American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

On the Job, In the Classroom

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School may be out for the summer, but several American Airlines IT team members are already working on lesson plans for the next school year.

As part of the airline's partnership with W. H. Adamson High School in Dallas, IT team members are working with the school to develop a software development and computer support track for students.

"We can tailor the curriculum and modernize it," said Alex Zekhulin, an IT project lead. "We're bringing in our equipment, our terminals and kiosks and having them learn how to fix it or program it."

Throughout the inaugural year of the program, American team members visited Adamson every other Friday, teaching coding lessons, bringing in a jet engine blade and discussing artificial intelligence.

"It's really trying to teach them through interactive activities and show them how a career in IT is fun and a career at American Airlines can be fun as well," said Toshika Robinson, an IT business systems analyst. "It's all of us coming together to impart the knowledge we have, not just of the airline industry and our love of travel, but also of our love of IT."

During one session this year, American team members had the students follow a typical customer's journey, looking at each touchpoint a customer makes when taking a flight. It something most of these students haven't experienced before.

"We printed boarding passes with their real names on it and they were floored because for a lot of them that was the first time they had ever seen a boarding pass," Draper said, noting that the power of that moment has stayed with her. "I like to engage kids that are hiding in the shadows."

Most of the students, who live in Dallas' Oak Cliff neighborhood, have not traveled on an airplane or knew little about American prior to enrolling in the early collegiate program at Adamson.

"At first, I thought American was just about flying airplanes, but there is so much technology that goes into an airline," said ninth grader Estefano Dominguez.

In addition to installing American's equipment in a classroom during the summer, about 20 IT team members have moved their office into the old choir and band rooms at the school.

By allowing students to watch and interact with IT team members as they work on coding projects, they hope to inspire students to think about careers in IT or at American, said Rawnda Draper, an American Agile Coach and team lead, who has her office at the high school.

Eventually, the students will work side by side with American's developers on projects as part of a practicum.

"What American Airlines and DISD and Adamson are doing is to provide these kids the wherewithal to get jobs in the industry," said DISD workforce coordinator Joseph Gonzales.

Last month, American was recognized by the Dallas Independent School District for its work at Adamson, receiving the first Succeeding Together Industry Partner Award.

The high school students, who just finished their freshman year, will earn an associate degree at the same time they earn their high school diploma.

For Zekhulin, inspiring the students to pursue a career in IT or aviation also inspires him.

"If you get that one spark, you never know what that kid will grow up to be," he said. "That's what drives me and that's why I like to do this."

About 20 American team members have their offices in select rooms at W.H. Adamson High School.

A small group of students were invited to Hack Wars V where Patrick Morin showed them how American developers work to solve an airline issue with a technology solution in 24 hours.

Abby Stickler, Shirley Addison, Rawnda Draper, Uriel Zarco, Alex Uria and Ankaiah Dama were a few of the American IT team members who volunteered to host educational sessions with the students.