

Career program well received on first round

by SUSAN RANDALL, Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, June 20, 2013 9:47 am

The Casa Grande Elementary School District is the first district to pilot the Arizona Middle School Career Exploration Initiative with a grant from Arizona Gear Up.

Deb Raeder, a consultant with the Arizona Business and Education Coalition, recently briefed school board members on the program.

The coalition's mission is to expand partnerships with businesses and help students learn about careers and how to prepare for them, she said.

Raeder said freshmen have to write an education career action plan, but many first-generation students don't know what they want to do after graduation or don't know what kind of education they need to prepare for their chosen career.

Arizona's Common Core Standards, on the other hand, were business driven, and business leaders wanted to know how they could be more engaged with education.

Cactus Middle School piloted the first career day, in which business partners talked to seventh-graders about what they do for a living and what kind of preparation is needed for their job.

One of the visitors told her, "I had many difficult challenges getting where I am today, and telling my story to these students and knowing that some of them have these exact same challenges was very emotional to me."

Raeder said all the visitors offered to come back.

Kia Warner, Gear Up coordinator at CMS, said the event helped students connect academics with their futures.

Seventh-grade math teacher Mike Spooner said the students were very engaged. They had a lot of questions. It was nice to have "a real person" tell them why education is important, he said.

Presenter and architect Kali Mota from Phoenix, a first-generation American born in Mexico, said she completed her bachelor's and master's degrees in architecture at Arizona State University and was delighted to explain to kids how important education is and how it will change their future and their lives and their families' lives.

"I was happy and thrilled to see children who were so engaged and excited to hear about what they could do later," she said.

Also at the meeting, the board split in its approval of a resolution approving the statement that will appear in the district's budget override election pamphlet. It says that prior to 2000, district

salaries were so low not all classroom teaching positions could be filled. Since the first override passed in 2000 and was renewed in 2004 and 2009, the district has been able to compete for the most qualified teachers while keeping administrative costs well below other Arizona districts. The 10 percent override, which is in place, provides \$3.5 million a year. Loss of that funding would be detrimental to students, according to the statement approved by the board.

Board members Jennifer Ortiz and Barbara Davis voted against the resolution.

Ortiz said she was not against the override, but she was against putting it on the ballot this year because of the expense. She would rather spend the year informing the public about how much the override is needed. She doubts it will pass this year.