

TheCypressTimes

PROJECT GRAD HOUSTON DEVELOPS MENTORING PROGRAM FOR FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE-GOING STUDENTS

Published 01/22/2011 - 10:07 a.m. CST

"Project GRAD Houston Hosts First iMentor Meet-and-Greet with Apache Corporation"

HOUSTON ISD - Most of us can think of a person, a mentor, who taught us something new, offered advice, challenged us, or simply expressed an interest in what we were doing with our lives. With that concept in mind, Project GRAD Houston has launched the implementation of its *iMentor for College Success* program. The iMentor program is designed to increase college persistence rates and to help first generation college freshmen access academic, career, and personal resources via a college-degreed professional.



GRAD, with the support of Apache Corporation, held the first official event, a luncheon where 25 Apache Corporation volunteer iMentors were introduced to their mentees at Apache Corporation headquarters. Apache President Roger Plank welcomed Team Apache and GRAD scholars and reinforced the importance of education as well as having a network of support. "Apache volunteers are creating new possibilities for our scholars. Every year we have over 500 new college freshmen, most of whom are among the first generation in their families to attend college. These mentors will help them successfully navigate the new world of higher education," said GRAD Executive Director Ann B. Stiles. Adding to the excitement of the day was the presentation of new laptops for all students, compliments of Walmart.

The mentor/mentee relationship is conducted through weekly emails as an added component of Project GRAD's \$4,000 college scholarship for economically disadvantaged students. Students are all GRAD scholars from one of GRAD's five partnering Houston Independent School District (HISD) high schools: Davis, Sam Houston, Reagan, Wheatley and Yates.

First generation college student Gabriela, a freshman at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas, says, "I love the fact that I will have a personal mentor, someone I can talk to whenever I am having difficulties that relate to school... I think that this program will benefit me in many ways and I look forward to getting close with my mentor."

Gabriela's mother states: "This program puts my daughter in contact with a mentor who can add support to her education. Her mentor has gone through college experiences and she can relate her experiences to my daughter, who is a first generation college student."

Gabriela's mentor Christy Reaves says, "I am honored to share in the journey of a first-year college student. Gabriela is a very passionate young lady, and I can't wait to see what the future has in store for her. The iMentor program offers a meaningful opportunity to give back to the community that is uniquely accessible to those with busy schedules. I am proud that Apache, my employer, has joined in the program's efforts."

Project GRAD works with five high school feeder patterns, which serve 64 schools and approximately 44,000 students. Since it was founded in 1994, GRAD has awarded \$20 million in college scholarships to approximately 5,000 HISD students. For more information about Project GRAD Houston, please visit our web site at: www.projectgradhouston.org or call 832-325-0467.