


Tech Upswing: Blue-Collar Jobs in Red-Hot Demand

High-Paying, Highly Skilled Jobs Increasingly Available

 By Ellen Leyva

EAST L.A., June 13, 2007 (KABC-TV) - As thousands of California students graduate high school, less than half will go on to complete a college degree. But that should not hold them back from a good money-earning career. So-called "blue collar" jobs are in hot demand right now, and after years of cutbacks, career tech education in Southern California is on the upswing.

Related Links

- [AdultInstruction.org \(www.adultinstruction.org\)](http://www.adultinstruction.org)
- [SkillsUSA \(www.skillsusa.org\)](http://www.skillsusa.org)
- [East Los Angeles Skills Center \(elasc.adultinstruction.org\)](http://elasc.adultinstruction.org)
- [East Los Angeles Education & Career Center \(www.lausd.k12.ca.us\)](http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us)
- [Encorps Teachers Program \(www.investinginourschools.com\)](http://www.investinginourschools.com)

It's not just flipping burgers. You may remember woodshop or auto shop from your high school days. But the world has changed, and vocational education has too.

Kartica Revilla, graphic design student: "I'm a mother, and I have an ambition to do something with my life."

Seventeen-year-old Kartica Revilla is a young mom and a talented artist. She was heading for life as a high-school drop-out until a teacher turned her on to graphic design.

Kartica Revilla: "If I wouldn't have found out about this program, I'd probably just have another regular job, like washing dishes or something." Instead, Kartica is now well on her way to a high-paying job and a diploma.

Alan Helfman, LAUSD, Adult & Career Education: "It's a question of following your passions, and the passion then turns into a paycheck."

The L.A. Unified School District has renewed its focus on vocational education -- now renamed "Career Tech Education." District officials hope it will help to reverse a drop-out rate estimated at between 30- and 50-percent. Students and recent graduates can master a skill that could earn them bigger paychecks than many so-called "white-collar" careers.

The construction industry projects it will need one million new workers in the next six years. Well-trained mechanics, now known as "automotive technicians," can make up to \$150,000-dollars-a-year. Some dealerships even offer signing bonuses.

Danielle, Automotive Technology Student: "I've always liked getting dirty, and I've liked cars since I was a kid." Danielle tells ABC7 Eyewitness News that college just wasn't for her. She felt worthless until she started a class at the East L.A. Skills Center (LAUSD), one of LAUSD's 11 regional centers that provide career tech education to students and adults. Classes are free to high school students and heavily discounted to adults.

Danielle is already fielding offers months before completing the program. Danielle, Automotive Technology Student: "It's like I'm actually kind of needed out there, and it's cool."

With most cars now run by dozens of computers, the idea of mechanic as a grease-monkey is outdated.

Alan Helfman: "Mathematics and physics and chemistry are involved in these courses of study. They're quite challenging. They're all computerized and quite technical."

Years of budget cutbacks hurt California's career tech programs. There's a severe teacher shortage, and with classes moved off individual campuses and onto regional centers, students find it more difficult to sample a variety of trades to see what appeals to them most.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has championed career tech education since taking office, increasing funding by 18-percent. Schwarzenegger himself is a product of vocational education, working his way through college as a bricklayer.

Alan Helfman: "They're going to make a lot of money, and more than that, they really will have challenging careers, lots of dignity, lots of respect in the community. The ability to have a house, raise a family. It's a terrific, terrific opportunity."

The district partners with public and private companies to determine what skills are most in demand. Southern California Edison will need 10,000 linemen, and other electrical workers, over the next decade. They're partnering with LAUSD to train potential workers.

Journeyman linemen can earn well into the six figures.

Chuck Burnett, Southern California Edison: "This job will stay on home property, and you can't source it out."

These area jobs -- and careers -- to help Southland students scale new heights.

John Tello, Powerline Mechanic Student: "Actually, I was scared of heights. Now I conquered it. I had to, right?"

There's a great organization known as SkillsUSA. It's a partnership between students, teachers, and private industry that helps almost 300,000 students nationwide learn a skill every year.

Their contests are a bit like the academic decathlon, except students compete in fields like carpentry, cosmetology, masonry, and robotics. Twenty-three LAUSD students are going to the nationals in Kansas City later this month.

For more information:

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