This story is taken from Sacbee / Business.

Teens exposed to technical careers at Auburn academy

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Published 12:00 am PST Thursday, February 28, 2008

Auburn's Alder Grove Academy and Sierra College are exposing teenagers to careers in designing, fabricating and repairing the technical systems that run such modern-day electronic necessities as automated teller machines, gas pumps and hybrid cars.

With a two-year degree, students can get paid as much as $45,000 a year. Other careers require less time in school but pay as much as $33,000.

The nation as a whole will see the number of jobs requiring science, engineering or technical training grow by more than 24 percent by 2014.

Programs such as this one are desperately needed, said Jack Stewart, president of the California Manufacturers & Technology Association.

"The whole industry is cannibalizing each other to get skilled labor," he explained. "We're doing a tremendous disservice to kids when (careers) are out there and we're not introducing them to those careers."

On Wednesday, staff from Sierra's Center for Applied Competitive Technologies Tech-Explorer project worked with students at the paramilitary community school to fabricate parts and build catapults.

The students are turning their lives around, noted Joan Berry, director of alternative education for Placer County Office of Education.

"These are bright students, many of whom excel when they can learn by doing and see how the academic theory is applied," she said. "The CACT Tech-Explorer catapult project is perfect for our students because they'll ... be introduced to careers that they may not have considered."

Sierra is looking for industry sponsors to replicate the program. Want more information? Call Sandra Scott at (916) 781-6245.

Go to: Sacbee / Back to story