



Bellflower Unified School District

Media Release

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CONTACT: Valerie Martinez, William Diepenbrock
909-445-1001

Special Education Programs Prepare Bellflower Unified Students for College, Careers

BELLFLOWER – Mayfair High School senior Jacob Neale's career plan is to one day work in the retail market – a passion that has led him to three internships over the last year and which is influencing his plans to attend Cerritos Community College.

Bellflower High School senior Pedro Rodriguez isn't as certain about the future, but he's doing what he can to prepare for college and to develop the skills he will need to build a career.

"I know someday I'm going to be on my own," Rodriguez said. "I have to be ready for that."

Neale and Rodriguez are part of the Bellflower Unified School District special education program, which provides customized educational guidance for nearly 1,650 preK-12 and adult transition students who grapple with a variety of challenges, ranging from autism, specific learning disabilities, or other conditions that lead them to learn differently, to severe physical and mental disabilities. About 500 special education students attend District high schools.

"Our students – special education as well as general education – deserve every opportunity to prepare for college and careers," Bellflower Unified Superintendent Dr. Brian Jacobs said. "These programs ensure that happens."

As a result, the District offers two programs funded by state grants designed to teach special education students employment skills and to transition to college courses that lead to self-supporting careers – WorkAbility and the Transition Partnership Program. Bellflower Unified is in the process of applying for new grants for the programs and is expanding its staffing.

WorkAbility prepares students for job interviews, to craft resumes, to dress for work and to conduct themselves in a professional manner. The program starts middle school students on career exploration and provides training and a limited number of internship opportunities for students age 16 and older.

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Bellflower Unified School District provides a pathway for all students to attain the expertise and develop skills of academic excellence that will empower them to become lifelong active learners, demonstrate respect for themselves and others in a dynamic, diverse and global society, become responsible, informed, productive, independent and contributing citizens, and perform successfully in their chosen field and in society.



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Neale has interned for about a month each with community partners Dollar Tree and Hot Topic during the 2014-15 school year and for CVS over the summer.

"I learned how to communicate with customers and other coworkers. I learned how to take direction and to be on time, to dress up nicely," he said. "I want to do retail or customer service, maybe working for TJ MAXX or Forever 21, somewhere like that."

Rodriguez interned with the YMCA over the summer. He guided children on the playground and helped with food preparation – tasks with which he is familiar thanks to the time he has spent watching over his 10 nieces and nephews.

The two students also participate in the Transition Partnership Program, an effort that provides training to prepare juniors and seniors for careers after they graduate from Bellflower Unified. The program works with colleges, apprenticeships and adult schools. The program, which takes in a limited number of students each year, currently has openings.

Cerritos College partners through the program with Bellflower Unified, helping students determine which classes to take to prepare for careers and how to access services to ensure their success. BUSD Special Education Coordinator Irene Ramirez and her team help students fill out admissions paperwork and bring 50 students to the college for its Senior Preview Days each spring.

Neale said one of the strengths of the program is the passion shown by Ramirez and her team.

"They helped prepare me," he said. "They are very helpful with the interview process and the daily workday and how we should act, plus any applications we need to fill out. It really is very helpful."

Both students said a key lesson they learned was to look interviewers in the eye and communicate clearly their ideas and goals.

Ramirez, a 20-year BUSD employee, has coordinated WorkAbility and the Transitions Partnership Program since 2013. She said the District has hired a full-time transition specialist to ensure students have resources at Bellflower and Mayfair high schools, and is seeking a part-time team member.

"It's a richly rewarding effort to see these students gain the skills and move toward independence," Ramirez said. "We teach them they need to learn to earn and gain the skills to pay the bills."

CAPTION: Mayfair High School senior Jacob Neale holds up the first check he received for an internship through the Bellflower Unified School District's WorkAbility program for students in special education programs. Neale worked at Dollar Tree during one of three internships.

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