

CREATING AND REPLICATING HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

A GUIDE FOR BUSINESSES AND SCHOOLS

CASE STUDY

CareerWise Colorado

Building Talent through Apprenticeships in Diverse Industries



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CareerWise Colorado has brought a three-year apprenticeship model from the Swiss Alps to the Colorado Rockies. A variety of apprenticeship models exist, but after a long debate, Colorado decided to go with the Swiss model for two main reasons: It provides a positive return on investment for businesses during three years of apprenticeship, and it is highly permeable, meaning that it does not limit other educational or career pathways for students. CareerWise was founded in 2016 with the support of a strong coalition of business leaders, school administrators, and state agencies, including the Department of Labor and Employment. The first cohort of apprentices began in June 2017, with 116 students placed at 40 different companies in four industries. Just one year later, the program had grown to 225 students at 75 companies in five industries: manufacturing, technology, business operations, financial services, and health care.

The process begins with companies interviewing and selecting high school students the spring before their junior year. Once they are matched, students begin a three-year progression from student to full-time employee. The first-year students (juniors) take classes at their high school three days a week, work on the job 16 hours a week, and complete approximately 150 hours of training. In the second year (senior year), students transition to two days a week at school, working on the job 24 hours a week and completing approximately 175 additional hours of training. After the second year, students graduate from high school but continue with their apprenticeship, working 32 to 40 hours per week and completing their final 200 hours of training.

The company is responsible for paying each apprentice's salary and training costs up to \$5,000. Ashley Carter, CareerWise's chief strategy officer, points out that while this may seem like a large investment, the company gets a fully functioning employee who can contribute to the bottom line. Colorado is not the only state currently pursuing apprenticeship programs, but it has been particularly successful in creating a supportive infrastructure to help the program, business partners, and students thrive.

At the end of the third year, companies choose whether to keep the students on as full-time employees. CareerWise expects most employers will want to retain their apprentices due to their significant three-year investment. The first cohort of students has yet to complete their apprenticeship term, so it is too early to how many students will stay with their firms, but CareerWise leaders are optimistic.

