



CareerWise: Case Study of a Youth Apprenticeship Intermediary

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CareerWise is a Colorado-based apprenticeship intermediary that supports businesses, students, and educators seeking to start programs employing young people as apprentices. CareerWise focuses on building youth apprenticeships to ensure “students have access to the skills and knowledge they need for financial and academic success, and that businesses have access to highly-trained talent” (CareerWise 2020).

CareerWise collaborates with industry, education, and communication organizations at all stages of developing their youth apprenticeship programs and nationally advocates for the benefits of youth apprenticeship.

History

CareerWise was founded in 2016 by Colorado-based entrepreneur Noel Ginsburg, partnering with the Colorado state government, local industries, and national philanthropy. Ginsburg founded CareerWise after visiting Switzerland with Colorado Governor Hickenlooper and other prominent business leaders. The successes of the Swiss apprenticeship model inspired Hickenlooper to develop Colorado’s Business Experiential-Learning (BEL) Commission to expand youth apprenticeship and other youth apprenticeship efforts in Colorado like CareerWise. In 2017, CareerWise launched a pilot program with more than 100 apprentices and 44 employers. In the three years since its founding, CareerWise has helped three cohorts of youth apprentices start work with employers each year—a total of more than 400 apprentices with more than 100 employers. Of the current 400 apprentices, CareerWise will graduate their first cohort this year. CareerWise has expanded to other states, including Indiana and New York. As a youth apprenticeship intermediary, CareerWise has seen tremendous interest from

businesses and students since its start and has plans to grow in coming years. Nonetheless, CareerWise has faced several challenges in scaling its program, including difficulty persuading employers to participate, trouble coordinating with schools, lack of awareness around apprenticeship across their partners, and the decision of whether to register programs federally. Both CareerWise’s successes and its challenges can serve as useful lessons for advocates working to build youth apprenticeship across the country.

BOX 1

Youth Apprenticeship Intermediary Project: Case Studies

The Urban Institute’s Youth Apprenticeship Intermediary project is funded by the US Department of Labor to expand youth apprenticeships, raise awareness of their potential to connect young people to promising career paths, and help employers meet their talent needs. The Urban Institute team will capture promising practices in yearly case studies that highlight prominent youth apprenticeship models, programs, or initiatives. This brief is part of this larger series and illustrates how an intermediary like CareerWise provides infrastructure to help young people, employers, and schools create a successful youth apprenticeship ecosystem.

What Is an Intermediary?

In an apprenticeship system, an intermediary is an organization that connects different parties involved in apprenticeships—employers, apprentices, education providers, and potentially government entities—and supports them in creating and operating an apprenticeship program. Intermediaries have apprenticeship expertise that allows them to connect different groups that are integral to the success of apprenticeship—such as businesses, organized labor, and education—that would otherwise lack the infrastructure to work together.¹ Intermediaries may also provide technical assistance to help start a program and may assist with administration throughout the program’s duration.² Many intermediaries offer “industry or occupation-specific” knowledge, but some intermediaries, like CareerWise, work across industries.³ Many different organizations can be intermediaries: nonprofits like CareerWise, industry associations, community or technical colleges, workforce development boards, or labor organizations.⁴

Intermediaries provide immense value to the apprenticeship system and in many cases are the key players in making apprenticeships a reality. Most employers and education providers cannot take on the load of fully supporting a work-based learning program such as apprenticeship on top of their day-to-day activities.⁵ Intermediaries share some of this work. Moreover, many schools and employers acknowledge they lack the capabilities and relationships needed to build and sustain an apprenticeship program. Intermediaries can help “translate” between business and education, working to ensure both parties benefit. Ginsburg shared that throughout his career as founder and CEO of Intertech Plastics, a manufacturing business, he had engaged in community-based education programs, but could not make

an impact at scale until the CareerWise model was developed. This example highlights the importance of intermediaries to building successful youth apprenticeships.

In addition to CareerWise Colorado, intermediaries across the United States are helping grow the apprenticeship landscape. New America's Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship network is working to build and advance youth apprenticeships across the country.⁶ The Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship has contracted the Urban Institute and several other partners to act as intermediaries to increase the quantity and quality of youth apprenticeships across the US, particularly in nontraditional sectors.⁷ These examples and more have shown that intermediaries are an invaluable and growing piece of the US apprenticeship landscape.

Model

The CareerWise Colorado youth apprenticeship model is loosely based on the Swiss model of apprenticeship. The established Swiss model of apprenticeship works well because of Swiss investment and belief in the apprenticeship system—all parts of society from government to business to education are involved, and there is general recognition that apprenticeship is a quality route to careers. Approximately 240 apprenticeship occupations exist, and over 40 percent of companies participate.⁸ In Switzerland, nearly two-thirds of young people enter an apprenticeship during or after their secondary school education, and many choose to remain with their companies after their apprenticeships.⁹ The system has successfully connected young people with career opportunities and helped fill skills gaps in Switzerland.

In the US, apprenticeship is far less common, and the official registered system has relied on only a few industries and occupations, especially the construction trades and military. In addition, registered apprenticeship programs in the US have generally had substantially higher ages of program entry than have programs in most other countries, mostly focusing on adult workers who are already employed at the organization providing their apprenticeships.¹⁰ In the early 1990s, federal government initiatives aimed to create youth apprenticeship programs but few materialized. Today, these programs operate in only a few states and only Georgia and Wisconsin have reached a moderate scale.¹¹ The CareerWise model aims to overcome past limitations by building systems to scale youth apprenticeship. As an intermediary, CareerWise partners with local businesses and public school districts to create the interconnectedness between education and employment necessary to make apprenticeships possible. It helps undertake all steps required for creating and operating an apprenticeship program, providing support and infrastructure to programs with inexperienced employers, allowing them to run smoothly.

BOX 2

What Is the Swiss Apprenticeship Model?

Switzerland's active apprenticeship system has served as a model for others across the globe, including CareerWise Colorado. It is viable because of its strong partnerships between educators and employers,

relevance to immediate labor market needs, and participation by nearly two-thirds of Swiss young people ages 16 to 18, who receive extensive support in their transitions to work in the vocational and education training (VET) model.^a These characteristics make it a robust, internationally renowned system.

The Swiss VET system is a combined school- and work-based program—considered dual-track. So VET programs are a balanced interplay between learning on-the-job with employers and learning in a classroom setting a curriculum aligned with employer needs.^a Employer support for the system is deep, with the prevalence of employer training collectives. For example, in Zurich, the Center for Young Professionals (CYP) was founded in 2003 by five major banks with funding from the Association of the Swiss Banking Industry to collectively train young people in the banking profession.^b The related technical instruction of Swiss apprentices is highly supported and influenced by employers that hire them because there is strong interest in ensuring schooling matches on-the-job needs. Evidence shows that most Swiss employers recoup their investments during the apprenticeship, including apprentice wages which start at around 12 percent of typical wages for any particular occupation.^a

Labor market and future hiring needs drive the job opportunities available and demand for training within the system. Because Swiss employers are only hiring as many apprentices as they anticipate needing in the coming years, the supply of training in various professions ebbs and flows with market needs. Apprentices are also drawn to pursue some occupations of interest more than others.^c The system generally produces satisfactory matches for employers and students alike. This stands in contrast to the US system which lacks strong links between available opportunities and the pool of future workers, in part because employers are rarely engaged in curriculum needs and development.

Students are well supported in the transition from compulsory schooling to either the VET system or advanced professional training. Around the equivalent of grade 9 in the US, students are counseled and prepared to think about their future employment and training options. For those who seek to pursue advanced professional training (e.g., doctors or lawyers), there is a highly selective entrance exam for admission.^b Most students pursue VET and begin applying to the more than 240 occupations for paid employment.^c Consequently, only 8 percent of young people in the Swiss labor force are unemployed.^d Young people are counseled at canton-based^e employment centers to help them prepare résumés, identify opportunities, apply to jobs, and interview.^b

CareerWise Colorado has adapted elements of the Swiss model to its approach. Like the Swiss model, employers are engaged heavily to provide employment opportunities and develop training programs. Young people ages 16 to 18, as in Switzerland, engage in dual-track education—learning equally at work and in the classroom—how to become an employee in a certain occupation. CareerWise also coaches young people through the process with school and industry partners. By incorporating such elements, CareerWise has modified the Swiss model to work successfully in the US context.

^a For more information about the apprenticeship system in Switzerland, see “Apprenticeship System,” Apprenticeship Toolbox, accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.apprenticeship-toolbox.eu/switzerland/apprenticeship-system-in-switzerland>.

^b Detailed Swiss case studies and examples are featured in this document: Center on International Education Benchmarking, *Gold Standard: The Swiss Vocational Education and Training System: International Comparative Study of Vocational Education Systems* (Washington, DC: National Center on Education and the Economy, 2015).

^c Facts about the Swiss apprenticeship model can be found here: State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation (SERI), *Vocational and Professional Education and Training in Switzerland—Facts and Figures 2020* (Bern, Switzerland: SERI, 2020).

^d “Youth Unemployment Rate,” OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development,” accessed May 29, 2020, <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/youth-unemployment-rate.htm>.

^e A canton in Switzerland is similar in function to a state in the US.

CareerWise staff have distinct roles to help each CareerWise partner.¹² Some staff members focus on relationships with employers, others on relationships with schools, and others on recruiting and helping apprentices. CareerWise undertakes several tasks to create apprenticeships: developing occupational standards; outreach and recruitment to employers, schools, and apprentices; training of employers and apprentices before and throughout the apprenticeship; ongoing program support; and wider advocacy. Having dedicated staff members and goals in each area allows the model as a whole to run smoothly, given that most participants are new to apprenticeship.

Most apprenticeships consist of three main components: on-the-job learning, apprentice contributions to production, and related technical or theoretical instruction, which usually occurs in a classroom setting. Related technical instruction for youth apprenticeships can sometimes take place within high schools and sometimes within postsecondary education, such as at local community colleges. Related technical instruction and on-the-job learning can take place concurrently or separately, depending on the right fit for particular programs.

As in the Swiss system, CareerWise youth apprenticeships generally start while students are in high school. The typical CareerWise apprenticeship lasts for three years—the first two while the student is still in high school and the final year devoted to nearly full-time employment (figure 1). Students spend more time on the job and less time in school as they progress through the program, and they have an opportunity to earn a high school diploma, an industry-recognized credential, and up to a semester's worth of debt-free college credit. Apprentices earn wages for their work on the job and have the opportunity to progress to higher-wage steps as they attain skills.

The model is applicable to various occupations across industries. Although apprenticeship in the US traditionally has been most common in construction trades, it is on the rise in industries such as health care, information technology (IT), and advanced manufacturing. CareerWise uses competency-based apprenticeships, which define the apprentice's progress entirely by their attaining specific competencies that lead to proficiency in an occupation. Most registered apprenticeship programs define progress based on time allocated to learning each set of tasks, largely because of the high concentration of construction trades where time-based apprenticeships are the norm. Competency-based approaches allow the apprenticeship to accommodate differences in how quickly individual apprentices progress.¹³ CareerWise has developed 15 competency-based occupational standards and offers apprenticeships in each occupation, although most of their apprenticeships are not registered. Their goal is to develop 12 to 18 new occupational frameworks each year to reach 75 occupations across 10 industry pathways by 2024.

FIGURE 1

Youth Apprenticeship Timeline

How apprentices navigate school and work over the three-year CareerWise program

	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
 AT HIGH SCHOOL Core academics courses at school (e.g., math, science or language arts)	Approximately 3 days per week	Approximately 2 days per week	You've graduated!
 ON-THE-JOB On-the-job training, in form of occupation, rotation or projects	12-16 hours per week	20-24 hours per week	32-40 hours per week
 ADDITIONAL COURSEWORK Multi-skill training curriculum in occupation-specific skills	Apprentices will not typically take any additional coursework in year 1. Varies by occupation.	Apprentices will earn an industry-recognized professional certification relevant to their work.	Employers have agreed to pay up to \$4,000 in college courses—about a semester's worth.

Source: CareerWise (2020).

Partners in the Process

Careerwise has built an ecosystem to support youth apprentices by connecting employers, students, and schools in partnership. Each partner is integral to the youth apprenticeship program's success. Fostering collaboration and a culture of flexibility between high schools, employers, and apprentices is crucial to the youth apprenticeship system's success.

Employers

Employers are vital to the apprenticeship model, playing a critical role in leading the development apprenticeship occupation and providing the applied learning environment. Industry informs which roles and career paths are in demand and has a hand in shaping the apprentice occupation competencies to ensure the program delivers meaningful work to the employer in addition to the apprentice. Employers are indispensable since they provide a job, training, wages, and a supervisor or mentor to oversee the apprentices. Some employers take charge of educational training and offer extra mentorship or benefits to student apprentices. Without an employer providing on-the-job learning in the context of a job, there can be no apprenticeship.

However, many education providers, governments, and intermediaries eager to start apprenticeships have trouble recruiting employer partners to offer apprenticeships. Apprenticeship, and particularly youth apprenticeship, can be a tough sell for employers whose resources are already

strained. Devoting time to training and mentorship and money to apprentice wages may strike employers as expensive. Some businesses may worry that teenage apprentices cannot contribute productively in the workplace. CareerWise's recruitment and employer relations strategies are critical to overcoming these barriers and misconceptions.

CareerWise has a team devoted to business recruitment and has thus far recruited 132 employers across a wide variety of industries (CareerWise 2020). The team generates leads through networks, involvement with industry associations, and digital tools.¹⁴ They pitch to ideal employers on the concept of youth apprenticeship and how CareerWise can support them. In doing so, CareerWise manages to reach employers in many sectors and industries, even untraditional ones. Although registered apprenticeship in the US is most common in construction trades, many CareerWise employers are in fields atypical to apprenticeship in America, ranging from IT to education to health care.

CareerWise also employs customer success managers (CSMs) who support employers leading up to and throughout the apprenticeship.¹⁵ They help employers through the hiring and onboarding process and work with them to create training and supervision plans for apprentices. They help businesses assess skills for apprentices and measure and track progress throughout the program. Finally, CSMs help employers manage challenges as they arise and promote apprenticeships that are mutually beneficial for apprentices and employers.

One challenge employers face is building buy-in among employees, especially those who will be supervising and working with apprentices.¹⁶ Additionally, employers may have trouble with the apprenticeship's logistics, including creating a schedule that works for both employers and schools. Collaboration and partnership coordinated by CSMs are often the keys to overcoming these and other problems. Working with CareerWise and the schools, employers have successfully trained their own employees to work with apprentices and have worked out compatible school and work schedules for apprentices.

Although the challenges should not be understated, most employers find they are far outweighed by the benefits of employing apprentices. Apprentices are quick-learning, hardworking, and talented contributors to their teams. Many employers benefit from apprentices' productivity sooner than they expected. Businesses see youth apprenticeship as an opportunity to grow their own workforce and train young people in useful ways (CareerWise 2020). Finally, many companies find the energy and enthusiasm of their youth apprentices contagious, with one employer describing their apprentice as "a breath of fresh air" (CareerWise 2020). Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, 67 percent of CareerWise apprentices were still working in remote or modified-for-safety work environments. The retention of youth apprentices indicates that their contributions are meaningful and important to their employers.¹⁷ These employer experiences show how beneficial apprenticeship can be as a business strategy.

SPOTLIGHT ON AN EMPLOYER: PINNACOL ASSURANCE

Pinnacol Assurance¹⁸ is a workers' compensation insurance company that provides coverage to over one million workers across Colorado. Headquartered in the Denver area, it has employed multiple

cohorts of youth apprentices in insurance-related occupations such as underwriting and accounting since CareerWise Colorado's inception. Mark Tapy, the apprenticeship program manager at Pinnacol Assurance, and his team designed and implemented the program and have fostered its growth since starting in 2017. What follows are Tapy's insights about their program and work with CareerWise.¹⁹

Pinnacol has invested in apprenticeships, in part, because leadership realized it was facing a retirement cliff in the insurance industry. Training younger people is a way to ensure continuity in its workforce. Their CEO visited Switzerland to learn about its successful youth apprenticeship model with the governor of Colorado and other prominent business leaders, including the founder of CareerWise. Lessons from the visit spurred a commitment to hire 25 apprentices in 2017 and create Tapy's position to initiate Pinnacol's youth apprenticeship program. Pinnacol has since hired two additional staff members to manage the program, and countless employees have been tapped as supervisors and mentors of apprentices since its inception.

In its three years of having a youth apprenticeship program, Pinnacol has learned lessons along the way. One of the most fundamental was to shift apprentices' work schedules. Pinnacol started its program with a Tuesday and Thursday block schedule where apprentices worked full days on both days. By year two, it switched to an afternoon schedule to have apprentices work from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays. Having apprentices in the office only two days a week resulted in discontinuities in workflow and on-the-job learning, so the schedule shift has been an important improvement.

Unlike most employers working with CareerWise Colorado, Pinnacol has chosen to register their apprenticeships with the US Department of Labor (DOL). They were motivated to do so for several reasons. First, Pinnacol was connected to a registered apprenticeship working group in the insurance industry early on and recognized that a federally registered program conveyed high quality and legitimacy. They had also integrated many components of registered apprenticeships in their program's design, so it was a "natural next step" to meet the registration requirements. Finally, multiple funding opportunities are available to employers who register, which can be helpful for starting and supporting programs. But Tapy acknowledges the registered apprenticeship system is not always conducive to the obligations of high school students who need to work part time as they balance both school and work, because of total work and instruction hours required. Additionally, forecasting a three-year design can be complex in a constantly evolving business climate. Despite these challenges, Pinnacol is pleased to have a registered program and the high quality that registration conveys.

Pinnacol has realized many benefits from hiring youth apprentices. Staff have come to see apprentices as valuable colleagues. Tapy reported that Pinnacol's internal metrics show apprentices are 75 to 80 percent as productive as a regular full-time employed staff member doing similar tasks. He also reports that supervisors and mentors experience great satisfaction in this role, such that their retention is higher. Supervisors at Pinnacol become certified, receive a small stipend, and are recognized by their managers. Before the end of the first cohort's three-year tenure, Pinnacol also hired five apprentices full time. One apprentice hired as a software developer has more than paid for the firm's investment because of recruiting cost savings in hiring for the role. Had the COVID-19 crisis not occurred, Pinnacol

would have hired many more apprentices as full-time employees at the end of their tenure. Overall, the program has been considered a success internally. Pinnacol hopes that if more employers follow suit by hiring youth apprentices, the pool of high-quality talent will increase for the entire industry.

Apprentices

Apprentices, like employers, have much to gain from participation in an apprenticeship. After apprentices begin their three-year apprenticeships at an organization in an occupational pathway, they work their way toward competency through a combination of on-the-job learning and related technical instruction. Apprentices' occupations and daily tasks depend greatly on their interests and employers' needs, but they are given real responsibility at their organizations. CareerWise works closely in partnership with apprentices throughout the process to ensure the program is mutually beneficial for all participants.

Apprentices in the CareerWise program start during their junior or senior year of high school. They are generally students who are motivated learners and are drawn to work-based learning experience.²⁰ CareerWise usually recruits apprentices through the schools they work with and then helps them through the application process. Students are able to apply to employers for apprenticeships in specific occupations that interest them so they have the opportunity to grow their own career goals. Because they are able to choose, apprentices generally find the programs personally meaningful and professionally relevant to their future careers. In fact, 78 percent of apprentices surveyed said that they found their apprenticeship very relevant to their career path, compared with only 34 percent who said the same about their school work (CareerWise 2020).

As high school students, entering an unfamiliar professional environment can be challenging for some apprentices when starting their programs. Many students initially are unfamiliar with workplace norms and may be intimidated to speak up at work.²¹ CareerWise trains apprentices to help them prepare for these challenges, teaching them about dressing for work, arriving on time, and communicating with bosses and mentors.

Some challenges may persist through the program, such as balancing time. Committing to a three-year intensive work-based learning program that involves a job adds significant time burdens associated with school, family responsibilities, homework, extracurricular activities, and spending time with friends. CareerWise works closely with schools to ensure students get the academic help they need if they are struggling to balance school and work. With the help of CareerWise, their employer, and their school, most apprentices who enroll in the program are able to find balance in their schedules.

Apprentices shared anecdotes about how empowering it is to contribute and succeed in a practical way and to earn a wage while doing so.²² Beyond the benefits of contributing to a workplace community and earning wages, most apprentices felt the apprenticeship greatly helped them in their career goals. In fact, 88 percent of apprentices who said they were very likely to continue working in their industry or field found their apprenticeship experience very valuable in working toward that goal. Nine apprentices were even hired into full-time positions by their employers before completing their apprenticeship

(CareerWise 2020). Apprentices work very hard and accomplish things uncommon among their age cohort, if only because the opportunity to excel in a professional environment isn't the norm in a country without a robust youth apprenticeship system.

SPOTLIGHT ON AN APPRENTICE: MONIQUE LANE, PINNACOL ASSURANCE

Monique Lane is finishing the third year of her apprenticeship at Pinnacol Assurance in Denver, Colorado.²³ Since she started, she has earned her high school diploma, completed her associate's degree, and discovered that she wants to pursue a career in accounting.

Monique first learned about apprenticeship when CareerWise representatives visited her computer science class in 10th grade. She was motivated to participate because she was looking for a way to earn money and was enticed by the idea that she could also take college classes and earn debt-free college credit. She applied to CareerWise by submitting a cover letter, résumé, and three letters of recommendation. Once approved by her school to apply for a CareerWise apprenticeship, she applied to two apprenticeship jobs, including one at Pinnacol, which was the only employer she saw give a presentation at her school.

She was a member of the first CareerWise cohort when program adjustments were being made. In the program's first year, scheduling was difficult because she had classes on the same days (Tuesdays and Thursdays) that she had to be at work full time. This meant that on workdays she also had to catch up on any schooling she missed that day. Students learned to communicate clearly with teachers and administrators. Although most teachers were understanding, sometimes students enlisted the help of the school's apprenticeship lead. Monique found it helpful to be part of a five-student cohort at her school and the larger CareerWise cohort that provided support and advice about how to manage any complications.

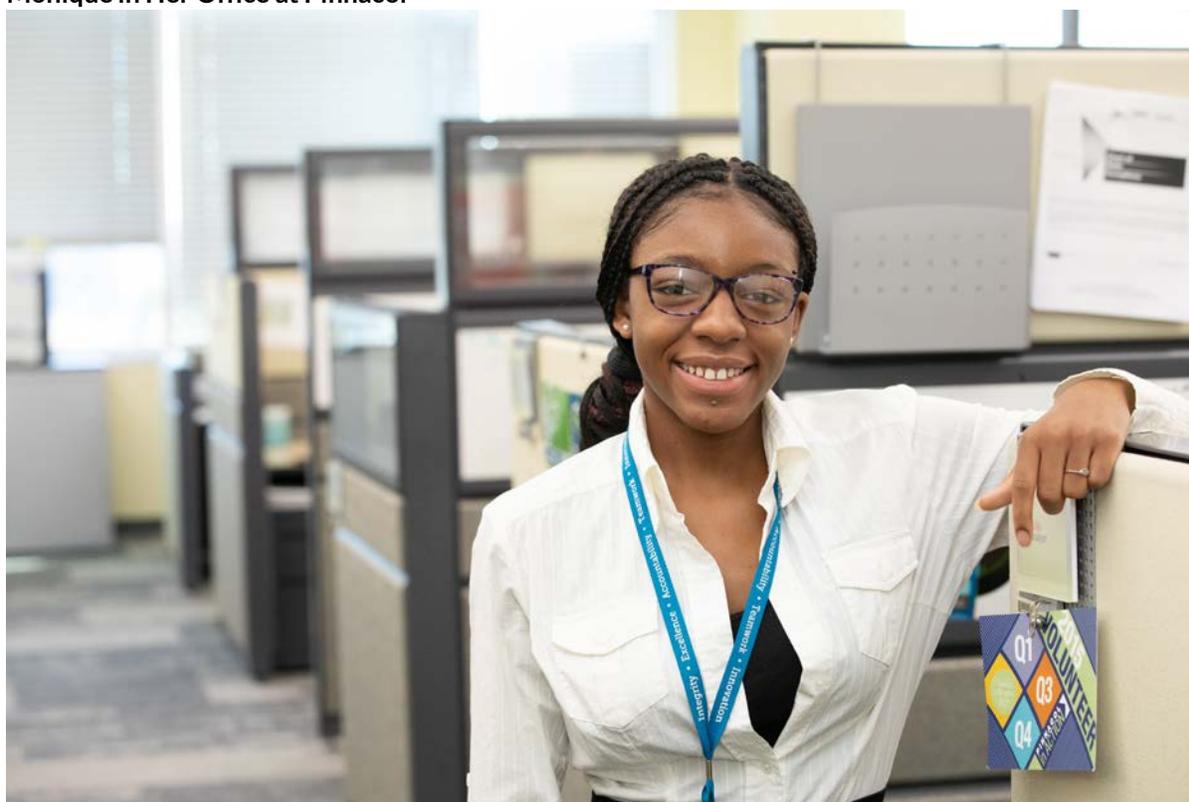
Monique liked her experience at Pinnacol from the start and felt especially supported by the full apprenticeship cohort and other staff including her mentor, her direct supervisor, and the apprenticeship team. Challenged by her mentor, she grew personally and professionally by learning how to dress for the office, improving timeliness, and developing networking skills at the workplace. In her first year at Pinnacol, she rotated between different departments, shadowed different employees, and learned where she enjoyed working the most. In the second year, she chose the auditing department to complete the next two years of her apprenticeship. In her current auditing role, she assigns online cases to auditors, works on monthly lists of cancelled policies that need to be billed, bills regular low-touch cases, and sends emails and faxes, often related to compliance. She likes her auditing role because she gets to work on billing, a task closely related to her professional goal of becoming an accountant. She hopes to earn a bachelor's degree in accounting.

With the end of her apprenticeship in sight, Monique is weighing future options. She had hoped to continue working at Pinnacol upon the completion of her program, but with COVID-19 pandemic and its economic ripple effects, she is unsure if she will have the opportunity to do so. If she cannot find a position at Pinnacol or elsewhere, she has plans to return to school full time to finish her bachelor's

degree. This will be easier to attain because of the associate’s degree she earned along the way, paid for by Denver Public Schools and Pinnacol.

Monique is positive about her experience in the CareerWise program. It met her original goals for doing an apprenticeship—to earn money, earn debt-free college credit, gain professional skills, and get work experience in accounting. In fact, she earned her associate’s degree, far beyond the 12 credits typically included in a CareerWise apprenticeship. She recommends the program to other young people but recognizes that apprenticeships may work best for those who are dedicated and especially goal oriented. Apprenticeship has been a positive experience for her, and she believes the program should be available to young people across the country to offer exposure to and experience with different occupations.

FIGURE 2
Monique in Her Office at Pinnacol



Source: Monique Lane.

Schools

Schools are critical partners in the CareerWise endeavor. One role they serve is recruiting students for the program. CareerWise maintains relationships with schools throughout the apprenticeship process to help students better balance school and work. CareerWise has a team dedicated to K–12 school partnerships, and their role is to implement apprenticeship in schools across Colorado.²⁴ At the

moment, CareerWise has 95 partner high schools, including 11 school districts and 5 charter schools, which all operate slightly differently.

Incorporating the youth apprenticeship model in high schools is crucial to the success of the youth apprenticeship program, because without investment from school leadership, recruiting students is very difficult. One of the biggest challenges CareerWise faces in working with schools is helping school leadership, including teachers and administrators, invest in and understand the value of apprenticeship. The CareerWise education partnerships team, led by director Ginny Reece, works with high schools to determine current practices that could be expanded to meet the requirements of youth apprenticeship. The team identifies other work-based learning practices or areas of scheduling flexibility that would be good foundations to build on for the youth apprenticeship program. Once onboard, leadership support is crucial to normalizing youth apprenticeship as a possibility for students. CareerWise works with schools to spread the word about youth apprenticeship to students. For example, CareerWise hosts information sessions for students and parents and helps talk them through the application process. They rely heavily on teacher support to let students know about the program early on in their high school journeys.

Even once students are recruited into the program, CareerWise collaborates with schools to help students overcome challenges. As evidenced by Monique’s difficulties balancing school and work in the program’s first year, it is important to have school schedules that can be compatible with work schedules. CareerWise helps schools and employers collaborate to find the most useful school and work schedule—one option is block scheduling, where students have all their classes only twice or three times a week, and work the full day the rest of the week. Some students have difficulty juggling all their responsibilities, and some may become less interested in and motivated to do their schoolwork. CareerWise works closely with schools to ensure students get any academic support they need and stay on track to graduate.

SPOTLIGHT ON A SCHOOL SYSTEM: DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CareerWise works with schools across Colorado, but a notable and vital partner is the Denver Public School (DPS) system. DPS has around 20 schools participating in the CareerWise youth apprenticeship program. It has invested more in apprenticeship than other public school systems across the country. Emily Takimoto manages a team focused on the apprenticeship program within DPS’s Career and College Success Department. Much of her work focuses on managing Denver’s four school-based apprenticeship coordinators, who each work to engage schools in the youth apprenticeship model. Most other districts CareerWise works with do not employ coordinators. Takimoto also works on student recruitment and meets regularly with “pathway directors”—assistant principals who manage work-based learning. Finally, she works on case management for students in the apprenticeship program, helping them navigate their new schedules. Having a dedicated apprenticeship staff makes it far smoother for DPS students to participate in apprenticeships.

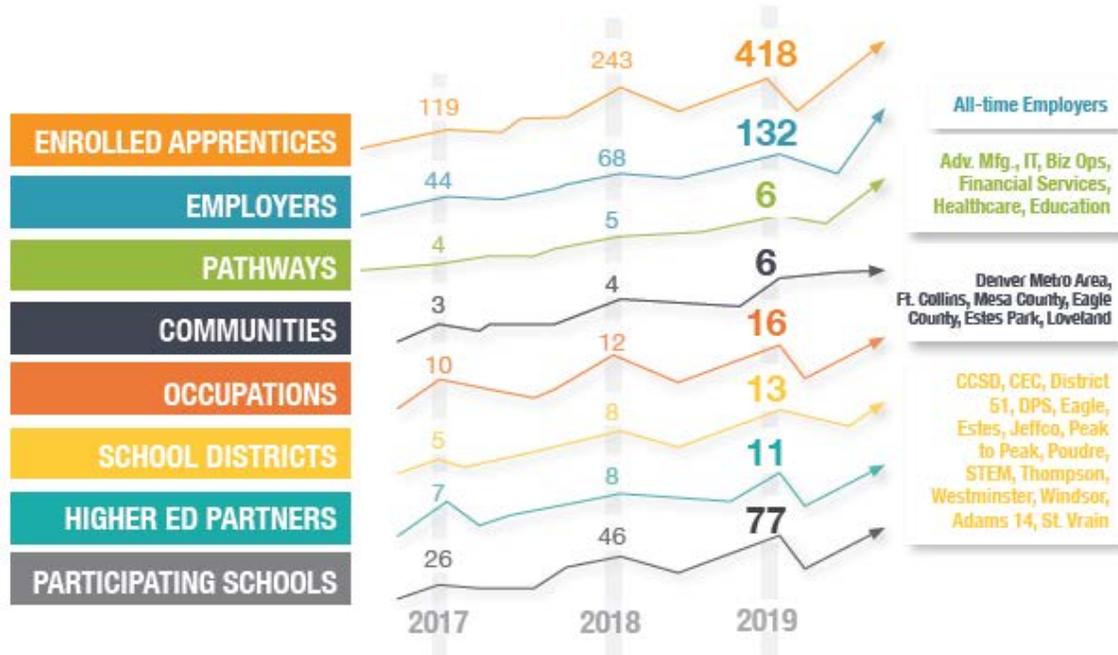
Beyond staffing, DPS has invested heavily in youth apprenticeship in terms of scheduling hours. All schools with apprentices in the program have adjusted their schedules, either allowing apprentices to use block scheduling and only come in two or three days a week or allowing students to use to whole

afternoons for their apprenticeship. The district has worked to ensure students can fit core classes into this compressed schedule.

The investment on behalf of DPS, as well as CareerWise’s close partnership with the schools, has allowed it to scale the program. CareerWise has more than 90 apprentices across the DPS district. The number will grow with the five-fold increase from four to 20 schools in fewer than three years. The unique partnership between DPS and CareerWise has been instrumental in growing CareerWise throughout the area and helping their apprentices to succeed.

FIGURE 3
CareerWise Growth

How the CareerWise system has grown in all-time metrics in the three years since its founding



Source: CareerWise (2020).

Beyond Colorado

CareerWise has had some success solidifying partnerships and implementing their model in Colorado in only a few years. The program has grown since it began but has been mostly concentrated in Colorado, especially the Denver area (figure 3). However, champions of the CareerWise model see it as applicable to the US youth apprenticeship system as a whole. Founder Noel Ginsburg explained that he always envisioned CareerWise as a model that would be shared and adopted across the country.²⁵ CareerWise leaders want to be a resource for others trying to start youth apprenticeships. Ginsburg explained that consistency of youth apprenticeship standards across the country is necessary to get a wide variety of companies engaging with the model, regardless of whether it is the CareerWise model specifically.

CareerWise has taken the first steps in moving beyond Colorado to partner with locations across the country. Currently, it has launched programs in Elkhart County, Indiana; New York City and Washington, DC. The intermediary is also consulting with organizations from such as Chicago, Louisiana and Minnesota. CareerWise partners in Colorado and across the country believe that with good leadership and collaboration the successful system in Colorado and Denver is applicable across the nation.

SPOTLIGHT ON A CAREERWISE SITE: ELKHART, INDIANA

One of the early adopters of the model outside of Colorado is Elkhart County, Indiana. Elkhart County has a population of just over 200,000 people located in northern Indiana, and is known as the “RV capital of the world” because recreation vehicle (RV)–related production is the city’s predominant industry and economic driver.²⁶ RV production is tied to consumers having discretionary income, so in the 2008–09 recession Elkhart and its residents faced high unemployment rates and had to rethink investments in and strategies for education and training.

Horizon Education Alliance (HEA) was founded after the 2008–09 recession, with a dedicated focus on rethinking education, including for its youngest residents.²⁷ HEA is a research and evidence-based organization that partners with major employers, local educators, and community leaders across Elkhart County to rethink educational and career pathways for residents. After a trip to Germany and Switzerland to observe apprenticeships, HEA leaders were motivated to incorporate the Swiss model in their approach, which in turn led them to conversations with CareerWise—adopting their model in 2019 as a pilot in Elkhart. HEA started their program with 10 businesses committing to hire apprentices and 12 students representing four participating school districts.

HEA adapted the CareerWise model slightly to meet their community’s needs. They initially wanted to do a three-year apprenticeship commitment as is the norm in Colorado, but wanted to accommodate apprentices who could demonstrate competencies on different timelines, with some moving faster and some slower toward mastery of the work. HEA is working on building awareness among apprentices and parents that there is a commitment to the program beyond high school. Although typically it is juniors who start the apprenticeship program in Colorado, HEA has built in flexibility for seniors to start the program too. HEA is committed to registering programs and apprentices with the Department of Labor (DOL) as well, because they want the validation of high quality. They are also working toward dual enrollment (students having access to both college and high school classes and credit). Indiana is at the forefront of such efforts, but HEA has not finalized their dual-enrollment plans yet, in part because the program is still a small pilot.

HEA encountered a few challenges in their first pilot year. Getting apprentices to work with adequate transportation was initially an issue, but schools provided activity buses to shuttle them to employers until students earned enough money to purchase their own vehicles. In other cases, there were issues of fit. One apprentice for whom on-the-job learning seemed appropriate had difficulty with the combined responsibilities as an employee and student, and the individual and employer mutually agreed to end the apprenticeship. Consistent with the CareerWise model implemented in Colorado,

HEA has worked hard to prepare both students and employers for navigating these roles and provide strong coaching and supports throughout the engagement to address issues such as these.

Logistics and supply chain employer Kem Krest was one of the first employer partners to commit to hiring apprentices in Elkhart County.²⁸ Their first apprentice was hired and started with the first HEA cohort in 2019, and the apprenticeship has been a success so far. The company has had a long commitment to employing interns from local schools and felt apprenticeship was a way to extend engagement with a student, realize benefits from a young person's perspective and interests, and extend Kem Krest's productivity. Kem Krest also saw apprenticeship as an opportunity to recognize and develop a high-performing junior staff manager who serves as the apprentice's mentor. They chose the mentor first and empowered him to hire a candidate. Their apprentice currently works in supply chain management, with their designated mentor, and is getting experience buying in scale and managing supply chains.

HEA is looking ahead at next steps for their apprenticeship program and sees expansion on the horizon. In the near term, they are adding apprentice cohorts in August and January and have plans to add 60 more apprentices to the program over the next four years. At one point, their long-term goal was to have half of all local high school juniors and seniors become apprentices in the next five to seven years, or a total of 1,500 students per grade. But, they are now prioritizing designing a quality program over early growth, focusing on a model that develops over time to achieve the best outcomes for all. In the interim, HEA is seeking to build awareness and develop champions for the model among the schools, employers, and families in Elkhart County.

Applying the CareerWise Model to Youth Apprenticeship More Broadly

As apprenticeship grows in popularity among employers, as more students want to explore alternative pathways to careers, and as models like CareerWise's achieve major successes, advocates are seeking to scale youth apprenticeship more broadly. The CareerWise system provides important lessons learned for growing youth apprenticeship throughout the US.

Challenges to Overcome

Although CareerWise has been successful in developing their model over a few years, it faced significant challenges that can be expected in any organization beginning an apprenticeship program. Interviews with individuals involved in the CareerWise system reveal challenges that other intermediaries have to overcome.

One significant challenge is the issue of cooperation with schools, particularly public schools. The employers, schools, and apprentices we spoke with all explained that it was very difficult to start the program when schools were not heavily incorporated in the apprenticeship model. Many students initially had trouble balancing school and work, and for some, their efforts in both realms suffered.

Coordination and flexibility on behalf of schools is key to making schedules work, but it may look different in varying locations. In Denver, the public school system invested significantly in supporting the apprenticeship program, but such investments may not be forthcoming everywhere, particularly in larger, more bureaucratic school systems. Other organizations seeking to start apprenticeships will need to work closely with local schools to identify solutions that align with the individual schools and students.

Another challenge that arose frequently was employer reluctance to participate in apprenticeship programs, especially regarding misconceptions they may hold about apprentices. Many managers hold preconceived biases about teenagers that make it hard for them to picture youth apprentices being productive, capable members of their business. They may hesitate to implement apprenticeship for fear that it would be a waste of time and resources if apprentices are not able to contribute. CareerWise leaders and employer champions said overcoming this bias is a big barrier to scaling youth apprenticeship. Getting employers on board and comfortable with youth apprenticeship is essential for organizations starting new apprenticeships.

Finally, building awareness is still a big component of the work of CareerWise and apprenticeship advocates across the country. Although support for apprenticeship has grown over recent years and continues to expand, many schools, students, and employers have still never heard of apprenticeship and are unaware of how it can benefit them. Even fewer have seen evidence of successful youth apprenticeships in their sector, location, or among their peers. CareerWise's education team explained that they spent the majority of their time building awareness to get students and parents to even consider youth apprenticeship as a legitimate option. Other organizations may require similar efforts.

Registration

Organizations considering beginning a youth apprenticeship program face the decision of whether to register the program with the DOL. CareerWise does not require employers to register their programs, and most of their employers have kept their programs unregistered. Only 10 percent of apprentices in the CareerWise system are registered, and CareerWise has not widely used their resources as an intermediary to make registration easier for employers.²⁹ Employers often see registration as a time-consuming barrier to starting programs, and some may believe that registration will make their program less flexible and harder to adapt to the needs of the company. However, evidence exists that registration can be very beneficial, both for employers and apprentices.³⁰

Pinnacol was one of only a few employers working with CareerWise to register their apprenticeships with the DOL. It learned from working groups that registration would help convey the program's quality and help them access funding opportunities to strengthen the program. Because the Pinnacol program already included most of what is required for a registered apprenticeship, registration was not a major barrier. Pinnacol managers are happy with their decision to register and would recommend it to other employers as well. In fact, CareerWise is now taking steps to incorporate federal registration into the model. It is working with the USDOL to get its competency-based apprenticeships

recognized as local and national programs alongside the agency's time-based apprenticeships it has been applying to its more traditional adult programs.

Organizations seeking to start new youth apprenticeships should consider the many benefits of registration. One major benefit to registering apprenticeships is the access to federal funding that comes with it. Once registered with the DOL, employers can apply for funding from various federal sources, such as Pell Grants, the GI Bill, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and DOL Registered Apprenticeship funding (DOL ETA 2014). Apprentices also receive a nationally recognized certificate for completing an apprenticeship program, which allows their training to be portable nationwide. Registering apprenticeships can also make many employers and apprentices eligible for state funding opportunities, such as tax credits and tuition assistance.³¹ These opportunities can help offset employers' costs of starting an apprenticeship program and can subsidize and legitimize apprentice training.

Finally, as Mark Tapy of Pinnacol mentioned, registration provides an opportunity for the DOL to review the apprenticeship program and indicate that the program is held to a high standard. Registration allows organizations to promote the quality of their program to applicants. For organizations already developing programs, registration can be beneficial without adding significant work. Groups seeking to start youth apprenticeships and model them after CareerWise may choose to include federal registration in their own model.

Partnership and Coordination

Perhaps the biggest lesson that came out of interviews with various CareerWise stakeholders was the importance of partnership and coordination. All interviewees spoke at length about the value of their collaboration with other partners. Employers, schools, and students are all needed to make an apprenticeship happen, and without CareerWise bringing these different groups together, that collaboration would not exist. As an intermediary, CareerWise connects partners that might otherwise not have interacted, and in doing so create a shared language of work-based learning that facilitates collaboration. The work of bringing stakeholders together cannot be understated, and this is a crucial element to scaling youth apprenticeship.

Beyond the work of connecting collaborators, some of CareerWise's most vital work is continuously translating between the different parties. CareerWise helps their partners more easily communicate and troubleshoot with one another. The fact that, for example, public schools and employers are collaborating to find a student schedule that works for both parties is unusual. However, it is necessary for them to run a successful youth apprenticeship program with public school students. Replicating this spirit of coordination is not easy, but it is crucial for scaling youth apprenticeship throughout the country. Future advocates of youth apprenticeship should focus on incorporating partnership and coordination across their organizations to undertake the group effort of running a youth apprenticeship program.

Notes

- ¹ Myriam Milfort Sullivan, “Seven Ways Intermediaries Help Develop Apprenticeship Programs,” Jobs for the Future, October 7, 2016, <https://www.jff.org/points-of-view/seven-ways-intermediaries-help-develop-apprenticeship-programs/>.
- ² “Intermediaries,” US Department of Labor (DOL), accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/employers/intermediaries>.
- ³ “Intermediaries,” DOL.
- ⁴ “Intermediaries,” DOL.
- ⁵ ESG and PAYA (2019), p 4.
- ⁶ “Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship,” New America, accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/partnership-advance-youth-apprenticeship/>.
- ⁷ “Youth Apprenticeship Intermediary Project,” Urban Institute, accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/center-labor-human-services-and-population/projects/youth-apprenticeship-intermediary-project>.
- ⁸ “Swiss Apprenticeship Model: An Employer Driven System of Education & Training,” Colorado.gov, accessed May 29, 2020, https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/Swiss%20Apprenticeship%20Model%20and%20BASIC%2005_2016%20Abbrv.pdf.
- ⁹ “Swiss Apprenticeship Model,” Colorado.gov.
- ¹⁰ Lerman and Pouncy (2018), p. 70.
- ¹¹ The Georgia program has about 3,000 youth apprentices while about 5,000 participate in Wisconsin’s youth apprenticeship program. See Lerman, Kuehn, and Shakesprere (2019).
- ¹² The information in this section is based on presentations at the CareerWise summit in February 2020 and CareerWise Colorado’s 2019 Annual Report (2020).
- ¹³ For more information on competency-based apprenticeship and examples of competency-based occupational standards, see Urban Institute, “Competency-Based Occupational Frameworks for Registered Apprenticeship,” accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/center-labor-human-services-and-population/projects/competency-based-occupational-frameworks-registered-apprenticeships>.
- ¹⁴ Information provided on the CareerWise employer recruitment model is based on presentations at the CareerWise summit in February 2020.
- ¹⁵ Information provided on the CareerWise CSM model is based on presentations at the CareerWise summit in February 2020.
- ¹⁶ The information in this section is based on an interview with Mark Tapy, apprenticeship program manager at Pinnacol Assurance, on April 23, 2020.
- ¹⁷ This information is based on an interview with Noel Ginsburg and Ryan Gensler of CareerWise on April 30, 2020.
- ¹⁸ Pinnacol Assurance, accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.pinnacol.com/>.
- ¹⁹ The information in this section is based on an interview with Mark Tapy, apprenticeship program manager at Pinnacol Assurance, on April 23, 2020.
- ²⁰ The information in this section is based on an interview with Ginny Reece of CareerWise and Emily Takimoto of Denver Public Schools on April 30, 2020.
- ²¹ The information in this section is based on an interview with Monique Lane, apprentice in auditing, Pinnacol Assurance, on April 29, 2020.

- ²² The information in this section is based on presentations at the CareerWise summit in February 2020.
- ²³ The information in this section is based on an interview with Monique Lane, apprentice in auditing, Pinnacol Assurance, on April 29, 2020.
- ²⁴ The information in this section is based on an interview with Ginny Reece of CareerWise and Emily Takimoto of Denver Public Schools on April 30, 2020.
- ²⁵ The information in this section is based on an interview with Noel Ginsburg and Ryan Gensler of CareerWise on April 30, 2020.
- ²⁶ “Elkhart, Indiana,” Wikipedia, last updated June 3, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elkhart,_Indiana.
- ²⁷ The information in this section is based on an interview with Brian Wiebe and Breanna Allen of HEA on May 8, 2020.
- ²⁸ The information in this section is based on an interview with Amish Shah of Kem Krest on May 8, 2020.
- ²⁹ This statistic was sourced from presentations at the CareerWise summit in February 2020.
- ³⁰ “Center for Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning: Registered Apprenticeship,” Jobs for the Future, accessed May 29, 2020, <https://center4apprenticeship.jff.org/apprenticeship/registered-apprenticeship/>.
- ³¹ “Apprenticeship: Learn about Tax Credits,” DOL ETA (US Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration), last updated January 28, 2020, <https://www.doleta.gov/oa/taxcredits.cfm>.

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