



Wisconsin State Legislature

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Developing a Strong Workforce in Wisconsin

In August, I was honored to receive the *Working for Wisconsin Award* for the 2015-2016 Legislative Session from the state's chamber of commerce, Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce (WMC). Brakebush Brothers, Inc. hosted the award ceremony and I had a chance to talk with leaders at their company about their business. A common theme I hear from area employers, including Brakebush Brothers, Inc., is that they work hard to grow their business within our local communities, but it can be hard to find skilled workers to fill job vacancies.

We want to make sure our next generation has the skills and necessary education to enter Wisconsin's workforce and fill the job vacancies that exist across our state. In order to address the problem of finding skilled workers for the state's businesses, the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development has administered the Youth Apprenticeship program for over two decades. This program reaches high school students in their Junior and Senior years. Students take the traditional high school classes they need for graduation, plus additional apprenticeship classes and are employed by a local company where they are taught by a skilled mentor. The program includes four semesters of related classroom instruction and at least 900 hours of work-based learning under the two-year program. Program participants are exposed to different components of an industry, are evaluated on their on-the-job performance and obtain a state-issued Certificate of Occupational Proficiency. They leave high school ready to enter the workforce or ready for additional training at a technical college or elsewhere. In the 2015-16 school year, the Youth Apprenticeship program reached 3000 students. 83 percent of the seniors graduated and 80 percent received job offers after completing their apprenticeship.

The Youth Apprenticeship program was created in 1991, although Wisconsin's first apprenticeship program began in 1911. Apprenticeship training programs are available in a wide-range of employment areas, including: agriculture, food and natural resources, architecture and construction, art, A/V technology and communications, finance, health science, hospitality and tourism, information technology, manufacturing, science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and transportation, distribution and logistics. The Youth Apprenticeship program also helps students learn the soft skills that are critical to job performance and retention, such as showing up for work on time, coming to work regularly, and working hard every day.

The legislature continued to support the Youth Apprenticeship program in the 2015-17 biennial budget by maintaining separate funding for the program, rather than grouping it in with other workforce development programs under the Wisconsin Fast Forward program.

CESA 5 and CESA 6 both received youth apprenticeship grants for programs that serve schools in our area including Baraboo, Cambria-Friesland, Columbus, Fall River, Lodi, Portage Community, Poynette, Randolph, Rio Community, Wautoma Area, Westfield, Wild Rose, Wisconsin Dells, Berlin Area, Green Lake, Manawa, New London, Princeton, Ripon, Rosendale-Brandon, Waupaca, Waupun, and Weyauwega-Fremont. Parents, students or businesses can learn how to get involved with the Youth Apprenticeship program by visiting the Department of Workforce Development's (DWD) website at <http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/youthapprenticeship/>.

If you have any questions about any of the information I have included or if you have suggestions on other topics or issues you would like learn more about, you may call my office toll-free at (800) 991-5541; write me at P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707; or e-mail me at: Sen.Olsen@legis.state.wi.us. You can also sign up for our newsletter at our website: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen14/news/index.htm>.