

Elementary school students learn about career options

By Carly Sharec
csharec@gainesvilletimes.com
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SCOTT ROGERS/The Times

North Hall High School student Hannah Fleming asks students a question about careers as she visits a Mount Vernon Elementary School class Tuesday. About 20 students from nearby North Hall visited the school, speaking to students about career pathways as part of the state of Georgia's requirement that, just like high school students, younger students also have to be exposed to the different careers open to them.

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If Kaitlin Smith's first-grade class at Mount Vernon Exploratory School is any indication, the world will be full of veterinarians and doctors in the future.

But by the time those students reach middle school, they will be exposed to a variety of career and job options that may just change some of their minds.

"Part of (the College and Career Readiness Performance Index) requirements for elementary school is that the students be taught certain lessons and introduced to career clusters," explained Deana Harper, a career-related education specialist with North Hall High School.

Students are now required to choose one of the 16 career "clusters" when they reach high school, with each cluster leading down several "pathways," or jobs within each career. As part of that, elementary school students must be exposed to these different options before entering middle school.

"It is just about career awareness, and educating them just so they get used to the terminology of the career cluster, and what those clusters might look like," Harper said.

In first and second grades, students learn about three clusters, while four are taught in fourth and fifth grades.

Harper took 20 students in the teaching career cluster at North Hall High School into Mount Vernon on Tuesday to teach the elementary school students about the different options available to them.

"We both want to be elementary school teachers," said North Hall High junior Kaitlyn Smith. Smith, along with classmate Jennifer Mullican, taught the first-grade class about pathways under agriculture, transportation and law. She said being a part of this program was a good practical application of what she's learning about her potential future career path.

"I learned a lot about kids' attitudes (and) how talkative they are," Mullican said. "We have a better idea about what we're going to get into!"

Harper said she first took high school students into Mount Vernon last year as a sort of pilot program. This year, high school students are going into 21 of the 23 Hall elementary schools to teach about career clusters and pathways.

The high school students use slideshow presentations and an interactive website to introduce these different ideas.

"We got a lot of great feedback," Harper said. "The elementary students loved seeing the high school students come in, and it was somebody different standing up talking instead of just the teacher."

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