



Young entrepreneurs get real

Sunday, November 17, 2013

By: Jordan Graham



A group of entrepreneurs, armed with business plans, prototypes and mock-ups, pitched their start-ups to a panel of potential investors, and then got back to work on college applications.

High school seniors taking an entrepreneurship class at Beaver Country Day School in Chestnut Hill, presented business plans Wednesday for companies ranging from a recipe website that links with grocery delivery companies to a running-shoe sole that tells the wearer when shoes need to be replaced.

“We’re putting them in real situations. It’s so authentic,” said teacher Kevin Bau.

Students pitched their companies to a panel of “sharks,” including Michael Bronner, founder of Digitas and natural food company UNREAL, and Jeremy Levine, founder of StarStreet and a BCDS alum.

“I actually felt like I was running a small business,” said Isabel Hechavarria, who pitched Bella, her line of swimwear made from material that lets the wearer get an all-over tan.

Bronner said the students’ detailed pitches and business plans impressed him. “I’ve seen presentations from kids coming out of college, honestly, that are not as strong as these,” he said.

After the pitches, Hechavarria was approached by one of the judges about setting up a “game-changing” conversation, according to Lisa Trask, the other teacher in the class.

“This is definitely a case of the classroom and real-world experience overlapping and transitioning, and she’ll have the support of the school to pursue this endeavour,” Trask said.

Trask would not say which entrepreneur was involved or what the talks were regarding, but during Hechavarria’s pitch and after, several of them expressed interest and said if they became involved they would seek a celebrity endorsement.

Other CEOs said they were interested in pursuing the proposals beyond the class, but said they would likely take some time before they did so.

Steve Gold, an entrepreneurship professor at Babson College who is not involved in the BCDS class, said the program will be valuable for all the students. He said skills critical to entrepreneurship, such as communication, organization and leadership, all translate to nearly every other job.

“It’s the kind of thing that benefits everybody, no matter what path these students take in life,” Gold said.

Bau said one of the main goals of the class, now in its second year, is to help students understand that they can make an impact in whatever field they go into.

“You don’t have to fit into the existing structure exactly as it is,” Bau said.

“I think it’s going to change their lives,” Bronner said.

