



Executive Summary: Evaluation of the Harbor Freight Tools for Schools L.A. County Skilled Trades Summers Program

This external evaluation of Los Angeles County Skilled Trades Summers—an effort that aims to provide high school students with quality hands-on learning and training in a variety of skilled trades—was conducted by the FDR Group for Harbor Freight Tools for Schools. The purpose of the evaluation was to document the impact of skilled trades summer programs on attitudes and behaviors; to ascertain the influence of summer programs on skilled trades offerings during the regular school year; and to better identify opportunities for improvement in program design and implementation. The research was conducted in 2024 and included 9 focus groups; 20 leadership interviews; and online surveys with 286 high school students, 117 parents, and 64 “staff”—a catch-all that includes such roles as administrator, case manager, guidance counselor, instructor, principal, program coordinator, and industry partner.

Among the most compelling survey results:

- 2 out of 3 parents believe that their child will be more likely to graduate from high school as a result of participating in a skilled trades summer program (67% parents).
- Virtually all students and parents would strongly recommend their skilled trades summer program to others (94% of students and 98% of parents gave a score of 8 or higher on a 0-to-10 scale).
- Virtually all parents and staff agree that learning the skilled trades in high school teaches valuable life skills (97% parents; 100% staff).
- Students, parents, and staff believe that participating in a skilled trades summer program has an impact on students’ personal growth and maturity. Majorities report positive benefits for students in each of the following:
 - Willingness to try new things (80%, 92%, 81%)
 - Pride in one’s work (75%, 99%, 86%)
 - Self-confidence (70%, 94%, 84%)
 - Attendance at school or work (65%, 70%, 58%)
 - Making new friends (50%, 75%, 72%)
- Students, parents, and staff also believe that participating in a skilled trades summer program will have an impact on students’ future education and careers:
 - More than 8 in 10 agree that students will feel more excited about their future (82% students; 88% parents; 86% staff).
 - Strong majorities agree that students will consider careers that they never would have before (69% students; 71% parents; 95% staff).

- Most parents and staff think that the skilled trades summer program prepares students to:
 - Understand the career pathway for the skilled trade that they learned (86% parents; 94% staff)
 - Be successful in a community college or trade school (85% parents; 91% staff)
 - Be more successful in high school overall (79% parents; 80% staff)
 - Be successful in a 4-year college (58% parents; 59% staff)
 - Know the steps to join a union (53% parents; 67% staff)
- Among the survey respondents who were high school graduates (a sub-set of the student sample), 44% have pursued further education in a skilled trade and 24% have worked for pay in a skilled trade.

Key Findings

The key findings are:

Finding #1. Students and parents greatly value the skilled trades summer program.

Finding #2. Participation in a skilled trades summer program leads to personal growth and maturity in students.

Finding #3. Participation in a skilled trades summer program broadens students' thinking about career options and the future.

Finding #4. Parents and staff believe that students come away from the skilled trades summer program well prepared for further education and future careers in the skilled trades.

Finding #5. The skilled trades summer program may help build the pipeline for skilled trades practitioners in Los Angeles County.

Finding #6. Students, parents, and staff strongly support skilled trades instruction during high school.

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