



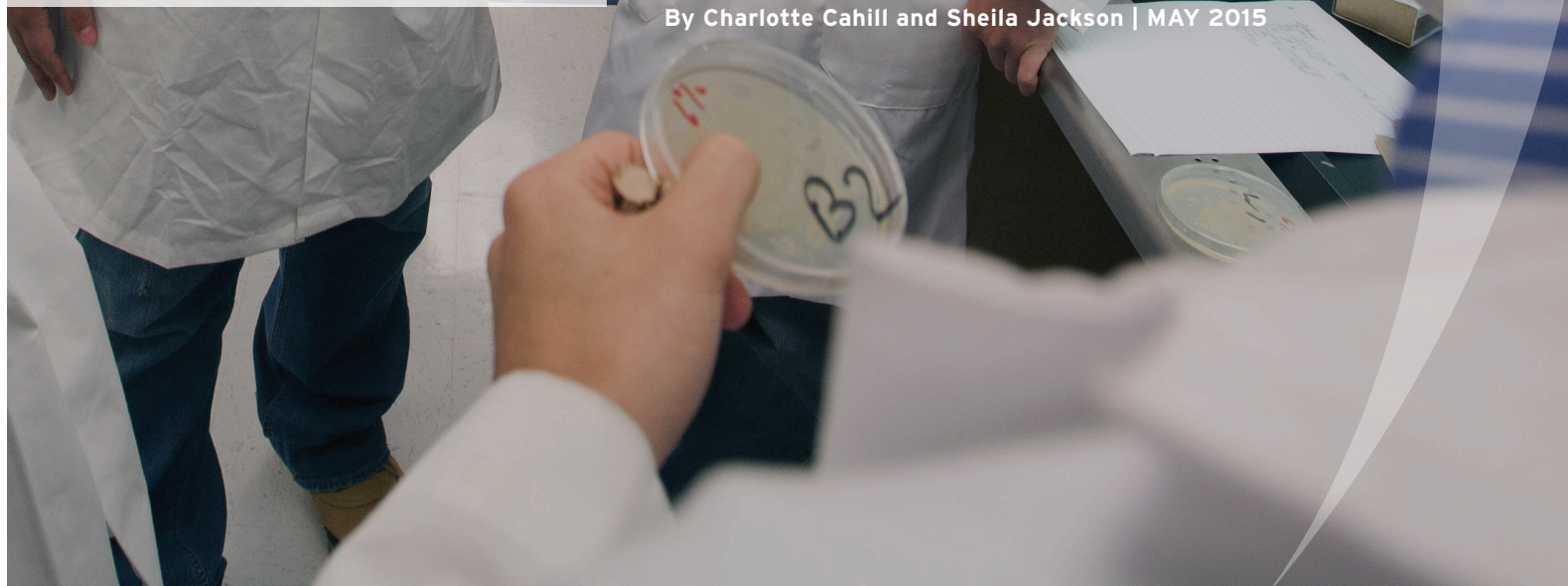
## Pathways to Prosperity Network

AN INITIATIVE OF JOBS FOR THE FUTURE  
AND THE HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF EDUCATION

# NOT AS HARD AS YOU THINK

## ENGAGING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN WORK-BASED LEARNING

By Charlotte Cahill and Sheila Jackson | MAY 2015





## JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

**Jobs for the Future** works with our partners to design and drive the adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today's economy.

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**The Pathways to Prosperity Network**, a collaboration of states, Jobs for the Future, and the Pathways to Prosperity Project at Harvard Graduate School of Education, seeks to ensure that many more youth complete high school and attain a postsecondary credential with currency in the labor market. Each participating state is engaging educators and employers in building a system of grades 9-14 career pathways, combining high school and community college, that launches young people into an initial career, while leaving open the prospect of further education.

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# NOT AS HARD AS YOU THINK: ENGAGING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN WORK-BASED LEARNING

## INTRODUCTION

**E**mployers interested in working with young people are often concerned about possible barriers that may limit youth's access to workplaces, such as labor laws and liability issues. Employers who eagerly partner with educators to provide guest speakers and company tours might nonetheless be hesitant to invite students into workplaces for experiences such as job shadows and especially internships. Addressing employers' concerns head-on is therefore critical to scaling up work-based learning opportunities in states and regions.

In reality, federal and state laws and policies do not prevent high school students from participating in meaningful work experiences in professional environments. In many cases, the same guidelines and regulations associated with adult employees apply to youth under 18, making it unnecessary for employers to navigate unfamiliar policies or design new human resources processes in order to accommodate young people. In other cases, there are certain regulations based on a young person's age, the nature of the work, the hours she or he works, and the compensation he or she receives. Employers who familiarize themselves with a few main policies relevant to their sectors can easily remain in compliance while providing enriching and important career and skill development opportunities for youth that have lasting impacts on students, families, and entire communities—not to mention the employer's work and workforce.

This brief is intended to allay concerns about perceived barriers to young people's access to workplaces and to highlight the successes of employers who have opened their doors to high school students. It explains how some employers have benefitted from working with young people and provides an overview of the laws and policy barriers most often cited by employers as impediments to work experience for high school students. The brief

profiles some employers within the Pathways to Prosperity Network who have found ways to provide young people with meaningful work experience. These case studies highlight the ways that these employers have managed the logistics of work-based learning and explain the benefits of doing so. As these case studies demonstrate, investing in young people is something that all employers can do if they so choose.

### THE PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY NETWORK AND THE ROLE OF WORK-BASED LEARNING

Connecting young people with work experience is a central focus of the Pathways to Prosperity Network, which is a collaboration among 12 states, the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and Jobs for the Future, a national nonprofit organization based in Boston. The Network began in response to a 2011 report released by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*. According to the report, more than 50 percent of young Americans reach their mid-20s without the skills and labor market credentials essential for success in today's increasingly demanding economy. The report called for an intensive effort on the part of employers, educators, and government leaders to build pathways that link work and learning, are aligned with regional labor market demand, and help ensure that young people have the skills and credentials they need to succeed.

The goal of the Pathways to Prosperity Network is to create statewide systems of career pathways that ensure that more youth complete high school, attain postsecondary credentials with currency in the labor market, and get launched on careers. The Pathways to Prosperity Network convenes key stakeholders from the fields of education, business, and government to build STEM career pathways that are aligned with high-growth sectors of the regional economy and that combine rigorous academics with powerful career-focused learning. A core component of the Pathways to Prosperity framework is work-based learning, which can help employers address the growing skills gap by collaborating with educators to prepare young people with the skills needed in modern workplaces.

# THE VALUE OF INVESTING IN YOUNG PEOPLE

**F**ifteen years ago, many American high school students held part-time jobs that provided them with opportunities to develop professionalism and other skills valuable to employers. However, the number of young people who are employed has declined dramatically since 2000. Economic downturns have led to cuts in the total number of available jobs, and older workers are waiting to retire or are returning to the workforce, leaving few jobs open to young people. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in March 2015, the unemployment rate for 16- to 17-year-olds was the highest of any age group, at 17 percent, while the unemployment rate for workers between the ages of 55 and 64 was only 4.2 percent.<sup>1</sup> The decline in the number of young people who are working represents a problem for both high school students and employers. Students have little opportunity to learn about their career options or to develop skills, and employers struggle to create a talent pipeline of young people with the work experience needed to fill vacant positions.

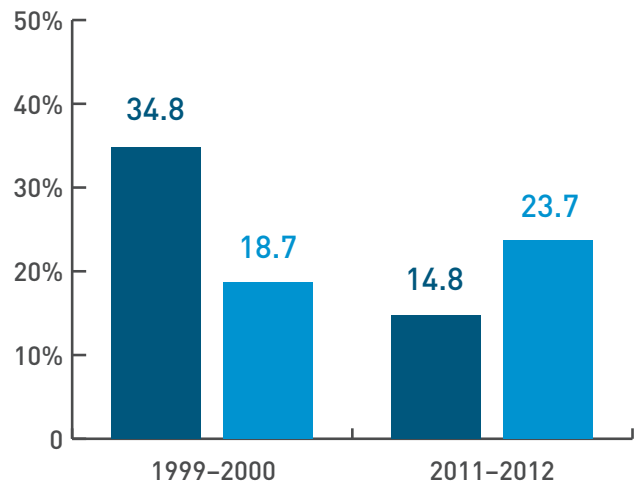
## THE GROWING SKILLS GAP

Despite national attention to the skills gap in recent years, employers across the country report that the gap continues to grow. A 2014 survey by Northeastern University found that 73 percent of business leaders believe that there is a skills gap in the American workforce, and 87 percent of business leaders think that college graduates lack the most important skills needed to succeed.<sup>2</sup> The problem is especially acute for employers in fields that require science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills, including sectors such as health care, information technology (IT), and manufacturing. Even throughout the past decade's economic crisis, STEM occupations have remained in demand. Three and a half million manufacturing jobs will need to be filled over the next

**FIGURE 1. COMPARISONS OF THE EMPLOYMENT/POPULATION RATIOS OF 16- TO 17-YEAR-OLD MALES AND 68- TO 75-YEAR-OLD MALES IN THE U.S. IN 1999–2000 AND 2011–2012**

Source: Andy Sum, 2013, *Key Findings on the Labor Market Experiences of Teens and Young Adults (16-24 Years Old) in the U.S. from 2000-2012: Implications for Pathways to Prosperity*

■ 16 to 17-year-old males  
■ 68 to 75-year-old males



decade, but it is likely that 2 million of those will go unfilled because of a shortage of qualified workers. Eighty percent of employers in the manufacturing sector say that they are willing to pay above-market rates in order to attract qualified workers, but 6 in 10 jobs are still going unfilled.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these concerns about a lack of technical skills, many employers worry that young people do not have the 21st-century skills—such as problem-solving and communication—needed to succeed in the workplace.

This disconnect between the needs of employers and the skills of their prospective employees suggests that current efforts to address the skills gap have not been entirely effective. Educators and employers are collaborating on efforts to better prepare young people for careers, but their perceptions of the challenge differ. Polling by Gallup has shown that, while 96 percent of chief academic officers at postsecondary institutions are extremely or somewhat confident in the ability of their institutions to prepare students for the workforce, only 11 percent of business leaders strongly agree that college graduates have the skills needed by employers.<sup>4</sup> Employers' concerns are underscored by numerous studies showing that American college graduates tend to be less well prepared for the world of work than their counterparts in other countries.<sup>5</sup> A 2015 report by the Educational Testing

Service comparing the skills of American workers with those of the workforce in 21 other countries found that, while college completion rates in the United States are similar to those in high-performing countries, American workers' scores on a skills assessment were comparable to those of workers in the countries with the lowest education rates.<sup>6</sup> This disparity suggests that the American education system is not necessarily equipping young people with the skills they will need to succeed when they enter the workforce. Some of the world's most productive economies have long recognized that building a talent pipeline requires long-term planning, strong public-private partnerships in which employers play a key role, and opportunities for young people to participate in meaningful work experiences.<sup>7</sup>

As employers across the country have increasingly recognized that education and training programs are not always aligned with workforce needs, employers' interest in efforts to close the skills gap, including upstream strategies that engage youth, has grown. Working with organizations such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, businesses seeking to address the skills gap are working to develop public-private partnerships between employers and educational institutions that focus on preparing young people for the world of work.<sup>8</sup>



## BENEFITS FOR BUSINESS

Employers report that they have benefitted from leading or participating in initiatives that help young people acquire the skills and experience needed to succeed in careers.<sup>9</sup>

Employers working with young people have reported that doing so has strengthened their organizations in several key ways:

➤ **Development of a more robust talent pipeline.**

Employers see working with young people as part of a grow-your-own strategy that will increase the number of workers who are qualified for positions that have historically been difficult to fill. In leading and contributing to efforts to educate young people, employers have an opportunity to ensure that young people acquire skills and qualifications that are aligned with workforce needs. Sector strategies are an important and effective approach to this work. Organizing by sector reduces the burden on individual employers while helping to ensure that young people develop skills that are broadly applicable within an industry sector rather than training for employment within a specific company. Some employers also view internships as “pre-employment screenings” that give them an opportunity to train and observe potential employees before committing to hiring them for vacant positions.

➤ **Access to a diverse and innovative workforce.**

Employers who work with young people often report that they are favorably impressed by the innovative ideas and new perspectives that young people bring to their workplaces. These fresh ideas help employers stay competitive and keep pace with a rapidly evolving marketplace. Young people are often especially valuable

contributors to conversations about technology, thanks to their knowledge of social media and the digital world. In addition, employees with diverse perspectives can help a business market itself to a broader customer base than would otherwise be the case. Working with young people is a particularly effective way for employers to create a diverse pool of applicants from which to hire for future job openings. Overall, employers are consistently impressed by the energy, enthusiasm, and productivity of young people when they are engaged in meaningful work-based learning.

➤ **Branding opportunities, increased name recognition, and positive press.**

Business leaders often report that their work with young people has earned a great deal of positive publicity and goodwill in their communities. Employers have successfully capitalized on increased name recognition and positive publicity to build their brands and reputations. In addition, as young people, their teachers, and their families become more familiar with specific companies, employers have an opportunity to correct any misconceptions about their companies and industries.

➤ **Economic development that boosts business prospects.**

Many employers see working with young people as a way not only to give back to their communities, but also to strengthen and encourage economic growth in those communities. In the long run, the creation of a skilled workforce can contribute to economic development that benefits everyone in the region by reducing unemployment, increasing consumer spending, and attracting new businesses to the area. This type of robust economic growth benefits existing businesses in a region.

# A CONTINUUM OF WORK- BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

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“Work-based learning provides an array of both broad and very particular ‘meta-lessons’ about work, workplaces, and vocations. Young people learn that tasks and problems in work settings are rarely as neatly defined as those in the classroom. . . . Young people develop a deepened understanding of what work is and what it means, its rhythms, its distinct pleasures and difficulties. They might learn that there are different kinds of days at work—good and bad, faster and slower, rougher and smoother. . . . Young people learn that almost any field is deeper than it seems from the outside, and a field that may have seemed mundane has many elements that make it interesting to consider. Work-based learning has been found to increase young people’s social capital, in particular sources of support and connection to postsecondary options and continuing work opportunities. . . . A young person knowing that she has committed to and worked at something, coped with difficult tasks and both failed and succeeded at them, changes the way she approaches subsequent tasks, considers options, and relates to others who have committed themselves to a particular pursuit.”

—Robert Halpern, *Youth, Education, and the Role of Society*,  
p. 117-119

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Work-based learning is not only a strategy for narrowing the skills gap, but an important opportunity for young people. Work-based learning, which is a sequenced and coordinated set of activities through which students gain increasing exposure to the world of work, addresses a shared goal of educators and employers: preparing students with the knowledge and skills needed for productive careers. Opportunities to engage in meaningful work experiences help high school students develop both technical skills and 21st-century skills, including the maturity needed to work collaboratively, solve problems, and follow assignments through to completion.<sup>10</sup>

The most effective work-based learning takes the form of a continuum of activities. Students begin with **career awareness and exploration** through activities such as guest speakers and field trips. They then transition to **career preparation** activities, such as working with industry mentors and completing internships. Finally, the **career training** phase of the continuum prepares students for work in specific occupations. Students should

be engaged in this continuum beginning no later than in the middle grades and should continue with work-based learning through high school and into postsecondary education.

Employer engagement at all points along this continuum is essential in order to ensure that students receive up-to-date information, acquire skills aligned with industry needs, and have opportunities to learn about the world of work from professionals in the field.

However, many employers are hesitant to engage at the more intensive end of the continuum, especially to offer internships, because of perceived barriers such as safety regulations and liability issues. Of course not all levels of engagement make sense for every employer. It is up to individual employers to decide where they think they could make the greatest contribution and to determine what would be of the greatest benefit to their companies. Yet if students are to have access to the full continuum of work-based learning activities, it is essential to address employers' concerns and possible, or perceived, barriers.

**FIGURE 2. EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT AT ALL POINTS ALONG THE CONTINUUM**



# YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE

**M**ost employers interested in working with young people will find that they need to make only minimal changes, if any, to existing workplace policies and procedures in order to ensure compliance with state and federal laws and policies that govern access to workplaces for students under the age of 18. In many cases, the same regulations apply to both high school students and adult workers.<sup>11</sup>

Some laws and policies regulating youth employment do exist at both the federal and state levels. Federal laws pertaining to youth employment generally fall under the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division, which enforces the Fair Labor Standards Act. The FLSA outlines federally mandated provisions related to wages and overtime pay, hours worked, record keeping, and child labor. The FLSA regulates minimum wages for youth and sets out a test to help employers determine whether internships must be paid.<sup>12</sup> The chief restriction on youth employment in the FLSA is a list of 17 "hazardous occupations" in which youth under 18 are generally not permitted to engage. However, most employers that are working with young people identify only one of these occupations—operating a forklift—as an activity in which their workforce regularly engages. There are additional restrictions, including a prohibition on working in manufacturing environments, that are applicable to 14- and 15-year-olds, but not to 16- and 17-year-olds. Other FLSA provisions are applicable only to certain industries, including separate policies related to agricultural occupations, lifeguards and swimming instructors, and facilities that process wood products. The FLSA also limits the number of hours that 14- and 15-year olds—but not 16- and 17-year-olds—may work.<sup>13</sup> Additional restrictions on work hours for students under 18 are generally a matter of state law, which varies across the country. All states have some laws pertaining to youth employment. These commonly address issues such as minimum wages, work permits, and required rest and meal periods.<sup>14</sup> Where there is overlap between federal and state laws, the stricter standard applies.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) safety guidelines generally do not distinguish between youth and adult workers. As with adult workers, employers are required to provide the appropriate and necessary safety training and information to protect employees. When working with youth, the "appropriate" delivery and format of this information might extend beyond the employees' preferred language to include communication practices that assume young people's competence and maturity, but acknowledge their lack of familiarity with not only the task at hand, but also professional environments in general. The Department of Labor encourages employers to be proactive around safety issues by specifically outlining the steps a student should take if he or she gets hurt or encounters any type of safety issue. Two suggestions offered are introducing a "buddy system" so that young people have a designated person to whom they can ask questions and clearly labeling machinery and tools that youth cannot use.

Liability concerns and employers' insurance policies are a more likely source of barriers to workplace access for students under 18 than are federal and state regulations, though numerous employers have successfully addressed this challenge. Employers' liability for paid student interns is the same as it is for their other employees, and interns are most likely covered under employers' existing workers' compensation policies. It is generally recommended that employers cover all employees, including high school interns, under their workers' compensation policies regardless of whether those employees are eligible for unemployment compensation at the end of their internships. However, some insurance policies seek to further limit employers' liability by incorporating restrictions on workplace access for young people under the age of 18. Some employers have successfully worked with their insurers to clarify or address possible restrictions on work-based learning. Employers may also take additional steps to limit their liability. These may include requiring students and families to sign liability waivers, covering students through their schools' insurance policies, or working with intermediary organizations that assume liability.<sup>15</sup>

A number of other perceived challenges or barriers can be resolved by simply applying the same expectations

and policies to youth as to adult workers. Employers that require health screenings or drug tests of employees may require the same of young people as a condition of access to the workplace. Similarly, students who will be exposed to confidential information may be required to sign confidentiality agreements like those often signed by adult workers.<sup>16</sup>

While existing laws and policies are not overly burdensome and should not discourage efforts to improve access to workplaces for youth, there is still a need for additional policies that encourage and support employers' efforts to open their doors to young people. These policies could include:

- **Incentivizing** employer engagement through mechanisms such as tax credits, subsidies, training levies, and vendor contracts.
- **Embedding** work-based learning in the curriculum through efforts such as teacher externships, expanded learning time, and credit for work-based learning.
- **Supporting** the development of intermediaries that can broker work-based learning opportunities and serve as resources to schools and employers, including by helping to develop strategies that address the challenges outlined in this brief.<sup>17</sup>

New federal and state policies to support work-based learning could also address issues related to employers' liability. In Massachusetts, for example, the state law regarding workers' compensation specifies that students participating in work-based learning are considered employees and are covered under the law.<sup>18</sup>

While these policy changes would be welcome, they are not a prerequisite for increased access to workplaces for young people. What is needed is increased understanding of existing laws and policies and a willingness on the part of employers, educators, and intermediaries to design work-based learning placements that comply with existing regulations and expand the opportunities available to young people. The case studies that follow show how employers—working with schools and with intermediaries—in several states in the Pathways to Prosperity Network have built successful work-based learning programs by doing just that.

# CASE STUDY

## SIMMONS MACHINE TOOL CORPORATION

### BUILDING A TALENT PIPELINE IN MANUFACTURING

#### FAST FACTS

**Company:** Simmons Machine Tool Corporation

**Type/Industry:** Precision Manufacturing

**Location:** Albany, NY

**Size:** 95 employees

#### Benefits for Business:

- Other employers in the region increasingly look to Simmons as an example of cutting-edge practices and workforce strategies
- Development of a skilled talent pipeline in response to looming workforce issues
- Opportunity to dispel myths about manufacturing careers

#### Benefits for Students:

- Expanded knowledge of education and career options
- Exposure to a modern manufacturing facility
- Development of skills valued by employers in the manufacturing industry

## GROWING WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

When David W. Davis came on board as president and chief operating officer of Simmons in 2007, he faced a problem familiar to many employers in the manufacturing industry: an aging workforce and a limited pool of skilled applicants for vacancies in the company. A SWOT analysis of the Simmons' plant completed by Davis and his team made it clear that the company did not have the in-house capacity to train the required number of employees at the skill level necessary to remain competitive in the market.

These problems were compounded by the stereotypes of manufacturing that many young people in the area—and their parents—held. Davis realized that the stigma attached to manufacturing stemmed from a lack of knowledge about the industry. When people thought about manufacturing, many pictured the dirty, dangerous plants of the last century—a common misconception that manufacturers across the country are working to change. Some parents' negative views of manufacturing were the result of their own experiences working in the industry, being laid off and left to struggle for work thereafter. Consequently, Davis believes that these parents distrust the forecasts for future growth of manufacturing in this country and therefore discourage their children from entering the field. Given these challenges, Davis knew he had to implement a multilayered approach to improving the community's perception of both Simmons and manufacturing in general if he wanted to make space for on-ramps into the middle-class jobs his company could provide.

## LEARNING FROM A SISTER COMPANY

Davis turned to Simmons' sister company in Germany for ideas on how he could address his workforce challenges. Simmons, established in 1910 in Albany, NY, is a member of the German business group Niles-Simmons-Hegenscheidt. This relationship gave Simmons an opportunity to observe how extensively young people in Germany are engaged in the world of work and the critical role German employers play in educating youth.<sup>19</sup> Simmons' connection to Germany has greatly influenced how the company approaches the development of its workforce and views its role in regional economic development. As a result, Davis has thought about Simmons' regional impact in relation to its bottom line since he came on board in 2007.

As Simmons struggled to find qualified workers to fill existing vacancies, Davis brought in skilled labor from

Simmons' sister company in order to keep up with production. Davis remembers this as a “wake-up call” that prompted him to take a deeper look at what the German company was doing to support and prepare a steady talent pipeline of trained workers. Once Davis gained a clearer understanding of the company's apprenticeship programs and training workshops for less-experienced workers, he decided to bring these strategies back to Albany.

## COLLABORATING WITH EDUCATORS

One of the first steps Davis took to address his workforce issues was to approach Hudson Valley Community College and to work with instructors and the administration to enhance the current curriculum and create a scholarship and internship program for students in its Advanced Manufacturing Technology degree program. While Simmons' partnership with Hudson Valley Community College began successfully and continues to be a reliable source of talent for the company, Davis understood that in order to make a long-term impact on the economic prosperity of the region and health of his company, he would need to reach even further back to engage students before they entered college. In 2009, Davis and his team began visiting local high schools to talk to students and guidance counselors.

Through these initial outreach efforts, Davis learned of additional factors contributing to Simmons' workforce challenges. Conversations with high school counselors revealed that the performance metrics by which counselors are assessed prioritized student enrollment in four-year colleges. As an employer, Davis knew that two-year degrees and industry certifications would provide the necessary qualifications for jobs at a place like Simmons. However, this information was not being communicated to the high school faculty and staff members who were advising students on their college and career options.

This discovery encouraged Simmons' growing involvement in educating high school students. Davis worked with a workforce intermediary, Questar III BOCES, to launch a new high school in the region. Across New York State, employers, educators, workforce boards, and other stakeholders are collaborating in the launch of similar schools focused on STEM education, called Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH). Davis' involvement with P-TECH has provided an opportunity to establish Simmons as a premier employer in the region and a committed partner in an innovative educational initiative.

Over the last two years, Davis also observed that the design of P-TECH as a six-year pathway where students leave high school with both a diploma and at least thirty college credits toward an Associate's degree seems to be helping parents see the value of an Associate's degree. Davis noted that parents in his community previously resisted the idea of their children entering a two-year degree program, but he speculates that P-TECH has encouraged parents to see an Associate's degree as a springboard rather than a ceiling, launching students into well-paying entry-level positions in fields like manufacturing and providing many flexible career pathways and opportunities for advancement with further education.

## STARTING SMALL AND BUILDING ON SUCCESS

His work with P-TECH led Davis to begin structuring small-scale activities like barbecues and plant tours through which students and their families are learning more about Simmons. Simmons surveys students who participate in these activities in order to ensure that students are benefitting from them and makes adjustments to career exploration activities in response to students' feedback.

The number of Simmons employees, including both engineers and machinists, who are volunteering to mentor students is growing steadily as employees have a chance to see their colleagues working with high school students. Additionally, Simmons' partnership with P-TECH has enabled stakeholders to work collaboratively to build out other elements along the continuum of work-based learning, such as mentoring. Often, employers may take on the full responsibility of introducing and designing employee mentorship programs, but Davis has found that having a school partner can help the company through a trial-and-error process that improves aspects of the program efficiently and effectively. Similarly, Davis made adjustments to the company's job-shadow program after receiving feedback from students and the school that a month was too long for such an activity.

The career exploration activities in which Simmons is currently engaged are laying the groundwork for Simmons to create more extensive work-based learning experiences. Davis is now in the midst of working with school and workforce leaders in Albany to plan internships for P-TECH students.

## ADDRESSING CONCERNS ABOUT LIABILITY

As part of the process for creating spaces for young people within his company, Davis is re-evaluating the company's current insurance policy. Once Davis became familiar with the state and federal laws concerning youth employment, he realized that restrictions in his insurance policy presented the majority of obstacles to providing internships. He is now working with his insurance provider to clarify the restrictions imposed by the policy and expects that his insurer will allow Simmons to offer internships to students under 18 as long as the internships conform to safety policies and procedures laid out by both the insurance company and by state and federal guidelines.

In the meantime, Davis has continued to find creative ways to offer work experiences to high school students. For instance, Davis offers students administrative assistant positions, where they perform clerical tasks but remain immersed in the manufacturing environment. Additionally, Davis trained students to manufacture the promotional coasters that Simmons sends as gifts to its customers using permissible tools and machinery. Another approach to getting students onto the shop floor without running the risk of having them operate machinery is to have students serve in support roles, where they perform tasks such as delivering designs to operators.

For almost 10 years, the Simmons leadership team has been developing targeted initiatives and fostering partnerships with local secondary and postsecondary institutions in order to influence how young people in the region are exposed to and prepared for careers in advanced manufacturing. While Davis and his team remain committed and energized around these efforts, the establishment of work-based learning programs for high school students in his facility is still a work in process. Nonetheless, the Simmons story underscores the reality that—while it takes time, creative problem-solving, and nimble strategizing—creating work-based learning experiences in which students under 18 participate in meaningful work at employer worksites is a worthwhile endeavor. Davis remains confident that the effort he has put into addressing these challenges will pay off and remains committed to engaging youth.



# CASE STUDY

## SOUTHWIRE, TANNER HEALTH SYSTEM, AND SUGAR FOODS IN CARROLL COUNTY, GA

### SCALING UP WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

#### FAST FACTS

**Company:** Southwire  
**Type/Industry:** Manufacturing  
**Location:** Carrollton, GA  
**Size:** 7,500 employees

**Company:** Tanner Health System  
**Type/Industry:** Health Care  
**Location:** Carrollton, GA  
**Size:** 2,600 employees

**Company:** Sugar Foods Corporation  
**Type/Industry:** Manufacturing  
**Location:** Villa Rica, GA  
**Size:** 800 employees

#### Benefits for Business:

- Building a brand and raising the organization's profile in the community
- Developing a talent pipeline
- Young people bring innovative approaches to challenges

#### Benefits for Students:

- Gaining skills and credentials with value in the labor market
- Developing professionalism
- Improved graduation rates for at-risk students

## COLLABORATING ACROSS A COMMUNITY

**B**usinesses in Carroll County, GA, are working together to create an impressive array of work-based learning opportunities for students with varied interests and backgrounds. Southwire, a leading manufacturer of electrical cable and wiring, launched a new program, called 12 for Life, for high school students in 2007. The program aims to help the community's most at-risk students graduate from high school and succeed in college and careers. Southwire invested in a new manufacturing facility—which is operated by students and incorporates special safety features—for the program. Students split their time between work in the plant and taking classes; Southwire pays students a starting wage of \$8 per hour for their work and offers incentives for strong work habits such as good attendance. Leaders at 12 for Life consider paying students to be important because they have identified financial issues as a key reason that many students drop out of high school. Students rotate through a variety of positions on the shop floor before choosing one in which to further develop their skills. In addition, students operate a quality assurance lab for the plant. The products manufactured in the plant are sold alongside those made in Southwire's traditional manufacturing facilities. In its first year, the program graduated 22 students; that number has grown steadily, with 330 students in the program in the 2014-15 school year. Southwire has also begun to expand the program to other Southwire plant locations and is providing assistance to other manufacturers interested in starting similar programs.

Other employers in Carroll County have joined Southwire in offering extensive work-based learning experiences to students. The Tanner Connections program created by Tanner Health System, a regional health care system serving nine counties in western Georgia, offers students opportunities to learn about the wide range of occupations and careers available in hospital settings. Students who participate in Tanner Connections work in both clinical and non-clinical settings, including radiology, pharmacology, intensive care, pediatrics, nursing, nutrition, engineering/heating and cooling, IT, marketing and public relations, administration, emergency management, and safety and security. While the 12 For Life program serves Carroll County's most at-risk students, Tanner Connections targets students in the academic middle, whose records may reflect some relatively minor behavioral or disciplinary issues. In the 2013-14 school year, Sugar Foods Corporation,

a multinational food products company, launched a work-based learning program that, like those at Southwire and Tanner Health System, engages students in a variety of functions across the business. In addition to working with student interns in its manufacturing facility, Sugar Foods engages students in research and development for new products and utilizes the high school's commercial kitchen and culinary arts program in the production of bread for the croutons made in Sugar Foods' manufacturing facility. Several other employers in Carroll County have also begun working with students under 18. Nclear, a biotechnology company, is providing students with opportunities to participate in research focused on environmentally safe water treatment solutions.

Starting small in order to build buy-in throughout the company has been an important strategy for many employers in Carroll County. Employers are working with varying numbers of students engaged in a range of work-based learning activities; the structure of work-based learning programs depends on what makes sense for each business. For example, in the first year of its work-based learning program, Sugar Foods offered internships to three students. These internships were in areas of the company in which employees were eager to try working with high school students. The program is now in its second year, and Sugar Foods is able to offer 14 internships in a wider range of operations areas because, based on the company's experience during the first year of the program, more employees have volunteered to serve as supervisors and mentors.

This growing network of businesses that have created work-based learning programs reduces the burden on individual employers and, in turn, encourages more employers to join this countywide effort. Employers are learning from one another as they share strategies and resources for working with young people. This cross-pollination has a double benefit for employers: not only does it reduce the resources that individual employers devote to the development of work-based learning programs, it also strengthens the business community in Carroll County by encouraging collaboration across industry sectors.

## DEVELOPING PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Employers in Carroll County have also created strong partnerships with the Carroll County Public Schools. Southwire's 12 for Life facility includes a charter school

co-located in the plant, where students take classes in core academic subjects as well as career and technical courses. Teachers in the school are employees of the Carroll County Public Schools, but Southwire pays teachers an additional 50 percent on top of the salary they receive from the school district as an incentive. Some 12 for Life students take all of their high school classes on-site, while others take classes at their home schools and commute to the Southwire facility to work in the plant. Southwire provides transportation for students. The company has also partnered with the Carrollton City Schools to create an engineering academy within Carrollton High School. Students in the academy engage in real-world, work-based learning and receive mentoring and support from Southwire employees. For example, students designed a smart phone app to determine how much wire remains on a spool after some wire has been used; Southwire estimates, thanks to this app, that these students have saved them \$750,000.

Employers emphasize that their partnerships with schools have provided them with valuable tools and resources and have been a key factor in the success of work-based learning programs in the county. The Carroll County Public Schools employ three work-based learning coordinators (one of whom is based at 12 for Life) who work very closely with employers across the county and help employers develop and manage work-based learning programs.

Work-based learning coordinators who are located in the schools are helping employers develop and structure work-based learning activities, select student participants, train employees who will supervise or mentor students, and manage logistics such as TB tests, confidentiality agreements, liability waivers, and tracking students' work hours.<sup>20</sup> The work-based learning coordinators also serve as resources in case there are any challenges with a particular student. In addition, the work-based learning coordinators teach a work ethic class in high schools in Carroll County. The class is designed to introduce students to the world of work and to develop work readiness skills so that students are prepared to succeed in workplaces.

## ORGANIZING AROUND AN INTERMEDIARY

The work of Carroll County's exemplary intermediary organizations facilitates these partnerships. The Carroll County Chamber of Commerce and Carroll Tomorrow, a public-private, countywide economic development organization, have played a pivotal role in scaling up

work-based learning in the county. Both organizations view this work as essential to creating a foundation of community success across economic development, workforce development, and education. Improving educational outcomes is therefore a key element of the Chamber's strategic plan. The Chamber also created and regularly convenes a workforce-education committee, as well as a Blue-Ribbon Taskforce on education, and has worked with its members and the business community to better understand the challenges that educational institutions face. Carroll Tomorrow's director of workforce development works closely with educators and employers to build career pathways. He is also familiar with laws and policies related to internships for students under 18 and serves as a resource for employers who are navigating logistical challenges.

## NAVIGATING LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES

Employers in Carroll County have also worked closely with the school district and Carroll Tomorrow to ensure that work-based learning programs operate smoothly and minimize risks to both employers and students. Students in several work-based learning programs in the county sign confidentiality agreements and liability waivers. Students in the Tanner Connections program participate in an orientation session that includes training on the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). At the 12 for Life facility, student leaders work with the plant manager and other adult Southwire employees to supervise and ensure the safety of students working on the shop floor. The plant manager also regularly invites OSHA to inspect the facility, which he views as a preventative measure that enables him to be proactive about quickly identifying and correcting any potential safety hazards.

Creative solutions to logistical challenges are a hallmark of work-based learning programs in Carroll County. For example, because federal regulations prohibit students under 18 from operating forklifts, students at the 12 for Life facility use manual pallet loaders to move material on the shop floor.

The numerous options for addressing liability concerns are illustrated by Carroll County employers. Southwire is self-insured; liability for students in the 12 for Life program is the same as for regular Southwire employees. Sugar Foods has worked with its insurance carrier to ensure that students are covered under the company's policy. Tanner Connections staff work closely with Tanner

Health System's risk management department to identify approved work tasks for students that minimize Tanner's liability.<sup>21</sup> Students may be excluded from work in some departments, such as obstetrics, labor, and delivery, where there are increased liability issues. In addition, school systems with students participating in the Tanner Connections program sign affiliation agreements that minimize Tanner's liability and spell out the school systems' responsibility for logistical issues such as drug screening and vaccinations.

## SEEING ADVANTAGES FOR BUSINESS

Scaling up work-based learning across Carroll County has had a positive impact on businesses engaged in these efforts. Employers agree that their participation has raised their profiles within the community and generated positive publicity for their businesses. The talent pipeline created by Carroll County's work-based learning efforts is valued by employers throughout the county. Leaders of the 12 for Life and Tanner Connections programs regularly receive

phone calls from other employers asking them if they have any graduates who are looking for jobs. Working with young people has also helped employers identify new ways to improve processes within their companies. Southwire has incorporated some of the safety features designed for the 12 for Life facility into their main plant after seeing how these features could help to protect all workers. In addition, the 12 for Life program is helping Southwire manage employee turnover; the entry-level positions now filled by students in the program were previously held primarily by temporary workers with a high turnover rate.

Work-based learning programs have also boosted companies' bottom lines. When the 12 for Life program launched, it started turning a profit almost immediately and broke company production records within the first month. The program now earns \$1 million in profits annually. Employers in Carroll County agree that, beyond the advantages for individual businesses, the development of a skilled workforce has encouraged economic growth from which the entire community benefits and that helps to ensure the future success of the county's businesses.

# CASE STUDY

## BJC HEALTHCARE

### A HISTORY OF COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

#### FAST FACTS

**Company:** BJC HealthCare

**Type/Industry:** Health Care

**Location:** St. Louis, MO

**Size:** Over 26,000 employees

#### Benefits for Business:

- Opportunity to encourage students' interest in high-need careers and occupations
- Boosts employee morale
- Establishes BJC HealthCare as a visible and engaged community partner

#### Benefits for Students:

- Students are able to apply classroom learning in real-world settings
- Students have an opportunity to identify possible career pathways within the health care field and other professions
- Students are able to leverage internships to gain research experience and use that experience to apply for scholarships for college

## PLANTING THE SEEDS

**W**ith over 26,000 employees at 12 hospitals serving the greater St. Louis region, BJC HealthCare is one of the largest employers in Missouri. Its hospitals have been active community partners for more than 80 years.

BJC HealthCare's School Outreach and Youth Development Department is housed within the organization's corporate communications and marketing department under the community benefit division. BJC SOYD began in 1991 with the mission of educating young people about healthy lifestyle choices and the wide range of career options in the health care field. BJC SOYD Director Diana Wilhold notes that, while BJC's executive leadership demonstrated a deep commitment and philosophical belief in school outreach from the beginning, these initial efforts were designed primarily as prevention health education, with career exploration for young people as an added value. Today BJC HealthCare employs physicians and allied health professionals who were once high school interns. Eleven new hires just in the last year have been a direct result of the school outreach program. Both the company and the community are seeing a larger return on this long-term investment than they would have anticipated over 20 years ago.

## THE BJC APPROACH TO CAREER EXPLORATION

BJC School Outreach and Youth Development's 18-person staff includes community health educators who help implement and coordinate all programs and services for the City of St. Louis, St. Louis County, Jefferson County, St. Charles County, and St. Francois County in Missouri, as well as school districts in 6 southern Illinois counties. A BJC community health educator describes how her job entails working with school districts to design developmentally and academically appropriate career exploration opportunities and activities for students. This means working with teachers and principals to understand where students are in their curriculum and finding ways to expose students to activities within the hospital that would contextualize their classroom learning. Project Lead the Way is a hands-on STEM curriculum that many schools across the country have adopted; BJC SOYD is able to provide career exposure that supports STEM content. For instance, PLTW has units on specialized topics like genetics, and BJC uses the curriculum's content to pinpoint what aspects of genetics would resonate with

students during a job shadow or group career visit to a BJC HealthCare facility. This helps students better understand how knowledge learned in school translates to a career in a health care setting.

Job shadows, short-term summer programs, and classroom visits are a few examples of the types of career-exploration experiences that reach 5,500 students on an annual basis. BJC SOYD also coordinates more intensive internships for approximately 50 high school students, who typically work on-site 3 times per week in a range of roles and departments within hospitals. These internships are in line with the School Outreach department's original goal of exposing students to a wide range of careers in health care. Students can be placed in non-clinical departments like media relations or health information management—an area that happens to be particularly in demand for the company. There are also opportunities for students who are interested in medical professions to gain exposure in the emergency department and surgical suites. All students in BJC SOYD have access to an infrastructure of wraparound services that includes the hospital's human resources department, behavioral health team, and employee assistance programs, as well as other supports that help ensure each student's experience is smooth. For example, before a student leaves for the day, he or she is required to check out via phone with a community health educator to debrief the day and assess whether further support is needed based on the student's experience. The additional support can be especially beneficial to students working in potentially upsetting or disturbing environments, such as the emergency department.

## A WELL-OILED MACHINE

In addition to these safety precautions, BJC School Outreach and Youth Development has several programmatic components that aid in simplifying and streamlining processes. The school is the initial and primary point of contact for BJC and must demonstrate a level of commitment and engagement equal to that of BJC. BJC SOYD also asks administrators to create a document that outlines what they hope will result from this partnership and what the school partner is willing and able to bring to the table. This initial establishment of trust and an agreement that spells out roles and responsibilities for both the employer and educators are critical to BJC SOYD programs. One reason why BJC is able to reach so many students and run programs effectively is that the School Outreach and Youth Development office is embedded in several different aspects of schools' culture and

operations. The BJC SOYD team also serves on advisory councils for 17 school districts. This level of engagement and visibility in the communities that BJC serves has helped build support and interest in the program among students and their parents.

## THE ESSENTIALS

Partner schools work with students and families to gather materials to satisfy the core job shadowing requirements of BJC HealthCare and its affiliates. These requirements include a signed parental consent form and letter of recommendation from the student's school. In addition, students must also provide current immunization records, complete a HIPAA orientation, consent to drug testing, receive a flu shot during flu season, and have two negative TB skin tests within the past 12 months. Students who are 18 or older consent to criminal background checks. The policies for job shadowing and career exploration are reviewed and updated as needed every 2 years to ensure that safety and compliance measures remain relevant.

In addition to ensuring quality experiences for both students and employees through safety and compliance measures, BJC School Outreach and Youth Development is intentional about matching students with professionals. Supervisors and mentors are employees who both express a desire to work with young people and have the capacity to play a mentorship role in the student's life by infusing the internship or experience with targeted career advice and information. Supervisors are provided with information and documentation on how to contact the SOYD office in an emergency and to answer common student questions.

Student placements in certain departments are carefully planned. For example, students often start in radiology, which is a noninvasive clinical setting that is a relatively neutral department in terms of the level of blood and trauma to which students are likely to be exposed. This gradual health care career exposure allows students to assess and explore their comfort levels without taking on too much too soon.

## THE IMPACT

A major success of BJC School Outreach and Youth Development's career exploration program is its lasting

effect on the students' academic and professional careers. Several BJC HealthCare facilities are located on the same campus as the Washington University School of Medicine, which has provided additional opportunities for students to leverage their internships to support research studies and, in some cases, even receive credit as coauthors on published medical articles. Graduate-level research opportunities have launched some of these high school students into fast-track medical career pathways and have helped students earn full-tuition scholarships to postsecondary institutions. While students participating in BJC SOYD internships are not paid, the structure and systems established by the BJC SOYD director have created some opportunities for other nonprofits and community-based organizations to partner with BJC and provide stipends to students.

BJC staff members enjoy working with these young people and seeing them grow professionally and personally. While the School Outreach and Youth Development program is currently at capacity, staff members continue to be encouraged and energized by hospital employees' testimonials about their positive experiences working with high school students and their requests for more students to return year after year.

## ADVICE TO EMPLOYERS: BE IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

The BJC SOYD director underscores that a long-term commitment is a critical component of career exploration programs that make sense for a company's workforce needs and for the schools, students, and families involved. This dedication must also come with a long-term vision and understanding that the outcomes and impact of such programs will not be immediate. In fact, BJC advises employers working with high school students to expect a commitment of at least eight years before seeing the true impact of work-based learning programs. It is important to build a strong foundation for school partnerships because these institutions are essential touch points for cultivating and maintaining relationships with students and shaping the next generation of workers. An internal commitment to investing in education that originates from the company's highest leaders and decision makers and permeates all levels of the company is also crucial to the sustainability and growth of youth-oriented programs.

# CONCLUSION

**M**any of the strategies adopted by the organizations profiled in this brief are accessible to other employers interested in working with young people. While the construction of the 12 for Life facility has paid off for Southwire, a similar strategy may not be practical for all employers. But, it is not necessary to take such a big step. Numerous other strategies are available to employers seeking to make their workplaces accessible to young people. Almost any employer can easily adopt strategies such as starting small to build buy-in and asking students and parents to sign liability waivers. These strategies can be tailored to reflect the needs of a particular industry or employer.

The case studies in this brief demonstrate that perceived barriers to workplace access for students under 18 are far from insurmountable. While each business profiled here has taken a different approach to work-based learning, these employers share an understanding of the critical need to provide opportunities for young people in their communities. They are also unified in their decision to overcome the initial hurdle of simply expanding the notion of who belongs in their workforce and making space for youth. Employers can open their doors to young people—it is a matter of choosing to do so. Collaborations among businesses, educational institutions, and intermediary organizations can successfully address common concerns and challenges and create opportunities to scale up work-based learning. Doing so will benefit both employers and young people.



# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Employment Status of the Civilian Noninstitutional Population by Age, Sex, and Race," Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, April 3, 2015, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea13.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Northeastern University, "Innovation Imperative: Enhancing the Talent Pipeline," accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.northeastern.edu/innovationsurvey/talent-pipeline/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> The Manufacturing Institute and Deloitte, "The Skills Gap in U.S. Manufacturing: 2015 and Beyond," accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.themanufacturinginstitute.org/~media/827DBC76533942679A15EF7067A704CD.ashx>.

<sup>4</sup> Lucia Anderson Weathers, "Today's business leaders say, 'It's what you know, not where you go' when making hiring decisions, new study shows," Lumina Foundation, February 25, 2014, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-events/today-s-business-leaders-say-it-s-what-you-know-not-where-you-go-when-making-hiring-decisions-new-study-shows>.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, William C. Symonds, Robert Schwartz, & Ronald F. Ferguson, 2011, "Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century," Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Graduate School of Education, accessed April 13, 2015, [http://www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Pathways\\_to\\_Prosperty\\_Feb2011-1.pdf](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Pathways_to_Prosperty_Feb2011-1.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Madeline J. Goodman, Anita M. Sands, & Richard J. Coley, January 2015, "America's Skills Challenge: Millennials and the Future," *Educational Testing Service*, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.ets.org/s/research/30079/asc-millennials-and-the-future.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of the vocational education systems in a range of countries and suggestions about how lessons from those systems might be applied in the U.S., see: Nancy Hoffman, 2011, *Schooling in the Workplace: How Six of the World's Best Vocational Education Systems Prepare Young People for Jobs and Life*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on these partnerships and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's work on talent pipeline management, see: <http://www.uschamberfoundation.org/talent-pipeline-management>

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the benefits to businesses, see: Susan Wolf Ditkoff, Willa Seldon, & Diann Daniel, 2015, "Making Youth Employment Work: Essential Elements for a Successful Strategy," U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Making%20Youth%20Employment%20Work.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Nancy Hoffman, 2015, *Let's Get Real: Deeper Learning and the Power of the Workplace*, Students at the Center: Deeper Learning Research Series, Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.jff.org/publications/lets-get-real>. See also: Robert Halpern, 2013, *Youth, Education, and the Role of Society*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

<sup>11</sup> For more detail on laws, policies, and other logistical issues related to workplace access to students under 18, see the Pathways to Prosperity Network website: <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/pathways-prosperity-network/resources-developing-and-scaling-work-based-learning>

<sup>12</sup> For more information on wages, see: <http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/youthlabor/wages.htm>. For an explanation of whether interns must be paid, see: <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed summary of Fair Labor Standards Act provisions related to youth employment, including the list of "hazardous occupations," see: <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs43.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Because state laws vary considerably, it is not possible to provide a summary of them in this brief. For additional information on regulations by state, see: <http://youthrules.dol.gov/law-library/state-laws/index.htm>. Many states also make available online toolkits with guidelines for youth employment.

<sup>15</sup> For examples of liability waivers used by employers, see: <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/pathways-prosperity-network/resources-developing-and-scaling-work-based-learning>

<sup>16</sup> For examples of confidentiality agreements used by employers, see: <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/pathways-prosperity-network/resources-developing-and-scaling-work-based-learning>

<sup>17</sup> *Let's Get Real: Deeper Learning and the Power of the Workplace*, "Policy Bulletin," Students at the Center: Deeper Learning Research Series, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/publications/materials/Lets-Get-Real-Policy-Bulletin-020415.pdf>. For additional information on state policies to support work-based learning and intermediary development, see: Charlotte Cahill, Nancy Hoffman, Amy Loyd, & Joel Vargas, 2014, *State Strategies for Sustaining and Scaling Grades 9-14 Career Pathways: Toward a Policy Set for Pathways to Prosperity*, Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.jff.org/publications/state-strategies-sustaining-and-scaling-grades-9-14-career-pathways-toward-policy-set>.

<sup>18</sup> Massachusetts General Laws c. 152, "Workers Compensation Act," Section 152:1, accessed April 13, 2015, [http://www.mcle.org/includes/pdf/2130345B01\\_S.pdf](http://www.mcle.org/includes/pdf/2130345B01_S.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> For a brief overview of German apprenticeship programs, see: Kirk Carapezza, "Blue-collar aristocrats thrive in German economy," *Marketplace*, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.marketplace.org/topics/education/learning-curve/blue-collar-aristocrats-thrive-german-economy>.

<sup>20</sup> For examples of these documents, see: <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/pathways-prosperity-network/resources-developing-and-scaling-work-based-learning>

<sup>21</sup> For the current list of approved tasks, see: <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/pathways-prosperity-network/resources-developing-and-scaling-work-based-learning>



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