

From Gap to Growth: How West-MEC Is Powering Arizona's Workforce

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PEORIA (October 9, 2025) - A skilled and capable workforce is essential to keeping any economy thriving, especially in fast-growing regions like Arizona's West Valley. With major employers such as Amkor, Nestlé, Amazon, and others expanding operations in metro Phoenix, and with population growth soaring, the demand for skilled careers is only expected to rise, particularly in the semiconductor and advanced manufacturing industries.

However, the region faces several challenges in building the talent pipeline needed to meet this demand. The high number of entry-level openings, coupled with an aging workforce approaching retirement, has created a widening skills gap. Compounding the issue is a general lack of awareness about careers in advanced manufacturing, specifically what these jobs entail, the benefits they offer, and the paths to enter them.

Arizona must act now to meet the growing demand for skilled workers. One organization helping to address this challenge is Western Maricopa Education Center, or West-MEC.

West-MEC is a public career and technical education (CTE) district serving more than 45,000 students from 49 high schools across 3,800 square miles in the northern and western Phoenix metro area. Each year, more than 3,000 students receive hands-on, industry-aligned training at West-MEC's four central campuses.

CTE programs are developed in close collaboration with local employers and advisory councils made up of industry professionals. This ongoing feedback loop ensures West-MEC's offerings are responsive to workforce needs, whether by updating curriculum or launching new programs like the Advanced Manufacturing program, which will begin in Fall 2025.

West-MEC equips high school students with a powerful jump-start toward in-demand careers, yet misconceptions persist. A common myth is that CTE students forgo college or are not suited for higher education. In reality, about 70% of West-MEC graduates go on to further their education, while 28% enter the workforce directly out of high school.

For example, students who complete relevant programs at West-MEC could pursue careers with companies like Amkor Technology Arizona in roles such as:

- Manufacturing operations
- Facility technicians (HVAC, electrical, mechanical, water, controls)
- Logistics and warehouse technicians

Every student's path is different; some go to college, others enter the workforce, and many do both. CTE does not limit a student's future; it expands it.

West-MEC has over 30 career training programs in areas such as Auto Tech, Coding, Welding, Nursing, and more. Each program is aligned with local industries to ensure students are learning what an entry-level employee would need to know to excel in their role. Not only are students taught the technical skills required to obtain these roles, but just as importantly, they are learning the professional skills required to keep and progress their careers.

As the West Valley's workforce evolves, CTE is proving to be a powerful launchpad for lifelong success. By empowering students with real-world skills, industry credentials, and a head start in the job market, West-MEC helps bridge the gap between education and employment, an urgent need in our rapidly changing economy.

An investment in CTE is an investment in a future-ready Arizona—one with a skilled workforce, a robust economy, and a thriving community.