



Press Release

## West Virginia High School Skilled Trades Teacher Among 50 Finalists for 2020 Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence

*\$1 Million in Cash Prizes to be Awarded in October*

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CALABASAS, Calif.—Kevin Cornell, a Charleston, West Virginia high school skilled trades teacher, is among 50 teachers and teacher teams from across the country who were named today as finalists for the 2020 Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence. Cornell and his high school skilled trades program are in the running for a share of \$1 million in total cash awards.

Cornell, who teaches automotive technology at Carver Career and Technical Education Center and is the first finalist from West Virginia, was chosen by an independent panel of judges from a field of more than 600 skilled trades teachers who applied for the prize. The finalists—some competing as individuals and some as teacher teams—hail from 23 states and specialize in trades including manufacturing, welding, construction, automotive, agriculture mechanics and technical theater.

“Trades teachers are truly unsung heroes, and our prize seeks to show everyone how powerful these classes can be,” said Danny Corwin, executive director of Harbor Freight Tools for Schools. “Skilled trades education has enormous potential to offer students pathways to multiple postsecondary opportunities, and these are the teachers who are providing them with the knowledge, skills and inspiration year after year.”

A 15-year industry veteran and an Automotive Service Excellence-certified master technician, Cornell decided to become a teacher in 2003. That year, he reached out to his former high school shop teacher, who told Cornell that trades teaching positions were opening in Kanawha County due to retirements. After earning his bachelor’s degree in career and technical education, Cornell entered the classroom, teaching an

Automotive Service Excellence-aligned and -certified curriculum. Since then, Cornell has created internship agreements with local dealerships for his students and offers college credits through his program. Advanced students run a live shop working on customer cars and pursue projects with peers in welding and collision repair programs. The majority of Cornell's students are considered "at risk," on a path toward leaving high school without graduating. To support his students, Cornell uses trauma-informed teaching practices based on the Adverse Childhood Experiences study. His students graduate at rates near 100 percent.

The full list of finalists is available [here](#).

The 2020 finalists now advance to a second round of competition, where they will be asked to respond to online expert-led video learning modules designed to solicit their insights and creative ideas about teaching practices. The contenders will be asked how ideas from the modules might be used to inspire students to achieve excellence in the skilled trades. Two rounds of judging, each by separate independent panels of reviewers, will narrow the field to 18 winners and, finally, name three of those teachers Grand Prize recipients. All winners will be announced in late October.

The 18 winners will split \$1 million in prizes. Grand Prize winners will each receive \$100,000, with \$70,000 going to their public high school skilled trades program and \$30,000 to the individual skilled trades teacher or teacher team behind the winning program. The 15 additional winners will each be awarded \$50,000, with \$35,000 going to their public high school program and \$15,000 to the teacher or team. Finalists whose school, district and/or state policy prohibits receipt of the individual portion of prize earnings were eligible to apply on behalf of their school's skilled trades program. If they win, their entire share of the prize will be awarded to the school.

The Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence was started in 2017 by Eric Smidt, the founder of national tool retailer Harbor Freight Tools. The prize recognizes outstanding instruction in the skilled trades in U.S. public high schools and the teachers who inspire students to learn a trade that prepares them for life after graduation. As recent [research](#) from JFF (formerly known as Jobs for the Future) and funded by Harbor Freight Tools for Schools found, students who "concentrate" (or take multiple trades courses as part of a program) are more likely to graduate than their peers. Upon graduation, students are prepared for either further education or work in fields that routinely rank among the hardest jobs to fill.

Now, in the fourth year of the prize, more than 200 teachers have been recognized as winners or finalists. Winners join a nationwide network of outstanding trades teachers

who convene regularly by webinar and in a three-day summer workshop to share best practices and advance their field.

“There’s a reason why polls show enormous support for trades education—with more than 8 in 10 parents and voters believing it deserves more funding,” Smidt said, citing a [poll](#) conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago and released this spring by Harbor Freight Tools for Schools. “Trades teachers are building up the tradespeople of the future—the workers who will keep our critical care infrastructure, our communication networks, our homes and cars, up and running. They deserve to be celebrated.”

### **About Harbor Freight Tools for Schools**

Harbor Freight Tools for Schools is a program of The Smidt Foundation, established by Harbor Freight Tools Founder Eric Smidt, to advance excellent skilled trades education in public high schools across America. With a deep respect for the dignity of these fields and for the intelligence and creativity of people who work with their hands, Harbor Freight Tools for Schools aims to drive a greater understanding of and investment in skilled trades education, believing that access to quality skilled trades education gives high school students pathways to graduation, opportunity, good jobs and a workforce our country needs. Harbor Freight Tools is a major supporter of the Harbor Freight Tools for Schools program. For more information, visit us at [HarborFreightToolsforSchools.org](https://www.harborfreighttoolsforschools.org) and [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

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