

WORK READINESS SKILLS 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**

Given that a Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Program may be a student's first job, youth apprentices may not yet have mastered work readiness skills. As discussed in *The Importance of Quality Mentors in Youth Apprenticeship* publication in this series, RA Program mentors serve as role models and provide guidance to apprentices. However, apprentices will benefit from having some level of work readiness when they start an RA Program and continue to build these skills over time. Since the classroom instruction (also called related technical instruction or RTI) of an RA Program is focused on the technical skills, education systems need to find alternatives for students to gain work readiness skills rather than focusing on them explicitly. This publication offers approaches for state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to build in these experiences.



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.

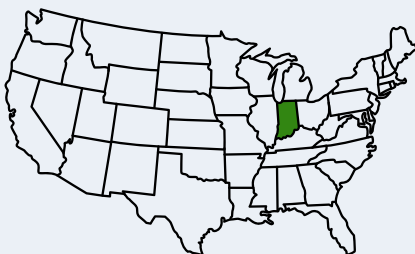
High schools and career and technical education centers can provide the supplemental classroom education portion of apprenticeships and recruit students to participate in RA Programs. This is typically referred to as related technical instruction (RTI). Schools may also operate [pre-apprenticeship programs](#) 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 Programs¹

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

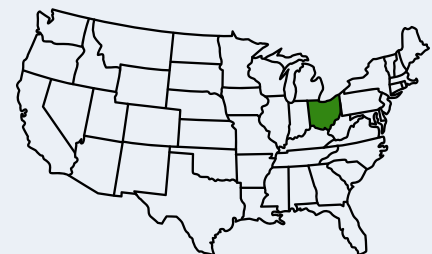
Indiana: 9,140



Michigan: 8,410



Ohio: 9,960



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

What are Work Readiness Skills?

There are a variety of terms used by educators, employers, and workforce development practitioners that depict the set of skills needed to be successful in the world of work. Examples include work readiness, as will be used in this publication, [employability skills](#), [workforce skills](#) or [durable skills](#). These skills include dependability, collaboration and teamwork, work ethics, problem solving, and more.

Work Readiness in Pre-apprenticeship

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) defines [pre-apprenticeship](#) as “a program or set of strategies designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a Registered Apprenticeship program and has a documented partnership with at least one, if not more, Registered Apprenticeship program(s).” The DOL issued [Training and Employment Notice \(TEN\) 23-23](#) that includes a quality pre-apprenticeship framework to maximize the potential benefit of pre-apprenticeship to apprentices. There are five elements in the quality pre-apprenticeship framework:

- 1. Partnership with RA Program sponsors.** Quality pre-apprenticeship programs should be designed and delivered with input from at least one RA Program sponsor. A pre-apprenticeship program’s educational and pre-vocational services prepare individuals to meet the entry requisites of one or more RA Programs and occupations.
- 2. Sustainability through partnerships.** To support their ongoing sustainability, quality pre-apprenticeship programs establish partnerships with entities to collaboratively promote the use of RA Programs as a preferred means for employers to develop a skilled workforce and to create career opportunities and pathways for individuals.
- 3. Meaningful training combined with hands-on experience replicating a workplace that does not displace paid employees.** Quality pre-apprenticeships provide hands-on training to individuals in a workplace, simulated lab experience, or a work-based learning environment.
- 4. Access to career and supportive services.** Quality pre-apprenticeship programs provide or otherwise ensure access to career and supportive services² during the program, which may continue after a pre-apprentice enters an RA Program.
- 5. Strategies that increase RA opportunities for underrepresented or underserved populations facing significant barriers to employment in the RA labor force.** This includes educational and pre-vocational services as well as design of instruction and training that reach underrepresented or underserved populations to assist them in overcoming barriers to entering and succeeding in RA Programs.

²For details on the importance of support services in youth apprenticeship, see the *Supportive Services in Youth Apprenticeship* publication in this series.

High schools can integrate their existing work readiness curriculum into a pre-apprenticeship program. For example, SkillsUSA offers its [Career Essentials](#) curriculum and a certification program for state agencies and local districts looking for off-the-shelf lessons and assessments to embed. Career and technical education (CTE) programs can serve as pre-apprenticeships since they provide students with the opportunity to develop work readiness skills and even build foundational occupational skills. DOL's quality pre-apprenticeship framework can help SEAs and LEAs ensure CTE pre-apprenticeship programs increase access to RA Programs for all students. The framework is built around placing students on a career pathway to employability in an RA Program. Sponsors/employers provide input into the pre-apprenticeship to ensure the competencies are aligned to specific RA occupations and that students seamlessly enter the RA Program during high school or after graduation. In addition, supportive services can assist students with overcoming barriers during the pre-apprenticeship and/or RA Program.

Work Readiness Skill Development through Contextualized Teaching

Contextualized teaching can be used as a strategy to embed work readiness skills into the RTI. For instance, the North Carolina Network for Teaching Excellence's [Contextualized Teaching Toolkit](#) defines contextualized teaching as an integrated approach that recognizes:

- Students do not want to learn in a vacuum.
- Students are motivated by answers to the question “how is this course relevant to my future career?”
- Understanding real-world connections to course content increases student engagement.

The benefits of integrated instruction include:

- Integration of technical and academic content,
- Student engagement at a higher level that fosters critical thinking, collaboration, and other skills valued by employers, and
- Authentic assessment opportunities.

The Toolkit includes lesson plans and other templates grounded in the five essential learning engagement processes called [REACT](#):

- **Relating:** Learning in the context of life experience—everyday sights, events, and conditions—allows learners to then relate those familiar situations to new information to be processed or problems to be solved.
- **Experiencing:** Learning in the context of exploration, discovery, and invention is the heart of contextual learning.
- **Applying:** Learning by using new concepts and information in a useful context allows learners to envision future success in careers and postsecondary education.
- **Cooperating:** Learning in the context of sharing, responding, and communicating with others is a primary instructional strategy in contextual teaching.
- **Transferring:** Learning in the context of existing knowledge, or transferring, uses and builds upon what the learner already knows.

Recommended approaches to contextualized teaching include:

- **Contextualized Units:** These are short units of instruction built around a lesson topic, using the REACT strategy and linking academic principles to “real-world” activities or situations. For youth apprenticeship, this would be taking components of the RTI curriculum and carefully thinking through the real-world connections for students ahead of time and seamlessly integrating it into the lesson. [Contextualized Units Template](#)
- **Scenarios:** These are authentic workplace situations that provide students with relevant context for the academic, technical, and work readiness skills presented in a lesson. Scenarios should be fact-based, provide real-world context, and prepare students to examine a complex situation. SEAs and LEAs can develop scenarios with input from RA employers to ensure they reflect situations students may encounter in the RA Program. [Sample Scenarios](#)
- **Integrated Projects:** Integrated projects include the opportunity for students to use academic, technical, and work readiness skills. RA employers can be instrumental in developing projects that are real world and contextualized to the workplace environment and occupation of the youth apprentices’ on-the-job training. [Integrated Project Template](#)

Work Readiness Skill Building Through Afterschool Programming

Another strategy for youth apprentices to gain work readiness skills either prior to or while participating in an RA Program is afterschool programming. According to the American Institute of Research’s (AIR) [Ready for Work: How Afterschool Programs Can Support Employability Through Social and Emotional Learning](#), afterschool programs can be prime settings in which to implement social and emotional learning programs and practices, which, in turn, contribute to the development of employability work readiness skills. Youth development programs have been promoting these skills for many years with great success. AIR published a [Planning Tool](#) with the report that can be used by SEAs and LEAs.

There are free open-source work readiness curriculum options that can be utilized in afterschool programming.

- [Overcoming Obstacles | High School](#): With hundreds of activity-based lessons covering more than 30 skills, students learn how to communicate effectively; make informed decisions; set and achieve goals; resolve conflicts; solve problems; respect one another; and more.
- [Building Economic Opportunity](#): Youth Workforce Readiness: Boys & Girls Club of America hosted the Great Think: Workforce Readiness on April 17, 2019, a convening of top leaders from the public and private sectors, including other youth-serving organizations, educators, employers, trade groups and government officials. This document chronicles the challenges and the recommended solutions that emerged from the Great Think, highlighting the power of partnerships to bridge the workforce skills gap on a national scale.
- [Soft Skills to Pay the Bills | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#): This curriculum focuses on teaching “soft” or workforce readiness skills to youth, including youth with disabilities. Created for youth development professionals as an introduction to workplace interpersonal and professional skills, the curriculum is targeted for youth ages 14 to 21 in both in-school and out-of-school environments. It focuses on six key skill areas: communication, enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, problem solving and critical thinking, and professionalism.

The [Afterschool Alliance](#) provides resources and technical assistance to agencies, elected officials, business, 50 state afterschool networks, community leaders, and program providers across the nation. SEAs and LEAs can reach out to the Alliance to see who may be offering work readiness programming in their state and/or region to connect with potential new partners.

Resources

[Models of Youth Registered Apprenticeship Expansion](#)

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

[TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE No. 31-16 | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)