

Schools help graduates enter working picture

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give students a necessary career edge as they grow to be adults.

MANY COURSES are taught at Farmington, Harrison and North Farmington, while others are offered to students throughout the county at SVOVEC — Southwest Oakland Vocational Education Center in Walled Lake.

At Farmington High School, Richard Burgess teaches two beginning electronics courses and has nine students in an advanced, two-hour electronics class for the serious, career-minded student. The words "Keys to the Future" are displayed on a classroom board, showing students the future direction of our automated, electronic society.

Burgess' graduates have grown into positions as engineers, service shop owners. One is currently a na-

tional sales manager for an electronics company.

"It's an opening step, a step in the door," said Burgess, who has taught electronics since 1969. "The hardest thing to do is to keep up with the technology."

Although all grade levels of students are represented, the electronics classes are currently comprised of all boys. He encourages high school girls to get involved in the courses, which are really "applied math," he said.

THOSE THAT like their vocational/technical subject matter usually do well, according to Harrison High teacher Paul Bennett.

"It helps if you like what you're doing, and these guys love it so they'll do better," said Bennett, in his 16th year teaching auto shop, one of the program's most popular

courses. Sections are offered at all three high schools.

About 15 junior and senior students in the advanced class at Harrison were rebuilding engines, repairing steering systems and working on a differential one morning last week.

Most of these advanced students will make auto mechanics a career. Some take further schooling; others move directly into the workplace.

After completing Bennett's advanced course, students "know a lot more than turning a wrench." They have learned a bit of chemistry, some electronics and physics.

"We're always talking about career opportunities," he added, "as mechanics, service writers, in auto parts."

"This class can open up a lot of opportunities. I want to make them aware of all the career possibilities they can choose."

Vocational education called integral part of high school

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Increased and the district is reviewing social studies requirements, where recommendations for increases are also expected.

According to Baumunk, most students do not have the opportunity to enroll in a vocational or technical course until later school years because early years are filled with re-

quired courses.

"Other people have to get on the bandwagon if they want a balanced program," Baumunk said of trends in vocational education nationwide. "Right now, it's headed toward an unbalanced one."

Proponents of the vocational/technical options are calling on high school counselors to help advise students in these areas. Baumunk is encouraging Farmington counselors to develop an individual, four-year plan for each student that includes broadening the base of skills with a balance of academics and vocational classes.

"It doesn't mean it's etched in stone," he said, "but it gives a guideline."

IN FARMINGTON vocational/technical courses, about half a student's time is spent with books and lectures, and the other half with hands-on applications, Baumunk said.

About 50 percent of the 1987 high school graduates had a "saleable skill" and about 75 percent of these



Staff photo by RANDY BORST

Harrison High junior Richard Croft disassembles the rear axle of a car during the advanced auto mechanics class.

go on to college. Some use their skill for full-time work, while others simply apply it to their lives in other ways, Baumunk added.

A good example is use of the keyboard, which anyone in almost any job today needs to master because of the influx of computers.

But student participation in Farmington programs is declining overall, he said. Several years ago, 57 percent of the student population graduated with a "saleable" skill.

Baumunk said the enrollments have dropped by 70 students since last year, which he attributes to the additional high school science requirements.

Although Baumunk and others approach vocational/technical education today as part of a well-rounded

program for all students, the traditional approach directed students who were not planning to attend college into these programs.

The importance of such programs for non-college-bound students was stressed recently in a report titled "The Forgotten Half: Non-College Youth in America."

Drafted by the 19-member William T. Grant Foundation's Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship, the report said these students, who number approximately 20 million nationwide, "are in danger of being left at the starting gate."

"Where high school graduates could once seek steady, good-paying jobs in manufacturing, agriculture and transportation, they find these positions are disappearing by the

millions." Without better programs to help these youths succeed, it said, "this nation may face a future divided not along lines of race or geography but of educational attainment."

The report recommended that non-college youth be given more help moving into careers and encouraged schools to "forge links with business and government to give youth a careful look at the work world."

A recent partnership between the Farmington Public Schools and the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce was formed to encourage such change.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.



Farmington High School senior Joe Duprey, 17, manipulates a robotic arm in the electronics class.

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