



WISCONSIN YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Every year in Wisconsin, thousands of students engage in programs that change their future and set them up for success after high school. How? The Wisconsin Youth Apprenticeship (YA) program combines real-world work experience with classroom education so students can explore and gain skills in a career field of their choice. The YA program prepares youth for success after high school – whether they plan to continue their education, enter the workforce, or both. Launched in 1991 as the first statewide youth apprenticeship program in the nation, the YA program is also helping to create the pipeline of future workers that businesses in the state need to thrive.

HIGH SCHOOL APPRENTICESHIP: MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF STUDENTS

From childhood, Jon Brendemuehl was always interested in the technical aspects of how things work. During his sophomore year in high school, Jon's favorite teacher suggested he consider the Wisconsin YA program to learn more about careers connected to his passion. After talking with his parents and teachers, Jon decided to give it a try. He applied for the YA program in industrial machining and was accepted.

Jon successfully completed the YA program and received his high school diploma. He was offered a full-time job with the company he had worked with during high school and, a year later, was selected for their CNC Machining Registered Apprenticeship program. Jon has continued his education as well, and in a recent talk at Lakeshore Technical College, he expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to advance his education with no debt, the chance to gain valuable work experience, and for the teachers and mentors who helped him achieve tremendous



success at such a young age. In Jon's words: *"I was very excited at the age of 18 to start building my retirement account; not having a giant college debt has provided me with a platform to achieve my life goals."*

Nearly 30 years ago, Wisconsin's government and education leaders identified the need for businesses to have a pipeline of highly-skilled workers and for youth to complete high school prepared for employment. Today, the YA program has grown to include more than 3,500 students who are learning and working in 49 career pathways in 11 [nationally-recognized career clusters](#).

Students choose a career cluster and receive classroom and work-based training in multiple aspects of that industry. At the job site, students rotate and perform functions in different areas of the workplace. This broad exposure helps students explore career choices in the industry.

STATE AND REGIONAL LEADERSHIP.

The foundation of the YA program is a combination of state leadership and strong regional partnerships. The Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards within the state Department of Workforce Development provides guidance and oversight. A network of 33 regional consortia throughout the state operates the program. Most of the consortia are led by regional education service agencies, school districts, or technical colleges, while the remainder are led by Chambers of Commerce, non-profit organizations or local workforce development boards. Each

consortium has a steering committee comprised of local employers, high school districts, technical colleges, youth-serving public agencies, workforce organizations, and others. The state provides annual funding to the regional consortia through competitive grants. Additionally, the state sets standards the regional consortia must meet, including expected enrollment levels, completion rates, high school diploma rates and apprenticeship certificate attainment, and the expectation that at least 60% of students who complete the YA program must be offered employment in their career field.

BUSINESS-DRIVEN MODEL.

Employers are at the center of youth apprenticeships, guiding the program in critical ways:

- Identifying skill standards
- Interviewing and selecting students
- Providing students with paid, on-the-job work experience
- Assigning skilled mentors to work with students
- Evaluating student progress on competencies
- Communicating with program coordinators about student successes and challenges

The program is designed to ensure that businesses' needs are met. For example, school-based YA coordinators at the high schools work closely with participating employers in their region to ensure their complete satisfaction with the program.

The YA program focuses on 11 career clusters:

- Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources
- Architecture and Construction
- Art, Audio/Visual Technology and Communications
- Finance
- Health Sciences
- Hospitality and Tourism
- Information Technology
- Manufacturing
- Marketing
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Math
- Transportation, Distribution and Logistics

STUDENT RECRUITMENT.

The recruitment and interview process is the key kick-off point for each year of the program. The coordinators for the YA program at the high schools conduct extensive outreach to market the program to parents and students, which increases interest and helps students make informed decisions about

committing to the program. School counselors participate in recruiting students and work closely with YA coordinators. Word of mouth from student to student is also a major source of recruitment. To select students for the youth apprenticeships, employers interview students recommended to them by YA coordinators, so they have direct input into selecting the best students for their business.

WORK-BASED LEARNING.

Students in the YA program gain skills and experience by working as paid employees, and the job becomes an extension of the classroom. Skilled workplace mentors supervise and train students on the skills identified for the career cluster. Students also learn the company's culture and core values during their apprenticeship.

COURSEWORK RELATED TO WORK-BASED LEARNING.

What students learn on the job is reinforced with related instruction in the classroom. This instruction is provided at the high school, the local technical college, online, or at the employer's worksite, depending on the program model used by the regional consortium. All curricula comply with state guidelines. In addition to passing their classes, students must demonstrate proficiency on state-defined competencies, through ratings from their worksite supervisors on a standardized skills checklist. Students may switch career clusters or employers during the program, although they are encouraged to stay within an area they believe will meet their career aspirations. Through this coursework, students may also receive advanced standing toward an associate's degree at any of the state's technical colleges or credits towards a technical college's program of study in a related field. For example, graduates from the YA program in the Culinary Arts career cluster may receive credits for the introductory level Culinary Arts program coursework at the Milwaukee Area Technical College.

Students may work before, during or after school hours, as well as during summers and holiday breaks, according to the business' preference. In some cases, students who complete the program go on to become full-time apprentices to these or other employers in the industry.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE. Students generally participate in the work and classroom activities concurrently, providing the opportunity to integrate the two forms of learning. Programs may be one or two years in length, depending on the needs of the student and business. In the two-year program, students begin the apprenticeship in their junior year of high school and complete four semesters of classroom instruction and at least 900 hours of work-based learning. Regional consortia also have the option to develop one-year programs, if the shorter program better meets the needs of students and employers. In the one-year program, students begin in either their junior or senior year, and spend two semesters in classroom instruction and at least 450 hours in work-based learning.

All programs incorporate employability skills (also known as soft skills, such as teamwork, punctuality, and following instructions) into the classroom instruction curriculum, and these skills are reinforced by supervisors and mentors while on the job site. Mentors are also instrumental in helping students build interpersonal skills, such as self-esteem, maturity, and a positive attitude.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES.

- For the 2016-17 school year, nearly **2,500 employers and 3,500 students from 342 high schools** participated in the YA program.
- In the 2015-16 school year, the **program completion rate was 84% and the students' average wage in the program was \$9.93 an hour.**

Students who complete the YA program receive a high school diploma, a state Certificate of Occupational Proficiency, and credits toward an associate's degree. With these certificates, and increased knowledge and skills about a career field, students are prepared for their next steps – whether that is college, employment, an adult apprenticeship program, or a combination.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

For states considering development of a youth apprenticeship program, here are some of the key elements that have been effective in Wisconsin's program.

PROVIDE EASY-TO-USE TOOLS AND RESOURCES.

The state has a robust set of online tools and resources available through a comprehensive [website](#). Examples include flow charts describing the roles and responsibilities of each partner, a detailed YA guide for businesses, curriculum standards for each career cluster, and information on legal aspects (e.g. child labor and workers' compensation laws).

ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE PROGRAM LEADERSHIP.

Through the guidance of the Department of Workforce Development, the Department of Public Instruction, and the Wisconsin technical college system, the YA program has a strong foundation of support and well-defined program standards for businesses, school systems, students and parents. At the regional and local levels, each regional consortium has a lead organization that manages the program, as well as dedicated high school YA coordinators who oversee the day-to-day operations.

DEVELOP REGIONALLY-FOCUSED PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS.

Wisconsin's YA program pays close attention to engaging all partners and strengthening these relationships at the regional level. The result is that YA programs meet the needs of businesses and effectively engage community organizations and resources. The regional consortia have flexibility to innovate and develop continuous improvement practices that address each region's unique characteristics.

LEVERAGE FUNDING TO DEFRAY PROGRAM COSTS.

Wisconsin provides state revenue to the regional consortia – through a competitive grant process – currently in the amount of \$900 per student. This funding supports the YA coordinator and costs associated with classroom instruction, student materials and supplies, and recruiting businesses and students, along with school-based coordination and supervision. Other program costs are absorbed by the partners.

To Learn More...

Visit the Wisconsin YA Program website at dwd.wisconsin.gov/youthapprenticeship/

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