Diesel Industrial Agricultural Mechanics

Herndon Career Center | Video Transcript

Hi, I'm Chad Dudley. I teach Diesel Mechanics here at Herndon Career Center. Students get to see a wide variety of equipment, from construction equipment and on-highway trucks to agricultural equipment. Student training is twofold: first, learning what the equipment is—because many students haven't seen it before—and second, completing actual disassembly and reassembly. That's the nutshell of what mechanics do.

The Diesel Technology curriculum is ASE-based, and we focus on five areas: diesel engines, powertrains, steering and suspension, brakes, and maintenance and light repair.

Students begin with a very basic understanding of the work, and we build from that foundation. In engines, we start with mechanical engines and progress to electronic engines. In powertrains, we begin with basic manual transmissions and work up to electronically controlled powershift and automatic transmissions.

Most elements of the curriculum follow that progression. Hydraulics is a little different because it is more industrial, but it also includes an electronic component. Throughout the curriculum, electronics are critical. Everything is electronic, and students' willingness to embrace that technology is a huge part of the program.

Students in the Diesel Technology program have several choices after graduation. One option is to go straight to work. We offer an internship program that gives students the opportunity to work during the school year and, hopefully, continue with that employer after graduation. Students can also attend postsecondary colleges such as State Tech or Milford in Nebraska for training related to manufacturers such as Caterpillar and John Deere.

Students can earn ASE student certifications in diesel engines, electronics, powertrains, brakes, and steering and suspension. There is also an ASE component for air conditioning. Between ASE certifications, internships, and postsecondary training, those are the three main pathways for students who graduate from the program.

In addition to the other certifications, students leave Herndon Career Center with an OSHA 10 certification.

ASE stands for Automotive Service Excellence. It is a third-party standardization organization that writes tests, establishes curricula, and certifies programs. Its goal is to ensure entry-level technicians meet a minimum standard of knowledge.

For a student coming out of the program without additional postsecondary training, the average starting pay is in the low $20s per hour. Many students who are interning are earning at least $21 to $22 an hour. Pay can increase with experience and depends greatly on the employer and location. At the high end, some crane technicians earn around $60 to $65 an hour.

Demand in the diesel industry—whether in agriculture, heavy equipment, or on-highway trucking—is not slowing down. It continues to grow. Almost every business partner we work with would hire good students, and that demand is not going away in the near future.