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Keeping things rolling

Will C. Wood automotive classes teach students valuable skills.



Automotive students Greg Moore, Tyler Moorhead and Jason DaCosta work on a truck in Will C. Wood's student auto class.

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When your tire goes flat, quotations from Shakespeare or the quadratic formula are unlikely to help you solve the problem. But something Vacaville Unified School District high schoolers learn in their automotive classes just might.



This year, Reeves has about 125 students from across two levels of automotive classes. In Auto One, students spend three class periods a week in the classroom, studying automotive concepts, then work in the shop for two days a week, applying their knowledge in practical ways.

Automotive Two is a two-period, more intense class, Reeves said, where students take on bigger projects such as changing out transfer cases, motors, and fix-up cars brought in by the community. Some cars belong to educators, he said, some belong to students and some the students work on for local nonprofit organizations.

The school also participates in an internship program with a local Ford dealership, Reeves said, through which students can complete Ford training modules, job shadow mechanics and interview for one of about 10 paid internships offered by the company to VUSD students each year

“They get paid to go to high school,” he said. “You can’t beat that.”

Students are given specific shirts for auto repair, which they wear during class, with the Will C. Wood Wildcats logo embroidered on them.

Reeves said he gets positive feedback and thank yous from many students who have participated in his classes over the years. While few go directly into the automotive industry immediately after graduation, many go on to get degrees from local trade schools.

Will C. Wood has provided a guidance counselor specifically for trades and technical education, which has been a huge help to students interested in those areas so far, Reeves said. Students often graduate high school with college-level technical credit, he said, and the school provides seven technical pathways.

Reeves said he wishes the school had more space for technical classes, as the programs are often operating at capacity and sometimes have to turn students away. This year, he said, Will C. Wood has been able to allow a few students from Vacaville High to come over their lunch break to take automotive classes.

The district is helpful and quick with getting equipment for the shop, though, as Reeves said, they recently purchased a state-of-the-art auto-alignment system.

Last year, he said, about 30 students made it through the entire program, and this year about 50 are on track to do so.

Bella Derfuss, a senior, takes automotive classes because she has grown up around the trades her entire life. She said it’s cool to have a school that allows students to explore these kinds of pathways for their futures.

“I was like ‘the teacher is cool, the class seems cool, heck yeah, let’s go,’” she said.

Learning how to work on tires has been the most useful skill she has learned so far, Derfuss said. She hopes to go into the automotive industry after she graduates, but wishes there were more scholarships available for trade and technical education and more encouragement to explore those pathways.

“They preach college and the military to us all the time, but you don’t really learn about trade schools until your junior and senior year.”

Jason DaCosta, a senior in the class, said he has grown up around auto mechanics in his family, and he picked up an interest in it as a kid. This year in the class, he’s learned to do wheel alignments and has worked to get a truck donated to the class running. After graduation, he hopes to go into welding.

Tyler Moorhead comes in before school to take automotive classes, and said he loves being able to work with his hands in a school setting. He hopes to become a pipe fitter after he graduates, and said skills he has learned in technical classes will set him up well for that career.