

# THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY MENTORS IN YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP

Youth apprenticeship is a work-based learning model that allows youth to earn competitive wages while obtaining the relevant training and experience to start their careers, often including the opportunity to earn college credit. The Region 8 Comprehensive Center Network Youth Apprenticeship Series is a set of four mini publications that provide introductory information on Registered Apprenticeships and examine four key areas that are essential to the success of youth apprenticeship.

- 1. The Importance of Quality Mentors in Youth Apprenticeship**
- 2. Bridging the Gap Between Related Technical Instruction & On-the-Job Training in Youth Apprenticeship**
- 3. Addressing Barriers to Access & Completion: Supportive Services in Youth Apprenticeship**
- 4. Work Readiness Skills in Youth Apprenticeship**

Quality mentorship is important to the success of any apprenticeship—and for youth, for whom an apprenticeship may be a first job, [mentorship is critical to apprentices' learning and persistence in the Registered Apprenticeship \(RA\) Program](#). While not all employees may know how to be good mentors, they can learn the skills and behaviors that can enhance apprentices' experiences. This publication provides an overview of the mentoring role, how to select mentors, and tips for mentoring youth apprentices. While mentors are employees of the apprenticeship employer and not the school system, a variety of strategies are offered for state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to use this information to ensure all youth apprentices have a quality mentor as they navigate relationships with employers.



## Introduction

An apprenticeship is a work-based learning model that combines paid job experience with relevant technical instruction in the classroom. A Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Program is an apprenticeship that is registered by the [U.S. Department of Labor Education & Training Administration's Office of Apprenticeship \(OA\)](#) or a [State Apprenticeship Agency](#) demonstrating the program aligns to [seven key elements](#):

- **Industry Led** – Programs are industry-vetted and approved to ensure alignment with industry standards and that apprentices are trained for highly skilled, high-demand occupations.
- **Paid Job** – Apprenticeships are jobs! Apprentices earn progressive wages as their skills and productivity increase.
- **Structured On-the-Job Learning/Mentorship** – Programs provide structured on-the-job training/learning to prepare for a successful career, which includes instruction from an experienced mentor.
- **Supplemental Education** – Apprentices are provided supplemental classroom education based on the employers' unique training needs to ensure quality and success.
- **Access** – Programs are designed to reflect the communities in which they operate through strong non-discrimination, anti-harassment, and recruitment practices to ensure access, equity, and inclusion.
- **Quality & Safety** – Apprentices are afforded worker protections while receiving rigorous training to equip them with the skills they need to succeed and the proper training and supervision they need to be safe.
- **Credentials** – Apprentices earn a portable, nationally recognized credential within their industry.

OA defines a youth apprenticeship as one designed specifically for in- or out-of-school youth ages 16–24. In this Youth Apprenticeship series of publications, the focus is on [high school students](#) who start apprenticeships during their junior or senior year. A student becomes a registered apprentice through an agreement signed by the student, the employer, and, if under 18 years old, their parent/guardian.

- The work portion of the program is flexible and is completed when school is not in session or through a formal work-study program.
- Students take courses at their high school and/or community and technical college, in addition to their required high school coursework, which count toward high school graduation.
- Students may complete the RA Program during high school or continue after graduation, depending on the program's length. For dual enrollment students, the RA Program continues and is completed at the college.

## Perkins V and Registered Apprenticeship

SEAs may use [Perkins V state leadership funds](#) to develop, improve, and support RA programs, and their components and prerequisites. Subrecipients may also use Perkins V funds to develop, coordinate, implement, or improve RA programs and their components and prerequisites provided that these programs are sufficient in “size, scope, and quality to be effective” as determined by the SEA.

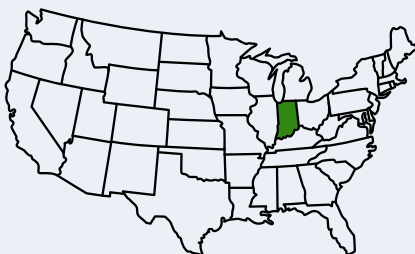
High schools and career and technical education centers can provide the supplemental classroom education portion of apprenticeships and recruit students to participate in RA Programs. This is typically referred to as related technical instruction (RTI). Schools may also operate [pre-apprenticeship programs](#) as feeders to the RA Programs and in some cases can serve as the [RA sponsor](#)—the entity that oversees the operation of the program.

SEAs can support youth RA Programs by developing statewide RA Program and pre-apprenticeship [frameworks](#) or take on a larger coordinating role, such as helping to develop and [register programs](#) and facilitate relationships with employers, the workforce development system, and other partners. SEA support for youth apprenticeship is important for many reasons. As reported in [Models of Youth Registered Apprenticeship Expansion: Evidence from the Youth Apprenticeship Readiness Grants](#), some of the common barriers to secondary school-based RA models include insufficient funding, alignment of the apprenticeship requirements to high school curriculum, and scheduling challenges for students to participate in work-based learning. These barriers could potentially be mitigated at the state level through braided funding, curriculum frameworks, and policy development, which can in turn improve the quality and efficiency of youth RA Programs in local school districts.

## Youth Apprentices Enrolled in RA Programs<sup>1</sup>

\*Source: [Apprentices by State Dashboard | Apprenticeship.gov](#) (as of July 10, 2024)

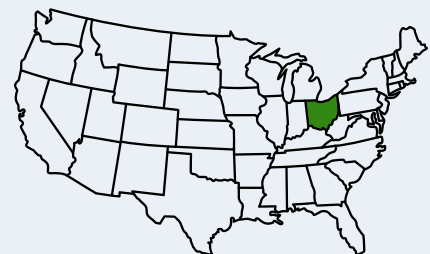
Indiana: 9,140



Michigan: 8,410



Ohio: 9,960



<sup>1</sup>Data do not differentiate youth ages 16–18 and 18–24 or those who are in school vs. out of school.

## What is mentoring in youth apprenticeship?

The mentor in an RA Program is an employee who has mastered the occupation and is paired with the apprentice to model the skills and behaviors necessary to be successful in the RA occupation. The mentor serves as a teacher, coach, and role model. This individual may or may not be the apprentice's supervisor. As described in Urban Institute's [Mentor Guide for Youth Apprenticeship Programs](#), a mentor is responsible for teaching an apprentice on the job, where he or she continues to work productively while teaching; introduces the apprentice to coworkers and explains how the workplace runs, including informal norms and expectations as well as rules; advises the apprentice about work- and career-related issues; and helps the apprentice work through problems that may hinder their progress.

Apprenticeship mentoring is a structured process. The mentor needs to be well acquainted with the apprentice's training goals and requirements as laid out in the **Apprenticeship Program Standard** so the mentor can guide the apprentice through the progression of skills necessary for successful completion of the apprenticeship. Mentors formally assess, record, and report on the apprentice's progress.

## The Apprenticeship Program Standard

The [Apprenticeship Program Standard](#) is an organized, written plan outlining the terms and conditions of employment, training, and supervision for apprentices. Standards include an outline of the work processes in which an apprentice will receive work experience and training on the job, the related instruction for technical subjects related to the occupation, and a progressive wage schedule among other information.

Mentoring falls into four key areas:

- 1. Technical skills:** tasks required to master the occupation.
- 2. Problem-solving skills:** diagnosing problems, coming up with solutions, and testing those solutions.
- 3. Social interaction:** teamwork, communication, and fitting into the organization.
- 4. Personal behaviors:** building confidence in being competent, learning how to learn, and career planning.

## How to Select Mentors

The relationship between the mentor and apprentice is a two-way street and necessitates respect and trust. This takes time and patience and requires open communication on the part of both individuals. While the mentor is likely highly experienced and has mastered the tasks for the occupation, an apprentice often brings a fresh perspective to the tasks; the mentor may therefore have opportunities to learn from the apprentice.

Here are **five recommendations** for selecting mentors:

- 1. Choose a mentor for their skills and professionalism, the qualities the employer wishes to promote in its workforce.**

2. Choose a mentor who is fully committed to the concept and value of mentoring an apprentice.
3. Mentors are role models, not just of the occupation, but of the company culture; if the mentor has not bought into the company culture, neither will the apprentice.
4. Mentors should have an enthusiasm and aptitude for teaching and coaching the apprentice in the mentor's acquired knowledge, skills, and wisdom.
5. Mentors must be good, active listeners; apprentices should feel comfortable communicating difficulties and questions to the mentor without fear of judgment.

In addition, whenever possible, select mentors who mirror the background of the apprentice. This can help individuals who may be underrepresented in the occupation and/or workplace feel a greater sense of belonging. However, when that is not possible, aligning to the five recommendations can help ensure the mentor will be supportive of the apprentice.

Mentors should be trained. Being prepared is essential to their success. The employer should provide the training. However, if they do not have the expertise or capacity, employers can check with RA Program partners to consider pairing small employers with larger ones. SEAs and LEAs may also want to participate in training mentors as described in the last section of this publication.

## Tips for Mentoring Youth Apprentices

Youth mentors should:

- Be purposeful about engaging with the apprentice; plan and organize.
- Listen, ask questions, and encourage.
- Get to know who the apprentice is beyond their workplace persona.
- Be interested in what matters to them.
- Build the apprentice's confidence and self-esteem.
- Be diligent about evaluation and follow-up.

Mentors recognize and accommodate differences. Mentors also need to know their apprentices well, including their hopes, values, reasons for choosing the occupation and program, barriers they face at work and elsewhere, and plans for the future. From Urban Institute's [Mentor Guide for Registered Youth Apprenticeship Programs](#)

## Considerations for Minors

Parents and guardians of minor apprentices can be partners in the mentoring process. Family can be a source of encouragement for an apprentice and a source of information for the mentor on personal issues that may affect work performance. Having a channel of communication open with the parents of a minor youth apprentice can contribute to the apprentice's chances of success. An apprentice of any age may bring personal issues to the workplace. Mentors are not required to deal with non-workplace issues but may if a sense of trust and empathy develop to that level in the mentor-mentee relationship. The mentor must know where to draw the line, however, and not attempt to deal with issues that are beyond their abilities. The mentor should also be comfortable

telling the apprentice when an issue crosses that line and when the mentor needs to seek advice.

## Strategies for SEAs and LEAs to Ensure Quality Mentors Are a Part of Every Youth Registered Apprenticeship

- Develop a mentoring handbook that can be distributed to RA employers. Leverage this publication as well as resources including the [Mentor Guide for Registered Youth Apprenticeship Programs](#) and [Mentorship Training – StartTodaySD](#).
- If the SEA or LEA is the RA Program sponsor, host mentor training. This could be done through regional events and/or virtually. Serving in this role can be extremely helpful to mentors in understanding youth apprentices, as they may not have experience working with adolescents. Consider incorporating a panel of youth apprentices that have completed at least of year of their program to share their experiences and advice for effectively mentoring youth apprentices.
- Successful mentorship in the apprenticeship model is a two-way street. Consider developing curriculum that helps students to understand the role of their apprenticeship mentor and depict scenarios that may arise in the workplace with the mentor. These types of interactive learning activities can arm students with skills to effectively navigate situations that may arise. Integrate real-world scenarios and role-playing activities.
- Educate parents and guardians about apprenticeships, including the essential role of the mentor in their child's success in an RA Program. This could include a section on the SEA or LEA website, standard brochures or other print materials that can be distributed to families, or hosting periodic virtual information sessions. See Scholastic's [Inside Apprenticeships](#) booklet for ideas.

### Resources

[Mentor Guide for Youth Registered Apprenticeship Programs: Youth Apprenticeship Intermediary Project](#)

[Models of Youth Registered Apprenticeship Expansion](#)

[Youth Apprenticeship Playbook: How to Build Successful High School Sponsored Programs](#)

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