

TUPPER TECH PROGRAM

Written: Maria Rantanen

Students clock in and they clock out. They dress in safety gear and are responsible for their own learning - no interference from their parents.

This is the tight ship run by Russ Evans, who is in charge of the Vancouver School Board's Tupper Tech program.

Tupper Tech is a year-long district program that gives students in Grade 12 an introduction to several trades.

Over the course of the year, 20 students will learn about residential carpentry, welding, electrical, sheet metal, machine work and automotive work.

Russ loses a lot of his students throughout the year – but he sees this as a success of the program, and not a failure.

That's because, as students go off on their first practicums to try their new-found skills at job sites, often six to 10 of them get hired and apprenticed – and they often don't return to school except to complete their high school graduation. (Many come to the program with only their Grade 12 language requirement to do.)

Russ puts this down to the fact that he runs his program like a workplace: students have to arrive on time, they are given assignments and the expectation is that they behave professionally and courteously and obey all rules, foremost being the safety rules.

This means before graduating, they are already on their way to become a tradesperson and by the time their friends are going through university, they will have the opportunity to gain their Red Seal.

"Those who attend Tupper Tech are usually two years ahead of the peers upon graduation – they'll be journeymen at the time their peers are in third-year university," Russ explains.

Not only are they working and training in their chosen profession, Russ finds his grads are more mature than their peers because of their work experience.

"They are radically different people from third-year university students," he adds.

Every year, Russ receives about 45 applications for 20 spots and he will interview each student he is considering. He tries to pick a cohort that will work together; it's like putting together a team, he says.

Before being chosen for Tupper Tech, students drop by for a day to see what takes place in the program. At that point, they will get a sense of whether they want to apply for the program.



Once students are accepted into the program, "it's on them to be successful and responsible," Russ says, placing the onus squarely on the students to carve their own career path in the trades.

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