

Belleville Students Learn About Trade Skills, Apprenticeship Opportunities at Job Fair

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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BELLEVILLE - Students from Belleville Township High School District #201 gathered at the Center for Academic and Vocation Excellence (CAVE) for a job fair and trade show on Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023.

The students take advanced classes at the CAVE to learn vocational skills like welding, carpentry and automotive repair. The job fair allowed them to speak with union leaders and local companies who are looking to hire students after high school.

“It really gives students a good eye to really see what they’re getting involved in,” said Cydney O’Bannon with Midwest Career Source. “Rather than sitting in a classroom and reading a book on it, they get to sit in a classroom, learn, and then go do the actual work.”

Midwest Career Source is a government-funded vocational training school that allows students to shadow healthcare workers and work as apprentices while attending the school free of charge. O’Bannon added that students can get “a foot in the door” and learn about what they will be doing in their career before graduating.

Kevin Stewart noted there are many benefits to apprenticeship programs like this. As a representative of Boilermakers Local 363, Stewart has seen firsthand how many people who don’t have the means or the desire to go to college can study as an apprentice and enter the field making upwards of six figures.

“It’s a good opportunity, kind of like four years of free college, but you earn while you learn,” Stewart said. “You can make good money in the trades. All the trades have apprenticeship programs. It’s like going to college, but instead of paying to go to college, it pays you.”

The job fair allowed companies and unions to reach potential employees at the high school level. Students could learn about each field and how their education at the CAVE can help them after graduation. Representatives with TerraSource Global, which is based in Belleville, also noted the benefits of recruiting people from the community where they live.

“It’s big,” explained Derrick Totsch, safety lead with TerraSource Global. “Big for us, big for the community. It’s nice to help out kids that want to better themselves.”

For the students, the CAVE offers an alternative to the classroom and allows students to strengthen their skills before they start apprenticeships. Students can choose from a variety of classes, and they are allowed to try out different trades every semester.

A few students noted the quality of the equipment they work with in addition to the instruction. They also take a class that teaches life skills, like how to write a resume or

fill out tax forms. While not every student at the CAVE will go into a trade field, most of them agreed that the experience at the CAVE will benefit them for the rest of their lives no matter what career path they ultimately choose.

“It kind of just prepares us for day-to-day life outside of high school,” student Noah Mesiti said. “I would have that background knowledge and experience to be able to fall back into that and do that as a career if I end up liking it or needing it...We’re definitely lucky to have this.”

To learn more about T.A.K.E. and the various programs offered, visit their website. Congratulations to T.A.K.E. for this Trade Spotlight recognition from the Home Builders & Remodelers Metro East Association!