

Mayor's internship program hits record participation

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Hopewell High School junior Jaylon Alexander is an engineering fiend. He loves his classes in the school's Academy of Engineering.

He takes apart pens when he's bored in class and pieces them together to make them different and better. Sometimes he uses the springs to make toy motorcycles go faster. He looks under the hoods of cars whenever he can.

When he visits Discovery Place, he beelines to the Explore More Stuff lab, and this summer he will get the chance to actually work there, helping visitors experiment with energy and matter. Jaylon is one of 317 area high school-

ers who will have internships sponsored by the Mayor's Youth Employment Program. Starting Monday, a record-breaking number of rising high school juniors and seniors will spend eight weeks gaining work experience in more than 70 local businesses, nonprofits and government offices — and they're all getting paid.

The program, founded in 1986, has seen participation grow dramatically — up 70% since 2006, when 40 students landed internships.

Charlotte Mayor Anthony Foxx on Monday helped kick off the summer internship season for the program at a luncheon for interns and their employers at Time Warner Cable Arena. Foxx told students their summer experience will

help them "gain an understanding of what you need to do and what you want to do to have a great career path in the future."

Program manager



Foxx

Dawn Hill says she and Foxx called on the chief executives of companies and asked them to provide internship positions. The program tries to target growing industries, such as health care and energy.

Hill says the program is good for businesses as well as students.

"They're not just getting an extra set of hands," she says. "They get to groom our

future work force."

Jaylon says he loves Discovery Place but never thought he would work there. He says he's excited about his summer job. "I want to find out what engineers do, outside the classroom," he says.

He found out about the summer internship program through his participation in the ACE club — for architecture, construction and engineering — at Hopewell.

Organizations such as the engineering club help recruit students into the Mayor's Youth Employment Program. Teachers and school staffers can encourage students to apply, based on their interests. Applicants write an essay about why they want to participate. Once selected, interns spend time after school in training sessions, where they learn about job skills such as financial literacy and customer service.

The Bank of America Charitable Foundation donated \$100,000 to the program to fund the salaries of 68 interns working at nonprofit organizations. The gift enables nonprofits to participate, when otherwise they may be unable to pay interns.

Charles Bowman, president of Bank of America Corp.'s North Carolina and Charlotte market, also spoke at the luncheon. He noted the high unemployment rate among 16- to 19-year-olds — about 22% as of May.

"Summer jobs provide more than a paycheck to young people," he says. "Connecting these outstanding young people to work experience helps them gain additional skills and build their network as they develop further as leaders."

The program is part of a larger push for youth employment in Charlotte. An advisory council to the city's Workforce Development Board, called Youth Works, also is addressing the issue as part of the Charlotte Works program.



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