

## Professionals busy, but find a way to help

### E-mail facilitates mentoring

Want to help a student, but short on time? Try eMentors, a program that pairs students with professionals who mentor them through weekly e-mails.

The program aims to reinforce the skills and lessons teens need to learn before entering the workforce. It allows busy professionals the opportunity to mentor without a huge time commitment.

BestPrep, an organization that sponsors the programs to improve students' business, career and financial literacy skills, runs eMentors, which began seven years ago. More than 1,900 students will be matched up this school year, with mentors from companies like General Mills, Ecolab, Medtronic and Travelers.

"We want students to understand that what they're learning in the classroom will apply to their career," said Bonnie Vagasky, vice president of special projects at BestPrep.

The program was a perfect fit for O.J. Magnan, who works in human resources at Deloitte, a financial services company in Minneapolis. The mother of two wanted to do some type of volunteer work, but didn't have a lot of time.

"My days and nights are pretty busy, but I wanted to volunteer in some way," Magnan said. "I absolutely think it was a rewarding experience."

Valerie Bradt, a business teacher at Park High School in Cottage Grove, decided the program sounded like a good fit for students in her business internship class. Teens go to school for half the day and then work at an area business the remainder of the day.



Charles Xeroteris, left, who works in the payroll department at Deluxe Corp. in Shoreview, gets to know Roseville student Dustin Kernan, the teen he is working with in the eMentors program. Students visit their mentor's workplace to get a feel for how their business works.

Bradt picked a weekly topic for the students to discuss with their mentor via e-mail, such as finding the right college, managing their time or proper e-mail etiquette. Students and mentors have one face-to-face meeting at the mentor's business where they have lunch and get a tour.

"It wasn't just about getting them ready for college, but getting them ready for life after post-secondary," Bradt said. "The ultimate goal isn't college. It's about finding a job you're happy with."

"It was just a really valuable experience and I think the students got a lot out of it," she said.

Derek Glazier agrees. The 18-year-old senior at Park learned where his mentor went to school and what jobs she had before coming to Deloitte. Glazier also quizzed her on what she does on a day-to-day basis. He particularly liked the visit to Deloitte, where he got a first-hand look at how

the business works.

Glazier is attending California State University in Long Beach this fall to pursue a degree in business administration and is glad he participated in eMentors.

"It was very beneficial for me," he said. "I hope more businesses get involved in the program." That's exactly the goal – to arm students with the information and skills they need to successfully enter the workforce.

"I think all the information, regardless of what career they choose, will go a long way," Magnan said.

"They hear this from their parents and their teachers," Vagasky said. "But this is another voice that's coming at them and it really reinforces the message."