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WISCONSIN'S YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Can it help reduce holes in workforce?



Appleton East High School student Carter Steward works at Bassett Mechanical as part of his youth apprenticeship on July 27 in Kaukauna. WM. GLASHEEN/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

More students are getting paid to work as part of their education

Inside

A guide to the state program allowing high school juniors and seniors to work while earning an hourly wage and school credit. **7A**

Cleo Krejci
 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
 USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

This summer, 16-year-old Carter Steward's day begins at 8:30 a.m. sorting through an array of mechanical tools. The Appleton East High School student didn't know he could work as a paid youth apprentice — a job that sets him on track for the career he wants in welding — until a teacher suggested it. "You can only really know about it if you take a shop class, or something related to that," Steward said. "Normal classes won't give you that option."

He's among the increasing pool of students in Wisconsin who are getting paid to work at least 450 hours for a local employer as part of their high school education. Designed to introduce young people to industries before they leave high school, the state's youth apprenticeship program reached a record last year at 8,359 students. That's almost four times the number of participants compared with a decade ago. Worker shortages have drawn attention across Wisconsin, especially after the pandemic. Proponents of the youth apprenticeship program say it's a win-win solution: it allows employers to build and train their future workforce, while giving students a chance to test-

"I think that some additional investments would also yield big benefits. I think it's one of the most cost-effective programs that you'll see."

Robert Lerman
 A national researcher who studies apprenticeships

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State's 'death grip with alcohol'

It's taking lives at unprecedented rates

Sarah Eichstadt and Anupras Mohapatra
 Wisconsin Watch

Blanketing the wall of an American-style dive bar in Prague: the Milwaukee Brewers, the Tavern League of Wisconsin and the iconic phrase "Drink Wisconsibly." Not only does Wisconsin consistently rank among the U.S. states with the highest excessive drinking rates, its high alcohol consumption draws global recognition. While many Wisconsinites take pride in this reputation, alcohol is taking lives at unprecedented rates in the state. In 2020, Wisconsinites died from alcohol-induced causes at a rate nearly 25% higher than the national rate. The rate tripled from 6.7 to 18.5 per 100,000 from 1999 to 2020. Wisconsin is "locked in this weird death grip with alcohol," said John Eich, director of the Wisconsin Office of Rural Health. "There's a cultural level of acceptance of excessive drinking." Despite challenges, some are pushing back against permissive drinking laws and culture.

After a drunk driver killed her son in 2018, Sheila Lockwood started lobbying to reform laws in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin. "I don't know what else to do with the pain other than trying to change something," Lockwood said. "If I can help somebody from going through this, then you just turn your pain into some sort of change."

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Sheila Lockwood holds a photo of her son, Austin, in the state Capitol in Madison. In 2018, Austin, 23, was riding in the passenger seat of a drunken driver's vehicle in Three Lakes. The driver smashed into a tree, killing Austin. DRAKE WHITE-BERGEY / WISCONSIN WATCH

Evers wants fake electors held accountable

Says Wisconsinites should face prosecution

Jessie Opoien
 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
 USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

NEW GLARUS — The 10 Wisconsinites who participated in a scheme to claim the state's 10 electoral votes for former President Donald Trump in 2020 should be charged and be held account-

able, Gov. Tony Evers said Friday. "Well, no," the Democratic governor said when asked by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel whether he would feel confident in the state's elections going forward if the 10 fraudulent electors don't ultimately face charges. "There has to be accountability," Evers said after a bill signing ceremony in New Glarus. "What they did was wrong, and so I'm hoping somebody will pick up the banner here, because this has to happen."

Trump is accused by a federal grand jury of organizing a conspiracy to steal the 2020 election from President Joe Biden — with strategies that included organizing slates of fraudulent electors in seven states, including Wisconsin, to claim to be electors for Trump despite the outcome of the election. Wisconsin is among several states highlighted in a sweeping federal indictment handed down Tuesday.

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Apprentice

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run potential careers before committing.

But there are limitations. While some districts send close to half their eligible students through the program yearly, others — including Milwaukee Public Schools, the largest K-12 district in the state — send relatively few.

And researchers who studied the program say it could better connect high school apprentices with job-training programs after graduation.

Closing those gaps will take investment.

The state budget approved in July reserves \$19 million for local youth apprenticeship grants — a sizable increase for a fund that, in the previous state budget, capped at \$12 million. That money is split in chunks of up to \$1,100 per student and doled out to the local “consortia” that operate youth apprenticeships in different regions of Wisconsin.

“It’s amazing that Wisconsin has been able to do as much as it has with a very, very small allocation, from my perspective,” said Robert Lerman, a national researcher who studies apprenticeships. “I think that some additional investments would also yield big benefits. I think it’s one of the most cost-effective programs that you’ll see.”

Wisconsin expanding apprenticeships beyond traditional trades

Wisconsin’s youth apprenticeship program is the oldest and largest of its kind in the United States, according to an Urban Institute policy brief released in July. It has grown substantially since its first school year in 1992-93 when just 21 students participated.

Statewide, 5,743 employers took on high school students as apprentices in 2022-23.

About two in five students, or 43%, worked in areas typically associated with the trades last year: agriculture, food and natural resources, architecture and construction or manufacturing.

As the program has expanded, so have job options. Another 17% of last year’s youth apprentices worked in health sciences, the second largest “program area” after manufacturing.

Added last summer are arborist, dairy grazer, phlebotomist and IT broadband technician apprenticeships, among others. In fall 2024, apprenticeships will open up in education and training; business management and administration; government and public administration; human services; law, public safety, corrections and security.

No matter their job, students are required to devote 450 hours at the job site per year of their apprenticeship, up to two years. It averages out to about 10 to 15 hours weekly. Also required are two semesters per year of “related coursework.”

Steward is getting started early: the summer before junior year. He knows it’s an investment, but he’s hap-



Carter Steward didn’t know he could work as a paid youth apprentice — a job that sets him on track for the career he wants in welding — until a teacher suggested it. WM. GLASHEEN/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

py about it.

“It keeps me out of the house,” he said with a laugh.

The ‘bridge’ to registered apprenticeships is small, but growing

As part of his youth apprenticeship at Bassett Mechanical, Steward will “shadow” professional pipefitters, sheet metal workers and HVAC technicians. The steady, competitive salaries typically associated with those job titles all require a “registered” apprenticeship — up to a six-year commitment and a minimum 2,000 hours of training, depending on the specialty.

Exposure to various careers within the trades is essential at this point in Steward’s career, says Bassett’s Chief HR Officer Patty Van Ryzin, “so he can feel good about the next five years, because that’s serious business with the (registered) apprenticeship.”

Tania Kilpatrick is the regional coordinator for the largest youth apprenticeship consortium in Wisconsin, known as CESA6. The program usually leads to one of two outcomes, she said: Students might realize the career they apprenticed in is right for them. Or, the exact opposite.

Both experiences are valuable.

“If you’re going to go to school to be a (veterinarian)

someday, let’s say,” Kilpatrick said, “you should probably have this type of experience before you go and spend eight years in school and a lot of money.”

If Steward decides that’s the right path for him, he has a good chance of moving forward: the company hires about 90% of its youth apprentices, Van Ryzin said.

But the youth program does not guarantee students a registered apprenticeship. Instead, it leads to a “certificate of occupational proficiency,” and in some cases, college credit. Its resume-builders like industry knowledge, hard skills and connections to employers that are often cited as its main benefits.

More than 200 youth apprentices “bridged over” to a registered apprenticeship in the most recent year, said David Polk, director of the Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards, in an interview.

That’s a record for the department and an increase from 125 the year prior, but still small considering the thousands of youth apprentices statewide.

There are some connections between youth and registered apprenticeship programs already, but Polk said the department wants to increase the number of students who bridge between them.

The Urban Institute researchers described the youth program as operating “almost completely outside” the system for registered apprenticeships. Lerman, the study’s co-author, Wisconsin could do more to integrate the programs.

“That would require an additional investment, but I think it would be very worthwhile,” he said in an interview.

Apprenticeships concentrated in industry-heavy regions of Wisconsin

Although youth apprenticeship is increasing overall statewide, participation is scattered. Districts decide whether to designate a staff member to oversee the program and build it up over time, if at all.

Of the 39 “consortia” overseeing youth apprenticeship in local regions of the state, two far outstrip their peers in terms of student participation. CESA6, which covers the Appleton, Oshkosh and Fond Du Lac areas, oversaw 1,779 students last school year. The consortium in Northeast Wisconsin managed another 1,021. The other 37 consortia average 151 students each.

One room for growth is within the state’s largest school district. Of the 8,013 juniors and seniors in Milwaukee schools last year, 86 — 1% — worked as youth apprentices.

The district had a close to three-year hiatus without an apprenticeship coordinator, Polk said, but recently filled the position. He said increasing participation in Milwaukee is a goal for the department.

In contrast, 44% of juniors and seniors in the small, rural Valders Area School District apprenticed last school year — among the highest participation rate statewide. The program has grown from 10 students in 2016-17 to 62 last year.

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Guide: State's youth apprenticeship program

Cleo Krejci

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

In Wisconsin, high school juniors and seniors have the option of working for a local employer while earning an hourly wage, school credit and industry-specific skills.

"Youth apprenticeship" has grown since the state Legislature established the program in 1991. The idea is to provide hands-on learning for students early in their careers, helping funnel workers into high-demand jobs.

Participation hit a record high in the most recent school year, with 8,359 students working at 5,743 employers. Numbers have increased steadily over the past decade, with new apprenticeship titles — dairy grazer, arborist, phlebotomist, among others — added last summer.

What types of youth apprenticeships are available in Wisconsin?

Youth apprenticeships are split into several broad employment categories:

- Agriculture, food and natural resources
- Architecture and construction
- Art, a/v technology and communications
- Finance
- Health science

- Hospitality and tourism
- Information technology
- Manufacturing
- Marketing
- Science, technology, engineering and math
- Transportation, distribution and logistics

Within each of those program areas are more specific career tracks. Health sciences, for example, includes medical assistant, nursing assistant, pharmacy technician, dental assistant and resident aide tracks, among others. The state oversees curriculum for the program, which it develops with the help of industry representatives.

Across Wisconsin, 39 different "consortia" work with school districts to operate youth apprenticeships at the local level. Which apprenticeships are offered locally depends on each consortium's relationships with employers, location in the state and other factors.

What type of time commitment is it for students?

Students are required to spend at least 450 hours at their job site per year of the apprenticeship, up to two years. They are able to leave the school day early to go to work, or alternate full schooldays and full workdays. They can also work in the summer — including the summer after senior year — on weekends and evenings.

Students must also complete two semesters of "related instruction," or classes related to the work they are performing at the job site. Where these classes are taught varies; it could be in their high school with a certified teacher, at a local technical college, a trades training center, online or somewhere else.

Who is eligible for an apprenticeship?

Students must be at least entering their junior year of a public or private high school to participate. Home-schooled students are also eligible, assuming they are able to prove they are at the related grade level.

There's no minimum grade point average to qualify, but students should "maintain progress" toward high school graduation.

State guidance also requires students to have "participated in career exploration, guidance or educational activities which allow them to make an informed choice about their chosen career area" before working as a youth apprentice.

What kind of credit do youth apprentices get?

School districts are required to give students credit toward high school graduation, both for the classes they

take related to the apprenticeship and their hours worked. School districts decide how much credit to award.

Students are also able to earn credit toward a college or university depending on the classes they took while in high school. The state expects Wisconsin technical colleges, school districts and youth apprenticeship consortia to create "articulation" agreements that outline what types of college credit — either "transcripted credit" or "advanced standing" credit — students can be awarded as a result of their apprenticeship.

How can students find a youth apprenticeship in Wisconsin?

Students should contact their local consortium in charge of youth apprenticeships at school, such as in the guidance counselor's office. The Department of Workforce Development at bit.ly/YouthApprenticeshipConsortiums also shows which school districts fall into which consortia, and includes contact information for the people who operate youth apprenticeships in each area of the state.

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Apprentice

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Valders High School Principal David Schmid attributes the high numbers largely to location: the district is located in manufacturing-heavy Manitowoc County. Worker shortages caused by the pandemic caused a bump in the numbers.

"The opportunities to get a good paying job without having to go to college are pretty abundant in our area," he said.

Some students "are going to work with their hands when they leave high

school," Schmid said, and it might not make sense to force them into an eight-period school day. Many youth apprentices leave school early to work at their job site.

Valders has help placing students with employers from its local consortium: CESA6. Within the educational service agency's department focused on college and careers, approximately 16 of 20 staff specifically focus on youth apprenticeship. It's CESA6 that receives up to \$1,100 reimbursements per apprentice from the state, not local schools.

That funding is directed to several different areas, Kilpatrick said, like staffing, marketing, technology and

mileage. The organization also helps schools pay the dual enrollment costs that arise when students' "related coursework" requires them to take classes outside their high school.

Those dual enrollment costs can "cause schools to limit or become less than enthusiastic about scaling apprenticeships," according to the Urban Institute brief. In an interview, Lerman said the \$1,100 reimbursements are not enough when considering dual enrollment costs.

One pool of money districts can pull from is the "career and technical education incentive grant" program, which pays up to \$1,000 for every student who

earns certain industry-specific certifications. That funding stream will increase to \$16 million in the 2023-25 state budget, up from \$13 million.

State Sen. André Jacque, R-De Pere, introduced a bill in May that would have increased the \$1,100 payments to \$1,700, and \$1,000 to \$2,000, among other changes. Although it did not move forward specifically, he is encouraged by the increased program funding.

"The more we have, the more we can do. It's important to have resources to grow the program because it's definitely an area that more people are moving (to)," Jacque said. "This is just a huge resume builder for students."

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