

Hispanic students learn STEM, win scholarships at Hispanic Youth Leadership Summit



By Nicole Foy

BOISE — Approximately 780 junior and senior high school students from nearly 50 schools across Idaho gathered for the 11th annual Hispanic Youth Leadership Summit at Boise State on Monday.

About 85 seniors, including several from Canyon County high schools, received nearly \$400,000 in scholarship money offered exclusively to summit attendees.

“I’m very excited to win, when there were so many who applied,” said Eliseo Ovalle, a senior at Caldwell High School who received scholarships from the College of Western Idaho and University of Idaho.

The summit, hosted in BSU’s student union, is the largest gathering of Hispanics in the state of Idaho, according to the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs. Students from as far as Coeur d’Alene drive to attend and compete for scholarships.

“We were going to cap it at 700 this year, but we didn’t have the heart to tell kids no,” said Juan Saldaña, the community resource development specialist at the commission. “Even still, we had 100 kids left on the waiting list.”

During Monday’s summit, students interviewed with representatives from nearby colleges and universities, visited career and internship booths or attend workshops. The American Civil Liberties

Union held workshops on civic engagement and voting rights while the Boise Police Department addressed substance abuse and binge drinking, a key problem among youth in the Treasure Valley. The nonprofit Second Chance Grace set up a mobile security cell, a replica of presenter Peter Vasquez's prison cell, to help students see one of the outcomes of substance abuse.

STEM workshops hosted by the Idaho National Laboratory, the Meridian Library District, BSU's Society of Professional Hispanic Engineers and the Micron Foundation introduced students to the basics of things like 3-D printing, SCRATCH programming and coding.

"There were a handful of students who said that they had not done any programming before, but were beginning to understand the concept of things like loops, and just making things do what they want them to do," said Sergio Barrera, a Micron data scientist volunteering in the SCRATCH Programming workshop.

Barrera attended Caldwell High School and enjoys volunteering in similar programming workshops around the Boise area, showing students that they can have opportunities in computer programming.

"I like to see when the kids figure something out and break this complex problem," Barrera said. "Their eyes light up, and they know they've solved something."

Although the summit primarily focuses on STEM careers, Saldaña said that the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs also hopes attendees will be inspired by the other groups present and run for public office, pursue careers in media or otherwise be vocal leaders in their communities.

"The majority of the (Hispanic) population in Idaho is 19 years or younger," Saldaña said. "They are going to be our workforce of tomorrow, our leaders of tomorrow. We need to make sure that they are well-educated and well-versed in a lot of stuff."