



Partnerships Build Pathways

W.F. West junior Austin Freeborn had a lot of interests and talents, but no idea how he'd turn any of them into a career path. That is, until W.F. West partnered with Awesome Ford to introduce a Ford Automotive Career Exploration (ACE) training program at the high school this year. Now, while many of Freeborn's classmates have completed around 10%-20% of ACE trainings, Freeborn has gone above and beyond by working on the trainings in his free time and completing more than 50% of the training modules.

"I had no idea what I wanted to do for a long time and then this came along and I thought this might be a good opportunity for my first career," Freeborn said.

Many Pathways Means More Success

The new ACE training opportunity, a partnership with Awesome Ford, is one of the newest Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways at W.F. West High School. It aligns with the Chehalis School District's Student Achievement Goal to create pathways to support all students in finding the post-secondary plan that is right for them.

"In Chehalis, our goal is to prepare and support 100% of our students by cultivating their interests, unlocking their full potential, and guiding them as they align their skills, talents and purpose with career pathways. This partnership and program is doing just that," said Rick Goble, Executive Director for Student Achievement.

The origins of this unique partnership started in the spring of 2023 when Chehalis Superintendent Dr. Christine Moloney met with Robert and Heidi Pehl of I-5 Cars and Awesome Ford to discuss a potential partnership that could benefit both W.F. West students and the local economy. When Mark Westley was hired as W.F. West Assistant Principal/CTE Director in the summer of 2023, he and Goble continued talks with the local auto group. The Pehls were enthusiastic about the idea to bring innovation to the W.F. West auto shop and have a group of qualified candidates for automotive tech jobs coming out of the local community.



During a recent visit to the W.F. West campus, Ford representatives brought a 2024 Mustang.

What is ACE

Ford ACE is an online training series offered for both secondary and post-secondary learners. There are no fees for schools to participate in the Ford ACE program if they are sponsored by a local Ford/Lincoln dealership.

The courses are a subset of the same trainings taken by all current Ford dealership technicians. Students can earn certificates that represent completion of several of the total 85 training modules including subjects such as shop safety, New Model Training, Electrical Systems Engineering, History of Ford Motor Company, and Steering & Suspension. By completing the ACE training, students have the knowledge needed to begin as an entry level automotive service technician at one of the more than 3,200 a Ford/Lincoln dealerships in the United States or qualify for one of 70 post-secondary Ford specific school-to-work training programs.

"It's not watered down. You're going to get the same education, straight from the manufacturer, that our technicians get," explained Matt Phan, Technician Placement Specialist for Ford, when he recently visited with W.F. West students taking part in the ACE program.

W.F. West Career Tech Education teacher Randy Smith stressed that while the ACE training is specific to the Ford company, the knowledge could help a student planning to work in any kind of automotive setting in the future.

"It provides some tech background for when they go out and work in a shop. It's a foundation," Smith said. "And it demonstrates to employers that they have some foundational knowledge."

A Bright Future For Students, Program

W.F. West High School has about 50 students enrolled in the class for the ACE program as well as a couple high school students not in the class but working on the ACE trainings. Each week, they are assigned a few of the training modules, though students can choose to do as many as they like. Students are given one class period every week to work on the training modules in class. Smith explained that the entire ACE program takes about 200 hours to complete.

Smith is also working through the ACE training along with his students and has completed about 62% of the modules. Westley praised Smith's commitment to the W.F. West CTE program, noting the work he has done for many years keeping programs such as wood shop and automotive running and available for students. Westley said Smith has shown the same kind of commitment and enthusiasm toward the start up of the ACE program.

"He's going above and beyond to make sure he's well aware of the curriculum the kids are going to be doing. He's doing a great job being a great educational leader. We haven't launched, it was more like we blasted off and it's all Randy's doing," Westley said.

Coleman Degravelles, an 11th grader who has completed about 26% of the modules, said he decided to sign up for the ACE program because he loves tools and working with cars. In fact he pointed to his backpack, where he had a set of 1/4 inch tools he had brought to school with him in case he needed them. He said he grew up working with his dad and his plan after high school is to do something in the automotive field.

"I love that I'm working with my hands," Degravelles said of the program. "In a classroom, I can't focus at all."

Josh Chisnell, a 10th grader, has also completed about twice what has been assigned so far. He said he was drawn to the ACE program because he loves working on cars. He most recently purchased a car for \$500 and rebuilt it from the ground up, including putting a completely new transmission into it with the help of some of his friends in auto shop.

"It's not so much working on a car but working with your friends that's really cool," Chisnell said. "Having my own personal car and I built it from the ground up out of the ashes, that's way more cool than your parents just giving you a car."

For freshman Paiten Curtis, the draw of ACE was about career goals. She already knows she wants to work as a diesel mechanic after high school, so participating in ACE training is a way to get education that will help her with that goal.

"It'll help advance my future after high school," Curtis said.

If the W.F. West ACE program's enrollment continues to grow as hoped, there is a potential that Ford could assist in bringing in more tools and diagnostic equipment, to give students more hands-on experiences. Smith explained that much of the equipment in the shop is outdated and needs to be replaced in order to give students experience with tools and technology automotive shops are using today.

"I'd like to see our shop working as a professional shop doing oil changes and things like that so our students are getting experience hands-on in these areas as well," Smith said.

Westley said they're working right now on brainstorming incentive programs to keep students interested and motivated in the ACE program. Like all CTE programs, Westley said he's working on 1-year, 3-year and 5-year goals for the ACE program. When he looks down the road at his hopes for the future of this partnership, Westley said they center around outcomes for students.

"I want our students to not only be employable but highly sought after," Westley said.

In Other News

March 8 Will Be Fourth Conference Day

March 8 will be an early release day, allowing for an extra day of conferences, Chehalis School District administration has decided.

The date was originally planned as either a snow make up day or no school. Since the Chehalis School District closed schools Jan. 12 because of severe winter weather, March 8 becomes a school day to avoid adding days to the end of the school year to meet student attendance requirements. On March 8, W.F. West will release at 12:10, Chehalis Middle School will release at 12:20 p.m., Orin Smith will release at 1:20 p.m. and James Lintott will release at 1:30 p.m. Lunch will be served.

Spring Conferences were originally planned to take place Tuesday, March 5 to Thursday, March 7 so adding March 8 as an early release conference day gives teachers an additional day to schedule conferences with parents.

[Notice of Non-discrimination](#)
[Anti-bullying Policy and Procedure](#)