fruit and coffee.

Matthew Stephens, a Menchville senior interested in political science, asked businesses and lawmakers to provide students with mentorships. Taylor Williams, of An Achievable Dream High School, pushed business partnerships with schools. Morgan Garcia, a [Denbigh](#) High junior and Brandon Hawkins of Heritage High talked about the need for business experiences and internships.

Danielle Cook, a senior at Woodside High who already is a Certified Nursing Assistant, asked for work-site volunteer opportunities for students. Michelle Griffin, a Menchville senior who said she was a little nervous, pushed for club sponsorships, saying students benefited from after school programs highlighting career fields like medicine and economics.

Alexzander Williams, of An Achievable Dream, asked the

audience to join the district's speakers bureau. Denbigh's Shaquia Idlett credited an eighth-grade career fair with igniting her interest in medicine and asked diners to participate in more such fairs. Heritage's Victoria Parker said students need to shadow people to gain a sense of what they do. She said her experiences as a laboratory assistant helped her survive Advanced Placement biology.

Then it was time for business leaders to "pay up," by agreeing to fulfill at least one of the students' requests. Representatives from [Northrop Grumman](#), Dominion Power, W.M. Jordan, [Fort Eustis](#) and the city itself were among the participating businesses and agencies. They signed up on posters tacked up on the ballroom wall. Several businesses also agreed to become partners with the district's middle schools.

Claire McCleery, W.M. Jordan's director of learning and development, said the company already provided job shadow opportunities and presentations at An Achievable Dream, but likely would add internship opportunities as well.

"There are plenty of opportunities to learn about project management," she said. "There's an amazing wealth of knowledge in these young people."

Superintendent Ashby Kilgore said the business partnerships were key to the success of the Career Pathways strategies. Without them, "This pathways program is just a lot of talk."