

# Stefanik: More programs like BOCES needed

- [KATHLEEN MOORE kmoore@poststar.com](mailto:kmoore@poststar.com)
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BOCES Southern Adirondack Education Center machining students Tyler Odell, left, and Matt Sawyer, right, show U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik an item designed to make perfectly round ice balls during her tour of the center on Wednesday.

- Kathleen Moore—[kmoore@poststar.com](mailto:kmoore@poststar.com)

KINGSBURY ▾ Students need more programs like BOCES, which provide hands-on training in real occupations, said U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-Willsboro, after a tour of the Southern Adirondack Education Center on Wednesday.

“This is part of the solution,” she said, adding that one of the top concerns she hears from businesses is a lack of employees.

They can’t find people who can do the job, she said.

“And in many cases these are good-paying jobs,” she added.

So she was “extremely impressed” by the students she met at the Southern Adirondack Education Center, who were learning to weld, operating tooling machines and design medical equipment.

“It gave me an opportunity to learn how important it is to make sure what our children learn in the classroom connects to jobs in the real world,” she said. “I think it goes to show the importance of flexibility in education.”

One student who was waiting eagerly to meet Stefanik has already gotten a job because of his work in the tool machining program.

Matt Sawyer, 19, a senior at Lake George High School, did a three-week internship at MNS Precision in Hudson Falls. At the end of it, he was offered a job as soon as he graduates from high school this June.

Other students have been offered jobs by employers who will also pay for them to earn a two-year degree in machining at Hudson Valley Community College.

Sawyer’s job doesn’t come with that perk, but he said his pay from the job will help him afford the \$11,000 tuition.

And by the end of his two years, he’ll have a degree and most of the hours needed for a much better job in the industry, said teacher Dave Coonradt.

A machining apprenticeship is 6,000 to 8,000 hours, he said. Students earn their first 840 hours in the class, which makes them hireable.

“It gives them a foot in the door, so to speak. They can run machines, produce parts, read blueprints,” he said.

The program also gives engineers valuable experience, said student Tyler Odell, 19, of Hudson Falls High School.

He plans to go to college for engineering. In the meantime, he’s looking into a free welding club to learn about welding, while practicing machining in the BOCES program.

He thinks companies want engineers who understand both trades.

As an engineer, he also wants to avoid designing items that are impossible to tool or weld.

“That happens a lot, so Fortune 500 companies are looking for people who understand all three,” he said.

To help students like them, Stefanik wants to make sure workforce development programs are fully funded, she said.

She’s on the Education and The Workforce Committee, where she believes there’s “a lot of interest” in funding alternative education like BOCES.

But she wants to go farther than just funding.

“I also think we need to have greater flexibility in our federal education policy,” she said.

She plans to use information from tours like Wednesday’s event to argue for greater flexibility to create classes that correspond more closely with occupations.

*You can reach Kathleen Moore at 742-3247 or [kmoore@poststar.com](mailto:kmoore@poststar.com). Follow her on Twitter @ByKathleenMoore or at her blog on [www.poststar.com](http://www.poststar.com).*