

CAREER: Planning beyond high school

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event, narrowing down their interests and matching them with the different careers. When the students arrived Tuesday, they were given a personalized list of vendors so they could navigate the 64,000-square-foot room according to their career path and not wander aim-

lessly. The eighth-graders were to ask the professionals who stood at the booths questions about their jobs and what it took to get them there. But before the eighth-graders stepped off their school buses, Rotary Club members gave a quick lesson on proper introductions and interview skills, including hand-

shakes and eye contact. Alicia Birks, a representative from Parsons and Brinckerhoff, an engineering firm in Adams County greeted students with a smile as they asked her some tough questions.

"They were asking what the downfalls of the job were and I was telling them you work really hard but it's really fun," she said, adding that she doesn't remember having an opportunity like this when she was in middle school.

"It's funny, half of them already know what they want to do and the other half have no idea," she said. "When I was their age, I had no idea what careers were, so it's really cool."

Students asked the professionals what days they worked, what education they needed and the most

popular question: how much do you make?

A running theme from the business professionals and higher education representatives was the importance of higher education. Lance S. Carl, the director of College in Colorado's student outreach stood in front of a sign that read "Athletics," as a student asked him what the odds are of playing a sport professionally.

Carl showed the eighth-grader the discouraging odds and said, "You should have education as a start-up plan not a back-up plan. Get a high school diploma and have your future in mind and long-term goals, short-term goals, just goals in general, guys."

The Adams County Education Consortium is staffed by Adams County Economic Development

with contributions from Adams County's major school districts and area community colleges.

In June 2005, the superintendents of Adams County School Districts 50, 12, 14, 27-J and 1 as well as the presidents of Front Range Community College, Colorado Community College Association and the Adams County Economic Development board of directors formed the Adams County Education Consortium, merging ACED's Workforce Development Task Force — which was formed in February 2004 — with the local education community.

"Our hope is that when today's eighth-graders enter the workforce that a larger percentage of them will be able to step into productive careers right here in Adams County," Paskewicz said.



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Bridging the language gap

Former District 12 student named bilingual teacher of the year

By Taylor Nelson
Staff Writer

As North Elementary School teacher Denise Hitchcock walks through the cafeteria at lunch time, it's easy to see why she was named Colorado's Bilingual Teacher of the Year.

"Ms. Hitchcock! Ms. Hitchcock!" her students yelled as they wrapped their arms around her to give her a hug. "If you ever wonder what it's like to be a celebrity, just walk through the cafeteria at lunch time," Hitchcock said, with a smile.

Hitchcock was named the 2006 Colorado Bilingual Teacher of the Year for her ability to teach Spanish speaking elementary students English, while still developing their native Spanish language.

"Our community base has a lot of Spanish speakers," said Hitchcock, who works for School District 27-J in Brighton. "By the time the kids leave our school, they should be able to speak, read, write and understand both languages. Our focus is a little more on the maintenance piece because we want them to be truly bilingual, not just have a basis and then transfer it all to English."

A native English-speaker, whose dad was in the navy, Hitchcock was born in Puerto Rico and grew up in Federal Heights, attending Northglenn High School where she began taking Spanish classes — quickly and easily learning the language. She attributes her ability to learn Spanish to the time she spent in Puerto Rico as a baby.

"I heard Spanish in utero and then (also) when I was a baby so I really think that had something to do with learning Spanish so easily," she said. At Northglenn High School, Hitchcock participated in the Foreign Language Elementary Educators in Training (FLEET) program. Three days a week she would go into a classroom and help student teach bilingual students.

"I knew I wanted to be a teacher, didn't know what I wanted to do," Hitchcock said. "I knew I liked Spanish and I knew I wanted to stick more with elementary, I really click well with them." Liz Balderas, the assistant principal at West High School in Denver, noticed this connection Hitchcock had with her students when they both worked at North Elementary School in Brighton and decided to nominate her for the award this

year. "Some people go to school to learn how to teach, some just have that gift as that's who they are," Balderas said. "That's Denise. Denise just has a gift for teaching."

Balderas said Hitchcock stood out even when she was a student teacher at North Elementary.

"She's just an amazing young woman who has a lot of passion for her students," Balderas said. "She's never been a beginning teacher she's been advanced in her teaching ability and that's why she's a master teacher now."

Hitchcock said her teaching style focuses on getting to know the students, their background and their families. She also likes to be creative with her methods.

"It's not just cold reading — today we hand a wand going through syllables in Spanish trying to figure out the different words," Hitchcock said. "So they're playing with the language, not just reading it. It's not the Dick and Jane world anymore, you have to get a little bit more creative with them."

Although Hitchcock can converse, teach and watch TV in Spanish, she said she'll probably never be completely fluent in Spanish.

"I don't know if we're ever truly fluent in English, but I feel like my Spanish fluency has become equal to my English fluency," she said. "I feel like you can't ever know everything about a language."

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