SCK Launch Experience links students, employers

bgdailynews.com/2026/10/25/sck-launch-experience-links-students-employers

Justin Story October 25, 2026

The video player is currently playing an ad.
Published 6:00 am Sunday, October 25, 2026



1/6

Auburn Eighth Grader Sawyer Gaskey climbs out of a smoke-filled maze set up by the Bowling Green Fire Department at the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce's SCK LAUNCH event at WKU's Knicely Conference Center on Thursday. (JACK DOBBS / Daily News)













Western Kentucky University’s Knicely Conference Center acted as the launch pad for the career ambitions of thousands of students this week, hosting the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce’s 10th Annual SCK LAUNCH Experience event.

About 3,700 eighth-grade students from schools in 11 southcentral Kentucky counties took part in the two-day career expo, in which employers and postsecondary educators offered interactive experiences to help students find a career interest and show what's possible in those fields.

Prior to the Experience, which took place Thursday and Friday at the Knicely Center, educators took students through a curriculum to prepare them to meet with people representing numerous sectors of the local economy, getting students to discover career paths available locally, explore their interests, gear up for hands-on experiences at the event and reflect on their time interacting with local professionals.

"This does provide an opportunity for the schools and teachers as they begin to work with students and talk about careers, we talk about what do you want to learn more about, how might we help you launch your career, how might we help you learn more about what's available out there," said Sandra Baker, senior vice president of education, workforce and talent with the Chamber. "That's the heart of what it is, to help young people understand that there's more than a doctor or nurse in health care (as career options), spread your net, leaen what's out there and try to find what you love and enjoy and have a passion and propensity for."

The first SCK LAUNCH Experience was held in 2016 in a room at the National Corvette Museum, and involved only eighth-graders from Bowling Green Independent School District and Warren County Public Schools.

Since then, the event has grown to include students representing more than two dozen schools.

The job expo is an important step in the larger talent development strategy that is SCK LAUNCH – which stands for South Central Kentucky Learning About Unique and New Careers Here.

Groups of students moved through several rooms in the Knicely Center, learning about available careers in the area in sectors like manufacturing, health care and professional services by taking part in any of a number of interactive experiences.

Students visiting the booth for Russellville manufacturer Logan Aluminum got to operate a forklift simulator, while at the booth for Glasgow health care provider T.J. Regional Health, students learned to perform CPR on a baby-sized dummy.

Several students gathered Thursday morning around a machine crafted by automation and engineering workers for Bowling Green laundry manufacturer Henkel.

The machine made lemonade using a process similar to how Henkel produces laundry detergent, with students able to adjust the amounts of sugar, water and lemon juice to perfect their formulas.

“So many eighth-graders are going into a pivotal part of high school and they don’t really know what they want do to, and Bowling Green has lots of opportunities, so we want to make sure they know there’s lots of great jobs available here,” said Lauren Laing, who works at Henkel’s talent acquisition department for its North American locations. “For a lot of kids, this is maybe the most interaction they get with a corporate company at this age and we just want to make sure it’s a positive one.”

For educators, the event is seen as an opportunity to help students recognize their interests, the ways in which they appear in any number of career options and the educational pathways that can be taken to enter a professional fiels

“One of the biggest values aside form them finding new interests is to know how many opportunities are here close to home that they can make connections with after school,” said Rachel Vargas, a math teacher at Chandlers Elementary School. “This is providing excellent opportunities for our students, and getting them to understand these types of career options as an eighth grader is going to help them make excellent choices for electives in high school and beyond, so it’s setting them up for success.”

Jennifer Smith has volunteered at the SCK LAUNCH Experience for three years and works at WKU, one of the title sponsors, as assistant vice president of government and external relations.

Smith said the event has given her a good perspective on how students begin to develop career interests.

“I’ve enjoyed watching the students be introduced to things they’ve never seen before and for them to be able to see different career pathways that they may want to take,” Smith said. “A lot of students see teachers at school, they see what their parents do, but they may not have any experience of all the other things that are out there, so it’s really neat to watch them go through this and pretend to draw blood and go ‘oh my gosh I could actually do that’, things they may not know that they could do before.”