

THE BETR GROUP
BESSELL EVALUATION, TRAINING, AND RESEARCH



Hillsborough County
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Preparing Students for Life



**HOSPITALITY and TOURISM
CAREER AWARENESS LEADERSHIP FORUM
EVALUATION**

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The hospitality and tourism industry includes a broad range of career opportunities that touches lives of almost every single person on earth in some way or another. What's more, the number of careers available in the hospitality and tourism industry is growing at an exponential rate. With one new job added every 2.5 seconds, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics¹ estimates that there will be more than 337 million jobs available worldwide by 2023. Working in hospitality and tourism, the #1 employer in the United States after government positions², can offer a fulfilling career path, but unfortunately, there are many misconceptions and myths that surround the industry creating unrealistic expectations about the job opportunities, status, and pay. As a result, there is a global lack of awareness and skills shortage in hospitality and tourism. According to the Food Service Consultants Society International, the lack of awareness and skills shortage represent some of the biggest challenges facing the industry.³ In addition, students often rely on information from parents and friends rather than on those with greater knowledge about the hospitality and tourism industry.⁴

Hosp

The Council for Educational Change in partnership with Hillsborough County Public Schools developed the Hospitality and Tourism Career Awareness Leadership Forum to address the existing gap between the needs of the hospitality and tourism industry and students' lack of awareness and skills for potential job opportunities. To address the challenges of this job/skills mismatch, the Forum aimed to expose students, along with their principals and teachers, to careers students might not hear about in a class or at a traditional job fair. With the knowledge gained during the Forum, principals can support teachers and counselors, as well as facilitate strategies and implementation plans that were developed by students at the Forum to bring the knowledge and enthusiasm garnered during the Forum back to the rest of their student bodies.

Hospitality and Tourism Career Awareness Leadership Forum Sessions

Twelve high schools were selected to each create a team consisting of an administrator, faculty/staff member and two students (one junior and one sophomore). Under the guidance of three facilitators and driven by their Forum experiences, teams collaborated to create implementation plans to disseminate information about the hospitality and tourism industry, education pathways, and career opportunities at their schools. Each of the four sessions was designed to offer a unique perspective, opportunities to interact with hospitality and tourism professionals, and explore their individual interests in hospitality and tourism industry careers. Sessions were held at:

Participating High Schools

- (1) Epicurean Hotel,
- (2) Tampa International Airport
- (3) Busch Gardens
- (4) Hillsborough County School Board

Bloomington High • Gaither High • Hillsborough High • Jefferson High • Lennard High
• Leto High • Newsome High • Robinson High • Simmons Career Center
• South County Career Center • Spoto High • Wharton High

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/>

² <https://brandongaille.com/15-hospitality-industry-employment-statistics/>

³ <https://blog.typosy.com/why-is-there-a-hospitality-skills-shortage>

⁴ <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/whats-wrong-with-a-career-in-hospitality-an-examination-of-student-choice>

Session I: Introductions, Keynote Speaker, and Breakout Workshops

Greetings Introduction and Program Vision

Chris Jargo, Hillsborough County Public Schools, Director, Career and Technical Education, Division of Workforce Connections, along with Dr. Elaine Liffin, the Council for Educational Change, President and Executive Director, welcomed participants, and spoke about how the Forum would build internal capacity within a school. Participants would learn about the hospitality and tourism industry, and create dissemination plans to share information about hospitality and tourism careers in their respective schools. The Forum helped participants explore possibilities and career opportunities and discover ways to engage business in education. Mr. Jargo emphasized that jobs are constantly evolving, so students need to be aware of choices for everyone: *“it’s not always necessary to get a college degree right out of high school.”*



KEYNOTE: Tom Haines, Vice President Mainsail Lodging & Development

A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, with over 30 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Mr. Haines currently oversees operations at all hotels in the Mainsail Lodging portfolio, as well as pre-operations for new hospitality projects. During his talk, he described the unique approach of Autograph Collection Hotels which strives to create a lifestyle that is rich in character, design, architecture and unexpected back-stories which enhance one’s travel experience.



He emphasized that the hospitality and tourism industry is made up of a broad range of fields within the service sector that includes lodging, food and drink service, theme parks, transportation, cruise lines, event planning, traveling, airlines and a plethora of other services geared towards comfort and serving others.

Mr. Haines also focused on his unique and varied experiences in the industry and how he *“never worked a day in his life”* because he loves what he does. He emphasized the importance of *“being welcoming...helping others feel at home when traveling and the importance of a smile and handshake.”* When asked what he looked for in prospective employees, he said: *“a comfortable, warm and engaged person who has to move me, and show me they have hospitality in their heart.”*

Student’s take-aways:

- *“When you’re doing what you love, it’s like you’re not even working. It can be complicated but also very fun and easy.”*
- *“I would love to manage a hotel, keeping the flow up and making sure everyone is where they should be seems like a great job with no boredom.”*
- *“To get to higher position jobs, sometimes he had to start at the bottom...every job is connected and equally important”*
- *“For me specifically, I took notice of the opportunity to work at this very hotel.”*
- *“Communication, honor and respect are key between an employee and the manager.”*

FACILITATORS and Behind the Scene Support

Facilitators and support staff play a pivotal role in scheduling events, providing materials and keeping the school teams motivated and on task. They also review requirements and goals, facilitate the development of the School Team Implementation Plan, as well as disseminate and collect evaluation forms for each session. Following the sessions, facilitators debrief and document successful student experiences that represent significant Forum outcomes.

Following Session I, facilitators shared their enthusiasm about *“all the activities which were great – very organized!!!”* and *“the hotel staff did an amazing job engaging students.”* It was *“a true learning experience for students with great information to learn about hospitality and tourism.”*



Annie Clasen, Suzanne Matthews, Bree Castelli, Niki Lockett, Nikki Pierro, and Sheila Cuffy

BREAKOUT WORKSHOP SESSIONS

Breakout Session 1: Visit Tampa Bay: Samantha Golden, Events Coordinator

Samantha Golden, a graduate of Florida State University with degrees in Family and Child Services, as well as Psychology and Communication, serves as an events coordinator. She had



plans to start her own non-profit or at least work on something bigger than herself. She found a home at Visit Tampa Bay, where she acts as a liaison between meeting planners and the city of Tampa, as well as local business partners.

Visit Tampa Bay’s mission is *“To create vibrant economic development for our community by collaboratively increasing visitations to Tampa Bay.”* Funding for this work comes from the Hillsborough County tourist development tax, charged to visitors who stay at hotels, motels, campgrounds, and condominium properties. In 2018, visitors spend \$4.2 billion, sustaining tourism-related jobs for 53,446 individuals.

Students were impressed with the marketing perspective. As one student stated: *“Samantha’s job as a marketer is a career I am going to consider. I really didn’t know what they did before.”* Others were impressed with how *“Visit Tampa Bay gives back to the community and small companies. Tourism generates major revenue for Tampa... We don’t pay a tax as residents because our tourists pay it for us.”*

Creative marketing strategies and exceptional service are used to book small and large meetings, conventions, family reunions, and sporting events. Research helps assess local residents’ perceived value of tourism, to explore perceptions of the impact on the community and individuals and examine awareness of efforts to support positive impacts.



Breakout Session 2: Culinary: Jason Bamford, Executive Chef, Epicurean Hotel



Chef Bamford took Forum participants along as he retold his life journey which began at Michigan State studying business and marketing. He eventually realized what his true passion was and enrolled in the Culinary Institute of America. His food offerings are influenced by different cultures including Indian, Mediterranean, and Asian cultures, humanity, and the history of spices. After more than 20 years of culinary experience, he became the executive chef at the Epicurean Hotel where he currently directs daily culinary operations.

Chef Bamford explained that selecting menu items is about providing a visual and

gastronomic experience. His *“use of local/community foods and products”* was thought to be admirable. He also recalled the relationship of the hotel with the legendary Burn’s Steak House. Rather than compete with steak on the menu, he created a distinctive selection of dishes including Ora King Salmon, Colorado Lamb, Australian Wagyu, and Squid Ink Chitarra. The level of *“thoughtfulness put into every dish, every ingredient, every menu, to create a unique and enjoyable experience”* was impressive.



Berns Steak House Mural



Epicurean Culinary Theatre

The Epicurean Theatre is a distinctive space that serves as a classroom, meeting place to discuss cooking techniques, competitions, and culinary demonstrations. Chef Bamford prepared his famous dry-aged beef tartare. Although some were cautious about tasting the finished dish, others were amazed that they *“never thought I would ever eat raw beef,”* *“that you can eat raw food and not get sick”* and *“raw food can be tasty.”* The

presentation was thought to be *“fantastic, enjoyed all the memories that he shared and how they relate to his daily job at the hotel...personality is extremely important, and Jason has it.”*

Students were moved by Chef Bamford and his message; *“chase the dream you desire.”* For one student *“Chef Jason fulfilled my interest and inspired me to continue with my dream of being a chef myself.”* While another student shared that *“this is what I thought I wanted to do, but now I’m convinced that this is what I want to do.”*



Breakout Session 3: Housekeeping: Ana Blum, Executive Housekeeper, Epicurean Hotel

Ms. Blum described the critical importance of housekeeping in a hotel. The “back of the house” is the heart of a hotel because if guests are not happy with their room, nothing else matters. Her journey took her from Peru to the United States in 2002, to an Associate Degree in Management in Hospitality from Hillsborough Community College in 2017, to executive housekeeper at the Epicurean. As manager, she shows her love to her staff because she knows what each job is like. Since she came up the ranks, she has done every job in housekeeping and has an appreciation for each member of her team.



Forum participants were struck with her “sense of family to her employees and clients” and how “housekeepers deserve so much respect for their long hours and behind the scene jobs.” Ms. Blum’s message was clear: “It’s very important to care for people who come to the hotel and care for the people that work for you...it’s also good to have a good bond with the people you work with.” Several students were particularly impressed with “how different people who seemingly have nothing, come and get a job to work hard and become the best they can be to move up in the world,” “to always be willing to help – no job should be beneath you,” and “how she showed that you need to have passion for that job, you have to love to give and show hospitality, then you will be successful.”

Impressions of Session 1:

Overall participants found the day well-organized and were impressed with the depth and breadth of information presented. The average evaluation ratings across all groups of participants was 4.8 out of 5. Faculty members commented on how “the Hospitality/Tourism industry is a mini-world (security, engineering, front desk, food) and how success can depend on housekeeping design...Leadership qualities/smiles are important...Creativity is endless!” and “How important entry-level positions are for personal growth and development in the hospitality and tourism field.” Administrators focused on internships, creating business partnerships, appropriate high school courses and “What we can I/we do as educators to better prepare students for immediate entry into the field.” Students felt that the most important things to share with their fellow students included “being passionate about your work, and you won’t work a day in your life,” and “how opportunistic this field of work is and how flexible one’s background can be in this field.”



Share Out

At the end of the day, participants had the opportunity to discuss the day's proceeding and each group selected a spokesperson to share their collective thoughts:

- You can start in one place and end up in multiple positions
- Everything is interdependent
- All jobs are multi-tasking and teamwork
- There are so many different options, you can find your own path



- Everyone had a smile
- The work you put in comes back 10-fold
- Chain reaction – one task leads to another, starting at the bottom
- It isn't just a word, it's a family and they all had a dream and passion
- Tourism is really big in Tampa – big money
- There are no limits as to what you can achieve
- Everyone works together to make thing happen

Questions that remained after Session I:

- Are there opportunities for students to engage in internships, shadowing, and volunteering in the industry?
- What high school courses would be most helpful (basic math, reading, writing, public speaking, etc.)
- What are the best courses to take in college to prepare for high-level jobs?
- What are the greatest challenges in each position?
- What is the best way to get started?
- What are the salary ranges for different positions?
- Is it helpful when students earn industry certifications in high school?
- What are some of the entry-level jobs in addition to housekeeping?
- How can schools get businesses into the classroom and/or engaged as partners?
- What type of security clearance is required to work in hospitality, especially housekeeping?
- What does hospitality and tourism look like in the future? What changes are anticipated in the next 10 years?

Session II: Tampa International Airport: Rotation with Panelists

The second session of the Hospitality and Tourism Career Awareness Leadership Forum focused on the aviation industry, including airlines, airports, training centers, vendors and regulatory authorities. This industry is responsible for transporting people and products throughout the world while providing essential services to many other industries from medicine and national security to tourism and sports.



Tampa International Airport (TPA) is an international airport in Hillsborough County, Florida. The airport is publicly owned by Hillsborough County Aviation Authority (HCAA). The airport is served by over twenty major air carrier airlines, four regional airlines, and three air cargo carriers.

TPA PANEL DISCUSSION

Each member of the panel shared his/her background, education, and prior jobs. They represented Transportation Security Administration, Hillsborough County Aviation Authority, American Airlines, and HMS Host. Introductions were followed by a short question and answer period; however, panelists were kind enough to stay and answer additional questions during lunch.



Rachel DeJesus-Ortiz, Matthew Adams, Carmine Testa, Carrie Hernandez

Presenters spoke with passion about their careers, commitment to their employees, and *“the creative ways they were able to grow in their careers.”* They were very informative and kept everyone’s attention. Participants also thought that it was *“amazing to see how they operate and communicate so well with each other.”* In fact, a common remark made on evaluations was that the question and answer time was too short.

Rachel DeJesus-Ortiz: Transportation Security Administration (TSA)

TSA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security which has authority over the security of the traveling public in the United States. It was largely created as a response to the terrorist attacks that took place on September 11, 2001. The agency focuses on air travel safety, employing screening officers in airports, armed Federal Air Marshals on planes, and even

mobile teams of dog handlers and explosives specialists. There are over 2,000,000 passengers screened each day by a staff of over 50,000 individuals. Ms. DeJesus-Ortiz started as a security officer 17 years ago and worked her way up to a supervisory position. She spoke passionately about her work and shared how important it is to make certain travelers are safe.

One student shared that he *“always thought TSA was a hassle but learned how important it is...also the reason TSA started was very impactful.”* Another commented that the *“TSA was significant to me because I learned how important it is to be on time (early) and to take your job seriously because everyone’s lives depend on what you do.”*

Matthew Adams: Hillsborough County Aviation Authority (HCAA):

Mr. Adams made his way from the United Kingdom to the Middle East and finally to the United States where he is currently part of the Hillsborough County Aviation Authority, housed at the Tampa International Airport. The Aviation Authority is an independent special district of the State of Florida that, not only is responsible for the management of Tampa International Airport and its tenants, but it is also responsible for its three general aviation airports in Hillsborough County.

Mr. Adams described the airport as a “city in its own right” with over 700 positions in more than 20 departments. There are many positions that only require a high school diploma from the airport operations center that includes training to respond to 911 calls to procurement positions. Students were impressed with all the benefits and *“how they take care of their people.”* Employment often includes tuition reimbursement, health insurance, 401Ks, staff development, and opportunities for advancement.

Carmine Testa: Manager Customer Care, American Airlines:

Mr. Testa started his career shortly after graduating from high school working on the baggage ramp. Now 43 years later, Mr. Testa is a seasoned leader in large scale airline operations. He talked about the ability to fly for free, choose where you want to work and live, and opportunities to advance in different geographic locations.

Mr. Testa reminded faculty that along with *“longevity, benefits, and mobility, interpersonal communication skills are critical...soft skills will help with that entry-level job and all the promotions that come later.”* Administrators were struck by *“the variety of entry-level positions available...the numerous development opportunities...and how friendly an environment the airport could be.”*

Carrie Hernandez: HMS Host:

HMS Host employs 41,000 employees worldwide in all facets of retail concessionaire services. As a global restaurateur, HMS Host is a world leader in creating customized food and beverage programs for travel venues. The company operates in more than 120 airports around the globe, including 44 of the 50 busiest airports in North America.

Ms. Hernandez talked about how her first job was to help recruit and hire for a restaurant and although she had thought about a career in the medical field, she fell in love with what she does and has continued her upward mobility to HR manager. She is not the only one who loves her

work; over half of the associates have been in a position 10+ years and there is one associate whose tenure is 33 years.

Participants took note of why a job with HMS Host “would be a great entry-level job/company for graduating students wanting to go directly into the workforce and advance...also growth potential and the ability to transfer to other airports and maintain job position are very intriguing.”

One administrator summed up the panel presentation by stating: “She showed the value of having a career at the airport. How once employed workers make it a career and stay long term. Job opportunities are available for all kinds of interests.” Faculty added that “the vast amount of jobs and range of opportunities that are available makes the airport very attractive” and “collectively, entry-level positions and career opportunities at all stages was eye-opening.”

SMALL GROUP ROTATIONS: Guest Services Representatives Athar Alwawi, Vic Curenton, Darius Hughbanks, and Maries Leyva guided Forum participants through the three interactive rotations aimed at providing a behind-the-scenes glimpse of how an airport operates. Administrators were very impressed by the inspiring way “all leaders were so personable and had great knowledge...All questions were thoroughly answered.”



Marilyn Craig checking on logistics

Scavenger Hunt

Teams consisting of participants from four schools each participated in a scavenger hunt inside of the main airport terminal. Armed with a list of 31 items that could be found on one of the three levels of the airport, participants set out to find the answers to each item on their list. Items included queries about color-coding, location of specific airline counters, aviator names of elevators, baggage claim, and historical facts about the airport.

Teams approached the 45-minute challenge by dividing up the list to search for the items and compete to finish first. The group that found the most items in 45 minutes won the scavenger hunt. Participants had fun participating in this teambuilding activity and liked “actually getting to know all areas of the airport, not just ticketing and trams to air sides.” They also found it valuable to learn about the “many different parts of the airport that all work together to make the airport run smoothly.”



Airfield Guided Tour

The tour of the airfield took place in a minibus with commentary from one of the Guest Services Representatives. As one faculty member shared: “This ‘backstage’ view of the airport, safety, maintenance and airline services was very cool.” Areas pointed out along the way included Airfield Maintenance, Air Cargo, Fuel Farm, Aircraft Maintenance Hangars, Baggage Tunnels, and General Aviation Facilities, all while watching planes on the runways and taxiways.

One student was particularly impressed with some special cargo. He learned that *“tropical fish is the #1 air cargo item passing through the airport!”* It turns out that tropical/ornamental fish farming is a substantial, but largely under-the-radar, the agricultural industry in Hillsborough County. As a result, tropical/ornamental fish are among the leading exports from Tampa International Airport.

However, the highlight of the tour was the state-of-the-art Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Facility (ARFF). After a short video, participants got to walk through the firehouse and saw the conference room,



the kitchen and dining area, the gym, lockers, and an up-close look at all the special vehicles. The Firefighters, who work 24-hour shifts followed by 2 days off, operate ten aircraft rescue and firefighting vehicles which can carry 10,500 gallons of water; 1,470 gallons of foam; 500 pounds of dry chemical Purple K and 460 pounds of Halotron.



Students remarked that *“there are a lot of moving parts and protocols to keep the airport running,”* and several students *“found this part of the tour valuable because of the information gained on possible career paths that interested me.”*



Career Presentation

This guided tour was a “walk-about” through the airport as a Guest Services Representative shared information about the history of the airport, aviation-related careers, the structure and design of the airport, public art exhibits, airport security, the airport Marriott, and the horticulture program. According to faculty members, this rotation was rated “excellent” and *“showed how entry-level jobs can lead to life-long careers and opportunities for continuing education and training specific to positions.”*



Forum participants were intrigued with the many stops on the walking tour including:

- **Color-coding System:** Throughout the airport, baggage claim areas, ticket counters, and elevators are coded red or blue depending on their location. The codes for elevators and parking garages are also assigned names based on aviation and aerospace pioneers in order to assist color-blind passengers and to make locations easier to remember. The names chosen include Chuck Yeager, Neil Armstrong, Amelia Earhart, Wright Brothers, TonyJannus, Robert Goddard and Charles Lindbergh.



- **Photograph Collections:** A series of black and white photographs that record the unique history of the social and urban growth of Tampa and Florida's West Coast intrigues Forum participants. The photographs, part of the Burgert Brothers collection, date back to the late 1800s to about 1950.

- **USO:** United Service Organizations' Center, housed completing by

volunteers, services active military and their families.

- **Travelers Aid Station:** Provides baby food, diapers, stamps, use of a phone, and serves as a "crisis center" for passengers.
- **Shops:** The 70 shops and restaurants can keep passengers busy while they wait for their flights and the 24-hour "mini-mall" and Starbucks meet everyone's needs.



- **TSA Supervisor Tara:** While walking with several colleagues, Supervisor Tara took the time to stop and chat with the group. She talked about the importance of *"good communication skills because the job includes lots of customer service. There's also an opportunity for lots of overtime during season, and TSA is a good stepping stone."*

- **Horticulture Supervisor:** At least one group bumped into a horticulture specialist as he walked around the airport watering and inspecting the 3,000 plants on

display. He also took the time to talk about the benefits of plants at the airport and plans to make plants sustainable by growing an additional 4,000 plants in the TIP greenhouse. One student was very impressed and said: *"This is great...it would give me the opportunity to combine two of my loves...I never thought that was possible!"* The horticulturist's parting words were *"plants make you dance!"*



- **Information Kiosk:** Staffed with Guest Services Representatives every day, they provided information about the airport and help with airport paging, directions, flight status and more.



- **Guest Services and Interactive Information Board:** New information boards are designed so that passengers can have their boarding pass scanned in order to find out information about their flight and departure gate. The interactive format also provides information about where restaurants and stores are located.



- **Police Chief:** Another unexpected visitor was the Police Chief who also took time to chat. He explained that TIA has a full-service, accredited law enforcement agency comprised of 76 sworn police officers, 59 traffic specialists, and 44 support personnel. The department even includes a lost and found, bicycle patrols, and K9. His parting words were:

“Stay in school, stay focused, and you’ll get somewhere in life.”

Krystal Clowers, Administrative Coordinator/Guest Services arranged logistics and made sure the day ran smoothly. As a result, Session II was a resounding success as evidenced by the overall rating of nearly 4.9 out of 5. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to participate in all the interactive activities, were inspired, and learned about so many opportunities that the *“school system doesn’t talk about like all the entry-level positions.”*



TPA offers several programs, including some new tours that began this year. These programs are readily available and strive to create a fun and educational experience for all ages and interests.

Facilitators shared that *“it was a great session and students had many opportunities to ask questions and seek job/internship awareness...it was well organized, each school shared that the tours and panelists were very informative. Several students had never been to the airport, so this was eye-opening.”* Additionally, the *“speakers were excellent; their ability to talk to the teens was obvious. They enjoyed what they do, and it showed. They gave advice that the students were open to,”* and the panel consisted of *“outstanding and pertinent speakers.”*

Facilitators expressed some concern that the scavenger hunt and airport tour had quite a bit of overlap. As a result, the group that participated in the scavenger hunt first found the airport tour redundant and the same thing happened when the airport tour was first. It was suggested that *“there could have been something different, such as a shorted scavenger hunt with items not covered on the tour and more time for detailed career tour.”*

Session III: Busch Gardens Tampa Bay

Busch Gardens Tampa Bay is a 335-acre African-themed animal theme park. There are nine roller coasters and two water rides amongst other rides suitable for both adults and children. Animal attractions include more than 200 species of animals, including the Serengeti Plains, which allows the African wildlife to roam freely, preserving endangered African animals in replicas of natural habitats. There are multiple venues for food, retail, as well as, seasonal festivals, shows, and entertainment.⁵

BUSCH GARDENS TAMPA BAY GUEST SPEAKERS

Michael Penzato, Director, Park Operations: Senior leader of operations has worked in the industry for 38 years. He told the story of his humble beginning at Busch Gardens as a 16-year-old parttime employee who then worked in culinary for 17 years. Mr. Penzato, a Hillsborough High school graduate, thought he wanted to be an architect and took classes at Erwin Technical College. Although that didn't happen, his hard work and determination helped propel him to success. His entry-level leadership position included overseeing 365 acres of landscape, in-house pest control, and overnight housekeeping. Forum participants were impressed by his high energy and liked his description of his job being *"fast-paced, challenging, and every day is different...People coming back want that fresh and exciting experience and I like to make that happen."* Reflecting on what Mr. Penzato shared, students commented that *"hospitality is a big part of my future since I like to make sure people are happy in there experiences...love the idea of making sure all guests feel happy and comfortable."* There was a clear message about how there is team effort in all departments.



Michele Cupps, Manager Human Resources: Applying for a job at Busch Gardens is a well-organized and a simple process. The website always has all the available jobs and it's easy to set-up a profile to indicate an individual's



preferences. Busch Gardens will actually contact the applicant if the desired position becomes available and even provides for you to schedule your own interview. The hiring selections are often made immediately so that on-boarding can occur in about a week. Jobs can also provide for flexible scheduling around school and other commitments. Ms. Cupps went on to talk about tuition reimbursement as only one of the many benefits of employment. Administrators found it *"interesting and powerful that there are multiple career path opportunities with a phenomenal company right in our backyard"* and *"today's visit has reinforced the need to provide students with more awareness of career opportunities beyond hotels."* Ms. Cupps *"reinforced the importance of educating students in the #1 employer in the state – Tourism."*

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Busch_Gardens_Tampa

A faculty member was impressed with all the “job opportunities, growing from entry-level positions to high end, that with dedication and hard work it can lead to a successful career...avoid job-hopping if possible, remember basic work skills, and listen to mentors, as it is invaluable.” Another faculty member shared that the day “changed my perception greatly. I wasn’t aware there were so many career pathways within the hospitality and tourism industry. It makes me glad that our students can choose from so many different options and do something that they love.”

Brian Kilpatrick, Vice President of Culinary Operations:

Management of all aspects of operations for multiple culinary locations within the park may seem like a daunting responsibility; however, for Mr. Kilpatrick, with 33 years of experience, it means doing what he loves every day. He began his career when he was in high school and a representative of Sea World came to his school. He got his first job there at 15 so he would have extra money for fun. Little did he know that it would become a lifelong career. He made his way through merchandising at a range of parks in four different states to his current position. His responsibilities include supervising development and maintenance of financial goals, planning and executing menus, working with all departments to achieve ultimate guest satisfaction goals, helping develop ambassadors and leaders to grow to their top potential and mentoring. He believes that “if you want to learn, be open to new ideas so you can have opportunities to try new experiences and challenges.”



He also told students that prospective applicants need to “go back to basics because every job starts with a resume and interview – you need to be able to sell yourself.” Students were also advised “to practice having a conversation about what you want to do – make that connection, show commitment and passion...make sure your intentions are known.” Additionally, “listen and take advice from the people who came before you, they will point you in the right direction – they will want you to succeed.”

Ernie Reyes, Executive Chef:

Although Chef Reyes has only been with Busch Gardens for three months, he has culinary and hotel experience that dates back to 1986 in Puerto Rico. He credits his success to Johnson & Wales, participation in many competitions, and long hours of hard work. He discussed the magnitude of 12 food venues at Busch Garden and his many daily responsibilities which include:



- Working with budgets – need to follow food costs, fix money issues as you go along.
- Daily walks around the park to make sure people are happy. He always tries to speak to at least five guests each day.
- Review the sampling of guest surveys taken as they leave the park.
- Work with procurement and logistics teams to help plan and execute. The larger company can leverage prices by buying in bulk.
- Work with all sorts of people in all sorts of positions – they all consider themselves operating a small city together.

BUSCH GARDENS TAMPA BAY TOUR of the GROUNDS

Chef Ernie along with Chef Richard and Chef Robert took Forum participants on a walking tour of the grounds of Busch Gardens. Participants

Culinary: learned that “these people work really good and hard to make guests happy.” Before the tour, students “didn’t know about these hardworking people and the p Many of the stops were behind the scenes in food preparation, serving, procurement, etc. There were many students who were already interested in a culinary career but never thought about an amusement park as a possibility.

One student explained, “I wish to pursue a culinary-based occupation, and now I may even end up working in an amusement park cafe or restaurant and will need to learn how to navigate the environment.” Another student commented that “culinary is something I have always loved doing. I have cooked my food since I was little so to see all of these different restaurants and how everyone cooks the food and to see how many people are in between each department was extremely valuable...Culinary is something I would love to do for the rest of my life”

Chef Richard told his group how he started as a dishwasher at the age of twelve and first hoped to pursue a career as an architect and then as an animator. He has been with Busch Gardens for 34 years and believes he is exactly where he is supposed to be. He talked about the tremendous range of positions from dishwashers to managers, as well as, qualifications from a high school diploma to college degrees.

Students enjoyed learning about “the business and logistical aspects of the culinary field.” They were particularly intrigued by the use of technology, data, and statistics to determine procurement needs and customer preferences. The large screens in the kitchens tracked how many visitors were in a particular



All that data was also used to determine what

needed to be ordered and warehoused so that the appropriate items were on hand to provide chefs with what they needed and to make sure all the required supplies were available for each of the different food venues.





The behind the scene tours included kitchens, storerooms, smokehouses, freezers, and restaurants.



Entertainment: Performers, Musicians, Costume/Set design, Festivals



Festivals are a big part of creating excitement at the park and a reason for patrons to return. There is always lots of food, concerts, music, and even fireworks on the agenda. The *Food and Wine Festival* is one of the largest where 23,000 plates are served in a single weekend. Additional festivals include the *Real Music Series*, *Viva La Musical*, *Summer Nights*, *Howl-O-Scream*, *Christmas Town*, and *New Year's Eve*. There are seasonal performers, as well as entertainers that



perform on a regular basis. Students enjoyed their experiences but wanted even more. One student explained: *I never knew about all these activities...this experience has further encouraged me to go into the theme park aspect of hospitality, but I wish we were exposed to more of guest relations and park operations.*"

Park Operations: Guest Relations, Tram Drivers, Ride Operations, Ticket Windows

Tigris, Falcon's Fury, Cheetah Hunt, Sheikra, Montu, Kumba, Cobra's Curse, Scorpion, Stanley Falls Flume, Sand Serpent & Congo River Rapids are among the thrill-seeking rides. A student commented about *"the importance of finding attractions that stimulate every member of the family."* Administrators noted that *"there are many people behind the scenes with different skill sets that are responsible for keeping the park running"* and *"so many opportunities for students right out of high*



school because of the huge variety of opportunities related to operating the park." Students also found *"the 'rides/park operations' tour most valuable because it sets a good example of how businesses are managed and laid out. Not only this, but there were many beneficial companies/organizations that work to benefit the animals and the community."* For one administrator, it was a trip down memory lane: *"This visit was nostalgic for me. I was hired in my first job as a ride operator here in 1986. New rides and attractions have expanded the park even further."*

Merchandise/Retail: Salesclerks, Photographers, Warehouse, Purchasing



The front of the property includes photographers, food options including a variety of "treats", an array of souvenirs, apparel, hats, jewelry, accessories gifts, toys, and stuffed animals. There are also animal sculptures, authentic African carvings, instruments, and home décor. As students explained: *"They hire nearly immediately, and they make the hiring process very easy. There are opportunities to move and grow within the company. The field is always changing, and it is*

dynamic...I love photography and I just learned that I could get a job taking pictures here and continue my education at the same time...I learned that the retail industry helps support the other industries of the park and works to attract customers to specific parts of the park. "

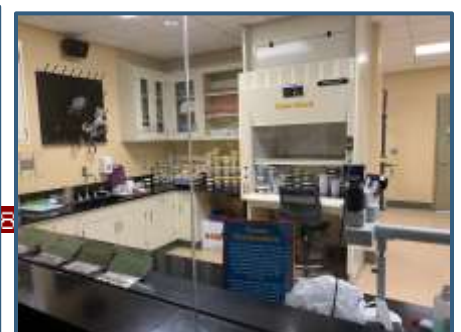


Zoological: Veterinarians, Animal Care Specialists, Education & Conservation

The zoo and 29-acre Serengeti Plains are home to more than 200 species of animals. There is a commitment to allow the African wildlife to roam freely while preserving endangered African animals in replicas of natural habitats.



Forum participants enjoyed watching the animals and were equally intrigued with the facilities to observe, feed and care for them – all in the public eye. The facility for animal care was state of the art and caught several students' attention. One said: *"I'm interested in working with animals so I would be interested to work at Busch Gardens, now that I know more about the amusement park."* Another commented that *"I've always wanted to work with animals, but never thought of an amusement park as a place I could get experience working with exotic and large animals and it's right here in Tampa."*



Horticulture: Grounds Maintenance

The grounds at Busch Gardens add to the joyful ambiance of the park. Although it must take a lot of hard work to maintain the elaborate displays of plants and topiaries, one student was not deterred: *"I think I have found a way to combine two of my loves – rollercoasters and growing plants. I could get a gardening job and ride the rollercoasters during my breaks."*



Marketing, Finance, Security, Human Resources

There is a myriad of jobs available that are typical of any large organization such as marketing, finance, security. Human resources was of particular interest to Forum participants.

Michele

presentation made applying for a job extremely information. A student stated: *"Some of our student population desires to go into a career right out of high school. This information will support that need"* and *"so many opportunities for every student and soft skills needed to incorporate in our curriculum in order to get students marketable."* A student also commented: *"What was most significant was the ability to always have a new opportunity and to climb the ranks throughout your career is exciting to me as someone going into the industry after high school."*

Overall participants found the day well-organized and were impressed with *"the way the people work together at the park. Also, the fact that there are so many positions within hospitality and tourism, and how it could open up job opportunities...There are so many different options and definitely an eye-opener."* Additionally, for one student: *"My perception of the industry changed because I didn't know how many people worked in one place, did so many different things, and still collaborated across all the departments."*

Facilitators were equally impressed with the team effort across all departments, particularly *"their marketing strategies and the various opportunities to market their culinary skills such as the punch card for the wine and food festival and surveys to improve customer service."* They also found the day *"very informative and diverse...the opening session with the panel included excellent speakers and was interactive."*

Facilitators shared that *"some students and colleagues suggested that it would have been great to see other areas of Busch Gardens in addition to culinary arts such as customer service and human resources."*

The average evaluation rating across all groups of participants was 4.5 out of 5. The parting message:

"There is a job for everyone!"

Session IV: Hospitality/Tourism Career Awareness Leadership Forum Group Presentations



Chris Jargo, Hillsborough County Public Schools, Director, Career and Technical Education, Division of Workforce Connections, along with Dr. Elaine Liftin, the Council for Educational Change, President and Executive Director, welcomed participants to the final session of the Forum. They were pleased to announce that the Strategic Plans and the Session recordings would be a valuable workforce resource other schools can utilize to become aware of current career and job opportunities in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry.

School teams were given the challenge of creating a comprehensive information plan to disseminate awareness about careers and job opportunities in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry. Each school team followed the criteria provided and highlighted how the administrators, guidance/teaching staff, and students plan to share their Forum experiences and career information with their respective peer groups, and even parents. Schools created a presentation that could be used at their schools, meetings, and social media. Presentations showed communication skills and technical creativity of the presenters by describing a wide range of opportunities to share their information. Each school team completed a ballot rating the top three presentations in first, second, and third place (excluding their own school). They were guided by a rubric that used a scale of one to ten for content and quality of the presentation. Ballots were tabulated by assigning three points for each first-place vote, two points for each second-place vote, and one point for each third-place vote.

Winners were determined by the total points received. Leto High School, the winner of the “People’s Choice Award,” received a \$100 gift card for their first-place standing. Based on points, Bloomingdale High School came in second, and Simmons High School took third place.

Students were particularly impressed with Leto High School’s use of emojis and how the presentation was *“attention-grabbing and entertaining enough to keep the attention...informs students of important information...It was very creative, and they included great content.”* Faculty shared that *“Leto presented the ins and outs of the service industry very nicely.”*



Leto High School – Peoples Choice Award Winners

JEFF EAKINS, Hillsborough County Public Schools Superintendent shared his thoughts during



the group presentations. He talked about the need to know trends and how job needs are shifting. *"Tampa will be ground zero next year when the Super Bowl will be held here. There will be a boom in hospitality and tourism."* He urged students to take advantage of the economic impact coming to the region. Hospitality and other tourism activities surrounding Super Bowl XLVIII will generate a tremendous number of jobs both in preparation of the event and during the event. Since unemployment in the Tampa Bay area is only 2.9%, it is important to know where the opportunities are. In addition to thanking everyone for their participation, Mr. Eakins also reminded administrators and faculty to mentor students as they consider opportunities and connect with careers in the community.

BOB CONIGLIARO, VP Caspers Co., Community Relations McDonald's Restaurants, provided a real-world perspective of

how to succeed in life. He started at the bottom and worked his way up at the Caspers Company over the last 45 years. His upbeat and humor-driven presentation described starting with a broom and a mop and how he learned to clean toilets and urinals better than anyone else. He explained: *"If you are good at what you do, you will be noticed and rise through the ranks, it's what I call 'business gravity.'"* He also reminded the audience that *"instant gratification comes from making people happy in the hospitality industry since we generate happiness."* His advice was to try to be significant in a person's life so that they will always remember you, and *"hospitality can be a stepping stone to other careers and also an awesome career choice."*



PAUL CASEBOLT, VP of Programs, Hillsborough Education Foundation took a moment to say hello and offer best wishes from the Hillsborough Education Foundation. He expressed his approval and appreciation of the Forum experience which will help students succeed and become part of a talented workforce for a strong, thriving community.

The Hillsborough Education Foundation is invested in the success of over 200,000 students in Hillsborough County Public Schools by providing educational resources and financial assistance to help give every student. We feel this is a relevant and necessary opportunity to discover career paths in hospitality and tourism management.

Bloomington High School (2nd Place Winner)

The video created will be shown to middle schools and potential business partners. They will also show clips on the school morning show and use it as a resource for marketing. The group also



described their classes in the culinary program and plan to provide information about internships and certifications. They will use Instagram for their café – photos of catering and a way to keep a record of student accomplishments. Students were happy to share that there are 17 different internship programs available at Tampa International airport. One student shared “who wouldn’t want to work at

an amusement park – work – have fun – maybe sneak in a ride once in a while.” Their final message was “anything is possible – there’s money out there and tuition reimbursement allows you to work, get an education and get a degree without going into debt.”.



Gaither High School

This presentation began with a student sharing her love for traveling and how the Forum opened her eyes to so many different jobs that can include traveling. The second student “has always dreamed of being a veterinarian, and now I’ve learned that I can do that in an aquarium or zoo.” So, sharing specific careers and the steps students need to take to get there is what they want to



share with their school. To that end, Gaither plans to do TV segments on the school's morning show including videos from each of the Forum locations. They will also focus on jobs you can get right out of high school.

Providing information about opportunities in the local Tampa Bay

area and CTE colleges are a major focus. In addition, they recognize the importance of soft skills, such as communication and leadership.



Hillsborough High School

Although this school is located in the center of the city, there are students who have never been to



a hotel and others who live in them. Their PowerPoint focused on “opening doors for pathways students never thought existed.” They also want to encourage students in ninth and tenth grade – connect with business partners and get students focused on the future

earlier in high school. A career fair could be a place

to meet with industry experts and begin planning for the future, as well as monthly industry guest speakers, field trips, and on-campus fairs. Their goal is to cultivate internship opportunities for at least 15-20% of juniors.

Whole school initiatives include industry speakers for parents, wall and board displays, and a focus on a different industry each month. They would also like to see after school classes for soft skills, job applications, time management, communication skills, and interview etiquette.



Jefferson High School

“The field trips were eye-openers because you never think about all of the behind the scenes activities, jobs, and opportunities.” Students were impressed with the chef at the Epicurean who showed his passion and inspired students. They never knew about tuition reimbursement and want to inform



students at their school. The entrepreneur program encourages teachers to create businesses. They plan to go to the Super Bowl committee to do photography, as well as “OJ selfie”

services. They will also use social media – their Twitter account captured a

National Signing Day event. The principal was inspired when he learned about “service design” and did some further reading so he could build that into the school. He also wants to “drive our students to get involved in career fields early and build the leaders of tomorrow today.”



Dr. Lennard High School

Lennard is the furthest away from the center of the Tampa community but still has a “welcoming perspective.” They plan to use flyers and PowerPoints to advertise courses available for a NAF Hospitality/Tourism Academy. The field trips were “fun, so it was easy to share the experiences of them...Great fun, meet new people and make life-long friends and have amazing experiences in your career” are the messages they want to share with students at their school. With a “now what?” perspective, students will share “the benefits of this industry, and how fun this industry can be...lots of



different opportunities.” They explained: “The field trips gave us a lot more knowledge on how great the hospitality industry is! One thing we really learned was how much effort and skills it takes to be in this business.”



Leto High School (1st Place Winner)

NAF Academy of Hospitality and Tourism has lots of plans for sharing information with other students at the school. Their presentation began by asking Siri



“what is hospitality?” They talked about starting at entry-level positions from data to security jobs and the coordination to make things work. They reminded the



audience that “hospitality workers can be found everywhere.” The presentation made use of avatars that represented each student presenter and discussed the “importance to know what’s going on in the industry today and the importance of creating partnerships with industry leaders.” They will share their video in the school auditorium, morning show, clubs, and on social media, and feel that videos have the greatest potential to communicate to a wide audience consistently.



They even ended with an avatar of Chris Jargo announcing that Leto High School had the winning presentation. Self-fulfilling prophecy or hard work – Leto High School was voted #1 by the participants of the Forum and awarded a \$100 gift card. See the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbg5QzW_KKM

Newsome High School

Students created a presentation for the school's morning show. The slides summarized each day of the Forum.



One of the students explained that *"hospitality is not just what you see, but also all the departments and people behind the scenes."* They marveled at *"who would have thought about fire-fighters at an airport but that job is available."* There are plans to deliver their presentation at the Senior Survival Class and create a video from their PowerPoint.

There is also the possibility to do a presentation at New Teacher Training. As a result of her participation in the Forum, the faculty member shared that she has been *"inspired to talk about hospitality/tourism careers and opportunities more to my students."*



Robinson High School

FLA and CTE go hand-in-hand. Presentation recalled three very unique ventures which provided

behind the scenes opportunities and even how to get experience while still in high school. The first student shared his interest initially in auto mechanics, aerospace, and animal care, BUT discovered a culinary class and his teacher ignited a huge interest in culinary as a career. He went *"from no plans to very confident."* The second student learned she could combine culinary and her interest in working with children. The possibility of working on a cruise



ship as a children's activity director would provide the

"best of both worlds scenario." By taking a more personal path, teachers and friends helped mold their career choices. There were "goal-setting conversations" kind of a career interest inventory. Building relationships with students and staff emphasizing soft skills. These personal stories and their presentation will help spread their message at their school.



The students leading discussions are passionate and surely will gain the attention of their peers and faculty members.

Simmons Career Center (3rd Place Winner)

Students presented a video about what they had learned – fully narrated with music in the background. They presented an overview of each of the sessions in the Forum with photographs of students from different schools. They plan on creating a resource board in the school lobby, using the morning show as a media resource, and reaching out to potential business partners. Students plan to



continue to share their experiences with other

students, pay attention to career and employment opportunities, and “*always be kind.*” Faculty would also welcome the possibility of collaborating with other schools to share information and experiences.



South County Career Center

The overarching goal at South County is for “*every student to get a degree and have a career goal.*” Their PowerPoint and brochure will be shared with feeder schools so the information can be shared at many schools and in the community. Faculty want to work with some of the new hotels in the area and build relationships. With a workforce of over 120,000 employees in regional tourism, the opportunities are endless and this group is



determined to get the word out. The PowerPoint was done as a newscaster asking other students questions. Some of the students being interviewed were nervous, others tried to be funny, but they all wanted to learn more about hospitality and tourism. The PowerPoint then provided information about the industry and the different pathways to be considered. They also showed salaries and how the dollar amounts go up with increased education. One student presenter shared that the Forum “*makes me want to push my limits.*”



Spoto High School

“Career journey in the year 2020 to encourage students to consider pathways other than college” was the theme of Spoto’s presentation. One of the students shared her interest in law enforcement and how the Forum showed her several career paths that could get her to her goal. They also want to



share many of the stories about starting at entry-level positions and the potential to move up to



administration, in classroom and small settings to introduce students to opportunities, and large group presentations that include the chance to ask questions. They also shared that parents often think that college is the only pathway to success so there is a need to educate them about opportunities right out of high school during conferences, on the school website, and announcements. The team had a long list of strategies including posting on social media, sharing information with the student government, Club Day activities, passing out flyers, sharing stories, and grade-level assemblies. The Principal will not only share information during his meetings, but he is also committed to “doing my very best to promote and facilitate the implementation of Hospitality/Tourism awareness.” There is also a desire to create close partnerships with businesses.

Wharton High School

The presentation utilized a PowerPoint that began with a definition of hospitality, then talked about how it looks like a business. So many different jobs where everyone needs to work cohesively as a



small city. For the last two years, Wharton has offered a career preparation course for exceptional students (ESE). They also have plans for a variety of activities including food, dinner theatre, ESE students working in the kitchen and learning skills, photography, career fairs, and clubs. They also

emphasized, “that the hospitality and tourism field is not much more than treating others right.”



LESSONS LEARNED

Reflective Synthesis Feedback Loops: At the conclusion of each session, the BETR Group, key organizers from the School District, and Council for Educational Change, along with the facilitators, engaged in formative, reflective and analytic practices in a continuous improvement model. These feedback loops supported refinements and adjustments that could be implemented immediately through a process that provided for debriefing opportunities and review of data from session surveys. For this Forum, only minor adjustments were needed such as providing water and small snacks at the beginning of each session.

Survey of Facts and Misconceptions of the Hospitality and Tourism Industry: Participants completed a survey about “Facts” and “Myths” regarding the Hospitality and Tourism Industry at the beginning of the Forum and at its conclusion. Pre-test scores averaged 71% while post-test scores averaged 88%. Clearly, participants became well-informed about the industry.

Students' Future Plans: Over 70% of student participants indicated that they plan to work towards a career in the hospitality and tourism industry and that participation in the Forum helped illuminate potential career paths for them. As one student explained: *“This experience has allowed me to investigate one of the chef jobs at the Epicurean Hotel. For my entire life, I’ve grown up in many different hotels, in many different states and countries...this has given me the spark to do what I’ve always loved.”*

Presentations and Dissemination Plans: Presentations continue to be well done and provide the opportunity for students to practice their communication skills and show their technical creativity. There have been comments about the lack of interaction during this session and the repetition of the same ideas in many presentations. One administrator suggested: *“Assign one element of the experience to each school and connect to one major presentation. This may reduce the repetitive nature of similar presentations.”* One facilitator suggested creating electronic versions of the forms that participants could access on their phones.

Shadowing Opportunities and Internships: Participants repeatedly ask about internship opportunities and potential jobs while still in high school. Requests for such information could be made in advance so those community businesses can be prepared to share possible opportunities for both internships and shadowing.

Soft Skills: Strong work ethic, good communication skills, time management abilities, problem-solving skills, acting as a team player, self-confidence, positive attitude, and the ability to accept and learn from criticism are all important for being successful. Consideration should be made to find ways to incorporate these skills into Forum activities.

Facilitators are the glue that keeps participants on track and focused. The current team was efficient, motivated, and engaging. They contributed to the success of the Forum.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Hospitality and Tourism Career Awareness Leadership Forum focused on building awareness of careers in the hospitality and tourism field. Participants included teams from 12 high schools consisting of an administrator, faculty member/counselor, and two students. Sessions were hosted by the Epicurean Hotel, Tampa International Airport, and Busch Gardens. Activities included keynote speakers, touring facilities, panel discussions, scavenger hunts, and interactions with hospitality and tourism professionals. The culminating session, which took place at the Hillsborough County School Board, provided the opportunity for each school to present their comprehensive plan to disseminate awareness about careers and job opportunities in the hospitality and tourism industry. A two-minute feature video of the Hospitality and Tourism Forum can be accessed at

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/2icu3a3sdjfdaf1f/IT%20Career%20Leadership%20Forum%20Feature.mp4?dl=0>

Based on evaluator observations and interviews, individual participant surveys, and debriefing sessions, the Forum was a resounding success. The overall rating for the entire Forum was a notable 4.9 out of five. Students were engaged, articulate, and remained focused throughout the Forum. They were moved by what they learned and indicated how they would integrate the new information into their future plans. They also expressed a profound interest in sharing the valuable information they learned with others at their school. Administrators and faculty members also found it a worthy experience and expressed the need for involving more schools and students. They felt that it would be beneficial create similar Forums in other industries.

Speakers with longtime commitments to the hospitality and tourism industry were inspiring. By telling their personal stories of starting at the bottom and becoming successful, they provided the framework for emphasizing career paths, particularly for students who may not be focused on college when they graduate high school. The Forum also provided an administrator a “*strategy to stay up-to-date about industry trends and to build relationships with industry leaders.*” It also gave faculty members “*the opportunity to be aware of the current job market supply and demand.*”

The template developed by the Council for Educational Change provides a valuable framework for Career Awareness Leadership Forums and can easily be adapted to any number of industries. Administrators and faculty members identified almost every industry for future forums; however, those that were mentioned more than others included: engineering/skilled labor/construction, healthcare/medical technology, and criminal justice/law enforcement/public safety. Additionally, the awareness of how critical soft skills are for students was highlighted and integrating such strategies into forums should be considered for all industries.

is President of Bessell Evaluation Training & Research, Inc. (BETR), the successor organization to the University of Miami Evaluation Team (UMEET). She has worked extensively in the area of program evaluation and has been the principal investigator and director for multiple UMEET projects. Under her tutelage, UMEET conducted large evaluations within complex systems such as Miami-Dade County Public Schools Smaller Learning Communities **ANI** project involving over 30 high schools, NSF studies involving collaborative relationships across the University of Miami, Florida International University, and Florida Atlantic University's Schools of Education, as well as initiatives that partnered UM's Engineering School, School of Communication, Film School and School of Education and Human Development in a single project. Dr. Bessell continues her work in private practice serving as the external evaluator for the Barbara Bush Foundation, Council for Educational Change, School of Engineering at Florida Atlantic University, and Dollar General. Dr. Bessell has a Doctorate in special education, Masters' degrees in health occupations education and microbiology, and a bachelor's degree in medical technology. Her research emphasizes the importance of communication among professionals and teaching effective educational strategies. Her advocacy work has focused on quality of life issues for children facing medical challenges by providing consultancy and mentoring to numerous families grappling with issues concerning the educational and psychosocial needs of a child with serious health problems and, at times, concerning the needs of families dealing with palliative care, death, and/or bereavement. Dr. Bessell has consulted and published research in evaluation and exceptional populations and is a frequent speaker at national- international conferences as well as community functions.

APPENDIX