

EDWARD J. MALLOY INITIATIVE FOR CONSTRUCTION SKILLS NEW YORK CITY, NY



ARCHITECTURE AND CONSTRUCTION



INSTRUCTIONAL ALIGNMENT: EXTERNAL
PROGRAM ARTICULATION: PREFERRED-ENTRY

BACKGROUND

Overview

The Edward J. Malloy Initiative for Construction Skills (Construction Skills) is an intensive, 14-week pre-apprenticeship program that prepares high school seniors for entry into Registered Apprenticeship programs in New York City's unionized building and construction trades. The program's mission is to create a diverse, well-prepared pipeline of union workers for the city's construction industry. Construction Skills recruits from 19 of the city's career and technical high schools, and serves an average of 150 pre-apprentices each year. The cohort size is tied to industry demand and the number of apprenticeships available in a given year.

History

The Construction Skills program has its roots in a pilot program launched in 1993 called Project Pathways, which is a joint venture of the New York City School Construction Authority (SCA) and the Building and Construction Trades Council (BCTC). The goal of Project Pathways was to build a diverse workforce in New York's building trades by setting aside 10 percent of apprenticeships for graduates of New York City's vocational and technical high schools, which at that time served a majority of African-American or Hispanic students.

By the late 1990s, employers and unions began to raise questions about whether the program graduates were adequately prepared to succeed in union apprenticeship programs. This led to declining apprenticeship placement rates for program graduates and a decrease in SCA's support for the program. To respond to these concerns, the program underwent a substantial restructuring. In 2001, Project Pathways was replaced by Construction Skills 2000, an independent nonprofit organization affiliated with BCTC and the Building Trades Employers' Association. The principal funders were—and continue to be—SCA and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. In 2007, the organization was renamed to honor Edward J. Malloy, the BCTC president who helped launch Project Pathways.

Today, Construction Skills continues to operate as an independent nonprofit organization that is based within the BCTC headquarters, and the city's unions continue to set aside 10 percent of apprenticeships for high school graduates. The program is now open to any city high school student, but the program continues to focus its recruiting efforts on the career and technical high schools because these students are most likely to be interested in a career in the building trades. Construction Skills staff serve as the intermediary between the city's technical high schools, labor, and employers. They are also responsible for program administration and implementation, which



Program Snapshot

- Participants (2014–15): 135
- Participants (2013–14): 161
- High school graduation rate (2014–15): 100 percent
- Placement rate (2014–15): 69 percent
 - Apprenticeship: 83 percent
 - Postsecondary: 16 percent
 - Workforce or military: 45 percent

includes brokering, maintaining, and nurturing the many relationships that are required to make Construction Skills work. The program relies on relationships rather than formal agreements to maintain its many partnerships.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE



Participants in the pre-apprenticeship program undergo 14 weeks of training to prepare for success as apprentices in the building trades. The training is broken into two segments—a 10-week training that is delivered to high school students in the spring of their senior year, and a four-week hands-on training over the summer following high school graduation that is designed to simulate industry employment, where participants learn the basic roles on a series of job sites.

Program completers receive a direct-entry referral letter for union apprenticeships in the building trades, which allows them to bypass the highly competitive public recruitment process. Construction Skills is one of only three programs in the city with a direct-entry agreement with the unions. However, participants must still meet the physical and aptitude requirements set by individual unions for entry into their apprenticeship programs. The other two programs seek to boost gender diversity as well as offer a pathway to employment for veterans.

While completers do not earn advanced standing in union apprenticeships or postsecondary credit, the Construction Skills program does provide training that gives participants a head start as they transition into apprenticeships. Also, the curriculum is designed to allow participants to explore the various building trades to help them select the apprenticeship program best suited to their interests.

On-the-Job & Classroom Instruction

During the 10-week classroom session, students attend a weekly, three-hour, after-school class taught by union journey workers from the building trades. Students receive training on basic workplace safety and professional skills, such as attendance and punctuality, and have the opportunity to hear from guest speakers who are completing apprenticeships in the building trades. Students also tour union-training facilities and meet with instructors to learn more about union apprenticeship programs in a range of trades.

Upon high school graduation, participants complete a four-week, full-time summer training run by the Consortium for Worker Education (CWE), a nonprofit organization that functions as a workforce development agency for the AFL-CIO of New York City. The training is not paid, nor do students have to pay to participate. Construction Skills does provide limited financial assistance to those who qualify because participants are not allowed to have other jobs while in training. CWE manages both the classroom and hands-on components of the summer program. Construction Skills works closely with CWE and the unions to ensure that training is aligned with union apprenticeship programs.

The hands-on training is conducted at sites throughout the city's five boroughs. Participants rotate through four different job sites, at which they work on basic construction projects, and are assigned to take on roles such as steward or foreman. The summer training acts as the program's primary work-based learning experience. Prior work-based learning experience is not a prerequisite for the program, nor is the training designed to seamlessly build on students' relevant high school CTE program, but Construction Skills staff report that they remain very connected to the high school CTE teachers who serve as their recruitment liaisons and have regular CTE curriculum alignment discussions even without a formal mechanism in place.

Curriculum & Assessment

The curriculum for Construction Skills was developed in close collaboration with the building trades unions, thus ensuring alignment between the program's instruction and the curricula for the available apprenticeships. Classes are taught by senior union instructors, who also play a role in ensuring alignment. A major emphasis of the training is on setting students up for success in apprenticeship programs by equipping them with work readiness skills. For example, Construction Skills participants are expected to adhere to very strict rules related to attendance and

tardiness that mimic the rules of apprenticeship programs and employers' expectations. At the end of the program, participants take aptitude and physical exams, both of which are entrance exams for apprenticeships, not necessary for an end-of-program assessment.

Though applicants are required to have a C average in math to be admitted into the program, program leaders cited math proficiency as an ongoing struggle, and as a result, the program has incorporated relevant math instruction into the curriculum.

Program Funding

As an independent nonprofit organization, Construction Skills is funded primarily through ongoing support from SCA and the Port Authority. It receives some supplemental grants from public-sector entities, including the New York City Council, the city's Department of Small Business Services, and the CWE's Education Jobs to Build On grant. In addition, the program hosts an annual fundraiser, the Building Futures awards reception, which honors leaders in labor, contracting, real estate, and government and is used to solicit donations.

KEY PARTNERS

Strong, long-lasting partnerships are a critical component of Construction Skills' success. These partnerships have been consistent since its founding as Project Pathways. The same key institutional partners are at the table, and they have been involved in largely the same capacities for more than two decades. However, rather than being governed by formal agreements or protocols, these partnerships were formed and are maintained on the basis of existing labor-management relationships. Construction Skills' program staff are from the union world, which enables them to serve as effective intermediaries who can speak the language of business and industry.



Unions

Given the program's roots in Project Pathways and the BCTC's role as a founding partner, Construction Skills' strongest partnerships are with the city's construction unions. As a result of the BCTC relationship, the program is able to offer direct-entry referral letters for completers to use when applying to the city's competitive union building apprenticeships. Though the primary driver of the unions' participation in Construction Skills and two other similar programs is the potential to build a more diverse workforce, the unions have also collaborated to validate and strengthen the program's curriculum and provide journey-level instructors to help deliver the training.

Employers

Because Construction Skills does not place participants directly with employers, the partnership between the program and employers is primarily financial in nature. Two of the largest employers, SCA and Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, have been a part of Construction Skills since the beginning and continue to serve as major financial donors to the program.

"We want students to be able to walk through the many doors we teach them to build."

John Widlund, Executive Director of Career and Technical Education, New York City Department of Education

Secondary Institutions

Over the years, Construction Skills has developed close relationships with high school teachers who serve as liaisons that help identify potential program participants, supply students with information about the program, and assist with the program's screening and recruitment process. Construction Skills also works with high schools to deliver the first 10 weeks of training during the school year and to carry out recruiting activities such as career fairs. Construction Skills works with high school CTE teachers to align secondary curricula to the pre-apprenticeship program. The program also has a very strong working relationship with the New York City Department of Education. However, the

district's role in directly supporting the program is limited, since Construction Skills largely operates independently of the district, and the most intensive portion of the program takes place after high school graduation.

STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND SUPPORTS

Recruitment and Entrance Requirements



While all students in New York City high schools are eligible for the Construction Skills program, the organization works most closely with 19 targeted high schools across New York City's five boroughs because these schools offer CTE programs in a related field such as construction trades, engineering, and architecture.

Construction Skills and CWE staff emphasized that their goal is not to “sell” the program to all students, but rather to focus their outreach efforts on students who are interested in the field. Program staff are also engaged in outreach and recruitment efforts, and spend a lot of time traveling to high schools across the city to talk with students, families, and school staff about the program. Recruitment efforts also include community outreach. Program staff often attend community events such as block parties to inform students and their families about the program. A consistent recruiting challenge noted by Construction Skills staff, however, is that many parents are hesitant to consider postsecondary options that do not include college. Students also have opportunities to participate in “Learning Days” organized by Construction Skills and CWE. Learning Days are structured like job fairs, but are not called job fairs in order to avoid giving the impression that the program leads directly to jobs, rather than to further training as an apprentice.

Program Eligibility Requirements

- Minimum cumulative grade average of 70 percent or higher
- 90 percent attendance record
- Commitment to pursuing a career in the unionized building and construction trades industry

To recruit students, Construction Skills uses liaisons, who are typically high school CTE teachers. The liaison role is not paid or formalized. High school teachers recommend students for participation in the program; students who wish to pursue this option then fill out an application and attend an orientation session. Construction Skills conducts interviews with applicants who are chosen primarily on the basis of recommendations from the liaisons. Admission to the program is competitive, and students must meet minimum cut-offs for both grade point average (GPA) and attendance records. The number of available seats in the program is determined by industry demand, and therefore varies and can range between 120 and 170 participants.

Student Supports

Once in the program, participants meet with a Construction Skills counselor who advises them on their choice of a specific trade. This person's primary role is to familiarize program participants with the entry requirements for apprenticeships in each trade and to help students ensure that their skills are aligned with the requirements for their chosen trade.

A related issue that suggests a need for increased student supports, particularly robust career information and advising, is that many participants in the program initially hope to enter apprenticeships with the electricians' union. Construction Skills staff noted that this is because an apprenticeship with the electricians' union demands less physical labor than apprenticeships in many other building trades, and is perceived as more closely tied to academic learning and college-level STEM coursework. Construction Skills and CWE staff also observed that families, especially those from immigrant communities, may encourage students to pursue the electrician track because they believe it is more likely to lead to college than apprenticeships in other building trades.

The program offers some financial supports to students, who can qualify for MetroCards during the four-week summer training, but Construction Skills and CWE made a deliberate decision not to offer additional wraparound supports, because they would not be available once participants enter their union apprenticeships. The goal of the

Construction Skills program is to emulate union apprenticeships to ensure that students are thoroughly prepared to become apprentices.

PROGRAM BENEFITS

Participants receive a certificate of completion and a direct-entry referral letter to union apprenticeship programs. Though neither is stackable, the referral is valuable because it allows students to circumvent the competitive public apprenticeship recruitment process. However, completion of the Construction Skills program does not confer any other special status on participants, who must still prove to the unions that they meet entry requirements, and who do not receive advanced standing in apprenticeship programs as a result of their Construction Skills training.



Unions and employers value the program, which they see as an important stream of diverse talent for New York's building trades. Unions' enthusiasm for the program is reflected in their strong support for it, including financial support, office space provided by BCTC, and a willingness to set aside 10 percent of apprenticeships for graduates of the career and technical high schools.

As for New York City schools, the district sees the program as a valuable pathway for students upon graduation. The executive director of CTE for the New York City Department of Education was previously the principal of the School of Cooperative Education, a primary sending school for Construction Skills. While he is enthusiastic about the program, the current state accountability system presents challenges for increasing participation, because the system does not track or reward placement into apprenticeships, which means that stakeholders at the school level are not incentivized to support Construction Skills or similar programs.

STATE SUPPORT

State support for Construction Skills is limited. Since this program is seated within the building trades unions, the state's Department of Education has not been particularly engaged with the program. The New York State Department of Labor, which has administrative authority over Registered Apprenticeships, granted approval in 2009 to Construction Skills for the direct-entry referral status, which was critical, as this is seen as one of the most valuable benefits of the program.



OUTCOMES

Since 2001, Construction Skills has placed more than 1,800 New York City residents into union-run apprenticeship programs. According to the program, more than 1,300 of these placements remain actively employed by the unionized construction industry, and of those, 700 are journey-level workers.



To track participant outcomes, Construction Skills uses Salesforce as a database. Indicators measured include application, enrollment, completion, and placement. Because its goal is to build a diverse construction workforce, the program also tracks the race and ethnicity of participants. For example, for the 2014-15 program year, participants hailed from all five boroughs, and 89 percent of the Construction Skills graduates who were placed into union apprenticeship programs were African American, Hispanic, Asian, or another minority group.

LESSONS LEARNED



Program staff and partners identified some lessons learned, including the following:

- Maintain a strong working relationship between labor and management, which is essential for a pre-apprenticeship program intended to connect with union-sponsored apprenticeships.
- Invest in education and training, as it is imperative for employers to build and maintain a skilled workforce. Steady donations and commitment from employers are necessary to support an intermediary to manage the program and its many partnerships—which are critical to its success and longevity—while maintaining financial stability.