

# “Tomorrow is Today”

Expanding Perspectives for Career, College Options

BY VIRGINIA AVNIEL SPATZ



Students in the CCC show off their Gold Rush program tee-shirts. Photos courtesy of CCC.

“**T**omorrow is today,” says Teresa Wooten, a management consultant for Deloitte and a volunteer with the non-profit College & Career Connections (CCC).

CCC works with middle schoolers in Wards 7 and 8 to build career and college awareness and help students see connections between school and employment. This is a good match, Wooten explains, with Deloitte’s outreach philosophy: “If we want to have intellectually prepared workers in the future, we have to invest now.”

But Wooten also volunteers with CCC for more personal reasons. She remembers how little career awareness women, especially women of

color, had in her youth. “If you had an education, you were supposed to be a teacher, give back to the community. That was it.” She’s glad to help today’s students explore a wider set of options.

CCC brings Wooten and other professionals to Cesar Chavez Public Charter School-Parkside, Friendship Tech Prep, The SEED School and other middle schools as part of their in-school, early college and career exploration and planning workshop series. These workshops, along with local college and workplace field trips, increase students’ knowledge about options for the future and help them begin building relevant skills.

## “Soft” and “Hard” Skills

“We are learning how to be suc-

cessful,” student Australia Humphries explains quietly during a recent workshop at Friendship Tech Prep. “When we get to college, we will learn hard skills. CCC is helping us learn soft skills now, to get ready for college.”

Soft skills? Students are breaking it down: paying attention, communicating, knowing how to practice, patience.

“Sleeping,” one student offers. The workshop leader is unconvinced. The student persists: “Sleeping means you can pay attention when you get to school.”

Students and leader agree that “soft skills” include the development of healthy personal and social habits.

Hard skills – like word-processing, biology or history – are important, this workshop teaches. But

employers also seek attributes like honesty, a good attitude and punctuality.

In other workshops on this particular morning, students learn to create resumes, explore the “anatomy of a company” and participate in “speed networking” with professionals from the community.

## Varieties of Options

As part of the “Anatomy of a Company” workshop, students are asked to consider how many different jobs are required to make a company work and to develop a new iPod. Research and Development creates and tests the product. Facilities Management and Informational Technology ensure a good working environment and the proper tools. Legal checks out patents and state-by-state permits. Human Resources, Marketing and Finance personnel perform specific functions.

Toward the end of the workshop, small groups present detailed reports of how their “department” would contribute to the development of the iPod, ending with a marketing rap.

Down the hall, community volunteers, led by Wooten, meet students in a “speed networking” process. In small groups, students ask volunteers a prepared set of questions, such as “What education is needed for your job?” and “What do you like and dislike about your job?” A lawyer, an events planner, a literacy advocate, an entrepreneur, a college counselor and other professionals rotate through the groups offering a glimpse of their work and the preparation needed to do it.

Students also ask their own questions: “In your job, do you have to deal with people who make you angry?” “Did you change your dream?”

“Management consultant?” Wooten laughs, “Even today, most grown-ups don’t know what that is.... If someone had told me when I was a girl that there were different career paths, it could have made a big difference. And now, I tell the students, they might even take more than one career path. I was in accounting and

## Student Thwarts Burglars

On May 16, the CCC office on Alabama Avenue was burglarized. As it happened, however, a ninth grader familiar with CCC was passing on the bus and noticed lights, late on a Sunday. The student phoned Executive Director Deann Ayer, who alerted police. The burglary was interrupted before all valuables – piled in the middle of the room – could be removed.

Ayer is grateful for the student's quick thinking and the rapid police response. Losses might have been much greater. But CCC must still replace equipment – including two laptops -- essential to their work. The organization is also installing a security system. Contributions to offset these losses are welcome.



A seminar on "soft skills" such as practice and patience that help insure success in school.

investment banking before becoming a management consultant."

### Program Impact

Following the morning at Tech Prep, students said they enjoyed "meeting good people from companies I've never heard of before," and "talking to different people because it really helped me think about what I want to be." Overwhelmingly, students report that such programs help them understand the range of skills needed for any job, the options for work within a company and the kind of preparation needed to perform those jobs.

In DC, about 50% of high schoolers graduate. Only 5% of high school graduates east of the river complete college within five years. Research shows that the conditions for dropping out develop in middle school, and that most who drop out do so by the end of 9th grade. While most college access programs focus on older students, CCC has found the need, and the opportunity, is much earlier.

CCC exposes 8th and 9th grade students to career and college opportunities and helps them see how their current choices are relevant to their future options. Deann Ayer, Executive Director; Meghan Behnke, Director of Programming; and trained facilitators plan and implement the program - workshops, field trips and in-school activities - for over 500 students. This early exposure helps students understand the importance of utilizing all four years of high school well -- from choosing challenging academics to participating in a variety of extra-curricular activities.

"CCC reminds us we don't have to follow some thug. It looks like they're doing something, making money. But we're looking to a future," one middle schooler explains.

Contact Deann Ayer, 202-536-4907. College & Career Connections, 4620 Alabama Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20019. Find CCC on Facebook and at [www.collegeandcareerconnections.org](http://www.collegeandcareerconnections.org). ★

## District of Columbia Department of Health Serving District Residents

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is the largest, continuously conducted, telephone health survey in the world. It enables the District of Columbia Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to monitor modifiable risk factors for chronic disease and other leading causes of death.

If you receive a telephone call on the behalf of the District of Columbia Department of Health to respond to a short survey, we encourage you to participate.

The data results from the survey will help DOH programs/health agencies guide health policy decisions, increase public awareness of personal behaviors that have negative consequences, and monitor progress toward achieving health objectives. All information is used to improve the quality of life of District residents.

For more information, please call 202-442-5857

