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## Exec shares inspiring words

By CRISTIANA LACAYO

A class of 21 Lauderdale Lakes eighth-graders carefully listened Thursday to business executive Mike Fernandez tell what he did as a teenager when his boss turned down one of his ideas.

Fernandez said he was working at a museum shop to earn money so he could attend a private school. At work, he told his manager that the museum's gift shop would benefit from selling camera flashes and dinosaur souvenirs.

He said after he was told to mind his own business, he decided to use his own paycheck to buy several souvenirs and camera flashes and demonstrate the profit the gift shop could make.

Fernandez, chief executive officer of CarePlus Health Plans Inc., a health maintenance organization, told the students at Phyl's Academy, a private prep school with campuses in New York and Lauderdale Lakes, that the anecdote is an example of how to build a successful life and career when faced with challenges and obstacles.



DONOR: Mike Fernandez wrote \$1 million check. WALTER MICHOT/HERALD STAFF

Fernandez presented a CarePlus check of \$1 million for student scholarships in Broward and Miami-Dade counties.

The money will be part of the Step Up For Students campaign, which finances scholarships in South Florida.

The money is generated by the Florida Corporate Credit Program, which allows state corporations to direct a percentage of their taxes to assist schoolchildren from low-income families.

Michael Benjamin, of the Step Up campaign, said students have the opportunity to receive a scholarship for up to \$3,500, used for tuition, books and transportation.



VOICE OF EXPERIENCE: Former Spanish television news anchorwoman Leticia Callava, now a CarePlus spokeswoman, tells her success story to Phyl's Academy students. WALTER MICHOT/HERALD STAFF

"These scholarships give the parents the choice to decide what is a better environment for their child," said Benjamin.

Eighth-grader Stephanie Smith said it's a great opportunity to have access to a scholarship program.

Smith said she liked how Fernandez and Leticia Callava, former news anchor and CarePlus spokeswoman, talked about what they had to go through to achieve what they have accomplished today.

Smith said Callava demonstrated that you should always find out what you want to do in life and keep that goal in mind at all times.

"It's inspiring to see her come from the point she was before and see where she is now," Smith said.