

## **Building a Nortel-School Partnership: A Fast Track Start!**

### **First-hand Accounts of Model Steps and Initial Activities, including How to Build High Interest and Respond with a Great Program**

This tells the story of how Nortel LearniT Ambassadors and Nortel's New Grad Leadership Program are developing the Alamance Burlington School System (ABSS), North Carolina, joint initiative. But this isn't a routine story as can you see, because as soon as the school heard what Nortel could offer, the first event mushroomed into a high-attendance, interactive success for student learning about careers and choices! There are four sections, **How the Partnership and the Event Began**; **Organizers' Comments**, **Participants' Comments**; and **Lessons Learned**.

### **How the Partnership and Event Began**

When Edgar Murphy was approached by Anshuman Mukerji and Adam Rose, about partnering the New Grad Leadership Program with a NC school, Edgar immediately thought of the Alamance Burlington School System (ABSS) and their recent commitment to partner with the Nortel LearniT program. This was a great opportunity for the NGLP to provide influential activities to help students realize the role education plays in their career decisions,

To make matters seem even more auspicious, the ABSS/Nortel LearniT Ambassador, Paul Grooms, happened to run into Murphy minutes later only to have Mukerji also come by while they were still discussing the opportunity. The three of them immediately set off on actions to make this happen.

It did not take only a few days to arrange a meeting with Graham Middle School's Assistant Principal, Ronald Villines, and get his enthusiastic response that both he and the Principal, Teresa Faucette, were both more than ready to have Nortel representatives present to some of the eight graders their personal experiences in making career and educational decisions.

To Murphy's, Mukerji's, Rose's and Grooms' surprise, the Graham Middle School responded to the the initial offer to spend an hour or so to present to some eight graders with a much larger agenda. They felt the need was important enough that they requested Nortel spend an entire day and present to the entire eight grade class (~240 Students). "I've arranged these events before but this is a first. We have never had a school show this level of interest by having an entire grade level participate in this kind of event," said Murphy.

Mukerji and Rose were able to quickly get enough volunteers to take care of the challenge, so on April 4, 2008, sixteen Nortel employees organized sessions for morning and afternoon sessions for small groups of eighth graders about their experiences in middle, high school and college and how they made decisions, and dealt with various career impacting/influential areas ranging from family issues to how they selected schools and course material.

The event was set up to have 4 groups of ~ 64 students come in, spend ~ 1 hour getting introduced to the volunteers and then breaking out into groups of 8 students with a volunteer for some one-on-one conversation. Ron Villines met with the students the day before in order to help them prepare questions to ask during the meeting.

Once the groups got started, the students quickly began to ask very candid questions...many were very serious, but laced with some humor and laughter.

Hector Rosado, a Nortel Customer Service Account Manager for C&W/TSTT Caribbean Operations and a volunteer said "I received one question, that really made me think. One young man, asked me, '*Have you ever thought about dropping out?*'. This reminded me of all the challenges I faced at his age and during my High School years. I wondered what difficulties this new generation will face and if we as responsible parents, adults, teacher, or role models were ready or equipped to deal with their difficulties."

The session was such a big hit with the students, teachers and administration. Assistant Principal Villines had to call a stop to the Q&A session several times so the next group of students could begin their sessions with the Nortel volunteers. He also stated that he is already planning to have Nortel back again next year.

Grooms said that the next step at the Graham Middle School is to schedule LearnIT training with a group of 10 science and math teachers on the Nortel LearnIT platform and how to integrate 21<sup>st</sup> century technology into the curriculum. This is tentatively scheduled to take place in late April early May.

## **Organizers' Comments**

Below are incorporated some Nortel Organizer and Graham Middle School Administration comments (that also appear in the web story).

- The chance to impact the community is a privilege, and on Friday, April 4th, Nortel volunteers were able to speak to over 200 8th grader students at Graham Middle School. These volunteers represented all the diversity councils within Nortel, as well as several new grad members. With diversity and personal experience under their belts, the Nortel LearnIT Ambassadors proceeded to share some of their background and life experiences with the students, echoing one important fact: there is no substitution for a college education and having higher education opens a multitude of doors. The event was truly a success as not only did the students gain new perspectives to succeed, but so did the Nortel team. After the event, the volunteers were brimming with their personal reflections and how they truly enjoyed the experience to share some of their life events. This also gave the Nortel team a chance to find out a little something about each other that they did not know before. Childhood hardships, difficult decisions, and bumps in the road were exposed, but along with their respective success stories and how challenges were overcome. -- Anshuman Mukerji, New Grad Program
- "The Career Bytes event was a deeply rewarding experience for all of the people involved, from the students to the teachers and volunteers. It was great seeing the students start to comprehend why their coursework really matters in developing them for success in the business world."
- "As I talked with the students, I could see where the light bulb just clicked on for some of them and they began to understand why they needed to make an effort in school. It is very rewarding to be able to see that you are making an impact in someone's life." -- Adam Rose, New Grad Program

**Participants' Comments**

## **Lessons Learned**

### **What Worked Well at Graham Middle School?**

- 1) The “School Visit Event Checklist” timeline and steps worked well in planning the event.
- 2) The assistant principal and teachers prepared the students the day before the event by assigning initial questions for the students to ask and by having the assistant principal tell his own story of how his educational choices affected where he is today.
- 3) Having a panel discussion, including all of the volunteers, works well in showing the students the diverse backgrounds of the volunteers.
- 4) In the panel discussion, most of the volunteers shared their personal story of where they came from and what impacted them the most in getting them to where they are today. The personal stories were very powerful in building the relationship with the students and understanding the different backgrounds of the volunteers.
- 5) After the panel discussion, small group discussions involving 1-2 volunteers greatly enhances dialog with the students, who are more hesitant to ask questions in the larger group panel discussions.

### **What Minor Improvements Can Improve Future Events?**

- 1) Ensure that there is a note in the checklist about working with the teaching staff to pair presenters with students with special needs (i.e., Non-English Languages).
- 2) Adding the event to Angel Points should be included in the planning document so that it can be used as a resource for the organizers.