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High School Academies are Preparing our Students for Real Life



Written By: **Tracy Wright**, Photos by: **Allison Durham**

It's never too early to begin thinking about the future, and there are many options in Alachua County schools for incoming high schooler students to help get them started down that path.

On Nov. 15, hundreds of eighth-graders and their families attended the Career Academy Forum held in the Buchholz High School Auditorium, where the students learned about the district's 15 career academies.

From entrepreneurship and health care to finance and gaming, the district's various academies focus on topics across the spectrum. The forum offered students real, hands-on experience in a specialty while receiving their high school education. The popularity of the forum shows the high level of interest among incoming high schooler students and their parents.

Theresa Beachy, mother to eighth-grader Nathaniel Harrison, said she was excited to attend the event with her son. Nathaniel attends Fort Clarke Middle School and is interested in a music career.

“I think it’s important for us to see all the options,” Beachy said. “Nathaniel came tonight to find out more about the Entrepreneurial Academy at Buchholz High School because he wants to make music and build a business around it, like producing music. I think it’s great that these academies offer real-world skills and experiences for students so that they gain valuable experience.”



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Theresa Beachy: mom to Nathaniel Harris, an eighth grader at Fort Clarke Middle School

The Entrepreneurial Academy at Buchholz allows students to receive the same high school education at the school that any other student would receive while also completing a four-year program focused on entrepreneurship, marketing, hospitality and business management. Students are encouraged to develop projects in areas of specialized interest such as fashion merchandising, advertising, sports and entertainment marketing or international business. Students compete in business plan competitions, internships and workshops.

Beyond the real-world skills, the academy has been an asset for students who are developing their social and leadership skills. “I was a pretty shy student when I came to high school, but being in the program taught me to open up as I gained more skills and became more involved,” said Morgan Carnes, a senior in the Entrepreneurial Academy. “Now I am so excited for the future because of everything I learned in this program.”

Carnes hopes to attend UF, major in advertising and eventually work in New York City.

A Variety of Skillsets and Interests

Loften High School, located on the east side of Gainesville, is home to five professional magnet academies, including Automotive Technology, Fire and Emergency, Gaming and Mobile Apps, Graphic Art and Design, and Robotics and Engineering. Lofton’s motto, “High Achievement through Career Education,” reflects its commitment to preparing students with skills needed for immediate employment or for building for their future career.

“We are a traditional high school with a small, family atmosphere,” said Cheryl S. Allen, Assistant Principal of Lofton’s Professional Academies Magnet. “Through our five separate academies, students gain hands-on experience, and our graduates have a wealth of knowledge and are ready for post-secondary education.”

For example, Lofton’s Academy for Gaming and Mobile Apps shows their dedication for embracing the current and future needs of the workforce. New computing jobs are growing three times faster than the number of computer science graduates. The video game design field is quickly becoming the premiere medium for cultural storytelling, information and entertainment.

The Gaming and Mobile App program offers courses that provide knowledge and skills needed to prepare for further education and careers such as a game designer, programmer or developer. The program includes applied learning that contributes to the academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning and problem-solving skills, including employability skills.

Students work with the same technology and software as today’s design professionals while pursuing traditional art classes, in addition to technology-intensive classes. They also have the opportunity to take courses such as AP Computer Science, which offer academic credit and insight into their chosen profession.

“We start by learning a few steps at a time, which is helpful to introduce us to the program. We learn to create games and get a more technical view of game programming. The best part is the satisfaction of learning how the coding works,” said Alexander Poole, a sophomore in the Academy of Gaming and Mobile Apps. “We learn to design games that other people like, so it’s up to us to figure out other people’s tastes and wants. We play each other’s games to evaluate each other, and we get very close.”

Becoming Career Ready

According to the Florida Department of Education, students are considered college and career ready when they have the knowledge, skills and academic preparation needed to succeed in college courses without remedial education.

“The students know that they have the knowledge base to be successful going forward in college,” said Janine Plavac, director of the Gainesville High School’s Academy of Health Professions. “But most importantly, it shows the academic institution that they are applying to that they also have the foundation and skills necessary to be successful. These are the same milestones that are needed for entry into and success in postsecondary workforce education or directly into a job that offers gainful employment and career advancement.”

Invested in Saving Lives

Takara White may only be a senior in high school, but she already has her future mapped out. White is a student at the Academy of Fire and Emergency Medical Sciences at Loften High School, which introduces students to the fields of health care, public safety and emergency response. The curriculum covers emergency medical response, health foundations, anatomy and physiology, and three firefighting classes.

White is looking forward to becoming certified as an Emergency Medical Technician and plans to continue her firefighter education at the Florida State Fire College in Ocala. From there, she hopes to further continue her education in health care.



Kieran Poole, a Junior at the Academy of Fire and Emergency Medical Sciences at Loften High School, speaks to attendees at the Career Forum.

The academy’s health science courses cover the basic medical skills in CPR, patient assessment and first aid. During their senior year, students have the opportunity to dual enroll in Santa Fe Colleges’ EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) program. At the conclusion of the program, students interested in earning their Florida State Firefighter I certification can complete a short course where they will be eligible for state certification.

For freshman Charles Leverett, the combination of learning fun, action-packed skills and gaining health care knowledge is why he loves the program.

“We get to learn cool skills we can use in firefighting or just lifesaving situations, but we also get the vital medical knowledge,” Leverett said. “It’s an awesome program.”

The practical classes and potential to earn certifications is one of the main features that attracted Takara White to the program, in addition to her interest in the field.

“This program gives me a backbone to my future. I have a certain way to have a job and profession that can help me pay for my future education,” said White, who ultimately wants to become a nurse in an emergency vehicle or airlift helicopter or even at a fire station. “I will always have the skills that I learned through this program, which gives me a great foundation.”

Educating our Future Caregivers

One of the most stable and growing career fields today is health care. The Gainesville High School Academy of Health Professions provides experiences for students who are interested in health careers. The program has an integrated curriculum between academic and clinical experiences in health care settings. The goal is for students to be better prepared to seek employment in the health care field where they can work as technicians but also continue their education after graduation from high school.

The program works cooperatively with Santa Fe College's programs for EKG Technician, Dental Aide, Physical Therapy Aide, Certified Pharmacy Technician, Nursing careers and Emergency Medical Services and is operated in conjunction with the health care providers of the community. All of the clinical components of the program prepare students for entry-level jobs as a certified nursing assistant (CNA), physical therapy or rehab aide, EKG technician, pharmacy technician, dental aide or certified medications technician.

"Career and technical magnet programs, such as the AHP program, are invaluable for students that will pursue a career in health care," said Janine Plavac, director of the Academy of Health Professions. "The reason is that they lay the foundation for the students to get a leg up on others that are applying to post-graduate programs because the students come out of high school with an industry certification in their chosen senior clinical field."

The advantage of being in this program is industry certifications that they will earn, along with real experience in taking care of people in the health care setting.

"It also sets them up for immediate employment because as they are working at their clinical settings, such as North Florida Regional Medical Center, UF Health, and Walgreen's pharmacy, they are making contacts and their supervisors are seeing their skill set," Plavac said.

Work experience and financial fortitude such as this can be invaluable. According to the Institute for College Access & Success' Project on Student Debt, 68 percent of 2015 bachelor's degree recipients graduated with student loan debt, and the average was \$30,100 per borrower. The average hourly pay for CNA, pharmacy technician or dental assistant can be anywhere between \$12-\$18 an hour, which can greatly help offset tuition.



Students in Santa Fe High School's Institute of Biotechnology.

"In fact, the majority of these students use their industry certification to work during college and get the experience they need in order to apply to post-graduate schools, such as nursing, physical therapy and pharmacy," Plavac said.

Eighth-grader Brendan Foley was drawn to the Academy because of his interest in health professions, somewhat influenced by his mom Michelle's role as an occupational therapist.

"Brendan is interested in physical therapy or sports medicine, and he likes the hands-on training that he can get while still in high school," Michelle Foley said. "I think he has been positively influenced by seeing my career."

Building Scientists One Step at a Time

The Biotechnology Education program at Santa Fe High School offers academic as well as career and technical education credits for a career path or articulation into Santa Fe College or the University of Florida. Biotechnology is the technological application of living organisms or their derivatives, such as DNA, proteins or cells, to make or modify new products or processes.

Biological technician employment is projected to grow 10 percent from 2016 to 2026, faster than the average for all occupations. The Santa Fe Biotechnology Program boasts a fun learning environment in one of the fastest growing industries with three primary areas of focus: agriculture, medicine and technology.

The school is located only 3 miles from Progress Park in Alachua, home to more than 30 companies employing more than 1,100 people in biotechnology and life sciences, which can provide valuable internships and job opportunities for graduates. In addition, the program works cooperatively with Santa Fe College's Charles R. and Nancy V. Perry Center for Emerging Technologies for real-life experiences and dual enrollment for students to earn college credits.

"I've always been into science, and I decided on this program because I was able to observe all of the passion of the students that were already in the program," said freshman Jacques Daniels. "It's been an absolutely amazing program. After the first week, you are in the labs experimenting with chemicals under supervision from your teachers, who are all so amazing and excited. It's very inspiring. I am thrilled I chose this program. I know what my future holds as a biotechnologist."

To find out more about specific programs, visit www.sbac.edu/domain/23

Alachua County Public Schools

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY MAGNET OPEN HOUSE SCHEDULE-2019

Updated October 1, 2018

School	Magnet	Open House Date	Open House Time
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS			
Archer Elementary	Gifted and Talented Magnet	January 9	6:00 pm
MK Rawlings Elementary	Center for Fine Arts Magnet	January 8	5:00 pm
Foster Elementary	STEM Academy	January 14	6:00 pm
Williams Elementary	Gifted Magnet	January 28	6:00 pm
MIDDLE SCHOOLS			
Bishop Middle School	Academy of Tech and Gifted Studies	January 15	6:00 pm
Lincoln Middle School	Lyceum Program	January 31	6:00 pm
Oak View Middle School	Center for Advanced Academics and Technology	January 17	6:00 pm
HIGH SCHOOLS			
Buchholz High School	Academy of Entrepreneurship	January 24	7:00 pm
Buchholz High School	Academy of Finance	January 24	7:00 pm
Eastside High School	The International Baccalaureate Program (IB)	January 16	6:00 pm
Eastside High School	Institute of Culinary Arts	January 16	EXPO 6:00 pm Open House 6:30 pm
Gainesville High School	The Cambridge Program	January 10	6:00 pm
Gainesville High School	Academy of Health Professions	January 10	7:15 pm
Gainesville High School	Academy of Future Teachers	January 10	6:30 & 7:15pm (two sessions)
PAM @ Lofton High School	Academy of Automotive Technology Academy of Fire & EMS Academy of Gaming & Mobile Apps Institute of Graphic Art & Design Academy of Robotics & Engineering	January 26 (Saturday)	EXPO 10:00am-1pm
Newberry High School	Academy of Criminal Justice	January 29	EXPO 6:00 pm Open House 7:00 pm
Santa Fe High School	Academy of Agriscience	January 8	6:45 pm.
Santa Fe High School	Institute of Biotechnology	January 8	5:45 pm