

Recruiting Younger Apprentices:

Three Vignettes, Three Approaches

by | **John S. Gaal, Ed.D.**

The author profiles three efforts to build a pipeline from high schools to registered apprenticeship training programs and, eventually, careers in the trades.





Since 2014, hardly a day goes by that at least one American mass media source does not proclaim there is a worker shortage in the construction industry (Krupnick, 2017), health care industry or yet another major industry. It is, frankly, mentally exhausting. The intent of this article is not to support or deny these claims (or relate them to issues of low wages). Rather, the purpose of this article is to share a few recruitment models that have worked. A word of caution: Relationships matter. Expecting success by merely plugging in and playing one of the following examples is a sure recipe for disaster. As with other aspects of our lives, we need to build trust among our potential partners. Please keep in mind that potential worker shortages did not happen overnight, nor will they be resolved overnight.

Bayless Floor Layers Middle Apprenticeship Program (MAP)

In 2004, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) under President George W. Bush issued requests for proposals for funding that would eventually be referred to as High Growth Job Training Initiative (HGJTI) grants. The St. Louis Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship Program (CJAP) applied for and received an award of \$2.1 million to train the regional workforce. CJAP took a three-pronged approach: (1) Migrate a successful advanced manufacturing labor-management training model from Cape Girardeau, Missouri to St. Louis, Missouri; (2) provide seed funding to Hazelwood School District to launch the *Project Lead the Way* program in at least one of its three high schools; and (3) design, develop and implement a German-style construction-related registered apprenticeship in a local high school (Gaal, 2010).

In late 2002, CJAP moved its school to Affton, Missouri. Bayless School District, a school district in a nearby area, faced a couple of burning issues: (1) The district lost its only secondary industrial arts teacher to retirement three years earlier and was unsuccessful in finding a replacement, and (2) it needed to stem the tide of a year-upon-year increase in Bosnian students dropping out of high school (Kreamer and Zimmermann, 2017). Representatives of the district met with CJAP as well as the Special School District (SSD) of St. Louis County, which provides secondary career and technical education to nearly two dozen districts in the county. A new approach was developed to embed a focused career and

technical education program within a comprehensive (academic) high school. CJAP helped design, develop and implement a registered apprenticeship program at Bayless High School. A first of its kind in the United States, the two-year (11th and 12th grades) program was dedicated to the floor-laying trade. The program was approved by National Apprenticeship Training Director Tony Swoope as a pilot high school registered apprenticeship program and was funded by the HGJTI grant.

All parties agreed to the following:

- Condense the typical four-year apprenticeship (related technical instruction (RTI)) training (which usually features about 640 hours of training) into the two-year school curriculum for 11th and 12th graders (which ended up offering closer to 800 hours of training).
- All on-site courses would be taught by a CJAP-approved instructor.
- Shop and classroom spaces at Bayless would mirror the shop and classroom space at CJAP.
- Students completing 11th grade would use the summer before 12th grade to work in the field in order to gain hands-on field experience. A three-way contract was signed between a contractor, parent and student to ensure work would only be performed from June 15 through August 15.
- Upon high school graduation, MAP students would be indentured with a willing signatory contractor. RTI would not be required, but DOL insisted on holding to the earn-while-you-learn model. In response, CJAP negotiated an articulation agreement with Ivy Tech College. MAP students were required to successfully complete a total of five three-credit-hour online courses at Ivy Tech over the next four years.
- Upon graduation from CJAP as a journeyworker floor layer, each MAP student would receive a DOL certificate and an A.A.S. degree. (This concept was modeled after the Gates Foundation Middle College Experience.)

Observations: The summer work was a great marketing tool since most of the MAP students' peers were making \$8 per hour in less desirable jobs while MAP students were earning more than \$13 an hour. In the interest of full disclosure, CJAP attempted to replicate this model at the Normandy (Missouri) School District in 2007, using carpentry

as the medium, but invoked its “out clause” six weeks into the start of the program due to a lack of support from upper administration.

Lesson learned: When the school district’s top brass stops attending monthly meetings, it is time for a gut check.

Ferguson-Florissant School District (FFSD) Advanced Manufacturing Program

In February 2011, the Harvard Graduate School of Education published a groundbreaking report, *Pathways to Prosperity*. The report served as a public policy tool that elevated apprenticeship programs to a point where politicians and parents were no longer ashamed to utter the words *career* and *technical education*. The report garnered so much interest that its authors held a summit at Harvard in the fall of 2012 and invited promising teams from six states (Symonds, Henderson and Schwartz, 2011). This author was invited to be part of the Missouri team based on the success of the Bayless MAP.

Eventually, the Missouri Departments of Education and Economic Development would work together to identify targeted sectors and at-risk school districts in the St. Louis region (Gromada, Tierney and Gaal, 2014). Proposals were requested by interested parties. FFSD Superintendent Art McCoy expressed an interest in working with CJAP to replicate the south-side Bayless MAP in the northern part of the county. A program was developed that was a variation of the MAP model for careers in advanced manufacturing instead of floor laying. One of the district high schools, McCluer High School, is in the heart of the industrial area that once housed Ford, GM and Pillsbury and still includes Boeing and various suppliers as nearby residents.

Since the CJAP facility is not near McCluer High School, it was vitally important to rekindle relationships with nearby longtime training partners. The first was St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley. Just a few years earlier, the community college upgraded its labs to include mechatronics funded by a HGJTI grant. In addition, bringing the community college on board gave FFSD students an additional path after graduation. The second partner was North Tech High School (NTHS), which is part of SSD. The connection was necessary in order to deliver welding training. All parties agreed to the following:

- Use current classroom and shop space to deliver 11th-grade curriculum.

takeaways

- The St. Louis Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship Program (CJAP) has partnered with St. Louis-area school districts on a variety of programs to recruit high school students into the trades.
- A floor-laying apprenticeship program at the Bayless School District condensed the typical four-year apprenticeship program into two years for 11th and 12th graders. After graduating from high school, apprentices went to work for a contractor and were required to complete five additional courses toward an A.A.S. degree.
- In the Ferguson-Florissant School District, an advanced manufacturing program used an area community college for instruction for 12th graders. Students earned several industry certifications following completion and could enter either the CJAP program with advanced standing or community college to pursue an associate’s degree in computer integrated manufacturing.
- The Building Union Diversity (BUD) Lite pilot program in St. Louis provided a one-week carpentry program and four half-day field internships to high school students. Eight of the nine student participants went on to apprenticeship programs for sponsoring contractors.

- Utilize the community college and NTHS for aspects of the 12th-grade curriculum (11th- and 12th-grade contact hours totaled 800).
- Whenever possible, courses would be taught by a CJAP-approved instructor.
- Upon successful completion, students would earn the following industry certifications: OSHA-10, fork lift, production technician and American Welding Society.
- The summer between 11th and 12th grade could be used to work in a contractor’s shop in order to gain hands-on field experience.
- Upon high school graduation, FFSD or NTHS students would need to decide if they would enter CJAP (cabinetmaker or millwright programs) with advanced standing or enter the community college A.A.S. degree program in computer-integrated manufacturing.

Observations: In the proposal submitted, NTHS administration immediately saw an opportunity to include a number of its advanced manufacturing students who live in or near the same region as FFSD students. FFSD dropped the pro-

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gram by the end of the third year, but it was picked up by the Jennings School District (JSD) and expanded to include carpentry. In the interest of full disclosure, FFSD Superintendent McCoy left the FFSD to become superintendent of JSD during this changeover. To partially offset costs, the grant provided \$500 per semester for each successful qualified FFSD and NTHS student.

Lesson learned: Seek program funding that looks beyond at-risk student populations as a sole qualifying factor.

BUD Lite

The Building Union Diversity (BUD) program began in 2013 as an effort by labor leaders to recruit minorities and women into the construction industry (Brucks, 2015). Coming out of the Great Recession of 2007 to 2012, the St. Louis region had two megaprojects on the books. (One is a ten-year project, and the other is a 20-year project). Both were anticipated to include workforce goals. Although the St. Louis Building and Construction Trades Council took the lead, council leader

Jeff Aboussie sought program design input from a number of community stakeholders, including but not limited to the Urban League, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), St. Louis City Workforce Development Board and St. Louis University. The result was a five- to seven-week program that involved upward of nine trades. Outcomes for the BUD program are as follows: More than 90% of enrollees have graduated, and more than 80% of graduates have been placed in registered apprenticeship programs. The White House touted the success of the program and invited the author, as a BUD representative, to visit in April 2015.

By late 2016, however, the pool of qualified adult candidates was seemingly drying up. In order to keep the success of the BUD program alive, leadership decided to focus on a captive audience: high school students. In spring 2017, CJAP piloted a one-week carpentry program (30 classroom/shop hours) followed by four half-day field internships with an assigned contrac-

tor's project manager (16 hours) spread over four weeks (Gaal, 2017). The program was dubbed *BUD Lite*. Nine students from two school districts participated in this training. They were bused to and from CJAP each day for the blue-collar training. School districts used their busing funds to provide cab rides for students to and from school and to jobsites during the (white-collar) internship phase.

This pilot resulted in five students from one school district being placed into apprenticeship programs from three trades upon graduation in June. The other four were offered jobs but could not accept them due to a lack of transportation. However, by mid-July, a contractor was awarded a job in the inner city on a bus line and made a second job offer to these four unemployed BUD Lite graduates. Three of the four accepted, and the other went on to pursue college. The desire now is to take this pilot to full scale. This would involve high school seniors participating in three one-week training sessions in the fall, followed by eight half-day jobsite internships spread over eight consecutive weeks in the spring.

Observations: With school district superintendents now being held accountable for college and career readiness, it may behoove them to partner with programs like BUD Lite in order to enhance their placement metrics, not to mention assist students who prefer an alternate track to college at the age of 18.

Lesson learned: Work with a recognized community leader who has the ear of the school district superintendent the program wants to influence. In the case of CJAP, the community leader was

Demetrious Johnson, a former NFL player now performing charitable works in the St. Louis region. The ultimate measure of success in the eyes of the school board will be placements in bona fide registered apprenticeship programs.

Time for Action

The following are five important steps and accompanying thoughts for successful programs.

1. Do your research.

Thought: Be a doubting Thomas, and insist on seeing the program in action.

2. Identify best practices.

Thought: Tweak the findings to fit your local needs.

3. If things seem weird, bail out sooner rather than later.

Thought: Anticipate failures, and learn from your mistakes.

4. Establish trusting relationships.

Thought: Most problems did not happen overnight, nor will they be resolved overnight.

5. Most importantly, keep students first in mind.

Thought: Take a long-term view, and celebrate the moments when high school graduates impacted by these outreach programs attain journeyworker status. 🎯

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