

## College isn't the only option



Jim Turner of New England Carpenters Training Fund talks with students from South Hadley High School about careers in carpentry during County Trades Day at the Turners Falls High School on Monday. Recorder Staff/Paul Franz



Shannon Doran of the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board talks with students from the Pioneer Valley Regional School about jobs in the area during County Trades Day at the Turners Falls High School on Monday. Recorder Staff/Paul Franz

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TURNERS FALLS — Colton Andrews wants to remind students that there's more than just college after graduation.

"The traditional high schools are pushed toward a college-or-bust approach. We try to explain to these kids that there is another option," Andrews of Laborers' Local 596 said. "There is a workforce that is starving and looking for a qualified worker."

About 100 upperclassmen from high schools from the region gathered at Turners Falls High School for an informational session Monday morning. It's a chance for nontechnical school students to learn about apprenticeships and other careers post-graduation.

Arranged by Donna Dusell, the youth pathways coordinator of the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board, eight different groups presented information in the hallways of Turners about different trades and how they may be able to find a career in them.

“The point of this day is to help students understand what an apprenticeship is,” DuSell said. “I work with lots of young people that don’t know what to do after high school. They’re thinking about college but they just don’t know if it’s for them.”

Students, mostly juniors and seniors, came from Turners, Greenfield High School, Pioneer Valley Regional School, Mahar Regional School, Four Rivers Charter School and South Hadley High School.

“There’s some pretty cool jobs here and some really helpful information,” Turners junior Kyle Dodge said.

A classmate, Jack Putala agreed, saying the day “gives us an opportunity to see the other types of jobs without going to college.”

After an informational session in the high school’s auditorium, the students rotated between employers. They heard pitches from companies and learned how they could land a potential apprenticeship post college.

Andrews noted that one of the “biggest misconceptions” is that there aren’t construction jobs available. He said they get college graduates from University of Massachusetts Amherst, looking for positions with them. Andrews emphasized that the workforce has plenty of openings for people who are skilled workers or willing, through an apprenticeship to become skilled.

“Right now, there are a lot of shortages in the labor trades. There’s a lot of openings,” DuSell said. “There’s an aging workforce that needs to be replaced.”

For Greenfield High School Guidance Counselor Shelly DeMeo, she was happy that some of her students could learn about viable career paths that they may not have known exist.

“Our message to them is it’s not too late to be an electrician or a plumber. You’re 17,” DeMeo said. “This was really inspirational for them even though they didn’t go to the tech school.”

And while most schools brought guidance counselors with the students, South Hadley High School brought its carpentry teacher Bill O’Neil. Although not a technical school at the moment, O’Neil said they are looking to become a vocational school as well. His students that he brought with him already had some training, but a chance for him to remind his teenagers what employers are looking for.

“The biggest thing I’ve been trying to hammer into them is that when people call for a recommendation for students, yeah the grade is important, but they really want to make sure they’re on time, they don’t take a lot of days off, and when they show up, they’re ready to go.”

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