

Public Sector Apprenticeship: Improving Work for Governments and Residents

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Why Public Sector Apprenticeships Make Sense

Young people benefit from exposure to career opportunities

Apprentices gain work experience and earn money and credentials

Government agencies can fill job openings

Residents benefit from a high-performing government

Cities and states help employ residents, which improves the tax base

Apprenticeships benefit apprentices and employers alike. **Apprentices** learn on the job, obtain credentials, contribute to meaningful work, and earn a salary. **Employers** have loyal and productive workers, higher retention rates, and the opportunity to train apprentices according to their own standards and procedures.

When governments hire apprentices, **returns to the public sector are especially high**. Apprentices hired from the local community reduce the need for other training programs. As with private employers, government agencies can use apprenticeships to fill job openings and those vacated by **retiring employees**, maintaining staffing and service continuity.

Public sector apprenticeships can **attract and expose young people to diverse career opportunities in government**. Engaging and training young people for public sector careers can upgrade the quality and quantity of public services, thereby benefiting all residents.

Finally, when public officials use apprenticeships for their own talent development, they can be more convincing in persuading private employers to do so as well.

PUBLIC SECTOR APPRENTICESHIPS IN THE UNITED STATES

Public sector apprenticeships exist nationwide but remain a very small segment of the government workforce. The data show that apprenticeships in the public sector are as diverse as in the private sector. They include roles in administration, education, health care, IT, public safety, repair and maintenance, and transportation. However, **data collected by the US Department of Labor** show that public sector apprenticeships are used most often by public safety and emergency service providers like the police or firefighters and in nonemergency service occupations like building maintenance, HVAC techs, or IT support.

One prominent example of public safety services using an apprenticeship program is the **California firefighting apprenticeship program**, which has been operating for more than 25 years and has employed more than 10,000 apprentices across 175 fire departments. In Boston, an **emergency services apprenticeship program** was started in 2018 to attract more diverse candidates and address staffing shortages for emergency medical technicians (EMTs) across the city. These programs provide employment on-ramps to careers, while ensuring residents receive consistent, high-quality services from critical government agencies.

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

We highlight three examples of youth public sector apprenticeships that show the variety of available opportunities.

Automotive technician specialist. In 2018, Kentucky launched several pilot apprenticeship programs as part of a broader strategy related to filling critical skill gaps in the commonwealth's talent pipeline. One program was designed to train automotive technician specialists working for the Transportation Cabinet. The program was created to cultivate the next generation to fill current and future automotive technician jobs across the state's 12 transportation districts. An equipment garage supervisor put his projected staffing concerns in stark terms when he stated, "In 3 to 5 years, 70 percent of people in this garage might be retired, and [the apprenticeship program] will be a good way to get good, qualified candidates [whose skills] are up to date."

The program also helped apprentices rapidly gain the two years' work experience required for the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certification exam, preparing apprentices for a career in both the public and private sectors.

Teaching assistant. Colorado is facing [general teacher shortages in rural areas](#), as well as increased statewide demand for specialists like early childhood educators, counselors, and ESL instructors. To meet such local needs, CareerWise Colorado¹ established a paraprofessional youth apprenticeship program in 2019 and has since worked with the Cherry Creek, Denver, Estes Park, and Thompson public school districts to employ high school students in the local elementary schools. Across these four districts every year, 20 to 30 youth apprentices work as teaching assistants with early childhood and elementary-age children. During their program, apprentices divide their time between finishing high school classes, working in elementary schools, and taking college courses to further their teaching education.

Overall, the program has been successful for school districts, apprentices, students, and parents. School districts see apprenticeships as an obvious solution for their staffing requirements and goals to bring more diverse, local staff to the classroom. Apprentices also benefit from the opportunity to learn whether teaching is right for them. Students benefit by having educators and counselors who are as racially and ethnically diverse as their classes. The program's success has spurred additional school districts in Colorado and other states to consult CareerWise on using this model.

Building maintenance technician. Prince Georges County Public Schools (PGCPS), like many school systems in the US, has a talent shortage across a range of occupations beyond teaching, including core administrative and building maintenance roles. To meet PGCPS's talent needs and help young people find career opportunities and employment, the school district started a "school-to-work" apprenticeship model. Select students start an apprenticeship while in high school and transition into full employment in the school system after completing the program. The first program at PGCPS was launched in 2018 with a building maintenance apprenticeship program including 20 students in 11th grade. Despite the challenges for on-the-job learning amid COVID-19, all 20 students in the first cohort graduated and are continuing the final years of their apprenticeships with PGCPS or an industry partner of the school.

Hiring for the program's second year paused because of COVID-19, but plans to hire another cohort of 11th graders in the 2021-22 academic school year are under way. PGCPS leaders hope this example will create interest among other school departments to start apprenticeship programs. As the program coordinator noted, "We have many departments like IT, food services, HR, transportation that could all potentially benefit from an apprenticeship program."²

¹ Whitney Allen, a customer success manager for CareerWise Colorado, was interviewed on March 25, 2021.

² Amy Rock, career and technical education (CTE) specialist and apprenticeship program coordinator at PGCPS, was interviewed on April 9, 2021.