

2017

Excellence in Action Award

Warren County Area Technology Center

Automotive Technology/ ON TRACK STEM Initiative
Transportation, Distribution & Logistics Career Cluster

OVERVIEW

The Automotive Technology Program at Warren County Area Technology Center (WCATC) in Bowling Green, Kentucky, was established in 2006 and serves students from three surrounding districts. The Motorsports ON TRACK STEM Initiative is in its second year and was developed to generate excitement around the Automotive Technology program at the secondary level as well as with the Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College Automotive Technology Program.

The competitive collaboration gets secondary and postsecondary students excited about a career in this leading industry, and helps to connect what they are learning in the classroom to what they can do in the workplace. While a relatively new feature of this program, the On Track car-building program, a partnership with the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, allows students to utilize multiple educational disciplines to rebuild competition sports cars and has generated a lot of excitement throughout the community.

Student Demographics (72 students)	Percentage
Male	100%
Female	0%
Low-Income	72%
Minority	33%

DEVELOPING A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE STUDENTS

The development of the program began because the business community wanted to engage students in STEM, automotive technologies and related disciplines and introduce them to a career pathway that they might not have otherwise considered. Industry partnered with Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College (SKYCTC), the Chamber and WCATC to develop a competition that would have students working on a single project – a racecar – that would encompass multiple disciplines and ground an interesting course of study that would benefit many students. From the perspective of the business community, it is an exciting way to get students interested in them and the work they do. From an educational perspective, the initiative is an innovative way to get students invested in a course of study.

In its first year, the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce

purchased two cars and donated them to the school. From there, businesses contributed money, products and time to help the students revamp the cars. In exchange, the companies received opportunities to directly engage with students who are now uniquely qualified to work in their industry. The competition also provides a platform for participating companies to be spotlighted at the annual Holley LS Fest, which attracts more than 10,000 people.

Industry leaders also serve as mentors to students. Every student participates in ‘mentor Mondays,’ where they learn from industry experts who share real-world examples and help them to develop the employability skills they will use in the workplace. Student not only gain these critical insights, they also build their professional network, giving them a leg up on their career.

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ALIGNING WITH INDUSTRY NEEDS

The On Track program was designed with input from the automotive industry to promote student success and meet workforce needs. Within a 50-mile radius of South Central Kentucky, there are 55,240 total job openings – with 2,310 openings in manufacturing and another 3,202 in transportation, distribution and logistics. More than 50 corporate sponsors stepped up to make the project a reality – providing financial support and working closely with students and faculty to aid in the development of the cars as well as the curriculum.

Understanding the local demand, the Warren County and Bowling Green Independent School Districts have even contributed funds to support the necessary teaching positions until state funding can be arranged.

“When you take these kids – many of them at-risk or low-income – and create something like this where the community can show how much they are investing in those kids. It’s evident, and the kids feel that investment, that pride.”

– Dr. Eric T. Keeling, Principal, Warren County Area Technology Center

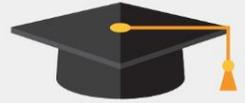
CONNECTING THE CLASSROOM TO THE WORKPLACE

Before enrolling in the program, many students struggle with how what they are learning in the classroom is relevant to the real world. Through the program, students take part in rigorous coursework, apply those concepts and have regular opportunities to engage directly with industry mentors.

The program not only allows students to engage with industry leaders, but also work as a team across the variety of disciplines it takes to build the car. Welding, STEM, automotive and information technology students come together for this hands-on experience to do everything from managing the budget to building the engine. Senior students can serve as team leaders, and all students gain the confidence, leadership and critical thinking skills that they will need for career success. .

SkillsUSA also serves as a critical component of the leadership development for students. Students have competed and placed in local, regional and state competitions, further honing those collaboration and leadership skills.

Success by the Numbers



100%

Graduated High School



100%

Participated in Work-based Learning



91%

Earned an Industry-recognized Credential



100%

Entered postsecondary education and/or the workforce or military

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