

Companies could offer high school apprenticeships under new state plan

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A new pre-apprenticeship program that will feed into existing programs already offered at college tech centers will be offered to interested companies and high schools across the state next year.

TRACK — Tech Ready Apprenticeships for Careers in Kentucky — will help students get a leg up on a job after high school and will help employers "grow their own work force," officials said.

Owensboro High School is interested in adding TRACK to its new tech high school offerings, Owensboro Public Schools Superintendent Nick Brake said.

"We're trying to get TRACK rolling here," Brake said. "It has a lot of promise. It allows kids the opportunity to get involved in a real world situation."

The idea of high school apprenticeships is not new, but one previous drawback for companies has been insurance and liability, Brake said.

"With the Labor Cabinet involved, that concern has been taken off the table," he said. "This lets an employer try a kid out and tell that person 'this is what you need to know.' And the employer also can evaluate the student's soft skills."

TRACK was introduced as a pilot program in 2013-14, said Mary Taylor, industry training and development specialist in the Office of Career and Technical Education.

"We worked out some kinks, and it was very successful," she said. "Now it will be available for the 2014-15 year."

Companies that want to participate must have a regular apprenticeship set up through the Kentucky Labor Cabinet and then work with the local school system on the coursework for the high school program, she said.

TRACK was initially offered in manufacturing only, but it is being extended to construction next year.

"This would be a great time for companies to start developing their apprenticeships," Taylor said. "If they can't find the work force they need, they can grow their own."

They can use their apprenticeship program for in-house training and promote from within. They also can work with the school system on the TRACK pre-apprenticeships as a pipeline for students to enter post-secondary apprenticeship training.

TRACK can have significant benefits for students as well, officials said.

Students get paid for on-the-job training, their hours count toward completion of their apprenticeship and, when it's finished, they will receive an industry certification as well as acceptance into a registered apprenticeship program.

The certification also counts toward the local school district's college- and career-ready accountability index.

The value for students is that they earn credits as they go, and by graduation, they have earned college credits and may go into a full-fledged apprenticeship program at Owensboro Community & Technical College, said Patty Osborne, vice president for business development at the Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation.

Osborne is working to identify companies that will participate in TRACK. She said she is starting with the building trades.

Taylor and Osborne said meetings with companies will be one of the next steps in making TRACK available locally.

Brake said once companies are identified, OPS can work with them to develop the program.

"It works well with out innovation efforts," he said. "It brings the learning environment into the workforce."

More information about pre- and regular apprenticeships may be found at www.kentuckyapprenticeship.com or by emailing KDETRACK@education.ky.gov.

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