

Foothills Education Charter High School

Success Through Partnerships: Foothills Welding Program

This spring, Foothills embarked on an exciting new journey in partnership with the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) and WorkForce Innovators of America (WIO America) to offer 18 Foothills students the opportunity to complete a 10-week welding program at the Barrow site. Upon completion of the program, the students earn an American Welding Society WPS Certification, along with Soft Skill Components that include Six Sigma, OSHA 10 Certification and CPR Certification.

The NEGRC was “very aware of the great work Foothills is doing and the opportunities we provide our students,” states Irene Munn, Foothills Dual Enrollment Specialist. In 2019, the NEGRC purchased a mobile training trailer for welding and industrial mechanical instruction, as well as for increasing community awareness related to jobs in the manufacturing industry. Last fall, the trailer visited Barrow Foothills, and many students expressed interest in learning to weld after touring the trailer.

Foothills and NEGRC joined forces and resources to bring the pilot program to the Barrow site. Foothills provided funds for the personal protective equipment for students, a portion of the instructional costs, background checks for instructors, costs for certification testing, and support with recruiting and job placement for the trainees. NEGRC provided the training trailer, as well as the balance of the instructor costs, all resources, and supplies. Students from the Barrow, Walton, and Social Circle sites were recruited through informational meetings and YouScience, an assessment that matches a person’s unique skills and aptitudes to a specific career field. Site directors at all three sites received information on students whose YouScience assessment showed an aptitude for welding so these students could be encouraged to attend an informational meeting.

In February, 18 students from the three sites entered the program that required them to attend classes each night Monday to Thursday from 5pm to 8pm. This was in addition to any schoolwork needed for other Foothills courses. Because of the broad flexibility provided by their charter, Munn notes that Foothills was “uniquely positioned to provide our Foothills welding course. We are using our broad flexibility to teach the standards from the CTAE intro to welding course in a 10-week period, using instructors from Workforce Innovators of America.”

The current COVID-19 situation caused three of our students to drop out of the course while the rest resumed the soft skills portion of the training (i.e. resume writing, interview skills, problem solving, financial literacy, six sigma) in an online format with nightly Zoom meetings. The hard skills components of the welding instruction were completed June 2 – 12.

This course proved successful and valuable to our students. The multiple certifications earned prepared all students for jobs in the industry. At program conclusion, every student’s skills were reviewed by hiring representatives from Kubota Industrial Equipment and Caterpillar. Eleven of the 15 students who were 17 and over were asked to interview for full and part-time jobs. The remainder of the class are well-qualified for the work-based learning opportunities offered in the Fall and Spring of 2021.

Certifications earned were Lean Six Sigma Intro, CPR/First Aid/AED Training, Welding Safety, Forklift operation’ and Introduction to MIG Welding. Of the 15 student completers, two were women.

Foothills Superintendent Sherrie Gibney-Sherman stated, "We could not be prouder of our Foothills students.

At Foothills we work very hard to help students earn a high school diploma. We identify barriers and work with students to find solutions to overcome barriers. For the last two years we have been focusing on helping students make the transfer from Foothills to the right post secondary or industry certification path that will lead them into the workforce and a great career. Our welding project is an example of our efforts. We want students to not only have success in completing their diploma requirement, we want them to also be able to navigate the work world and be contributing citizens to this great state. These students not only learned excellent, important welding skills but they got to participate in actual interviews, complete applications, and all 15 students have been placed in a welding environment as a work-based learning student or full time employment with salaries and benefits. We are super proud."

Student Voices from Foothills Welding

Joey Cagle:

I love it. It got me thinking about my future and a career in welding. It is a great opportunity for students who cannot afford this type of program. The people want the best for you, but you must be willing to work and put in the work. I am learning so many other skills, too—resume writing, interviewing, and life skills. We spent 6 hours talking about attitude and confidence. These are skills that will help in any career.

Destiny Evans:

I found out about the program through the announcements, and I went because it sounded interesting and I did not really have a plan for the future. The program opened my eyes. There is a stigma that welding is a task that “big strong men do.” But I realized how easy it could be for me, and I am learning skills beyond welding—blueprint reading skills that could help with architecture, time management skills that could help in business. Schools should have more programs like this because not all kids are good with books. Public school offers a “one size fits all,” but society is changing, and we need more options.

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Sherrie Gibney-Sherman, Ed.D.
Superintendent, Foothills Education Charter High School
Regional Office
2415 Suite B Jefferson Road
Athens, GA 30607
Foothills Regional Office: 706.395.9775
706.224.2287 (cell)
Email: sherrie.gibney-sherman@foothillscharter.org