

Building Minnesota's future workforce through paid, work-based learning.



Employer Toolkit: Youth Apprenticeship Program

Who Should Participate?

- Regularly hire and train entry-level workers
- Want to build a reliable talent pipeline
- Seek to reduce recruitment and onboarding costs

Why It Matters to Employers

- Train future employees to your standards
- Improve retention by hiring proven candidates
- Strengthen school and community partnerships

Employer Commitments (At a Glance)

- Pay at least minimum wage
- Provide a workplace mentor
- Offer 10–15 hours/week during the school year
- Participate in a training agreement (Coordinator supported)

Built-In Employer Support

- Students complete 50+ hours of safety training and 120+ hours of technical instruction
- CMJTS Coordinator manages paperwork and state reporting
- Mentor training and ongoing support provided at no cost



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What is Youth Apprenticeship?

A Minnesota Department of Education–approved, paid work-based learning program for 11th–12th grade students. Youth Apprentices earn wages and high school credit while gaining technical and employability skills on the job.

Youth Apprenticeship programs are approved career and technical education (CTE) programs that provide students with in-depth technical instruction both at school and at an employer partner's worksite.

The Youth Apprenticeship Program receives funding through multiple sources:

- Local school districts contribute vocationally certified instructors, classroom facilities, equipment, and administrative support.
- Local businesses offer training, wages, supplies, and paid mentors for participating students.
- Other funding may come from outside organizations involved in implementing the programs.

These funds support the Youth Apprenticeship Coordinator position, short-term training, certifications, assessments, and student testing.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Employers are essential partners in the Youth Apprenticeship Program and may choose how deeply they are involved. Participation can include helping develop or refine industry skill standards at the state level, hiring and training a youth apprentice locally, or serving on a Local Advisory Group that helps guide the program. Through these roles, employers help ensure the program aligns with real industry needs while supporting youth in gaining valuable skills and experience.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The Youth Apprenticeship Program offers a structured pathway for high school juniors and seniors interested in a specific career field. The program usually spans students whose academic schedules or extracurricular commitments limit participation. Youth apprentices, their parents, employers, and school districts sign a written agreement that defines each party's responsibilities. The program follows statewide or national skill standards developed by Minnesota industries to keep work-based learning relevant and aligned with employer needs. Training is organized around broad occupational clusters within an industry, so skills are transferable across businesses statewide. Local advisory groups, composed of employers, school districts, technical colleges, and other partners, oversee local implementation, identify participating industries, and ensure the program meets local workforce needs while maintaining consistent statewide competencies.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Youth apprentices receive hands-on, work-based training at the workplace under the supervision of skilled mentors and are paid at least minimum wage. All two-year participants must complete high school to meet program requirements. Upon completion, the Minnesota Department of Education awards a Certificate of Occupational Proficiency. Students may also earn advanced standing credits at Minnesota technical colleges and admission credit at some four-year colleges, supporting a smooth transition to postsecondary education or the workforce.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Role of the Employer

The employer hires, supervises, and trains youth apprentices in alignment with state standards. Employers are responsible for selecting students, providing paid work-based learning (including required hours), assigning a qualified workplace mentor, and delivering hands-on training tied to the approved skill competencies. They ensure appropriate coverage and agreements are in place, participate in regular performance reviews, and collaborate with organized labor when applicable to support a high-quality apprenticeship experience.

Role of the Schools

Schools are key to the Youth Apprenticeship program. They select students, oversee training, and offer support. Schools review job applications, interview candidates, and choose who will join the program. Some may offer the program as a class. Depending on the field, schools give up to 60 hours of safety and skill training. They also hold required meetings for students and parents to explain everyone's roles. Schools check in with students regularly and more often if needed. Parents can contact the school or Apprenticeship Coordinator with questions.

Role of the Mentor

One of the most critical factors in a youth apprentice's progress is the workplace mentor's involvement. Workplace mentors help youth apprentices succeed. Each employer assigns a mentor, who is trained and supported by the coordinator. Mentors work with school instructors, track skill development, and meet with apprentices and staff to review progress. They guide, encourage, watch for challenges, and stay in touch with the school liaison.

Role of the Apprenticeship Coordinator

The Youth Apprenticeship Coordinator connects students, schools, and businesses, making the program thrive. From marketing and media outreach to leading advisory meetings and organizing career events, this role brings people together and keeps things moving. The coordinator also handles paperwork, trains workplace mentors, and supports businesses every step of the way.

Minnesota data shows youth apprenticeships boost student outcomes (diplomas, wages, jobs) and help employers fill skills gaps in high-demand fields like manufacturing, healthcare, and IT by developing a future workforce, reducing turnover, and offering pathways to living-wage careers with industry credentials, making them a win–win for both youth and businesses.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

OUR COMPANY CANNOT HIRE UNDER AGE 18 - CAN WE STILL PARTICIPATE?

Yes. The Department of Labor allows exemptions for student learners. Schools provide safety training, and businesses provide additional on-site training. A minimum of 50 hours of documented safety instruction is required.

WHAT IF MY BUSINESS CAN'T PROVIDE ALL THE REQUIRED SKILLS?

If your business can't offer the full skill set, the Apprenticeship Coordinator may arrange for the student to gain those skills elsewhere. This must be discussed before hiring.

WHAT IF A STUDENT ISN'T WORKING OUT?

Youth Apprenticeship students are regular employees and may be terminated if needed. It's recommended to first consult with the school or Apprenticeship Coordinator.

WHAT IF THE PROGRAM AREA OF INTEREST IS NOT OFFERED?

We may be able to utilize an existing program area to match your needs. It is not guaranteed that we will be able to find you what you are requesting. If we cannot find what you are requesting, we will suggest other work-based learning options for your business.

HOW DOES THIS SOLVE OUR SKILLS GAP?

Apprenticeships offer companies a strategic way to develop targeted skills, build a loyal talent pipeline, and boost immediate productivity. By involving employers in program design, apprenticeships ensure industry alignment, deliver job-ready talent, and help diversify the workforce, all while providing participants with valuable, recognized credentials.

MENTORS AND BEST PRACTICES

The Workplace Mentor

Mentors are essential to apprentice success and are supported by CMJTS.

Mentors:

- Guide daily training and skill development
- Evaluate progress on required competencies
- Meet regularly with the student and school staff
- Model professional behavior and workplace expectations

Employer Best Practices

- Treat apprentices like regular employees
- Set clear expectations and provide regular feedback
- Rotate through departments when possible
- Communicate early with the coordinator if issues arise

If Challenges Occur

- Communicate early and document concerns: Address issues promptly by clearly communicating with the youth apprentice, document performance or conduct concerns, and follow the same defined disciplinary process you use for all employees, which may include formal warnings and performance improvement plans.
- Collaborate with partners for support: Work closely with the Apprenticeship Coordinator and educational institution as apprenticeship partners to develop and implement support strategies that help the apprentice succeed.
- Use termination only as a last resort: If challenges persist despite serious, documented efforts to resolve them, termination may be considered, but only after all reasonable supports have been attempted.



LEGAL BASICS, RESOURCES, and NEXT STEPS

Employment & Liability (Summary)

- Apprentices are covered under employer workers' compensation
- General liability coverage typically applies
- Transportation liability depends on who provides transport

Child Labor & Hours of Work

- Apprentices must follow state and federal child labor laws
- Limited exemptions apply under the "student learner" designation
- Hour restrictions apply for minors under 18

Industry-Specific Considerations

- Some equipment or tasks may be restricted by law or insurance
- Employers should confirm allowances with their insurance carrier

KEY EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- **Minnesota Department of Labor & Industry – Child Labor Laws**
<https://www.dli.mn.gov/child-labor>
- **Minnesota Department of Education – Youth Apprenticeship**
<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/cte/prog/wbl/>
- **Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development – Youth Apprenticeship**
<https://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/office-youth-development/>

GETTING STARTED - EMPLOYER CHECKLIST

- Contact CMJTS to explore eligible occupations
- Review industry skill standards
- Identify a workplace mentor
- Interview and hire a youth apprentice
- Complete the training agreement with CMJTS

CONTACT CMJTS TODAY

Visit: <https://www.cmjts.org>

OR scan QR code below

Phone: (763) 271-3700

All workforce development services are provided at no cost.



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