NEARLY 1,000 STUDENTS, FOUR YOUTH LEADERS AND A VERY FULL BOEING CENTER

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Hundreds of middle and high school students from across Bexar County recently filled the Boeing Center at Tech Port for the Future Ready Youth Summit, the main event of the annual Future Ready Week — a countywide series of college, career and wellness events for Bexar County youth.

The event not only served young people; it was organized by them too.

“The goal for today is for these students to meet new people, learn some skills, and let them know all of these resources are available to them,” said Hildie Villagomez, a Lutheran High School student who managed exhibitors, school registrations, the waitlist and the layout of the event.

Hildie was one of four youth leaders who organized the day-long event. She was joined by Danielle Adkins, a recent Prairie View A&M University graduate and UP Partnership Fellow, who served as project manager; Sophie Cimino, who is home-schooled and led the marketing effort; and Sophia Camacho, a senior at CAST Tech High School, who coordinated the 15 partner events held at schools and community sites across the county during the week.

Activities on Tuesday were spread across the Boeing Center. In one corner of the AREA 21 museum space, a mentor showed students how to write a resume and a professional email. A few tables away, leaders from local organization Students of Service, which prepares young people for life after high school, taught CPR. Nearby,

students from CAST STEM High School worked on the marshmallow challenge: build the tallest freestanding structure they could from a short list of materials, including marshmallows.

“A lot of my students are part of our ACE mentoring group, which is architecture, construction and engineering, so this is perfect for them,” said Aidan Apperley, an English teacher at CAST STEM.

Students also ran demonstrations of their own. Andrew Boutte, a junior at TMI Episcopal, showed groups of students how 3D printers build objects one layer at a time, and handed out 3D printed fidget toy kits that students could build at home. Across the arena, a student from CAST Tech High School, wearing a yellow vest that read “FAA Licensed Commercial Drone Pilot,” explained that school's drone program.

The summit was built around four pillars. Students explored access to college and careers, practiced using their voice in mock interviews, focused on wellness with yoga and habit trackers, and joined a career activity hosted by Boeing, the Port's largest employer.

Future Ready Week, led by UP Partnership, aims to connect young people and families with college, career and community resources, with the ultimate goal of increasing the percentage of high school graduates who pursue any type of secondary education.

“Being future ready doesn’t mean you have every step of your life figured out,” Cathy Jones, CEO of UP Partnership, told the students at the event's halfway mark. “It means you have the information, the experiences, the caring adults and the support you need to make informed decisions about what comes next.”

Adkins credited the team’s mentors, including Dr. Cliff Zintgraff and Josh Martinez of the San Antonio Museum of Science and Technology (SAMSAT); Dr. Carol Luckhardt Redfield, a computer science professor at St. Mary's University, and Dr. Stephanie Garcia of Intercultural Development Research Association and UP Partnership.

“They guided us so we could put on an event at this scale,” she said.

Successfully doing so, said Villagomez, "taught me that we're capable of more than we think, and I hope the students learned that, too, as they went through the stations."