

High School Apprenticeships: A New Path to Prosperity

It's no secret that the college degree has long been considered a path to success. It's also no secret that those who take that pathway are more often than not ending up in the [mire of student debt](#) – and struggling to get out.

This dilemma has caused many to look elsewhere for alternatives to college, particularly apprenticeship or career and technical education. Unfortunately, these ideas are still so cutting edge, that many students must blaze the trail alone with relatively little direction and information.

But individuals like Robert Luddy are seeking to change that. As a recent profile in a [Philanthropy Roundtable report](#) explains, Luddy has established a number of engineering career and technical education programs at various private high schools in North Carolina:

“Known as the Luddy Institute of Technology, this track uses a special four-year curriculum throughout high school, and many enrolled students devote the summer between their junior and senior years to an industrial internship. From the outset, students are immersed in the fundamentals of engineering: traditional drafting techniques, then computer-aided design through SolidWorks. The basics of mechanisms, energy, statics, materials, and kinematics. The history of engineering and manufacturing. Automation, computer modeling, robotics, and flexible manufacturing systems.”

According to Luddy, the training this program enables sophomore students to earn certification “which alone would enable them to command between \$40,000 and \$60,000 as employees.”

But the training doesn't stop there. By the time students graduate from high school, they have the option to either go on to a traditional college program – presumably with the credentials to hold a job and [earn their own way through](#) – or continue on to one of North Carolina's paid apprenticeship programs, which often incorporate free college into the training.

As the report explains, apprenticeship programs like these could be particularly helpful to young men, who seem to be falling behind in today's career world:

“Since the 1960s, educational trends have been zipping upward for females—who now significantly outnumber men on college campuses. But males have been suffering and declining on any number of educational measures. Equally, adult men have been getting battered in the labor force, with both rates of employment and levels of pay tumbling for many males.

Expanded tech-oriented training could help boys and men become more successful in K-12 education, in college, in job-winning, and in earnings trajectories—all the areas where males, especially blue-collar males, have been in eclipse.”

These revelations lead me to ask the following questions:

If Luddy is able to successfully train and certify high school students to hold a decent paying job by age 15 or 16, then why in the world are we keeping so many students in their desks for several years beyond that age? Is the drive and interest of many high school students lost (particularly in young men) when we fail to give them opportunities in high school for hands-on training? Would we see a more engaged high school environment if students were trained for real-world jobs in addition to the normal courses in the 3Rs?

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