Attention JATCs:
IT'S OUR TIME TO SHINE

by Alex Gromada, Ron Tierney and John S. Gaal, Ed.D.
To take advantage of the Obama administration’s new emphasis on apprenticeship training, joint apprenticeship and training committees (JATCs) may want to work with schools and employers to emulate the Swiss model of career and technical education.

The Pathways Effort

Far too many U.S. parents view career and technical education (CTE) as preparing people for jobs that are dirty, dangerous and dead-end.

But in their February 2011 report, *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans*, Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) researchers Robert B. Schwartz, Ronald Henderson and William C. Symonds posit that the “college for all” attitude in the United States is a misguided strategy for this nation’s social and economic well-being.¹

Within months of the report’s release, either Schwartz or Symonds visited nearly a dozen states that expressed an interest in their findings. International Foundation members who attended the 2013 Annual Employee Benefits Conference and/or the 2014 Trustees Institute for Jointly Managed Training and Education Funds may have attended workshops presented by Schwartz or Symonds.

The Swiss Model

In October 2012, HGSE, along with the nonprofit organization Jobs for the Future, held a three-day summit in Cambridge, Massa-
Massachusetts and invited teams from six states to further develop the concept of the Pathways to Prosperity Project.²

The summit provided opportunities for team members to meet with presenters with expertise in the area of traditional apprenticeships. The panelists represented a who’s who of the European models of youth apprenticeships, ranging from Germany to Switzerland to the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development.³,⁴

One of the most dynamic speakers was Ursula Renold, Ph.D., who now heads the Division of Comparative Education System Research at ETH Zurich. Renold’s research reveals that nearly 70% of high school-age students in Switzerland are involved with secondary vocational education and training (VET) programs. In her country, it is not unusual for 15-year-old students to enter into a vocational program. By the time they turn 18, these students are prepared to graduate with journey-level status.

Renold herself decided not to enter the high school academic track years ago but instead pursued a CTE track in banking. Upon graduation, she was deemed a journey-level banker but decided to go in a different direction and entered the university. She went on to earn a doctoral degree and until recently served as Switzerland’s Minister of Professional Education and Training (PET).

We mention this real-life story as a means to dispel the myth that “tracking” is bad for children. As noted, VET opens doors. Renold could serve as the poster child for CTE success.

Transferring Technology

In the summer of 2013, authors Gromada and Gaal visited Zurich to get a firsthand view of the Swiss model of apprenticeship. Renold and her team lined up visits with a variety of VET schools, apprenticeship schools, apprentices and employers in the carpentry and cabinetmaking sectors.

One of the most interesting aspects of these visits was the coordination between the schools and employers. In every facility on the tour, tools and equipment were nearly identical. In the shop and/or field, students (apprentices) were exposed to the same technologies that they had learned in school. Renold explained that “this does not happen by chance but by developing a curriculum at the national level with input from all stakeholders.”

In essence, the computer-controlled...
router and software program used in schools emulate what business owners use in their production shop.

Stakeholders comprise three partners:

1. The Confederation (similar to the U.S. government) supplies strategic management and development at the national level and one-quarter of total funding for VET.

2. The cantons (similar to our states) provide local support through implementation and supervision of VET apprentices, PET trainees and employers. Cantons also provide VET qualification procedures and three-quarters of the funding to VET/PET programs.

3. Professional organizations including industry groups and sponsoring employers work closely with the cantons to identify VET training content and alignment of employers for apprenticeships.

It is important to note that only 30-40% of Swiss companies offer VET apprenticeships. Those companies must go through an audit process and routine oversight to ensure they have the facilities and financial and institutional resources to provide a full VET apprenticeship experience. In Switzerland, being selected as a VET company is an honor for the employer and a source of national pride. Companies often use this in their marketing.

While in the U.S. it is common for educational institution instructors to receive instructor training, it is uncommon here for journeymen—who in the field are often given the task of practical training for apprentices—to possess formal instruction on how to teach. In Switzerland, instructors in both the VET schools and within companies must successfully complete instructor training courses. We believe this is a critical element of the Swiss VET apprenticeship system that should not be overlooked, especially in a national curriculum setting.

Having partners all committed to working toward the same mission is the key to success for a national VET curriculum. A national curriculum serves as a foundation that permits worker mobility throughout the country. Students participating in VET programs are assured they are developing skills and knowledge that will directly transfer to the workplace. Employers are assured that workers who complete VET apprenticeships have the requisite skills and knowledge to perform productively.

Note that not all VET participants are in employer apprenticeships. Some individuals, either by choice or due to lack of available apprenticeship openings, can attend private training workshops. These workshops use the same national training curriculum and have the same cantonal oversight as apprenticeships, but apprentices obtain practical application and practice on private work projects organized through the training center. (This is similar to how many U.S. technical—and some community—colleges provide practical experience.)

An additional benefit of the Swiss system is that a high-quality, rigorous national curriculum permits verifiable skill recognition with neighboring countries, widening career opportunities for Swiss workers. Likewise, Swiss companies that employ immigrant workers possess a means to verify work skills and abilities meeting an approved national standard.

As illustrated by Renold’s personal career path, the Swiss VET/PET and university tracks are not an either/or system. The Swiss system is a dual-track approach with practical training in the workplace under the guidance of the workplace instructor on three or four days per week and theory training in a vocational school one or two days per week. Credentials include a two-year certificate or a diploma after three to four years of training.

A VET program culminates with a final exam demonstrating practical, theoretical and general knowledge. The final exam also serves as a quality assurance measure for the training a company provides. The dual-track system allows those who successfully complete a VET program to earn the ability to continue on into PET, earning a voca-
tional baccalaureate degree and moving into higher education at the university level. The inverse is also true for those who choose and successfully complete the university track. They have the ability to continue into PET and, if desired or required for the position, serve a VET apprenticeship.

**Application:**

**St. Louis Carpenters Program**

In 2013 the St. Louis Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship Program (CJAP), with input from industry partners (including shop owners, a local high school and a local community college) and seed money from the Missouri Department of Economic Development, embarked on designing, developing and launching a high school program based on the Pathways and Swiss models.

In August 2013, the Advanced Manufacturing Innovative High School Campus program was implemented at McCluer High School (Ferguson-Floissant School District) and North Tech High School (Special School District). When 11th and 12th graders successfully complete the two-year program, which includes seven industry-recognized credentials, they will be provided two clear pathways: (1) Enter the CJAP with advanced standing or (2) enter St. Louis Community College with advanced standing toward an associate of applied science (A.A.S.) degree in computer-integrated manufacturing.

This is not CJAP’s first attempt to emulate the Swiss model. In the fall of 2005 the St. Louis Floor Layers Joint Apprenticeship Program (STL-FLJAP), the Special School District of St. Louis County (SSD) and Ivy Tech Community College (Indiana) launched a unique program known as the Middle Apprenticeship Program (MAP). The MAP targets Bayless High School 11th and 12th graders and additional 11th and 12th graders from adjacent, surrounding St. Louis County school districts.

During both the junior and senior school years, MAP students spend half a day in traditional academic classes five days per week. The other half of the school day is spent in the MAP. The program provides classroom instruction coupled with related technical instruction in manipulative floor-laying skills that are set by industry guidelines. During this two-year program, MAP students earn credit toward their apprenticeship and have the opportunity to work in the floor-laying industry for apprentice wages during summer months while also earning required on-the-job learning hours.

Successful MAP graduates are complete with their related technical apprenticeship training at the end of 12th grade and are eligible for direct entry into the construction industry via the STL-FLJAP. However, their educational journey is not complete; MAP graduates spend the next four years earning 6,000 on-the-job learning hours toward their U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) journeyworker certificate. They also are required to remain active in the Ivy Tech A.A.S. online degree program.

Once they have completed the required 6,000 hours, they receive their journeyworker certificate and the A.A.S. degree.

Programs such as these, modeled after the Swiss programs, require in-depth involvement from many partners in industry, education and economic development. Giving young men and women access to a skilled career may lead to their earning a living wage linked to a college degree.

**Broader Implications:**

**Time for Action**

President Barack Obama’s most recent State of the Union address set the groundwork for apprenticeship programs to become serious players in the workforce training arena. Successful MAP graduates are complete with their related technical apprenticeship training at the end of 12th grade and are eligible for direct entry into the construction industry via the STL-FLJAP. However, their educational journey is not complete; MAP graduates spend the next four years earning 6,000 on-the-job learning hours toward their U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) journeyworker certificate. They also are required to remain active in the Ivy Tech A.A.S. online degree program.

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munity colleges. Obama appointed Vice President Joseph Biden to oversee a revamping of the nation’s jobs training programs.

The authors believe it is high time this country’s economic development leaders move beyond the “skills gap” myth and recognize that as the economy begins to show signs of improvement, JATCs must engage their local stakeholders in order to develop partnerships that allow for increasing access into registered apprenticeship programs. When it comes to developing this nation’s workforce, no one does training “directly” linked to careers better than the U.S. apprenticeship system. Why? Because both labor and management have been diligent in ensuring high-quality results for the benefit of the industry on behalf of the apprentices.

What’s next? The authors suggest representatives of JATCs contact their state’s workforce investment board and local community college to see how the JATC can assist them by taking an active role in delivering workforce training rooted in the time-tested European model of apprenticeship.8

Endnotes


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