



Growing Youth Apprenticeship in Greater DC

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What Is Youth Apprenticeship?

Youth apprenticeships provide structured, long-term work-based learning opportunities for students. They combine academic and technical instruction with paid work experience. Apprenticeships offer young people flexible career pathways after graduation.

Why Youth Apprenticeship?

Apprentices **learn concepts in context** and apply them to real-world situations.

Employers benefit by retaining talent, making the initiative sustainable.

Funding for classroom learning is regularly covered by the high school.

Apprenticeships **strengthen youth development**—maturity and employability skills—cultivating purpose and pride.

Unlike a pure education model, apprentices **earn money, make products and provide services, and learn**.

Routes to rewarding careers are widened; evidence exists of large gains in earnings.

In June 2020, the Urban Institute **Youth Apprenticeship Intermediary** (YAI) team convened representatives from the Greater Washington, DC, region to discuss youth apprenticeship from an educational perspective. The virtual convening attracted roughly three dozen participants from local high schools and school districts, state and local government, community colleges, independent training and technical assistance organizations, and the US Department of Labor.

THE VISION

The goal of the convening was to spark dialog among practitioners and policymakers about their experiences producing quality youth apprenticeship programs and to create a supportive ecosystem to advance these efforts in the region.

Dr. Robert Lerman, Institute fellow at Urban, provided historical context for the current moment, explaining how in the early-1990s youth apprenticeship generated a **great deal of excitement**. However, by the time President Clinton signed the 1994 School-to-Work Opportunity Act there was little mention of apprenticeship. Enthusiasm waned and proponents concluded that a robust youth apprenticeship system could not exist in the US. In recent years, supporters have renewed energy and urgency around scaling youth apprenticeships because of

- recognition that the academic-only approach fails many young people;
- awareness of how youth apprenticeship works internationally; and
- bipartisan political support across local, state, and federal governments.

This renewed energy and urgency around scaling youth apprenticeships served as a catalyst for the DC convening's peer-learning exchange.

STRUCTURING YOUTH APPRENTICESHIPS IN A HIGH SCHOOL SETTING

Youth apprenticeship offers educators the chance to improve the skills and social development of any student, especially those who learn best by doing. In addition to the work-based learning and developmental benefits that youth apprenticeships provide students, they create awareness of **promising career pathways** for young people and connect them to **jobs of opportunity**.

Montgomery County's **TranZed Academy for Working Students (TAWS) program** was lifted up as an **exemplar of how high schools and community colleges can team up** to offer more schedule flexibility and opportunities for students. The TAWS program has excelled at persuading employers who hire high school students to convert their job opportunities to Registered Apprenticeships.

CHALLENGES TO YOUTH APPRENTICESHIPS AMID THE PANDEMIC AND BEYOND

Trish Morrison, director of Registered Apprenticeship at the [Virginia Department of Labor and Industry \(VA DOLI\)](#), highlighted numerous challenges impacting youth apprenticeship, including the COVID-19 public health emergency; institutionalized racism; preconceptions from parents and school personnel; and perceived implementation barriers from employers. COVID-19 has inhibited youth apprenticeship program operations this year, but these challenges represent more entrenched barriers that need to be overcome to advance youth apprenticeship opportunities.

Maryland State Senator Jim Rosapepe reflected that labor markets, the types of jobs available, and the prevalence and nature of distance learning will change in response to COVID-19, and that the Urban Institute can help policymakers and practitioners better understand and respond to these trends. Lateefah Durant, vice president of [CityWorks DC](#), which is launching [CareerWise DC](#), a [youth apprenticeship intermediary](#), added that they are focused on industries emerging from the pandemic positioned to grow.

How Is the Urban Institute Supporting Youth Apprenticeship?

Delivering [technical assistance](#) to schools, employers, and intermediaries to design programs

[Recruiting](#) employers in collaboration with schools

Providing [registration assistance](#) to apprenticeship programs

Providing [financial support](#) for employers

Developing [promotional materials](#) for young people, parents, teachers, principals, and employers

Offering the latest [research and policy recommendations](#) on improving youth apprenticeships to policymakers

BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING PARENTS, STUDENTS, AND EMPLOYERS

Nicola Richards-Wright, content specialist at [Montgomery County Public Schools \(MCPS\)](#), detailed MCPS's early efforts on **building awareness and buy-in from students, parents, and employers**. MCPS examined and used student data to match rising seniors with work-based learning opportunities and then sent custom letters to students and parents inviting them to learn more about youth apprenticeship.

Crystal Thrower, a Registered Apprenticeship consultant with VA DOLI, highlighted **telling the story** of her "apprenticeship family" to communicate the value of apprenticeships. While Thrower pursued a four-year college degree, her husband, a master electrician, began his career in the military and became an apprentice once he completed his service. Their eldest son attended college but is currently an apprentice, and Thrower's parents were also apprentices. Now, she reflects, "Everybody else gets to keep their money, and I'm paying student loans."

Several attendees, including Genevieve Floyd, supervisor of career and postsecondary partnerships at MCPS, and Robert Holm, director of the [IT Academy at McKinley Technology high school](#), underscored their shared approach of **recruiting students who have participated in internships or summer youth employment programs**. These students have demonstrated an ability to learn on the job and are therefore likely receptive to the apprenticeship concept.

ADVANCING YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP IN THE GREATER DC REGION

This convening demonstrated how school districts, state agencies, legislators, and nongovernmental entities help expand youth apprenticeship. These efforts require sustained creativity, collaboration, and adaptability. The Urban Institute is eager to continue working with these stakeholders to grow quality youth apprenticeships in the Greater DC region.

To learn more about Urban's role as an intermediary, visit the [Urban Institute's Youth Apprenticeship Intermediary project website](#).