

CREATING AND REPLICATING HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

A GUIDE FOR BUSINESSES AND SCHOOLS

CASE STUDY

Georgia Consortium for Advanced Technical Training Apprenticeship Program

Building the Industrial Mechanic Workforce Using the German Apprenticeship Model



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Manufacturers in Coweta County, southwest of Atlanta, were struggling to locate skilled talent. Their workforce was aging, they saw shrinking interest in skilled trades, and technology was changing their processes. So they asked the Coweta County School System and its college and career academy to help them identify a larger pool of young people with high-level technical skills and ways to better connect with future workers. The Central Educational Center (CEC), the local college and career academy, worked with its governing board and local employers to explore potential solutions. The CEC team settled on creating a training and development program by utilizing the German certified apprenticeship model.

Several local German companies and the German American Chamber of Commerce of the Southern United States helped inform education and business leaders on how a German certified apprenticeship could help students and companies—both German and non-German—succeed. Georgia’s Lt. Governor, Casey Cagle, and the German American Chamber, created The Georgia Consortium for Advanced Technical Training (GA CATT) via a Memorandum of Understanding in May of 2016.

GA CATT utilizes an alternative path to high school graduation created with a legislative change in 2015. The High School Post-Secondary Graduation Opportunity (Senate Bill 2) allows for a reduced number of high school classes in return for completion of a significant number of technical college credentials during the high school years. The rigor of the GA CATT program required such an approach to high school. In fact, in Coweta, student apprentices have to attend classes during regular school year, and during two summers, in order to meet the dual requirements for high school and college graduation.

GA CATT’s initial application was for the Coweta Apprenticeship Program launched in August of 2016. The apprenticeship program helps prepare high school students for careers in industrial mechanic roles in manufacturing. Developing the program took four years from the initial idea to launch. While the curriculum had to be translated from German, it has been aligned to courses and programs (multiple college certificates, a college diploma, and an associate degree) offered by the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG).

The Coweta companies initially involved include two German, three Japanese, one Canadian and two U.S. firms. Georgia Tech’s Manufacturing Extension Project is a critical resource in assisting GA CATT companies to incorporate this training model into their ongoing processes.

Students in the GA CATT Apprenticeship Program start as sophomores and continue through their senior year. Students combine their regular high school classes with technical courses offered by TCSG institutions through dual enrollment, and they spend time working at sponsor company sites. “The companies are an educational provider, not just a site where students intern,” said Mark Whitlock, the CEC CEO. In fact, the students do not produce anything for the companies during the first two years, but instead are doing school projects at the company related to the curriculum that prepares them for rigorous midterm and final exams. Those rigorous exams yield the internationally regarded German Certification upon successful completion.

Each student also has a mentor from the sponsor company. That mentor is trained in an educational methods course by the German American Chamber. Each mentor is, therefore, “certified”. The certification of the mentor is a pre-requisite that allows the student apprentices to participate in those rigorous midterm and final exams.

After its initial launch in 2016 in Coweta County, the program grew in 2017 to include three additional school systems—Spalding County, Rockdale County, and Newton County—and students are sponsored by and working at 18 companies, including the original Coweta eight companies. According to Whitlock, the industrial mechanic apprenticeship program is ripe for replication around Georgia. Companies and school systems do not have to build out the program from scratch but can rely on the curriculum, model, and lessons learned from Coweta’s initial rollout.