Select a newspaper

Main menu

SURPRISE INDEPENDENT

My account (/surprise-independent/account/) Log out (/surprise-independent/login.html?action=logout)

(/surprise-independent/)

TECHNICAL EDUCATION

West-MEC program lets West Valley students get jump on Firefighting skills



(https://gamma.creativecirclecdn.com/yourvalley/original/20261019-095818-315-West-MEC%20Fire%20Sciences.jpg)

(INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA/RICHARD SMITH)

West-MEC student Grant Liles tightes a screw atop a fire hydrant lct as instructor Paul Eaton watches Oct.15 at Glendale Regional Public Safety Training Center.





Posted Sunday, October 18, 2026 2:32 pm



By Richard Smith (/browse.html?byline=Richard%20Smith)
Mail (mailto:rsmith@iniusa.org) |
X: @rsmithYWV (https://twitter.com/rsmithYWV)

Nearly 50 West Valley high school students are getting a jump start on a potential career as firefighters.

In partnership with Glendale Community College, West-MEC offers fire science instruction in the classroom and in the field. Students are able to train alongside cadets from fire departments across the West Valley.

Every school year, two cohorts with 23 students in each train two days a week for six hours total at Glendale Regional Public Safety Training Center.

Dysart High School senior Isabella Ayala learned how to do the plug — where a firefighter hooks up an engine to a hydrant — and quick attacks — using water immediately from an engine's onboard tank.

“You can’t do that on a day-to-day basis unless you’re a firefighter,” Ayala said.

On Oct. 15, the trainees were going over quick-attack drills. They got practice draining hoses and reloading trucks. Students load the hand lines, which are deployed inside houses during house fires. Supply lines connect to hydrants.

GCC Fire Academy Director Mike Godleski was among the professional firefighters leading drills.

As a regional academy, West-MEC receives all access to the facilities for their high school class.

“Obviously, we’re not going to take the students into live fire at this point in their careers, but everything else, we’re trying to give them more exposure to,” Godleski said.

A fire instructor for about two decades, Godleski has eight years working with various colleges on fire science programs.

Didactic training is in classrooms and outdoor facilities at GRPSTC. Godleski said students get some basic wildfire training in the surrounding hills and desert.

“It’s really giving our students an advantage for those who do want to pursue a career in the fire service. They’re getting first-hand knowledge and hands-on experience that will prepare them when they are hired to go to a regional academy they’ll have already done the skills and tasks that are required,” he said.



(https://yourvalleybanners.creativecirclemedia.com/www/delivery/ck.php?oaparams=2__bannerid=3961__zoneid=39__cb=foce129986__oadest=https%3A%2F%2Fshoulderreplacement.com%2F%3Futm_source%3DSun%2BBC

The partnership between West-MEC, GCC and local fire departments started more than a decade ago, said Leticia Reyna-Stroud, West-MEC’s partner program manager.

“It developed out of a need to introduce more students to that world,” Reyna-Stroud said. “We thought why not have high schoolers start this program. Hopefully, this gets them some initial credentials and they can continue on in their studies with Glendale Community College.”

Ayala said she wanted to be a firefighter and was looking for the first steps to become a firefighter.

She looked into West-MEC because Dysart High did not have much information about fire science programs.

Her older sister is an EMT.

“I’ve always grown up inspired by them because they risk their lives,” Ayala said.

Dual enrollment is available for high school juniors and seniors. They can earn college credit in the program and transfer these credits to a community college or university, toward a specific degree.

Seniors who want more exposure to the fire service can get employed as certified wildland firefighters. Students from previous classes were out in the wildlands of New Mexico and California this summer.

“We hope to show them a little bit more of the search patterns — how to search a residence and things you’re looking for. The students will go through and get their CPR certification,” he said. “Next semester we’ll also put all students through their CPR certification. Next semester, we’ll also put all of the students through what’s called a red card class, which certifies them as wildland firefighters.”

Ayala plans to attend EMT school through GCC, then enter a fire academy as soon as she can.

Some friends at Dysart are now interested in the program.

She said the textbook portions of the program are more difficult for her than the firefighting drills.

“The physical stuff, I didn’t really struggle with. Of course, I did struggle with coupling but once you keep doing something over and over it becomes second nature,” Ayala said.