



Boards Making a Difference

Apprenticeships Unfolding in Iowa Schools

Published: Dec. 20, 2018

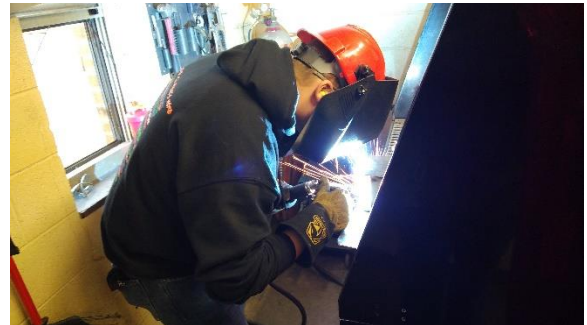
How do we keep Iowa students here in Iowa and prevent the dreaded brain drain that threatens local communities and businesses, as talented and educated workers leave their hometowns?

Several Iowa public schools have made headway toward plugging this brain drain, through board leadership supporting administration in developing innovative relationships with local businesses to offer apprenticeship programs. Why would apprenticeship programs incentivize Iowa students to stay in Iowa? It's simple. Teach students the skills they need and pair them with local businesses, and they're more likely to stay.

"Our businesses are telling us they can't find the skilled workers out there that they need. By us preparing our students and giving them those skills, they are more apt to get those positions that are open and then stay in the community," said West Delaware Board Member Linda Bessey.

The benefits are two-fold—the community benefits, because young Iowans are more likely to stay; and even more importantly, students benefit. "With these skills, students can go into a high-paying career field with no debt—no cost at all. They get paid very well to work in these apprenticeship programs," said West Delaware Superintendent Kristen Rickey.

According to Iowa Workforce Development, registered apprenticeship programs are proven solutions for recruiting, training and retaining world-class talent in Iowa. They combine on-the-job training with classroom instruction—and, bonus—students earn a paycheck!



BOONE OFFERS FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM IN IOWA

While some districts are offering apprenticeship programs, it's a relatively new concept in Iowa. The common starting place is offering pre-apprenticeship programs, like Boone's EDGE Program, which eventually led to a collaboration with Fareway to offer a meat-cutting apprenticeship program. This is the first registered high school meat-cutting apprenticeship in Iowa.

"Students complete on-the-job training at the local Fareway store in Boone, they take online courses, and they take courses at our high school that supports the skills that Fareway is looking for in their employees. It's a neat opportunity for students to work in collaboration with a company and help them find out what they truly want to do for a career," said Boone Superintendent Brad Manard.

Fareway and Boone launched this apprenticeship program back in October, and are giving every district in the state the opportunity to participate. If a district has a Fareway store nearby, they can offer the apprenticeship program in conjunction with online courses created by Boone.

"We're aware that not every student is college bound, so we wanted to provide something for all kids. Local businesses were interested, so our board encouraged administration to proceed. We want students to put some roots down, stick around and give back to the community what the community has done for them," said Boone Board President Jan Westrum.

WEST DELAWARE SEES WELDING SHORTAGE, PARTNERS WITH LOCAL INDUSTRIES

"There are, on average, 25 welding job openings in Delaware County at any given time. The industry has gone outside Iowa to recruit. We know that developing students and future citizens from within is much more beneficial," said Bessey.

West Delaware has had a strong welding program in place for the last 15 years, so the logical step, once they heard from local industries that there was a welder shortage, was to partner with the local community college and industries. They formalized the partnership with the support of the US Department of Labor, applied and received grants, and launched the welding registered apprenticeship program.

"Our board was very excited to get involved. To be able to have a student graduate high school certified in welding, that's just a great service to students. They can go right into the workforce, they've essentially already been interviewed and hired," said Bessey.

Students in the apprenticeship program are enrolled concurrently, so they earn both college and high school credit while in the program.

STUDENTS GAIN AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES, EXPOSURE TO REAL-LIFE WORKSITES

Students in apprenticeship programs are required to apply and interview, just like any other candidate for a job. Once hired, they have similar expectations—for attendance, drug screenings, meetings, and more, as any other employee. This provides students with insights into what it actually means to work in a job, as an adult.

“We’re helping students bridge the world of school to the world of work, which is really beneficial to them. They’re more likely to pursue a career when they’re exposed to that field and the realities of that worksite,” said Rickey.

Plus, just like any other adult worker, as they advance through the program (or job), they can earn pay increases based on performance.

“As a former teacher, I’m all about being authentic. We need to give kids real-life experiences. Kids are always wondering, when will I use this? These apprenticeship programs show students that they will use the information they are learning,” said Westrum, “Our board wants to provide all kinds of opportunities for students. They have different needs, so they need different opportunities. We’re being creative and helping students in different ways.”

Apprenticeship programs are likely a growing trend in the coming years, especially with grants and funding available if selected through Iowa Workforce Development. This past September, both West Delaware and Pella Schools were selected to receive \$15,000 each for high school registered apprenticeship programs, and Waverly-Shell Rock, Dubuque and Cedar Rapids were selected to receive \$10,000 in support of pre-apprenticeship programs.

[**Meet the Boone School Board**](#)

[**Meet the West Delaware School Board**](#)