

MAHWAH HIGH SCHOOL OFFERS PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM WHICH HELPS STUDENTS PREPARE AND EXPLORE CAREER PATHS

Students enjoy internships and externships at area businesses



Mahwah High School senior, Alexa Molino, works hands-on using play-based learning with preschoolers at Holy Cross Early Learning Center. The internship is preparing Alexa for her studies in early childhood education.



Seniors at Mahwah High School, like Gavin McClure, can participate in the Thunderbird Partnership Internship Program to explore career opportunities with area businesses. Gavin honed skills he will use in the engineering industry as a quality control intern with Leistritz Advanced Technologies Corp.



Experienced pharmacists mentored senior Fiza Khan while she helped manage the counter as an intern with Paramus Pharmacy. Fiza gained perspective through the Thunderbird Partnership Internship Program that will help her reach her career path.

Mahwah High School senior Alexa Molino, who plans to go into early childhood education, spent her summer at an internship at the Holy Cross Early Learning Center in Mahwah getting on-the-job experience working with preschoolers.

Payton Park, a junior at Mahwah High School (MHS) this fall who wants to work in the medical field, shadowed the director of homecare and hospice at Valley Homecare in Paramus over the summer. And senior Gavin McClure did a quality control internship at Leistritz Advanced Technologies Corp. in Allendale, which he said, “has been a great help in preparing for college.”

All these students participate in the Career Pathways Program at MHS where students select a career path, work with a guidance counselor to take classes related to their path, join clubs which offer experience in that path, and then participate in the Mahwah Thunderbird Partnership Program which offers personalized externships and internships for students.

This past summer, Mahwah had 25 students participate in its Thunderbird Partnership Externship Program and 26 students participate in its Thunderbird Partnership Internship Program. Students must apply to participate in these programs and be in good academic standing. Internships are also offered to seniors during the school year.

“The Career Pathways and Thunderbird Partnership programs have really broadened my knowledge,” said Emelysse Jacobo, who will be a senior this fall and is interested in cyber security. “I really like the personalized aspect of the program, working with a mentor and creating my own schedule.”

Emelysse said she enjoyed working at Becton & Dickinson in Franklin Lakes this summer, learning about medical device technology and that nurses can connect to multiple systems as a time to measure dosages of medication. “The externship program has really broadened my knowledge.”

The Mahwah High School Career Pathways was designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills required for success in college/university, the military or the workplace, meeting the challenges of the global economy, practicing responsible citizenship, becoming life-long learners and completing the NJ State graduation requirements successfully, according to MHS Principal John P. Pascale. Students can choose from eight career pathways: Visual and Integrated Design, Engineering & Technology, Information and Computer Science Technology, Biotechnology Research & Health Science, Government and Social Sciences, Business Administration, Performing and Communication Arts, and Technical, Career and Community.

Juniors and seniors are eligible to participate in the Thunderbird Externship Program: Career Pathway Exploration & Job Shadowing while seniors can take advantage of the Thunderbird Internship Program: Career & Academic Internships.

“Internship and externship programs provide an opportunity to add to your skill set, explore new career fields, navigate the professional world, and gain authentic work experience that you can include on your resume,” Pascale said.

For the internship program, students focus more on skills and experience in their interest area, said Estania Noel, transition plan teacher, internship program coordinator and work-based learning experience coordinator. “The students are paired with a mentor in the field to provide them with professional guidance in their designated career pathway or career choice.”

Noel said she worked with Pascale on the curriculum for the program and created it and piloted it with him in the summer of 2022. It grew as an extension of the work-based learning program with students taking seminar classes, focusing on the job experience, and developing soft skills such as effective communication skills, problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork and a strong work ethic.

Alexa said she loved her internship at Holy Cross Early Learning Center. “Once the kids warm up to you, it’s really nice,” she said. “My favorite part was coming in every day and interacting with the kids, playing with them and helping them learn new things. Their faces just light up.”

The internship is helping prepare Alexa for a career as a pre-school or kindergarten teacher.

“The Thunderbird Internship Program is an amazing program that I am very grateful to be a part of,” she said. “Ms. Noel has created a wonderful program where students can get hands-on experience in a field that they are interested in. This program has taught me so much about working with kids and becoming an educator.”

For an externship, students must commit to eight to 10 hours over a month visiting a business, shadowing a professional, all to complete the career pathway they have selected at the high school, said Brian Gregson, school guidance counselor and externship program coordinator.

An externship is a way for students to connect their potential career interests to the workplace, get firsthand experience, and learn how companies operate, he said. Most externships are short-term.

“Externships provide an opportunity for students and recent graduates to get an overview of an occupation or a workplace without investing a significant amount of time,” Gregson said. “Participants may observe a workplace, sit in on meetings, and conduct informational interviews with employees.”

Externships usually last one to two weeks and are similar to a job shadowing program, where participants spend time with a professional to learn about a job and a career field, he said. Externships give participants exposure to a variety of workplaces to help them explore career interests and occupations and are usually not paid.

Brandon Tsu, who will be a junior at MHS this fall, is participating in his school's engineering career pathway and is enjoying an externship at a dental implant manufacturing company. "I want to be a computer hardware engineer," Brandon said. "The whole externship experience has been extremely helpful. When I was with the team, I learned how to operate the machines and make sure that they function properly."

Brandon said he got to meet with different teams, learned how each team reached goals and made sure everything ran smoothly. "I feel like it is amazing how our school is the type of school which actually provides students with on-the-job experience."

The Thunderbird Partnership Program provides students with authentic work experience.

"I am learning what the day-to-day life is like working in the medical field and how you combat the daily issues that come up and how to deal with them," Payton said. "It's really cool to see how everyone works together as a big family at Valley Homecare. I had never experienced what the medical field was like, and I think that I want to become a doctor."

Senior Fiza Khan worked at the front counter of Paramus Pharmacy this summer. "I helped organize everything and helped with prescriptions," she said, adding she learned about managing a pharmacy and working with patients in a closeknit community.

"I am so glad that Mahwah High School has the Career Pathways program which also helps me determine which way I want to go, and which classes are better," Fiza said.

The program shows students what it is like to work in their chosen field, said Gavin, who said that his quality control internship at Leistritz Advanced Technologies Corp. taught him engineering principles that will help him decide if he wants to study engineering in college. "I am incredibly grateful that I have this opportunity which has been truly groundbreaking," Gavin said. "Before applying to college, I have this work experience that others do not."