

# Covina Valley rolls out welding program to meet rising demand

By [Jason Henry](#), San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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Christabal Ramirez, 18, learns how to weld with instructor Ervin More during the 9-week trade welding program at Fairvalley High School in Covina on Monday, March 16, 2015. The district wanted to offer students who may not want to go to college a way to get certificated in a growing field and to find immediate high wage work after they graduate. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda/ San Gabriel Valley Tribune)

Fairvalley High School senior Christabel Ramirez never considered welding as a possible career, until a class opened up this year that gave her a chance to let sparks fly. It's an option some say could net her a decent living without spending four years in college. "There's a lot of jobs to do this," Ramirez said, wearing protective gear and using tongs to hold a burned piece of metal. "They make a lot of money — and it's not as hard as I thought."

She's among 25 students at the continuation school taking part in a Covina-Valley Unified School District pilot program that revived a trade school previously used only to train adults. Eventually, the curriculum will include classes aimed at welding, electrical and HVAC certifications, with the hope of getting students high-wage jobs right out of high school.

“That’s our goal here, to make sure that not only our local adults learn the trades but our students as well,” said Jonathan Blackmore, director of curriculum for grades 6-12. “We’re looking at employability — we’re looking at wage.”

In California, welders make an average of about \$20 an hour and topping out at about \$25-\$30, according to the state’s Employment Development Department. It’s expected that the state’s welding industry will grow some 7 percent by 2022, with 770 jobs opening up each year, according to occupational projections. The National Center for Welding Education and Training previously projected a need for 238,692 new or replacement workers by 2019.

Covina-Valley’s trade center is currently open just to Fairvalley students, but by next fall, the district hopes to expand access to all three of its high schools. Officials used funds from the sale of a former welding center near the Covina Police Department to build the new facility at Fairvalley.

And the first academic offering drew quite a bit of attention. “We’re expecting it to be a very high demand program,” said Principal Dana Craig. “The word is getting out within our school community.” Nearly half of the school’s 150 students applied.

Instructor Irvine Moore began welding in the 1960s. He said the students caught on quick, and he has already received calls from welding companies looking to hire any standouts. They could even work after school, he added.

Moore’s goal is for the teens to have all the certification they would need at the end of the three-semester chain of courses. In just a few weeks, he said, the students are outperforming adults taking the class at night.

“They enjoy doing it,” he said of his charges.