SPRING/SUMMER 2026

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Eagle's Nest Project Wisconsin 2026 Annual Sweepstakes — Win a 2015 Van's RV-12 or $50,000

Enter for a chance to win a beautifully built 2015 Van's RV-12 Light Sport Aircraft, while helping inspire and train the next generation of aviators through Eagles Nest Projects Wisconsin.

This student-built aircraft represents thousands of hours of learning, teamwork, craftsmanship, and aviation passion. Your ticket purchase directly supports high school aviation programs where students build real aircraft, learn aircraft maintenance skills, and take flight training toward becoming licensed pilots

About the Aircraft

- 2015 Van's RV-12 ULS
- Professionally supervised student-built aircraft
- Rotax 912ULS engine
- Dynon avionics suite
- Excellent training & travel aircraft
- Efficient, reliable, affordable to operate
- Limited availability: Only 8,000 tickets will be sold.

The sweepstakes ends when all tickets are sold or by September 11, 2026, at 4:00 PM CST, whichever comes first.

To enter go to enpwi.com/sweepstakes

For more about Westosha Central High School's STEM Aviation Program see page 13

Arrowhead Automotive Builds Career-Ready Technicians Through Industry-Aligned, Real-World Learning

Arrowhead Union High School District

When you step into the automotive lab at Arrowhead High School, it feels less like a classroom and more like a professional service facility. Students are diagnosing vehicles, completing inspections, documenting work orders, and rotating through defined shop roles. This authentic environment is intentional and central to the Arrowhead Automotive program.

Arrowhead Automotive is a multi-course career pathway designed to prepare students for careers in the transportation industry through hands-on learning, industry credentials, and alignment with postsecondary and workforce expectations. The program emphasizes technical skill development, professionalism, and real responsibility at every level.

A Clear, Structured Automotive Pathway

Students enter the pathway through either Consumer Automotive or Automotive Technology I, depending on their interests and goals. Consumer Automotive focuses on automotive literacy and responsible vehicle ownership. Students learn routine mainte-

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IN THIS ISSUE

Hamilton Students Gain Real-World Insight from Industry Leaders

Hamilton School District

Hamilton High School students had the opportunity to learn firsthand about civil engineering careers from representatives of two major industry organizations. The presenters' personal connections to the Hamilton School District made the impactful presentation all the more meaningful.

"Hearing directly from professionals in civil engineering and transportation really helps our students see how their classroom learning connects to the real world," explains Hamilton High School Business and Information Technology Teacher and Youth Apprenticeship Coordinator Sheila Frafjord. "This presentation offers students a window into the diverse and meaningful work happening in civil engineering. We deeply appreciate the time and support from HNTB and WTBA. They truly helped our students imagine what's possible," adds Frafjord.

"Personally, I loved hearing from real professionals in the civil engineering industry and thought it was generally awesome and informative," shares Hamilton High School Junior Jonathan Nguyen. "It was helpful because they have first-hand experience as engineers and are able to actually reveal what goes on behind the curtains."

Presenters included Mike Ernst and Josh Depies from HNTB Corporation, along with Matt Grove from Wisconsin Transportation Builders Association (WTBA). All three speakers share personal ties to the Hamilton School District, having either graduated from Hamilton High School or currently having children enrolled in district school.

"Civil engineers design and build the infrastructure that shapes our communities," says Ernst. "This initiative provides high school students the opportunity to explore civil engineering and discover the broad range of career paths within the industry. Through our relationship with Hamilton High School, HNTB is working to spark interest in the field of engineering so that together we can create a culture of growth that promotes learning, development and fosters success," adds Ernst.

Hamilton High School Sophomore Evelyn Starrett enjoyed the presentation. "It was helpful to hear from professionals because they have real world experience," explains Starrett.

"I was surprised that the planning process takes years," explains Hamilton High School Junior Samuel Schmitt who calls the presentation informative. "It's helpful to hear from these professionals about how they are looking for new people, which I think makes it easier to see this as an actual career that can begin right away after college," he adds.

HNTB is a nationally recognized civil engineering firm with offices in Milwaukee, Madison and Green Bay. The firm has played a key role in many of Wisconsin's most prominent infrastructure projects. During their visit, HNTB representatives provided students with insight into civil engineering and urban planning careers, highlighting the many pathways available in designing, improving and maintaining public infrastructure. Wisconsin Transportation Builders Association is a statewide organization representing the companies responsible for building and maintaining Wisconsin's transportation systems. WTBA shared perspectives from the construction side of large-scale transportation projects and emphasized the broad range of career opportunities available within the industry.

Hamilton High School is grateful to HNTB and WTBA for investing their time and expertise to inspire the next generation of engineers and infrastructure professionals.

www.hamilton.k12.wi.us

HNTB Visits Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, Milwaukee

Thank you to HNTB for hosting a field trip of 12 CRJ students last fall to learn more about civil engineering and design! They gave a tour of the offices and gave a presentation about many different kinds of civil engineers, talked about the college experience, and answered great questions from our students. We look forward to having HNTB engineers visit CRJ this winter to speak with students at one of our career formation days!

cristoreymilwaukee.org

Consider a Career in Road Construction

If you are a high school student or a recent high school graduate who is uncertain about your future career path, perhaps you should consider a career in road construction. Road construction is a vital industry that offers numerous benefits and opportunities.

Construction is one of the largest industries in the country. However, many people do not even consider the opportunities road construction can offer. Unlike many other career options, road construction can be very rewarding and provide a great sense of accomplishment most other careers cannot match.

It's more than a job – it's a career. Craft skills are in-demand nationwide and careers in road construction offer financial freedom through high salaries and affordable education options. Thanks to improved technology, regulations, and focus, the industry is safer than ever. A career as a craft professional is dignified and requires high skills. The industry is open and welcoming to everyone, which makes this a great career path for many people with diverse skillsets.

Why Road Construction Is Considered a Good Job

When people ask "Is being a road construction worker a good job?", the answer often comes down to a few key advantages that set the industry apart from many other fields:

- **Job security:** Demand for skilled trades continues to grow nationwide.
- **Competitive wages:** Many construction jobs pay above-average salaries.
- **Hands-on work:** Ideal for people who enjoy problem-solving and building things.
- **Career mobility:** Workers can start in general labor and move into specialized trades or leadership.
- **Pathways to Entry:** Most jobs do not require a college degree to start, but there are plenty of positions where a degree can make a difference and don't forget the apprenticeship options!
- **Major infrastructure investments:** Road construction and public projects offer long-term stability.

Demand for Skilled Workers

The construction industry, especially roadwork, is looking for skilled workers. With tons of infrastructure projects popping up, there's a big need for people who are trained and ready to dive into these jobs.

- **Job Security:** Road construction jobs play a key role in building our infrastructure, which means they're not likely to be outsourced or replaced by machines. This leads to more stable jobs.
- **Growth Opportunities:** With more and more projects popping up, there are plenty of chances to grow your career and move up the ladder.

Competitive Salaries and Benefits

One of the most popular aspects of a career in road construction is the high starting salary that often comes with it. People working in this field are often paid well for their hard work and continue to make more as they gain experience.

- **Good Starting Pay:** Entry-level positions offer competitive wages that are higher than those in many other industries.
- **Benefits Packages:** Many employers offer comprehensive benefits, including health insurance, retirement plans, and paid time off.

Hands-On Work Environment

Road construction is a great choice if you enjoy working with your hands and being outdoors.

- **Active Lifestyle:** Road construction involves physical activity, which can be beneficial for your health and well-being.
- **Varied Tasks:** From operating machinery to working on-site preparation, keeps the job interesting and engaging.

Key Drivers of Career Mobility in Road Construction

A common trajectory for upward mobility often starts with 3–5 years of experience as a laborer or operator, followed by advancement into a supervisory role within 5–10 years.

- **Apprenticeships:** Many unions and companies provide training programs that allow workers to gain certifications while earning a salary, facilitating rapid advancement.
- **Technology Adoption:** As road construction becomes more high-tech (e.g., GPS-guided machines), operators who learn new technology can advance to higher-paying, more technical roles.
- **High Demand/Retirement Wave:** A "silver tsunami" of retirements and increased federal investment in infrastructure means there is a high demand for skilled laborers to move into foreman and supervisory positions.

Pathways to Entry

- **Entry-Level Positions:** Start as a general laborer, traffic flagger, or helper to gain on-site experience, which often leads to operating machinery.
- **Apprenticeships:** Participate in 3-5 year programs that provide paid, on-the-job training alongside classroom instruction.
- **Training Programs:** Utilize free or low-cost programs like Wisconsin DOT's HCST program (120-hour course) to learn basic safety, tool, and road construction skills.
- **Certifications:** Obtain an OSHA 10-hour safety certification to show employers you understand site safety.
- **Education:** Pursue civil engineering or construction management degrees for technical or managerial roles.

Major infrastructure investments — Key Job Creation Impacts

Examples include roads, highways, and bridges, as well as the assets required to make them operational such as transit buses, vehicles, and oil refineries. Technical systems such as networking equipment and cabling are considered hard infrastructure and provide a critical function to support business operations.

- **Job Stability:** Road construction and public projects offer long-term stability.
- **Diverse Roles:** Beyond construction workers, these investments demand engineers, project managers, site supervisors, and heavy equipment operators.
- **Multiplier Effect:** Job creation extends beyond the immediate site to related sectors like supply chain, logistics, and material manufacturing.
- **Long-term Economic Boost:** Improved infrastructure (roads, broadband, power grids) reduces business costs, increasing efficiency and attracting further private investment.

Learning and Development Opportunities

The road construction industry really cares about workforce development, providing a ton opportunities for learning and professional growth.

- **On-the-Job Training:** Gain practical experience and skills while you work.
- **Certifications and Education:** Many employers support continuing education and professional certifications that can enhance your career.

Contribution to Community and Society

Working in road construction gives you the opportunity to make a REAL difference in your community. The roads, bridges, and highways you help build are essential for the functioning of society.

- **Public Service:** Your work directly benefits the public by improving infrastructure and transportation.
- **Pride in Work:** There's a unique satisfaction in knowing that you've helped build something people rely on daily.

How to Get Started

If you're interested in pursuing a career in road construction, here are some steps to get started:

- **Explore Educational Programs:** Look for high school programs, community college courses, or apprenticeships that offer training in civil construction.
- **Gain Experience:** Seek internships or part-time jobs in the construction field to gain hands-on experience.
- **Get Certified:** Consider obtaining certifications that are recognized in the industry, such as OSHA safety certification or equipment operation licenses.
- **Network:** Connect with professionals in the industry through school programs, job fairs, and online platforms.

A career in road construction offers a blend of stability, good pay, hands-on work, and the chance to make a real impact on your community.

Skill Improvement and Apprenticeship Fund

Operating Engineers 139

In today's rapidly evolving construction industry, skilled labor is more essential than ever. Recognizing this demand, our apprenticeship program has actively engaged with the Highway Construction Skills Training Program to provide comprehensive training and development opportunities for the next generation of construction workers. This partnership has not only enhanced our apprenticeship offerings but has also contributed significantly to the infrastructure development of our communities.

Our involvement in the Highway Construction Skills Training Program started with a shared vision: to bridge the gap between educational training and real-world application in the highway construction sector. By collaborating on curriculum development and training sessions, we've ensured that our apprentices receive industry-relevant skills that are crucial for success in construction jobs, particularly in highway projects.

The training program offers a comprehensive approach that includes classroom instruction and hands-on experience. This format enables apprentices to learn essential concepts such as project safety, equipment operation, materials handling, and construction techniques. By directly participating in real highway projects, apprentices can apply their skills in practical settings, solidifying their understanding and building confidence.

One of the striking features of our involvement has been the emphasis on safety training. Given the potentially hazardous conditions involved in highway construction, we prioritize equipping apprentices with the knowledge and tools to work safely. The program integrates comprehensive safety protocols into every aspect of training, ensuring our apprentices value safety as a culture, not just a requirement.

Moreover, the collaborative nature of the apprenticeship program fosters an environment of mentorship. Experienced professionals from the Highway Construction Skills Training Program serve as trainers and mentors, guiding apprentices through challenges and sharing invaluable insights from their own careers. This mentorship not only enriches the training experience but also helps apprentices build professional networks and develop crucial soft skills like teamwork and communication.

Community outreach is another significant aspect of our apprenticeship program's involvement with the training initiative. We actively participate in local career events aimed at raising awareness about career opportunities in the construction industry. By engaging with schools and community organizations, we promote the importance of highway infrastructure and inspire young individuals to consider apprenticeship as a viable and rewarding career path.

As our apprenticeship program continues to evolve, we remain committed to helping our apprentices succeed in their careers while addressing the skilled labor shortage in highway construction. The ongoing collaboration with the Highway Construction Skills Training Program enhances our ability to provide participants with the training, experience, and support they need to thrive in a critical industry.

In conclusion, our apprenticeship program's involvement with the Highway Construction Skills Training Program represents a powerful partnership focused on fostering skilled labor for the future. Together, we are building not only the infrastructure of our roads but also the future of our workforce — one apprentice at a time. We are excited about the impact this collaboration will continue to have on our apprentices, our communities, and the construction industry as a whole.

Kromrey Middle School's "Trade Up" Event Showcases Skilled Trade Careers

Carrie Brooker
Public Relations Specialist
Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District

Seventh graders at Kromrey Middle School got a sneak peek of careers in the trades at the school's Trade Up event on Feb. 17.

Technical education teacher Dan Biddick organized the event to coincide with a day-long academic and career planning (ACP) experience for seventh graders to learn from skilled trades professionals and employers.

He invited plumbers, electricians and operating engineers, including IUOE Local 139 – Wisconsin Operating Engineers, who run heavy machinery such as cranes and excavators to talk with students. Representatives from two construction companies also presented, discussing careers at their companies such as mechanical contractors and construction jobs.

The presenters highlighted education and training requirements, salary ranges, work environments, and what their jobs entail. They also discussed apprenticeships and the requirements for obtaining journeyman licenses.

Students asked presenters questions about what they do, how much they earn, and how to start training.

"Honestly, all the careers were really interesting to me because you can keep developing your skills, and you can keep advancing onto one specification in your career, " seventh grader Harshitha Manikandan told WKOW 27 News, which covered the event.

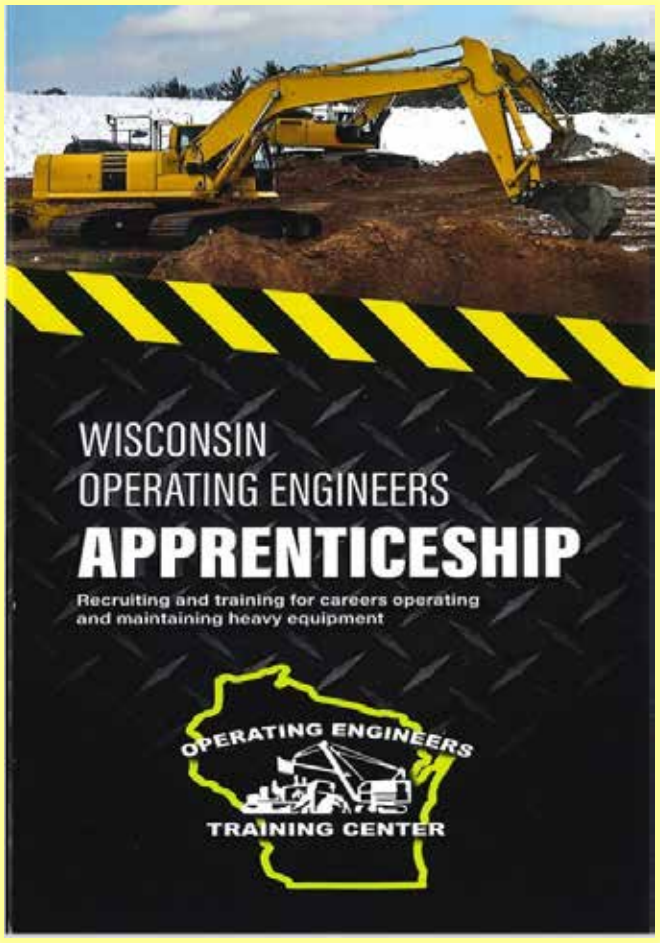
In addition to hearing from professionals, the event's curriculum included opportunities for students to learn about different types of post-secondary education and post-high school pathways. Students also received a preview of Middleton High School's Youth Apprenticeship program.

WMTV 15 News also covered the event. Kromrey Middle School Associate Principal and ACP coordinator Joanna Cree told WMTV 15 News the event aimed to broaden students' perspectives about their options after high school.

"The message we're emphasizing is that not everyone wants to go to a four-year college, and that's completely okay," Cree said. "The skilled trades offer great pay, job security and the chance to see something you built with your own hands."

www.mcpasd.k12.wi.us

BUILD A CAREER WORKING WITH HEAVY EQUIPMENT



WHAT IS AN OPERATING ENGINEER??

OPERATING ENGINEERS are the operators of what is generally referred to as HEAVY EQUIPMENT: Cranes, dozers, scrapers, loaders, motor graders, tractor loader back-hoes, excavators, rollers pavers, concrete plants and mixers, compressors, pumps and much more.

GREAT WAGES & BENEFITS

HOW DO I BECOME AN APPRENTICE?

YOU MUST ATTEND one of our Information Sessions held at the Coloma Training Center located at W11584 State Rd 21, Coloma WI. Please call (715) 228-4911 to register.

Applicants are required to arrive by 8:45 a.m. There will be no entry after 9 a.m.

Contact us with any questions

Phone 715-228-4911

Email info@139training.org

www.139training.org

WISCONSIN OPERATING ENGINEERS
W11584 STATE ROAD 21
COLOMA WI 54930

OPERATING ENGINEERS TRAINING CENTER

STATE OF THE ART TRAINING CENTER

Wisconsin DOT's Highway Construction Skills Training Program Offers Path To Career In Road Construction Industry

Highway and bridge construction jobs are in demand, and these jobs are a great way to earn a living. You might wonder, "where would I even start?" A good answer is to check out the Highway Construction Skills Training (HCST) program, managed by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT).

No prior construction experience is required. You may even be surprised how quickly you develop new skills. HCST is a certified pre-apprenticeship program taught by knowledgeable and passionate instructors. They will help you learn everything from the terminology to the tools, methods, math, safety regulations — even other skills like putting yourself out there, interviewing and landing your new job.

The training is a six- to eight-week commitment in a hands-on environment. It includes on-site visits with construction contractors and trade unions as well as classroom instruction by WisDOT and other industry partners.

The HCST program has many connections to the construction marketplace, most graduates line up good-paying jobs as laborers, flaggers, ironworkers and equipment operators upon completion of training. Many graduates frequently talk about the experience as life-changing, and reference a sense of pride and accomplishment in their newfound work. It's also a chance to chart a stronger financial future as many opportunities start at $20-plus per hour with room to grow.

Prospective applicants are encouraged to visit wisconsindot.gov/HCST to review testimonials and find more information on upcoming sessions. Employers, as well, are encouraged to get to know the program and benefits of hiring skilled HCST workers.

HCST classes are held in Milwaukee, Racine, Madison, Green Bay, Crandon and Hayward. HCST sessions at any of the six locations are open to qualified applicants. Core service partners include: WRTP Big Step, Forward Services Corp., WisDOT's Tribal Labor Advisory Committee, Sokaogon Chippewa Community College and Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe University.

Completion of the HCST program is reliant upon passing a Commercial Driver License (CDL) written exam, passing an apprenticeship test from one of the skilled trades, receiving flagger certification, and completing OSHA 10 safety training. While it may sound like a daunting list, WisDOT staff and the service providers work very hard to coordinate an effective program with experienced professionals. Instructors work with students every step of the way. To date, more than 1,000 HCST graduates have been placed with employers as laborers or apprentices.

Take action on your new career path in highway and bridge construction:

- Visit wisconsindot.gov/HCST to find application materials, an interactive tool to find a class near you and links to testimonials.
- Keep your eye out too! WisDOT Labor Development Specialists also work to promote the HCST training program at many career fairs and other outreach engagements across the state.

Highway Construction Skills Training

Highway Construction Skills Training (HCST) is an intensive 6-week training course taught by industry professionals. With us, you will learn the skills needed to start your career in construction:

- OSHA 10 Construction Safety
- Flagging Certification
- CPR/First Aid Certification
- Construction Math and Measuring
- Physical Conditioning
- CDL Preparation
- Plan and Blueprint Reading
- Tool Identification
- Construction Terminology
- Apprenticeship Test Preparation

See at right for contact information for HCST Training Centers

Highway Construction Skills Training Centers

Contact Information:

Milwaukee Area
Kimberly McGowan
Kmccgowan@wrpt.org
414-937-3630

Racine Area
Jon Anderson
janderson@wrtp.org
262-619-6560

Northeast Green Bay Area
Ranard Morris
rmorris@fsc-corp.org
920-518-1733

Southwest Area
Lori Thompson
lthompson@fsc-corp.org
608-640-9518

North Central Tribal Area
Noel Vandiver
noel.vandiver@scc-nsn.gov

Caleb McGeschick Sr.
caleb.mcgeshick.sr@scc-nsn.gov
715-478-7633

Roadway Maintenance Technician Apprenticeship

Chances are you've likely seen the construction crews on the sides of Wisconsin highways performing routine highway maintenance, but did you know Wisconsin is the only state in which the counties are in charge of the maintenance?

In other states, highway maintenance is done by the state's Department of Transportation, but here in Wisconsin we have a routine maintenance agreement with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation that gives the counties the responsibility of maintaining our state highways.

What is a Roadway Maintenance Technician?

A Roadway Maintenance Technician ensures the safety and longevity of infrastructure like highways and roads by repairing pavement, clearing debris, plowing snow, and operating heavy equipment. They also set up traffic control, such as cones and signs. Requirements typically include a high school diploma or GED, a valid driver's license, and on-the-job training.

Wages & Employment Trends

In Wisconsin:

- Workers on average earn $54,780.
- 10% of workers earn $43,750 or less.
- 10% of workers earn $64,460 or more.

In the United States:

- Workers on average earn $49,070.
- 10% of workers earn $35,030 or less.
- 10% of workers earn $69,210 or more.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024 wage data

TRAINING AT A GLANCE

TIME TO COMPLETE
2 YEARS

ON THE JOB TIME
4000 HOURS

PAID RELATED INSTRUCTION TIME *
288 HOURS

** Apprentices are paid regular hourly wages during the Paid Related Instruction time in the classroom*

Key Job Responsibilities

- **Repairs & Maintenance:** Patching potholes, filling cracks, cleaning drainage systems, and repairing guardrails.
- **Seasonal Duties:** Plowing snow, spreading salt/sand, and clearing brush or mowing roadsides.
- **Safety & Operations:** Setting up work zone traffic control (signs/cones), flagging traffic, and operating heavy machinery like dump trucks and loaders.
- **Infrastructure Inspection:** Monitoring roads, signs, and traffic signals for damage.

How to Become a Roadway Maintenance Technician

- **Education:** A high school diploma or GED is required.
- **Licensure:** A valid driver's license is required, with a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) often preferred or required for operating heavy machinery.
- **Training & Skills:** On-the-job training is common, but technical school courses in civil engineering, construction, or maintenance are beneficial.
- **Certifications:** OSHA 10-hour construction safety certification is often required.
- **Physical Requirements:** Ability to perform heavy physical labor, such as lifting, pushing, and pulling.

WHERE DO I START?

You can find more information about becoming a Roadway Maintenance Technician Apprentice (and other apprenticeships) at:

dwd.wisconsin.gov/apprenticeship/occupations/roadway-mainttech.htm

Or use the QR code at right

SCAN HERE

Contact information:
Phone: (608) 733-3930
E-mail: apprenticeship@dwd.wisconsin.gov
201 E. Washington Ave. | PO Box 7972 | Madison, WI 53703

Careers in Highway Construction

Heavy Equipment Operator

Heavy equipment operators are responsible for running the heavy machinery used in road construction projects, such as bulldozers, graders, and excavators. This job requires a high level of skill and experience, but it can be gratifying for those who enjoy working with large equipment.

As of early 2026, the median annual wage for construction equipment operators in the United States is approximately $51,500 to $58,300

Truck Driver

Truck drivers transport materials and equipment to and from construction sites. This job requires a commercial driver's license (CDL) and the ability to operate large vehicles safely.

As of February 2026, the median annual wage for heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers in the United States is approximately $50,127 to $57,440 per year.

Skilled Laborer

Laborers perform various tasks on road construction sites, including digging trenches, pouring concrete, and laying asphalt. This job requires physical strength and the ability to work in all weather conditions.

The median annual wage for construction laborers in the U.S. was approximately $46,050 to $46,730 ($22.14–$22.47 per hour) in 2024–2026, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. News & World Report.

Pipe Installers

Pipe installers place and repair underground pipes for water, gas, and sewer systems. This job requires physical strength and the ability to work in tight spaces.

The median annual wage for plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters was $62,970 in May 2024, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The lowest 10% earned less than $40,670, while the highest 10% earned more than $105,150.

Asphalt Paver Operator

Asphalt paver operators are responsible for laying asphalt on roads, highways, and other surfaces. This job requires experience operating heavy machinery and a high level of skill in working with asphalt.

As of early 2026, the median annual wage for construction equipment operators in the United States is approximately $58,320 per year.

Surveyor

Surveyors are responsible for measuring and mapping land for road construction projects. This job requires a high skill level in using specialized equipment and software.

As of February 2026, the average annual salary for a professional surveyor in the United States is approximately $74,746 to $78,465.

Electrician

Electricians are responsible for installing and maintaining electrical systems on road construction projects. This job requires high skill and training in working with electrical systems.

As of early 2026, the median annual wage for electricians is approximately $62,350 to $69,100.

Cement Mason and Concrete Finisher

Cement masons smooth and finish surfaces of poured concrete, such as floors, walks, sidewalks, roads, or curbs using a variety of hand and power tools. They may align forms for sidewalks, curbs, or gutters; patch voids; and use saws to cut expansion joints.

Concrete finishers pour and finish concrete surfaces for roads, highways, and other construction projects. This job requires high skill and experience in working with concrete.

As of early 2026, the median annual wage for cement masons and concrete finishers in the United States is estimated to be approximately $54,300 to $61,000.

Construction Foreman

A construction foreman plans, directs, or coordinates, usually through subordinate supervisory personnel, activities concerned with the construction and maintenance of structures, facilities, and systems. They also participate in the conceptual development of construction projects and oversee the organization, scheduling, budgeting, and implementation for the life of the project.

As of February 2026, the median annual wage for a construction foreman in the United States generally ranges between $69,400 and $77,400.

Construction and Maintenance Painter

Construction and maintenance painters paint walls, equipment, buildings, bridges, and other structural surfaces, using brushes, rollers, and spray guns. They may remove old paint to prepare surfaces prior to painting and mix colors or oils to obtain desired color or consistency.

As of February 2026, the median annual wage for construction and maintenance painters in the United States is approximately $45,394 to $48,660.

Construction and Building Inspector

Construction and building inspectors inspect structures using engineering skills to determine structural soundness and compliance with specifications, building codes, and other regulations. Inspections may be general in nature or may be limited to a specific area.

As of February 2026, the median annual wage for construction and building inspectors in the United States is approximately $66,000–$70,700.

LiUNA!

WISCONSIN LABORERS' DISTRICT COUNCIL

Feel the Power

THE WISCONSIN LABORERS' APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM is a comprehensive, hands-on training program designed to prepare individuals for a rewarding career in the construction industry. As part of the LIUNA Wisconsin , this program provides apprentices with the skills, knowledge, and experience needed to become skilled construction craft laborers.

This apprenticeship combines on-the-job training with classroom instruction, giving participants a well-rounded education in areas such as:

- Site preparation
- Concrete work
- Pipe laying
- Environmental remediation
- Safety and health practices
- Highway & bridge construction

Over the course of the program, apprentices work under the guidance of experienced journeyperson while earning a competitive wage with regular increases as skills develop. Classroom training is provided through the Wisconsin Laborers Training Center, which is recognized for its state-of-the-art facilities and certified instructors.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS TO APPLY — Individuals must be at least 18 years of age or 17 years of age with a high school diploma. They must have the physical ability to perform the work of the trade with or without reasonable accommodations, and they must have reliable transportation.

TESTING PROCESS — Any individual entering the Apprenticeship program must be tested before starting work. Our program requires a reading and arithmetic component. Most technical colleges offer online or in-person testing options. *If you are looking to test with us, please contact our office at (608) 212-0802.* If you have a contractor or a contractor has instructed you to be tested, contact the Director of Equity and Outreach Saul Castillo, email **scastillo@liunawisconsin.org**.

Wisconsin Laborers' Apprenticeship & Training Center

55,000 Square Foot Training Center
4 Hands-On Training Bays • 8 Classrooms
35 Courses Offered

- Heavy and Highway
- Commercial and Industrial Building Construction
- Utility Construction
- Environmental Remediation
- Asbestos Removal
- Hazardous Waste Worker
- OSHA
- MSHA
- ICRA
- Pipe Fusing
- CDL Prep
- Traffic Control

Learn more about apprenticeships at **liunawisconsin.org**

Wisconsin Laborers' Apprenticeship Coordinator
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Oconomowoc High School's New Aviation Pathway Takes Off

This year, Oconomowoc High School students have a new option on their schedules: aviation. The school's new aviation career pathway introduces students to a wide range of careers from commercial flight to drone technology.

The program was created in response to growing student interest. Kyla Stefan, coordinator of Career Programming at OHS, said that over the past several years she noticed an increase in interest in aviation careers, based on conversations with students and data from Xello—Wisconsin's career readiness software.

Each fall, OHS hosts a Career, College, Life Readiness Day, which allows sophomores to choose visit routes that align with specific career clusters or interests. As interest in aviation grew, the school added an aviation route several years ago.

"We could really see the lights going on and kids getting excited," Stefan said. "More and more conversations started happening, and we found out some students were already taking flight lessons while others were interested. It really started to snowball from there."

To better gauge demand, OHS surveyed students about their interest in an aviation club and learning more about aviation careers. The response, Stefan said, was overwhelming. From there, school officials began exploring the possibility of offering aviation courses—consulting with local industry partners and the neighboring Pewaukee School District, which already offers aviation classes.

With the help of numerous stakeholders—from local pilots to parents of students interested in aviation, and even an alum who is a current flight instructor—the idea came to fruition. Beginning this year, OHS officially launched its aviation pathway program, offering two courses: Flights and Aircraft Systems and Drones in Aviation. The program uses curriculum from the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, which Stefan said is free and turnkey, allowing it to be taught in-house by OHS teachers with "a passion for the content."

To further engage students, OHS also offers a Drone Racing Club and an Aviation Club. Through a partnership with Students in Aviation, the school received a flight simulator at no cost, providing students with a fun, hands-on experience.

Interest in the program has exceeded expectations, Stefan said, and continues to grow. Next year, OHS plans to add two additional courses including an introductory Aviation Exploration class and a higher-level Piloting & Weather class. The goals of the aviation pathway vary by student, as OHS aims to meet students where they are.

"The short-term goal is that they at least have exposure to and knowledge of careers in aviation, whether it's air traffic control, servicing planes, or flying them," Stefan said. "The longer-term goal is to provide students with access to the next step and show them what that looks like."

That next step looks different for every student. Some OHS students are interested in military aviation, including one who hopes to become a Black Hawk helicopter pilot. Another plans to pursue a four-year aviation degree, while another is working toward a commercial pilot license and actively logging flight hours.

Henry Ewart, a senior at OHS, said the Flight and Aircraft Systems class helped solidify his career goals.

"I would say that coming into Flight and Aircraft Systems, I had a slight feeling I wanted to be a pilot, and leaving the class I was confident that being a pilot is what I want to do in my future," said Ewart. "The class showed me the basics of what it's actually like to be in the aviation industry and actually helped me with my first steps of aviation by making it that much easier with the prior knowledge from the class."

Outcomes like this are exactly what Stefan hoped the program would achieve.

"We want to make sure they realize an aviation career can match any pathway—whether it is workforce, or a two- or four-year school," Stefan said. "We can provide resources, scholarship opportunities, and authentic experiences and knowledge so students are competent to take that next step."

Courtesy of the WI DPI

www.oasd.k12.wi.us

New Flight Simulator Allows Hamilton Students to Explore Aviation Career Path

Hamilton School District

Hamilton High School (HHS) students are enjoying the rare opportunity to experience what it's like to be inside the flight deck of an aircraft thanks to the school's new flight simulator. Students in Aviation is the Wisconsin-based nonprofit group that donated the simulator ahead of the 2025-26 school year.

"We're really excited about this simulator because it allows students and staff to experience what it's like to be in the flight deck and apply real-world problem-solving skills in a fun, engaging way," explains Hamilton High School Youth Apprenticeship Coordinator, Business and Information Tech Teacher Sheila Frafjord.

Hamilton students and staff are reportedly impressed with how detailed the technology is. "Every single airport in the United States is on that simulator," shares Hamilton High School Associate Principal, Extended Learning Coordinator Marquea Goike. "It is extremely realistic," she adds. "You can see Devils Lake as you fly over Baraboo, Wisconsin!"

Frafjord says the initial reaction from students has been pure excitement. "Many are amazed at how realistic it feels and are eager to try it again. Beyond the fun, this simulator connects to a rapidly growing career field in aviation and aerospace, giving students a chance to imagine themselves as future pilots, engineers or air traffic controllers," she adds. "It also opens the door to other career paths, where the same critical thinking and decision-making skills are highly valued."

Students interested in learning more about the HHS simulator are encouraged to sign up for HHS Aviation Club.

www.hamilton.k12.wi.us

Westosha Central High School Student Becomes ENPWI's 20th Pilot

Eagles Nest Projects Wisconsin has welcomed another pilot into our growing family. Mitch, better known by his callsign "Skid Mark," successfully completed his flight test with near perfection. His skills in the cockpit were on full display, earning him a well-deserved nod of approval and the compliment, "that was pretty good," after executing a perfect short-field landing right on the mark—reconfirming his callsign.

Skid Mark didn't just impress in the air—his strong performance carried through to his oral exam as well, where he demonstrated both knowledge and confidence. His dedication, precision, and professionalism are a reflection of the values we strive to instill in every student at ENPWI. Mitch is our 20th pilot to be trained through ENPWI.

About the Program

Started by James Senft, a motivated aviation enthusiast, in 2014, Westosha Central High School's STEM Aviation Program (Falcon Aviation) stands out as a remarkable educational endeavor where students actively engage in the construction of a Van's RV-12 aircraft, guided by experienced mentors. This program goes beyond traditional teaching methods, immersing students in hands-on experiences that foster skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, while also cultivating teamwork, leadership, and determination.

Not only has this high school aviation program built it's own fleet of light aircraft, but for some students, building the airplane is only the beginning. Students who are part of the program can use the plane for flight instruction. Two flight instructors, also professional pilots, train the students at the highest level.

This provides students with the unusual opportunity to learn to fly in an aircraft they helped build. Those who earn their license also have access to the aircraft.

The program includes a workshop at Westosha Central High School in Paddock Lake, Wisconsin and a STEM Aviation Center at the municipal airport. Students gather weekly in this dedicated space for meetings, build sessions, and ground school. The airport, KBUU, serves as home base for all flight operations.

The program is among several initiatives supported by Eagle's Nest Projects Wisconsin, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission to inspire and educate the next generation of aviators, engineers, and aviation enthusiasts through hands-on STEM programs, aircraft building projects, and mentorship opportunities.

ENP WI is proud to offer this unique opportunity to every high school student in Southeast Wisconsin, regardless of which school you attend.

Learn more at: https://enpwi.com

www.westosha.k12.wi.us

Academies of Racine – Aviation Pathway at Horlick High School

The Academies of Racine are all about preparing students for what really matters - their future careers! The Academies of Racine offer smaller, personalized learning environments, a focus on 21st-century skills and a culture of teamwork, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity. At the Academies of Racine students discover their interests, learn more about them through hands-on, real-world learning experiences and graduate ahead of the game!

The Academies of Racine Horlick's North Star Academy of Business and Trades encompasses four career pathways: Business, Marketing, Construction, and Aviation. Our mission is to provide educational opportunities for students passionate about these fields of study. We pride ourselves on preparing emerging leaders to compete, network, and thrive in a global economy.

The Aviation pathway is designed to prepare students for careers in the aviation industry through hands-on learning, drone certification, and industry partnerships. The program includes courses on drone technology, aircraft maintenance, and field trips to aviation facilities.

Aviation Pathway Classes:

Grade 10 Classes:

General Aviation

Students start with a general aviation overview and are exposed to careers, such as aircraft mechanics, pilots, and flight operation personnel, following topics such as Principles of Flight, Aircraft Construction, Aircraft Weight and Balance, and Aircraft Flight Systems, Flight Deck, Electrical Systems, Corrosion Control, Aircraft Materials and Hardware, and the certification process for different careers. (Industry certification opportunity)

Grade 11 Classes:

Airframe

Students learn about aircraft structures, covering, and systems used in flight and navigation with experiences including using wood and covering techniques, welding with emphasis on sheet metal structural repairs, composite construction, aircraft assembly, rigging, and inspection, as well as radio, navigation and instrument systems, electrical, hydraulics, landing gear, fire protection, environmental atmosphere controls, fuel systems, and ice and rain control. (Industry certification opportunity)

Grade 12 Classes:

Propulsion

Students study power plant theory, engine construction and maintenance, with an emphasis on reciprocating, turbine, and jet engines, exploring propellers, ignition, lubrication, electrical, cooling, starting, and fire protection, exhaust, and fuel metering, while learning to inspect, diagnose, adjust, repair, and overhaul aircraft propulsion assemblies. (Industry certification opportunity)

www.rusd.org/o/hhs/page/north-star-academy

A Recent Capstone Project — Drones

Under the guidance of James Bucholtz, the Horlick aviation teacher, students have explored the multifaceted applications of drones, gaining practical experience that extends beyond the classroom. Whether it's aiding the school's maintenance crew with aerial inspections or capturing the community's landscape from a bird's-eye view, these young pilots are already making tangible contributions.

In recent years, drones have become so much more than just high-tech gadgets for photographers and hobbyists and are transforming industries across the globe. As for what's next, the sky's the limit for aviation students at Horlick High School where they are exploring new ways to help the environment, save lives and discover other potential applications for drones.

The group of senior aviation students was tasked with coming up with a new use for drones. As part of that project, the students recently visited the folks behind Northern Lights Drone Shows in Caledonia. But the experience was about more than just designing, building and coordinating a drone show.

"The trip to Caledonia was very informative into the ways drones can be used in different career fields and gave me ideas of new ways they could be implemented into everyday use," said senior Seth Bergman.

The hands-on experience provided students with the opportunity to work on a mix of skills that require technical expertise, creativity and real-world problem-solving. Coordinating a drone show requires the ability to operate and maintain drones, an understanding of drone mechanics and navigation systems, advanced programming skills, collaboration, communication and careful planning around weather conditions, FAA regulations and airspace restrictions.

The opportunity to practice these skills will help the aviation students fine-tune their capstone projects. Some of their bold, innovative ideas for using drones in real-world applications include designing a drone capable of cleaning the ocean or developing one that could rescue people from burning buildings.

These ambitious concepts push the boundaries of what drones can do and how they can change the world!

Middleton High School's Racing Team Builds and Races Cars in High-Pressure Environments

Photo, back row, left to right: Students Mary Gaffaney, Eric Henke, Ian Davey, Issac Zander, Matthew Lanear, Bechem Davis, Jonathan Laschinger, Ellis McLoughlin. Front row, left to right: Students Antonio Roldan and Genesis Flores Lanzo. MCPASD leaders Brian Miles, Erin Wheeler, Dr. Barb Buffington, Jerrud Rossing, Shannon Valladolid and Eric Wheeler. *Not pictured:* Everett Kerkman.

Carrie Brooker
Public Relations Specialist
Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District

Middleton High School's Racing Club advisor and engineering and technology teacher Eric Wheeler is impressed with his students' ability to create racecars "from a pile of raw steel and parts."

The team's car was among the fastest at last year's Formula Student USA National Track Day. Formula Student USA is a national engineering and fabrication competition for high school students that challenges teams to design, build, and test open-wheel style cars.

Wheeler started Middleton High School's team in 2021 following a conversation with a student interested in cars. Wheeler mentioned Formula Student USA, and the student brought 10 of his friends to start a club.

"We had no plan and no money, but those 10 kids made up for it with a level of energy, optimism and drive that only naive teenagers can have," Wheeler said. "We spent the next eight months trying to figure out how to start a high school racing team."

Wheeler said his first team worked "relentlessly" to raise $12,000 and build a racecar.

"Looking back, that experience with that first group of kids is probably the most impactful experience of my teaching career," Wheeler said.

The current team of 11 students – four seniors, five juniors, one sophomore and one freshman – shares a passion for cars. Middleton High School junior Genesis Flores Lanzo is among the new students on the team.

"I've always been interested in motorsport, specifically Formula 1, and this club felt like a good way to get hands-on experience," said Flores Lanzo. "Compared to other clubs, Racing Club stood out because of how genuinely enthusiastic and dedicated everyone is. That energy made me want to be part of it."

Wheeler explained that everything the team does is an extension of the classroom.

"Every year we either build a new car from scratch or heavily modify one of the existing cars," Wheeler said. "Much of the students' time is spent fabricating the many steel components of the car including the chassis, control arms, and suspension components."

He said students spend a significant amount of time using computer numerical control, or CNC, machines.

"When it comes to the design of the car, there is a set chassis design and set of prints that all teams must start with to assure that all cars meet the necessary safety requirements," Wheeler said, adding there's room for customization.

Wheeler said the team has three cars staggered in a three-year rotation, noting that design modifications are usually done during a car's second or third year. After three years, cars are recycled and the parts are used to make a new one.

In addition to focusing on car fabrication, team members work on graphic design and social media marketing for the team.

"The idea is to continually bring in students with diverse skillsets so we can do more and more in-house," Wheeler said. "It also creates an opportunity to partner with a wider variety of local industry partners, which in turn creates more opportunities for students."

"Building Racecars Isn't Cheap"

Wheeler noted two businesses that have been key to the team's success:

"Not only have they provided the vast majority of our funding over the life of the team, they have provided students with education and career opportunities," Wheeler said.

The businesses have hired several of the team's alumni for jobs and apprenticeships.

"Building racecars isn't cheap," Wheeler added. "Finding enough funding is always a top priority every year as it affords us the opportunity to do everything else. In addition to funding, it has also been incredibly helpful to have experts come in to share their knowledge and skills with the team."

"Purest Definition of Hands-On Learning"

The first of the team's two big annual events took place Oct. 29 at Madison International Speedway, where schools from across Wisconsin converge.

"We don't even keep lap times," Wheeler said. "It's purely to get students more time behind the wheel and to show new members what the organization is all about. It's also a great opportunity for students to talk with people from the industry about career and continued education opportunities."

"I wanted to see how the cars really do perform in person and how all of the team's hard work pays off on track, whether it be looking at the wheels and thinking about sponsors, or the body of the cars designed by team members like Marie," Flores Lanzo said.

Closer to the end of the school year, the team will take part in Road America near Elkhart Lake, Wisc., where high schools nationwide compete in a time trial event.

"It is quite possibly the purest definition of hands-on learning I've come across," Wheeler said." One constant across all teams is that everything breaks. I heard one parent say, 'When the cars stop working, that's when the real learning starts."

It empowers students to problem solve in a high-pressure environment.

"It's impressive watching them come together with a single goal in mind: get the cars on the track so everyone can have fun," Wheeler said.

Shaping Students' Post-High School Paths

Wheeler said many team alumni pursue careers in mechanical engineering and motorsports engineering or as CNC programmers.

"Many of the team's alumni have also carried their passion into college participating in Formula SAE and Baja SAE, which are the college equivalent of the Formula Student USA program that Middleton High School Racing participates in," Wheeler said.

"Racing Club isn't just about cars; it's about teamwork, creativity, and learning real engineering skills in a fun, hands-on environment," Flores Lanzo said. "I truly believe anyone who's curious about design, mechanics, or problem-solving will find something exciting here."

Follow the team on Instagram to learn more. www.instagram.com/mhs_racing

www.mcpasd.k12.wi.us

Freedom High School Becomes First in the Nation for New ASE Accreditation!

Jay Abitz
Automotive Instructor
Freedom High School

Freedom High School has a long and storied history in automotive education. Retired instructor Bob Abitz started from modest beginnings in 1972. Over 34 years he built the program at FHS into one recognized at both the state and national level as a model program for automotive and specifically collision repair. Student success was highlighted in the SkillsUSA collision repair contest with students winning regularly as the state and placing at nationals. Many students would go on to work in the automotive industry at all levels, including technicians, adjusters, managers, and multiple shop owners. His son Jay Abitz took over in 2007, promising to take the program to the next level. Over the next years, Jay would introduce new teaching methods, tools, equipment, and technology, thus growing the program's success. That next level promise was completely fulfilled with the program's crowning achievement of ASE Accreditation in May of 2025.

Jay and Bob both are big proponents of what is now called Collision Fundamentals. High School level education that teaches the basics of collision repair, preparing graduates for employment as entry level technicians. Jay and Bob fought for many years to have a level of accreditation that matched the fundamental skills taught at the high school level similar to the MLR program on the auto mechanics' side. The WATDA as well as the ASE foundation came alongside Jay to make this happen. Dan Klecker and Aaron Troxell worked directly with ASE and were instrumental in showing the need for this accreditation as well as walking Jay through the initial steps of preparing for Accreditation and program evaluation. Jay was able to join the standards writing workshop and Collision Fundamentals was born. That opened the door for Jay to take the Freedom High School Automotive program to that next level!

Dan and Aaron worked with Jay to document and organize the program at FHS to meet the high standards of ASE. The program already taught to most of the standards, but to meet accreditation level it would need to be organized, polished, and have a few more specific call out of tasks and educational experiences. Jay saw this to be a large task, but one that had value in his already full schedule and busy life. Over the next year Jay took pictures, organized documents, and re-wrote a few pieces of curriculum to align with the Collision Fundamentals standards and task list. There were also a few new things added to each class as well, which Jay welcomed as good additions to what they were already doing! The standards and task list are spread across 6 classes. At the same time Jay also introduced the new I-CAR Academy training curriculum which matched up well and shared many tasks, standards, and outcomes with the ASE guidelines. Students in any of the 6 automotive classes at FHS have the opportunity to earn I-CAR Academy badges which are industry recognized as well as work their way towards ASE certification.

The automotive program at FHS already had great support from the school, administration, and community. Part of the accreditation process is forming an advisory board. Jay already utilized a large network of former students and local industry connections to support his program. Many of those alumni are shop owners, managers, and technicians working in the industry. Jay added a few more representatives from local dealerships and the advisory board became official. These board members meet twice a year to review the program and provide feedback. The board reviews program standards, tools and equipment, curriculum, teaching methods, and needs to name a few. Many members are in touch with Jay on a regular basis and provide all kinds of support to Jay and the program.

For many prospective instructors considering any type of ASE accreditation this sounds like a lot of extra work. Jay would tell you there certainly is some, but in many cases its more about showing what you are already doing than adding to your workload. Jay has found that the work done to meet the ASE standards helped to better organize and improve his classes and his teaching methods. The learning is more targeted and measurable. The skills learned and experiences for each student are more consistent and high level. Dan and Aaron (WATDA, ASE Foundation) were so helpful, quick to respond, and ready to encourage and support Jay, it really made it possible. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time! The onsite evaluation can even sound scary or invasive, but the preparation beforehand and the organizing methods Dan and Aaron shared made the process clear and the evaluation smooth. Brent Kindred, also from WATDA, was a champion for this process and went to great lengths to promote and celebrate this accomplishment. The accreditation ceremony was celebrated by our school with many invited guests and local media. It truly highlighted the accomplishments of all.

"For many years I never thought this was something I could accomplish, but with Dan and Aarons help, and the Collision Fundamentals matching so well to what we teach, for us

it was meant to be! If you are teaching proud of what you are teaching and you believe in your program, go for accreditation! Do it for your students, your school, your community, and yourself!"

freedomschools.k12.wi.us

Bergstrom Technician Apprentice Program

Bergstrom's Technician Apprentice Program offers high school and college-level candidates a hands-on, in-depth experience to jumpstart their careers in the automotive industry. Participants work alongside seasoned technicians, gaining practical knowledge and valuable mentorship.

Youth Apprenticeships:

- Offered to students interested in automotive who are in their junior or senior year of high school.
- Apprentices are paired with an experienced technician for guidance and skill development.
- Apprentices receive paid working hours during the program.
- Skills learned while on job correlate with competencies set by the school to allow work to qualify as class credit.

College Apprenticeships:

- Offered for team members who are enrolled in an automotive or collision degree program at a local technical college
- Tuition Reimbursement of 50% of tuition each semester and additional post-graduate reimbursement available.
- Apprentices are paired with an experienced technician for guidance and skill development.
- Apprentices receive paid working hours during the program and a structured raise schedule each semester.

This program is an excellent opportunity to gain hands-on experience, earn while you learn, and set the foundation for a successful career in automotive technology. One of Bergstrom's students who recently went through this program and graduated reflects on their time in the program fondly. We asked Gerardo to share his experience in the program and how his time correlates into his personal life and what his daily life as a collision repair technician looks like.

For Gerardo, the most rewarding part of being an auto body technician is the ability to work at his own pace while knowing he's making a meaningful contribution to the community. Being part of the Bergstrom team has been especially fulfilling for him, as he values the unique bond and approachable nature of his colleagues, something he believes sets the team apart.

Before joining Bergstrom, he studied Auto Body Collision Repair at FVTC and graduated in May 2022. His instructors played a significant role in shaping his career, helping him secure his position at Bergstrom. In just 2½ years, he advanced from a recent graduate to a flat-rate collision technician, a milestone he's particularly proud of.

Outside of work, he has a passion for snowboarding, which he considers his favorite winter activity. His admiration for his father runs deep, as he credits him with instilling the values of hard work and determination that have guided his career. These principles, along with a strong work ethic, have helped him navigate the ever-evolving automotive industry, where learning never stops.

A typical day in his role begins with setting up and organizing his workspace to prepare for the challenges of the day. Whether working on a minor dent or major structural repairs, he carefully plans each job to ensure efficiency and precision. Staying busy and accomplishing important tasks keeps him motivated, and he encourages those interested in the automotive field to stay focused and set clear goals. His biggest career lesson so far has been understanding how quickly vehicles evolve, making continuous learning a key part of his success.

With his drive and dedication, Gerardo continues to make an impact in his role at Bergstrom, helping customers get back on the road while growing as a skilled technician.

Vel Phillips Memorial High School: Where Engines — and Careers — Start

Madison Metropolitan School District

The clink of metal on metal echoes through the auto lab at Vel Phillips Memorial High School. A blow torch flares to life. The sharp, clean scent of Lava Soap lingers in the air. Under raised vehicles and over open hoods, students in safety goggles move with purpose — less like a class, more like a professional shop in full swing.

Here within the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), automotive technology isn't just an elective. It's a launchpad.

Memorial offers Automotive Technology Courses 1–4, along with Outdoor Power Equipment, building skills year-over-year. Technology and engineering teacher Miles Tokheim works closely with a community advisory board to ensure what students learn matches the local workforce needs.

In 2024, the program earned accreditation from the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence, a distinction that signals students are meeting industry standards before they even graduate.

And they're rising to the challenge.

At the end of first semester in 2025-26, 90% of students in Auto Tech 2, 3 and 4 passed their ASE Student Certification exams.

Memorial junior Edduar has always liked working on machines and understanding how they work, so earning his ASE certificate "And my mom, wow, she is so proud of me."

That pride is earned in moments both big and small. Working on vehicles donated by local dealerships, their own cars and even teachers' cars, students repair alternators, track down oil leaks, fix broken fuel lines — and recently — learned what to do when a rabbit is found nesting under the hood of a car.

"I can scan the car, I can diagnose the problem, and I can be the one to fix it. Here, we all get to be like doctors," Edduar said.

The scale and types of repairs the students experience have only grown since major upgrades were made to Memorial's career and technical education spaces through the passing of a 2020 facilities referendum.

The new auto lab features hydraulic lifts, oversized electric garage doors and almost any tool a mechanic could want, from borescopes to brake bleeder kits. The professional space makes the program a competitive, top-tier training center.

Beyond the classroom, students step directly into the industry through paid youth apprenticeships with certified mentors and dual-credit opportunities at a nearby college.

Through the school's chapter of SkillsUSA, they can even build and race a Formula 1–style car, transforming technical knowledge into teamwork. In May, Memorial's team will put their car to the test on the famed track Road America in Elkhart Lake, Wis., competing with other schools in the Wisconsin Formula Student USA project.

In fall 2025, the program received a major boost when Tokheim was awarded the $50,000 Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence. The investment is already expanding opportunities for students.

"It was a game changer, really," Tokheim said. "Having the funding here to continue this program is huge. Ultimately, it'll lead to students being more successful, more exposed to the industry and getting kids excited."

Back in the lab, another engine turns over. Another problem gets solved. Another student sees a future taking shape — not just under the hood, but beyond high school.

www.madison.k12.wi.us

Arrowhead Automotive Continued from Page 1

nance, warning lights, basic inspections, repair estimates, service scheduling, and how to communicate effectively with repair professionals. This course equips students with lifelong automotive knowledge while also serving as an entry point into technical automotive coursework.

Automotive Technology I provides a hands-on entry point for students seeking immediate technical experience. Students develop foundational skills in shop safety, proper tool use, lubrication services, brake systems, steering and suspension, and introductory electrical diagnostics. Automotive Technology II builds on this foundation with advanced electrical systems, engine performance concepts, drivetrain components, and structured diagnostic procedures.

Students seeking deeper technical preparation enroll in Advanced Automotive, a course aligned with the local technical college and focused on ASE A1–A8 content areas. Advanced Automotive emphasizes diagnostic reasoning, professional use of service information, and industry-standard repair procedures while reinforcing expectations found in professional automotive environments.

Throughout the pathway, students are encouraged to earn industry-recognized credentials, including ASE Entry-Level Certification (G1) and additional ASE-focused certifications. These credentials validate student skills, strengthen employability, and provide a direct connection between classroom learning and workforce readiness.

A Student-Run, Real-World Shop Experience

The capstone of the pathway is Arrowhead Automotive, a student-run service course that operates as a live-shop environment. Students apply their skills while servicing real vehicles from staff and community members under instructor supervision.

Students rotate through professional roles such as Technician, Service Writer, Parts Manager, Quality Control Inspector, and Shop Manager. Each role carries responsibility and accountability, reinforcing that automotive service is not only about technical ability, but also communication, documentation, safety, and trust.

Students use industry-standard technology throughout the program, including Tekmetric, ALLDATA, Autel scan tools, and a virtual shop foreman powered by ChatGPT. These tools mirror professional shop environments and support accurate diagnostics, clear documentation, and effective job management. By working with the same systems used in the field, students develop habits that emphasize quality, accuracy, and accountability.

Industry Partnerships and Career Exposure

Arrowhead Automotive is supported by strong partnerships with local dealerships, independent repair facilities, and diesel service providers. An active industry advisory board provides ongoing input related to curriculum relevance, safety practices, equipment needs, and emerging industry trends.

"Students regularly engage with industry professionals through guest speakers, advisory committee involvement, and career exploration experiences. One recent career exploration day included visits to a franchised dealership, an independent repair shop, and a diesel repair facility, allowing students to compare different work environments, career paths, and specialization areas in a single experience," said Aaron Troxell of the WATDA. Students and instructors have also participated in the organization's Transportation Showcase, where students explored emerging technologies and connected with employers.

Industry Alignment and ASE Expectations

A defining element of the program is the emphasis on modeling industry expectations. Instructor Joseph Premo actively maintains ASE certifications (G1, A4, A5, A6) and plans to continue pursuing additional credentials, reinforcing the same standards students are preparing to meet. Students regularly encounter ASE-style questions and performance expectations, building familiarity and confidence before entering the workforce or postsecondary training.

Arrowhead Automotive is aligned with ASE Education Foundation standards and is actively working toward ASE Education Foundation accreditation, with a Spring 2026 goal for full completion.

Preparing Students for What Comes Next

Arrowhead Automotive is designed to bridge the gap between education and employment. From informed vehicle ownership to advanced technical training, students graduate with hands-on experience, industry credentials, and a clear understanding of career pathways within the transportation field—prepared for what comes next.

www.arrowheadschools.org

Preparing the Next Generation of Automotive Professionals at Holmen High School

Travis Judell, Communications Specialist
School District of Holmen

At Holmen High School, the automotive education program is doing more than teaching students how vehicles work — it is building a direct pathway from the classroom to high-demand careers across the regional automotive industry. Through a comprehensive sequence of automotive courses, industry-recognized certifications, and strong partnerships with local businesses, students are gaining hands-on experience that translates into real-world opportunity.

Holmen High School currently offers four automotive courses, designed to meet students where they are and support growth from introductory skills to advanced technical knowledge. These courses provide instruction in areas such as maintenance and light repair, braking systems, engine performance, and diesel engines. As students progress through the program, they are not only learning technical skills but also developing problem-solving abilities, professionalism, and work habits expected in today's automotive workforce.

A cornerstone of the program is its strong connection to Youth Apprenticeship opportunities. Students enrolled in the automotive program have the chance to work directly with local automotive businesses throughout the region while still in high school. These partnerships allow students to gain paid, hands-on experience in real shop environments, applying what they learn in the classroom while building relationships with potential future employers.

"Our goal is to make sure students graduate with skills that matter," said Ryan Ziegler, automotive instructor at Holmen High School. "The youth apprenticeship program gives our students real exposure to the industry and helps them see what a career in automotive service actually looks like day to day."

Holmen High School is also a participant in Wisconsin's Technical Incentive Grant program, which supports students and school districts by recognizing the value of industry certifications. District incentive grants provide up to $1,000 per recent graduate who earns an approved certification. These incentives help offset testing costs and reinforce the importance of industry-recognized certification.

One of the most impactful components of the program is the opportunity for students to earn Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certifications. All students in the automotive program have the opportunity to attempt one or more ASE certifications, including:

- **Auto Service I:** Brakes or Maintenance and Light Repair
- **Auto Service II:** Brakes or Maintenance and Light Repair, Engine Performance, or Diesel Engines

On average, Holmen High School students consistently demonstrate strong success on ASE entry-level certification exams. Over the past three school years, students have attempted roughly 35–40 ASE tests annually, with the vast majority earning passing scores. This steady performance highlights the strength of the program's instruction, hands-on learning approach, and ongoing commitment to preparing students for industry expectations and long-term success.

According to Ziegler, the impact of ASE certification often extends well beyond graduation.

"We've had students tell us that when they leave Holmen High School and apply for a job with a local business, as soon as employers hear they're already ASE certified, it's almost an automatic hire — and sometimes even a raise," Ziegler said. "That's incredibly powerful for an 18-year-old entering the workforce."

By combining rigorous coursework, hands-on learning, youth apprenticeship opportunities, and industry-recognized certification, Holmen High School's automotive program is preparing students not just for graduation, but for meaningful careers. As workforce needs continue to grow across the automotive industry, programs like Holmen's serve as a model for how schools and local businesses can work together to build the next generation of skilled technicians.

www.holmen.k12.wi.us

Auto Program at Hartford Union High School Provides Students With Skills that Last a Lifetime

Stevy Schliewe, Ed.D.
Hartford Union High School
Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Hartford Union High School's automotive program is redefining what career preparation can look like in a high school setting. Through a sequence of three intentionally designed courses, students have the ability to gain practical life skills, explore high-demand career pathways, and earn college-level transcripted credit or industry-recognized credentials.

Auto Maintenance serves as an introduction to the automotive pathway as a course built for students with little to no prior automotive experience. This introductory class focuses on understanding the basic, required maintenance of a vehicle. Students learn through demonstrations and lab experiences. From checking fluids to performing routine service tasks, students build confidence through this hands-on approach.

The next level, Auto Service, takes students deeper into the systems that make vehicles run. This course emphasizes student-led exploration of automotive systems through structured lab experiences. Students diagnose common automotive failures, perform typical repairs, and complete regular maintenance tasks. A key highlight of Auto Service is the opportunity to earn transcripted college credit through the local technical college. Because the course content aligns with the college's Auto Service Fundamentals course, students can earn college credit while still in high school.

For students ready to elevate their skills even further, Auto Technician provides advanced, career-focused instruction. This course is designed for students who are seriously interested in the automotive service industry and want to explore professional pathways. Instruction centers on diagnosing complex problems, troubleshooting, and performing vehicle repairs, with a strong emphasis on brakes, steering, suspension, and electrical systems. Like Auto Service, Auto Technician also offers transcripted credit through the college, aligning with the Brake Systems course. Students leave with both advanced technical knowledge and tangible college credit, positioning them for success in technical college programs or entry-level industry roles.

Beyond technical skill development, the HUHS Auto Department stands out for its strong female participation, challenging outdated stereotypes about who belongs in automotive spaces. A significant number of female students are enrolled across the program, contributing to a learning environment that values diversity, collaboration, and inclusion. These students are not only succeeding in the courses but also serving as visible role models, demonstrating that automotive careers are open to everyone.

The auto program at HUHS provides students with essential life skills, authentic career exploration, early college credit, and pathways toward industry-recognized credentials. Whether students plan to pursue automotive careers or simply want to be informed vehicle owners, HUHS equips them with skills that last a lifetime.

www.huhs.org

From the Garage to the Classroom: How One Teacher Is Driving Success in McFarland's Tech Ed Program

McFarland School District

When you walk into the automotive tech classroom at McFarland High School, it feels more like a garage than a traditional classroom. That's by design—and it's thanks to a teacher who never expected to be here in the first place.

"I didn't go to school to become a teacher," says the auto tech instructor, Brian Hawn. "I went to school for automotive maintenance and spent years doing fleet maintenance for FedEx." After coaching football at McFarland for three years, an opportunity opened up in the tech ed department. "I was lucky enough to get this gig through an experience-based licensure program."

With help from district administrators, Hawn navigated the state's alternative licensure pathway. "They gave me a checklist of what to do and when," he says. "I started on a one-year probationary license. Now I've got a five-year license, and I'm here to stay."

The tech ed department currently includes three staff members, with Mr. Hawn focusing on automotive technology. Their program is not just about teaching—it's about building real-world skills that lead directly to employment. A central part of that is their certification through ASE, the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence.

"ASE certifies mechanics in the industry, but they also accredit high school programs. It's not easy to get certified," he explains. "When I started, our accreditation was about to expire, so we had to go through the full re-certification process. We got it renewed, and that was a big deal."

The ASE offers exams to students as well, and the program boasts an impressive 70% pass rate. "Students are really engaged in these courses. They love the hands-on learning."

Students start with a freshman elective, *Intro to Tech*, and then move into hands-on classes. The auto track begins with *Air-Cooled Engines*, then *Autos 1*, where students learn practical skills like servicing brakes and tires. *Autos 2* dives into electronics and drive systems.

But it's *Autos 3*, the capstone class, that really shines.

"I'm proud of this class," the instructor says. "It's collaborative, project-based. We've done engine swaps and full rebuilds. One of our biggest projects was taking a beat-up 1985 Chevy Corvette and turning it into a 400-horsepower off-road go-kart. The kids did everything."

Typically, 18-20 students enroll in Autos 3, and each year, five to six go straight into the field, often before graduation through McFarland's youth apprenticeship program.

"That program is unbelievable. Kids earn money, get credit, and work in real jobs, all while enrolled in my class."

The department is also intentional about encouraging female participation. "We've been working to improve representation. We actively recruit female students to explore this pathway."

Much of the program's success, he says, is thanks to district support.

"McFarland has really backed tech ed. We have the tools, the space, the safety equipment—everything we need to run this program professionally. That support from the district makes all the difference."

And for this not-so-traditional teacher, the reward is in the classroom. "What a joy it is to wake up and go to work every day. 'We're doing fuel injectors today—let's go!' The kids are excited to learn. They want to be here."

In McFarland, the road from the shop floor to the classroom is paved with opportunity—and horsepower.

www.mcfarland.k12.wi.us

The Beloit Memorial High Powered Automotive Program

School District of Beloit

The High Powered Automotive program at Beloit Memorial High School is quickly becoming one of the premier high school automotive training programs in the region, thanks to the leadership, vision, and hands-on philosophy of instructor Guy Olson. Housed within the PACMES Academy (Public Safety, Architecture, Construction, Manufacturing, Engineering, and Science) and connected to the broader work of the The Academies of Beloit, the program has transformed from a struggling course offering just a few years ago into a thriving, certification-producing, real-world training environment. The automotive pathway consists of a three-course sequence within the PACMES Academy, with each level increasing knowledge and skill levels, culminating in certification testing in the capstone Automotive 3 course.

Olson has built the program around a simple but powerful instructional model: 80 percent hands-on learning and 20 percent lecture. That shift has energized students and fueled rapid growth in enrollment. Students don't just read about automotive systems—they actively work on vehicles, diagnose real mechanical issues, communicate with customers, and manage repair workflows from start to finish. The result is a shop environment that mirrors what students will experience immediately after graduation in the workforce.

One of the biggest transformations under Olson's leadership has been the modernization of equipment and learning opportunities. Over the past four years, the program has added a new fleet of vehicles, allowing students to work with modern automotive technology and diagnostic systems. In addition, the curriculum now includes diesel instruction, made possible through the donation of a semi truck from Crete Carrier Corporation. This expansion gives students exposure to another high-demand sector of the transportation industry and increases their career readiness.

Students in the program experience the full scope of shop operations. They help order parts, communicate with customers about repairs, perform diagnostics, and complete repairs on functioning vehicles. This level of responsibility helps build confidence, technical skills, and professional communication skills—traits employers consistently look for in entry-level technicians.

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Go from Tinkerer to Technician in Just Two Years

If you've asked yourself the question, "how does that work?" or your free time is spent tinkering with engines or building a project car, pump the brakes. You may have a future in the automotive industry.

Blackhawk Technical College's Automotive Technician two-year program is an easy choice for car lovers. Learn how to maintain cars and trucks and diagnose and repair performance problems related to the engine, transmission, steering, suspension, heating, cooling, brake and electrical systems.

The instruction goes beyond how vehicles work. Those in the program also learn how to use hand and machine tools and computerized equipment. Blackhawk's program places an emphasis on problem-solving skills, including the use of diagnostic equipment such as lab oscilloscopes, scanning tools and digital voltmeters.

ASE accredited

Even better, the Automotive Technician program is accredited to meet ASE Education Foundation standards. That means you can gain ASE entry-level certification. You can also take your skills and credentials to the next level by successfully completing all eight ASE automotive tests to earn the professional-level G1 certification in Auto Maintenance and Light Repair. There is no extra cost for students to get the G1 certification, and you do not have to take the related exam because ASE recognizes the rigor of Blackhawk's accredited program.

This accreditation demonstrates to the industry, students and other stakeholders that we're committed to excellence and the support of our students to succeed in the real world," Automotive Instructor John Hayes said.

The five-step accreditation process evaluated Blackhawk's automotive service program—its structure, processes, resources, materials, and mission. Collaboration among educators, experts, students and the community is at the core of the accreditation process.

"Our automotive instructors here at Blackhawk maintain their certification just like any other technician working in the field," Hayes said. "We re-certify every five years in order to ensure that we are keeping up with current technologies. Along with that, we do 20 hours a year–at a minimum–of technical update training."

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West Bend Automotive Program Offers Unique Opportunities to Students

By Chloe Bauer
West Bend East High School senior
West Bend School District

When it comes to learning about cars, West Bend students are part of a well-oiled machine.

The West Bend East and West High Schools automotive program makes unique opportunities accessible to students with the help of school staff, local businesses, and a team of passionate auto instructors who steer the program with both hands at all times.

Gerald Sorce has instructed Autos I, II, and III for 11 years. After more than a decade of teaching, Sorce takes pride in having taught more than 2,000 students. He doesn't just teach kids to succeed in the classroom, but also in related careers.

"I have a number of former students doing very well in the automotive industry, which is really a thing to be proud of," Sorce said.

Sorce's teaching influenced one student to return to the program to inspire a new generation of students. Alan Christianson, an alumnus of the WBHS automotive program, is now in his second year as an Auto I, Metals I, and Welding I instructor.

"What used to be learning under someone as a teacher is now working with a friend, which makes teaching here a lot of fun," Christianson said.

Although he recalls many teaching highlights, Christianson especially enjoys finals season, not because it marks the end of a semester, but because students are able to show their growth.

"Seeing where they start from and where they get at the end of 18 weeks is awesome," Christianson said. "Seeing so much growth in this area and seeing that confidence level go up is very fun to see."

Since many schools in the area do not offer a true automotive course, students may have trouble getting their foot in the door of the automotive industry. However, opportunities to grow in the field are far and wide for WBHS students. Students can earn dual credit, receive their Automotive Service Excellence certification, and make repairs on staff vehicles rather than demo vehicles.

"We work on staff cars because it helps students to actually get experience working on engine repair, transmission, electricals, and so forth, and they get to do multiple different types of repairs as they go through the class," Sorce said.

West Bend West science teacher Matthew Wanie has had his vehicle repaired by automotive students, including oil changes, tire rotations, and battery replacements.

"I think it is so great that our students have this opportunity to work on vehicles," Wanie said. "There are more cars on the road than ever and they are always going to need work done on them. The skills the students gain here by actually doing the work is so great."

Students are also able to work closely with the community and local businesses who provide vehicles and funding, get students into the work force, and help the program stay on the cutting edge with new equipment.

"The outreach and support we have from our community is unprecedented," Christianson said. "They work hand in hand with students to make sure that they have somewhere to build a career."

Local businesses are sponsoring this year's Build Moto team, a group of automotive students who will hone their skills by working on a motorcycle provided by HD and competing with students from all over Wisconsin.

"It's a big thing for a lot of students, and it's not just automotive based," Christianson said. "We pull in everything from graphic design to accounting, but we house it in our classroom because it's very mechanical. It's a fantastic opportunity not only for work skills, but also for scholarships."

Build Moto is just one of the opportunities offered to automotive students at the West Bend High Schools.

"The thing I enjoyed most was doing it with my classmates and having a good time," said Connor Redig, a current student in the Autos III class. "What I take away from the automotive course is how I can apply it at home working on my own cars and saving myself money."

www.west-bend.k12.wi.us

The Beloit Memorial High Powered Automotive Program

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The program has also gained statewide recognition. It is one of only 12 programs in the state of Wisconsin to be certified by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence. Even more impressive, it is one of only five programs in Wisconsin to achieve Master ASE certification status. These credentials allow students to earn industry-recognized certifications before they even graduate high school, giving them a major advantage when entering the workforce or continuing technical education.

Student achievement has followed program improvements. Just this fall, students earned more than 30 ASE certifications in only half a school year—an extraordinary accomplishment that reflects both the rigor of the program and the motivation of the students enrolled.

This year also marked a major milestone with the program's move into a new on-campus facility. While the current shop footprint is smaller, it allows students to learn and work directly on the high school campus, increasing accessibility and visibility. Growth is already planned. Leaders are exploring a 4,000-square-foot addition that could house up to 9 vehicle lifts and include a dedicated diesel classroom space integrated directly into the shop environment.

Beyond technical skill development, Olson has built a culture centered on service and giving back. During the recent facility transition, the program donated a vehicle lift and additional automotive equipment to help launch a new automotive program in northern Wisconsin. Olson is also working with students on a vehicle restoration project intended to provide a donated car to a family in need—an experience that teaches both technical skill and community responsibility.

In just a few short years, the Beloit Memorial High Powered Automotive program has made remarkable strides. Through strong leadership, industry partnerships, certification success, and a commitment to real-world learning, the program is preparing students not just to graduate—but to step directly into high-demand careers with confidence, skill, and purpose.

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