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## Schools help students get down to business

By **CHRISSY KADLECK**

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Members of Magnificat High School's business club attend a Veale event at Ideastream.

Best known as the "granola man" around the University School campus, eighth-grader William Willoughby caught the entrepreneurial bug hawking his Hola Granola mix at school events and farmers markets.

Last month, Willoughby sold out of hundreds of dollars of his secret-ingredient granola in less than three hours manning a booth through the Youth Entrepreneur Market, a new program at Shaker Square & Crocker Park North Union Farmers Markets. The program is funded by The Burton D. Morgan Foundation and The Veale Foundation, and it's designed for youngsters with startups.

"He had samples and he was really good at approaching the customer and pitching them about the quality of ingredients and why they should buy from him," said Greg Malkin, founder and director of University School's Entrepreneurship Institute. Willoughby was one of more than 50 boys who learned the basics of running a business through the University School Entrepreneur Club.

"In talking to his parents, it has been a transformational experience for their son," Malkin said. "They have seen the light bulb click on for him. He is expanding his product line to granola bars and he has

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been spectacularly successful.”

Willoughby is not alone. Hundreds of high school and middle school students at the region's prep and parochial schools are embracing entrepreneurial programming and education. They are mastering concepts of finance, economics and marketing. They are developing business plans for real, viable businesses they can start for less than \$1,000. In some cases, they are even managing successful businesses well before they earn their high school diploma.

It's all a part of a growing trend of teaching entrepreneurship — and all its applicable life skills such as ownership, self-confidence and overcoming failure — to younger students and allowing them to immerse themselves in experiential programs that take them out of the classroom and away from traditional schooling.

Take Hawken School, which this year conducted its three-credit semester program in entrepreneurship. The rigorous curriculum spans four months and involves students working in groups to solve keep-you-up-at-night problems for real entrepreneurs and create their own business models that they present Shark Tank-style to a panel of investors.

“The students cover a huge amount of terrain in real knowledge and develop soft and hard skills that are critical,” said Doris Korda, associate head of school and director of entrepreneurial studies at Hawken School. Korda has gained national attention for developing her curriculum and will be teaching an educators workshop this summer.

“Hawken is a very progressive school and we're focused on doing school better,” she said. “But in many cases we're still approaching high school education the same way we did in the 1940 and 1950s when it was a completely different world. The real world needs skills like creativity and problem solving skills, communication skills and the ability to face complete uncertainty and constant change.”

### Getting an early start

Nine private Greater Cleveland schools participate in the Veale Youth Entrepreneurship Forum, an initiative that began in 2012 with a mission to provide exceptional education and real-world experiences in entrepreneurship, said Cynthia L. Bailie, executive director of The Veale Foundation.

“We fulfill that mission by running an annual business plan competition among the nine schools, supporting a Young Entrepreneur Market where student-run businesses can gain experience selling their products directly to customers, supporting the expansion of entrepreneurship classes and clubs on Forum school campuses, introducing students to the robust entrepreneurial ecosystem in Northeast Ohio, and facilitating the sharing of knowledge among Forum members about what works in entrepreneurship education,” Bailie said in an email.

During the 2013-2014 school year, nearly 1,000 students were engaged in some aspect of the forum program from the following participating schools: Beaumont High School, Benedictine High School, Gilmour Academy, Hathaway Brown School, Laurel School, Magnificat High School, Saint Ignatius High School, University School and Montessori High School at University Circle.

“There is literally nothing like it in the world,” said Malkin, who was selected by the foundation to lead the forum. “You've got private schools coming together focused on entrepreneurship education and teachers are coming together to share best practices.”

The forum began with eight schools — Montessori High School was added the most recent school year — that had high interest in expanding entrepreneurship education for their students and who were current grantees of the foundation started by Tinkham Veale, II, a lifelong, serial entrepreneur. Each school receives an annual \$10,000 grant.

At University School, more than 50% of the high school is involved in some aspect of entrepreneurship studies and 15 percent of the student body “majors” in business.

“We have a very robust program that starts in third grade,” Malkin said. “One of the things that we've

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seen is students who don't have success in schools who are not A students, these entrepreneurial studies give them a reason to come to school and a reason to study. They find relevance with what they are learning, they become more engaged in school and their GPA rises.”

### **Vital skills**

The entrepreneurship program is pass fail at Hathaway Brown's Center for Business & Finance, said director Kevin Purpura.

“Our girls come into the program with little to no understanding of any the topics we're going to talk about and I wanted it to be not graded. I wanted it to be a process,” Purpura said.

The program has two components: traditional classroom instruction and experiential learning through business plan development and competition.

“The classroom instruction is really business school-like. We look at topics such as leadership, management, accounting, finance, economics, strategy and marketing,” he said.

“What I'm finding is more and more of our girls are considering finance or accounting or economics at the college level than ever before.”

Purpura said when Hathaway Brown began experimenting with this type of programming five years ago, there was a tremendous amount of interest from students, parents and board members.

“In my mind, we're not trying to push girls into business or push girls into becoming an entrepreneur, but we also know that these skills are vital if they are going to be successful in whatever they are doing,” he said.

### **Their world has changed**

At Magnificat in Rocky River, more than 200 girls studied entrepreneurial concepts and applied them to student-based projects in economics and entrepreneurship classes, said Dottie Perez, business technology teacher and moderator of the Magnificat Business Club, which is heavily involved with the entrepreneurship programs.

“We've been focusing on entrepreneurship for five years and the two years under the Veale program has allowed us to really explode the program,” Perez said.

Forty-five girls worked together to operate The Blue Streak Bistro, a completely student-run business that is open after school every Tuesday and Thursday. The girls bake and sell cookies, popcorn and Mitchell's ice cream that they buy at wholesale from co-owner Mike Mitchell, a big supporter and local mentor to the club.

Connecting with the city's vast network of entrepreneurs and resources has had another notable effect on her students, said Korda of Hawken.

“It's been really exciting to see how you can bring many different parts of the Cleveland community into working together as part of the program, she said.

“We have people from universities, business accelerators, venture capitalists, and others throughout Cleveland who are incorporated into some aspects of the class and that's been really great for the kids and it completely alters their world view,” Korda said.

“I've had kids come out of our program saying I never before this thought I would want to stay in Cleveland after college, but it's a great city.”



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