

Tolar Students Among Youngest in State to Earn IT Certification

Can you imagine being in middle school and having the technical skills to land a great job in the workforce immediately?

That's the reality for some WR Tolar Middle School students who have earned IT certifications under a new program in Florida. One hundred seventh and eighth graders completed the requirements to be recognized as a Microsoft Office Specialist for Office Word, PowerPoint and Outlook.

State and business leaders gathered in Tallahassee to recognize some of the first middle school students in Florida to earn IT certifications, such as from Microsoft and Adobe, under a new state law.

The law requires all school districts to create at least one career academy, called a CAPE Academy, at a middle school in each district.

Fifteen districts, including Liberty County, have established their programs ahead of schedule.

These middle schoolers are the youngest students ever to earn certification from technology leader Certiport. Alan Raymond's work with Certiport has taken him to 47 countries so he says he's seen the competition around the world.

Raymond calls the students trailblazers.

"As I travel around, there's many universities in the Middle East that use the same certifications that you all just received as entrance exams for post-graduate degrees. You're in middle school in the U.S. in Florida and if you are in the Middle East this certification you have now would get you admittance into a post-graduate degree in several countries in the Middle East."

"What you guys did is really, really cool. You don't realize it but it is. And what you're doing is preparing yourselves for change. The world is changing, education is changing, careers are changing."

Sen. Don Gaetz developed the legislation to create these academies in 2007, but it was targeted for high school students. At the time, a lot of people thought IT certification for high school students would be too hard.

In 2011, the law was expanded to include a middle school academy in every district. Now the curriculum is being taught to 1,400 students in middle school CAPE Academies across Florida.