

# BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN RELATED TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION & ON-THE-JOB TRAINING 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**

Related technical instruction (RTI) delivers theoretical knowledge and technical skills that complements the on-the-job training (OJT) component of the apprenticeship. High schools and career and technical education centers can provide RTI through existing or new coursework that counts toward youth apprentice graduation, and in many cases, qualifies for college credit. In Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Programs, RTI must be at least 144 hours per year of the apprenticeship. To ensure all youth apprentices can make the connection between the learning that takes place in the classroom and on the job, it is important that employers and state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) collaborate to create strong linkages.



## 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.

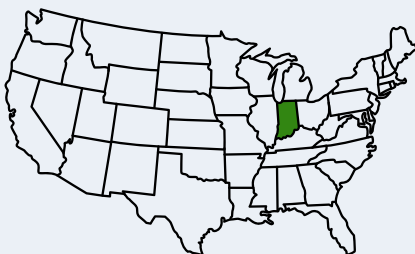
High schools and career and technical education centers can provide the supplemental classroom education portion of apprenticeships and recruit students to participate in RA Programs. This is typically referred to as related technical instruction (RTI). Schools may also operate [pre-apprenticeship programs](#)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

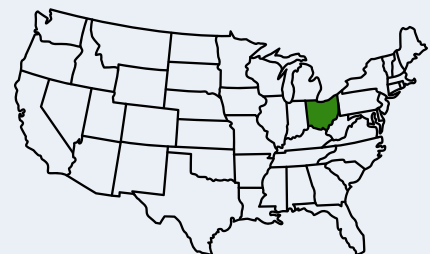
Indiana: 9,140



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.

## How to Create Seamless RTI & OJT

**Solicit direct input from the employer.** The SEA or LEA should start by soliciting input from the employer to understand the job success profile and skills required for the targeted occupation for any new youth apprenticeship. Once a deep understanding of these areas is gained, both the SEA or LEA and employer can collaboratively determine the areas of focus for the RTI. This level of employer engagement should be continued throughout the program design, launch, and monitoring of the apprenticeship, never losing sight of the employer's needs. This will ensure the RTI remains targeted and relevant.

**Ensure RTI and OTJ activities progress in parallel.** RTI and OTJ activities need to be closely aligned. For each RTI topic area, consider how it will help the apprentice understand specific [work processes](#). Does the sequence of topics complement and align with the sequence of OTJ training? The RTI should progress from understanding basic concepts to understanding deeper theoretical ones. This should correspond to doing simple OTJ tasks to progressively more complex ones.

**Conduct a gap analysis of current curricula and courses.** Once the SEA or LEA and the employer agree on the RTI topic areas, the agency can inventory existing curricula and courses to determine what might be usable, thereby circumventing the need to develop RTI from scratch. Then, the employer's subject matter experts, mentors, and supervisors should be solicited to review the curricula and course outlines, validate content, and identify gaps.

**Develop new curricula and course(s) to fill gaps.** Once the employer has identified the content gaps, additional curricula and courses can be developed to address those gaps. Invite the employer to serve in an advisory role as the curricula and courses are designed to validate content and offer ideas for learning activities. Request authentic workplace materials, scenarios, and examples from the employer to assist in contextualizing the instruction.

**Institute a continuous improvement process.** Apprentices can offer some of the most relevant feedback on how RTI is aligned to OTJ learning. Invite apprentices to complete course evaluations and ask for their feedback directly in the classroom. In addition, ask their mentors to share feedback on how apprentices are applying what they are learning in the workplace. Use this feedback to update and improve curricula and courses in partnership with the employer. SEAs and LEAs may want to discuss a more formal youth apprenticeship self-assessment and self-improvement plan with the employer and the full spectrum partners. This holistic approach will ensure all areas of youth apprenticeship are explored to maximize the success of apprentices. See [this example](#) from the state of Kansas.

## Tips for Engaging Employers

Evaluate the SEA or LEA's current employer engagement practices. Taking the time to evaluate the effectiveness of the SEA or LEA's current employer engagement practices is a worthwhile endeavor. This can uncover where improvements can be made that would benefit multiple employers. Below are areas for consideration adapted from the U.S. Department of Labor Education & Training Administration's [business services framework](#) for state and local workforce investment boards. Each item should be rated from 1-5, where 1 means "not at all" and 5 means "we are flying high."

1. Roles and responsibilities related to employer engagement and follow-up are understood and embraced by all staff members.
2. Our employer engagement team members have the skills to build meaningful partnerships with businesses, both individually and in the context of multi-business industry partnerships. Includes ability to work with businesses to effectively validate and dig deep on talent needs.
3. Those who conduct outreach are adept at collecting key business needs/information when meeting with businesses, maximizing their contact and providing partners with referrals for the sake of all-encompassing solutions. Because we do this, it minimizes touchpoints with businesses, thus limiting their “visit fatigue.”
4. We have an understanding, from working with key employers, the natural progression/mobility of workers in all targeted industries/occupations (i.e., career ladders/lattices).
5. We have trust with businesses and key target industries—and an understanding of how to leverage resources—to build innovative employer-focused programs/services including: work-based learning, apprenticeships, and other recruitment, hiring, training, and transition services.
6. Our coordinated employer services represent “the whole” when in front of business. Follow-up regularly includes bringing in the partner/resources to address the solution.
7. Messaging centers around concepts important to employers including how the services we provide will impact profitability and productivity.
8. A state or regional structure is in place (i.e., cross-partner committees, dedicated teams) to guide, implement, and sustain our work with employers.
9. An effective staffing structure exists to support both industry sector partnerships (i.e., state and regional industry-wide business engagement) and the day-to-day business outreach operations.
10. Leadership buy-in exists across partnerships for demand-driven, coordinated services, and shared performance goals and outcomes.

**Create an environment of open communication.** Schedule regular check-in meetings with employers, preferably on a set day and time so they can plan to ensure key players are in attendance. This also opens the door to an open communication and feedback loop. Early in the launch of the RA Program, this might be monthly. Eventually, quarterly may suffice. While these can be done virtually, at least some in-person meetings at the employer’s worksite are recommended.

Topics of conversation can include:

- What is going well with the OJT? What is not going well? How might we work together to address these issues?
- How are apprentices progressing according to the work process schedule?
- Are there any academic or technical skill gaps where additional relating training might be needed?
- Are there workplace skills that need to be integrated into the related instruction curriculum?

Throughout the discussion, institute effective listening skills—Listen to understand. Then, reflect back what was heard. This can prevent misunderstandings and build trust.

To sustain long-term partnerships with employers, ongoing, two-way communication is critical to supporting active participation and building commitment and shared vision.

–Jobs for the Future, [A Resource Guide to Engaging Employers](#)

**Use Behavioral Insights to improve written communication strategies.** [Behavioral Insights](#) offers a framework for understanding people’s behaviors and choices—and the motivators and tendencies that underlie the things they do. This is an approach used by SEAs and LEAs with RA, such as detailed in the National Association of State Workforce Agency’s [Behavioral Insights & Apprenticeship Sponsorship: How to Apply Behavioral Insights to Improve Employer Engagement and Expand Apprenticeship](#). See the [effective communication tips](#) below that should be taken into account in employer communications.

#### Curriculum/Materials Review

- Is the main point of the communication prominent, clearly written, and explained?
- Is there a checklist of steps and other prompts of the type of feedback that will be most helpful?
- Is there a clear deadline for the response?
- Is there ample time to complete the task but not too much that it will end up on the back burner?
- All acronyms written out and explained? Avoid jargon when possible.

#### Email Correspondence

- Is the text brief and to the point, with only necessary information included?
- If there is an action required, has this been explained clearly?
- Is the communication personalized beyond just the recipient’s name?
- Is the sender’s name included with title and contact information?
- Is the sender a person who the employer will recognize and respect?

An Employer Engagement Practice for LEAs: Invite employers into the classroom.

There are a wide range of opportunities that can be afforded to employers to see what is happening in the classroom and keep them actively engaged. LEAs can invite employers to serve as guest speakers, coach apprentices on projects, or institute creative ideas for the employer to demonstrate the connection between the RTI and OJT components. Just ask them! This can help the employer feel like a valued partner with the state educational agency and local districts.

## Resources

[Models of Youth Registered Apprenticeship Expansion](#)

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

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