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HIGH SCHOOL and middle school students from the state, more than 3,000 of them, attended the Connecticut Business and Industry Association's career expo in manufacturing this week. Above, Rene Melendez, 15, left, Marjorie King, 14, and Vanessa Sanchez, 13, watch a virtual manufacturing environment on Thursday at the Connecticut Expo Center in Hartford. The three are eighth-graders at the Read School in Bridgeport.

MANUFACTURING'S WORLD

CBIA Expo Gives Thousands Of Students A Look At 'Changed' Jobs

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About 3,000 Connecticut students got a close look at manufacturing jobs this week at the Connecticut Business and Industry Association's career fair for middle and high school students.

The event at the Connecticut Expo Center in Hartford, called "Manufacture Your Future," included representatives from more than 30 manufacturing companies from around Connecticut. It also featured an assembly line that produced commemorative key chains for attending students.

Manufacturers said they attended the career fair hoping to attract new

younger workers to a workforce currently experiencing a labor shortage. The average age of a state manufacturing worker is about 47, said Lauren Kaufman, vice president of the CBIA.

Jeff Blodgett, vice president of research for the Connecticut Economic Resource Center, said one reason for the labor shortage is a stigma that still surrounds manufacturing work.

"People tend to think of manufacturing as dusty, dirty, dangerous work," Blodgett said. "When, in fact, it has changed around. Previously, manufacturing was characterized by brawn, whereas now it's better characterized by brain."

This week's event aimed to accentuate the nature of modern manufacturing

jobs: Safe and clean technology was front and center. Many students who attended said they were impressed with technology on display, including a laser cutter.

Matt Lorkiewicz, 17, a senior at Henry Abbott Technical School in Danbury, said he enjoyed the event but said he is not sure whether he plans to enter manufacturing after school.

One instructor at the school, Angelo Velez, head of the computer-aided drafting and design department, said he thought students learned a lot.

"They came away with much more than we thought they'd come away with," he said.

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