

Driving career readiness

Brandeis Machinery supports the 2026 Kentucky SkillsUSA Diesel Competition by providing its facility, equipment and technicians



Keith Pearson,
Chair of the 2026
Kentucky SkillsUSA
Diesel Competition
and Skilled Trades
Program Manager
for United Rentals



Will Barnett,
Director of Training,
Bramco Inc.



Watch the video

Brandeis Machinery & Supply Company opened its Louisville, Kentucky, facility to a different kind of jobsite this spring as high school students from across the state gathered for the 2026 Kentucky SkillsUSA Diesel Competition. SkillsUSA is a national workforce development organization that helps students build technical, leadership and career-readiness skills through classroom programs and hands-on competitions in industries that include, but are not limited to, agriculture, nursing, architecture and graphic design.

The event brought together students enrolled in diesel, automotive and shop programs, along with industry partners who helped build and judge the contest. The 26 competitors rotated through 14 timed stations designed to test the technical knowledge and practical skills that matter in today's diesel technician industry, such as hydraulics, electronics, brake systems, chassis systems, diagnostics, DOT (Department of Transportation) inspections and job interviews. Each station carried 100 possible points, with scores based on a mix of written and hands-on tasks.

Keith Pearson, Chair of the 2026 Kentucky SkillsUSA Diesel Competition and Skilled Trades Program Manager for United Rentals, said the contest was built to show students just how broad the field can be.

"Since the SkillsUSA program has been in place, we've started turning a corner to see more

of the tech and trades come back versus a traditional four-year degree," stated Pearson. "This competition allows the kids to not only test their knowledge but also learn about the industry and different career paths available to them."

Providing the facility

For Brandeis Machinery, hosting the event was a practical way to support the competitors.

"When we found out SkillsUSA didn't have a good location for the diesel competition, we immediately offered up our shop in Louisville," recalled Will Barnett, Director of Training for Bramco Inc., the parent company of Brandeis Machinery. "There's a lot of equipment and a lot of people involved with a diesel competition, and this facility was an ideal setup for industry partners to bring in their trucks and machines in a safe and controlled environment."

Having the competition at Brandeis Machinery's shop also allowed students to work around real equipment instead of simulated examples.

"One station was designed to make students think like technicians by identifying hydraulic and machine components with the help of service and shop manuals," Barnett explained. "We provided a Komatsu PC238USLC-11 excavator and ran two exercises on the machine. One was basic component location on the hydraulic control valve, and the second had them locate simple components on the machine, such as the pump, the control valve, or a pressure or temperature sensor. It gets them used to connecting what they see in a manual with an actual machine."

Sparking curiosity

Many of the competitors were sophomores or juniors in high school, and both Pearson and Barnett emphasized that the bigger goal was to spark curiosity and help students picture a future in the trades.

"What I want them to take away is that they ran into things they didn't know today, and that it interests them in learning more," Barnett commented. "Or maybe they found something that was a lot of fun, and they want to go back and learn more about that. For me, getting them interested is the first step. Then, providing them with real examples of the equipment that

During a hands-on station, a competitor identifies machine components on a Komatsu PC238USLC-11 excavator at Brandeis Machinery's Louisville, Kentucky, facility.





A 2026 Kentucky SkillsUSA Diesel Competition participant evaluates engine components during a truck diagnostic station at Brandeis Machinery's shop in Louisville, Kentucky.



A competitor reviews inspection materials from the cab during a commercial vehicle-related station.

sparks questions and intrigue will keep them interested and pursue a career as a technician."

The competition also carried real stakes. The top high school finisher in Kentucky will advance to the national SkillsUSA competition in Atlanta in June, where that student will face other state winners from across the country. For Brandeis Machinery and its partners, the SkillsUSA competitions give students a serious test, introduce them to employers and help them see that diesel technology can lead to a long-term career, not just a class assignment. ■



At the 2026 Kentucky SkillsUSA Diesel Competition, a student works through an electrical diagnostics station that tests troubleshooting skills.



Two competitors complete a precision measurement challenge as part of the 2026 Kentucky SkillsUSA Diesel Competition.