

Good afternoon,

I want to thank Chairman Pat Fallon and ranking member Cory Bush and all the members of this committee for this incredible honor to speak to you today.

My name is Tony Ewing. I am President and CEO of Advanced Fixtures Incorporated. AFI is a manufacturer of retail store fixtures. We work with wood, metal, glass, acrylic and some electrical components. I am also managing partner of EdgeTec. Edgetec sells new and used Tow Trucks. We attach Tow Truck bodies to a truck chassis. This requires welders and technicians with electrical and hydraulic experience.

I am extremely fortunate that I had a grandfather who spent time with me on weekends. He worked in the maintenance department of LTV, a large Defense contractor. He taught me the basics of all the trades. At the time, I didn't realize it, but he was teaching me life skills that I would continue to use the rest of my life.

I was lucky to be a member of the first graduating class of Sam Houston Junior High School in Irving, TX. In 1977 standards, it was considered to be a state-of-the-art-school—open concept, circular ramps to all the floors and bright colors on the walls. The industrial arts classrooms were all located in the same hallway leading to the gym. These classrooms had a storefront of glass along the hallway that allowed you to see inside the entire industrial arts area. To this day, I can still picture the woodshop with all of the heavy-duty Green Powermatic

equipment. Needless to say, it was extremely enticing to me, so I signed up for woodshop. I was surprised when at the end-of-the-year awards ceremony, my name was called for Who's Who in woodworking.

Sam Houston Junior High School helped me find my niche in life. However, in high school, I learned if I was good enough, I could play any sport for four years; but regardless of talent, I was limited to two years of industrial arts.

College wasn't an option when I graduated from high school in 1981, so I accepted my first job offer. I was fortunate to work for a supervisor that was more of a mentor than a boss. He taught me the basics of building store fixtures. Over the next 15 months, I started taking classes at North Lake Junior College, quit my job, celebrated my twentieth birthday and started my first company. Three months after starting Ewing Remodeling, I quit junior college and changed the company name to Advanced Fixtures.

I have been blessed:

1. By a grandfather that taught me life skills
2. By Sam Houston Junior High School that placed industrial arts in front of every student every day
3. By a country that provides endless opportunity
4. By Mentors that have always been there when I needed answers or when I needed a swift kick in the pants
5. And with a wife that keeps me grounded

We can't go back to the world I grew up in, but I do believe that we need to adjust the narrative on how we view education for our children and grandchildren.

Eleven years ago, AFI started recruiting from Pittsburg State University in Pittsburg, Kansas. They have one of the best Wood Technology programs in the country. Scott Vasey and Chris Bell sitting behind me are both proud Gorillas. From 2011 to 2023 Pitts State had from eight to 17 graduating seniors in their Wood Tech program. On average that's 14 graduating seniors per year. Their Spring Company Day event attracts from 22 to 31 companies. That's 25 companies on average trying to attract 14 graduates. Most of these companies would hire more than one graduate and more companies would attend if there were more students. I'm confident that Pittsburg State could increase the size of their program by 400% and students would still have multiple job offers.

In 2016, AFI started hosting high school juniors and seniors and their parents at our facility in Farmersville, TX. The purpose of the event was to attract more students to Pitt State and ultimately to AFI. All of these students were in a local wood tech program. The first two years of the event were somewhat frustrating because 95% of the parents would not engage. The third year we changed things up. We separated the students from their parents. The students toured the facility and I invited the parents to my conference room to discuss the opportunities in our industry. After that meeting, it was clear that a large

majority of the parents were there because their child asked them to attend. They showed little to no interest in their child working in the trades. There was a clear lack of understanding of the potential opportunity for their child.

We have to change the narrative in our country if we want every American student to have the opportunity to live the American dream.

Four-year College is clearly not for everyone. I don't have a degree. Yet for all the reasons I listed, I've had the honor to lead a successful and growing company for over forty years, influenced hundreds of employees and contributed to their livelihoods. We need to incentivize school districts to help students find their God-given talents. Then we train them so they have confidence to be productive citizens. I am by no means an expert on what Germany is doing today, but it is clear that their education system regarding the trades seems far superior than ours. I think it would be a great place to start the conversation. I have included a good article about Germanys Vocational Training Programs in the packet I sent to the committee.

Thank you all for allowing me to speak today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

16 Nov 2018, 00:00

Paul Hockenos

How Germany's Vocational Education and Training system works

Business & Jobs Society

Most of Germany's highly-skilled workforce has gone through the dual system of vocational education and training (VET). This factsheet explains the basic principles of the system. [Updates information on BIBB website]

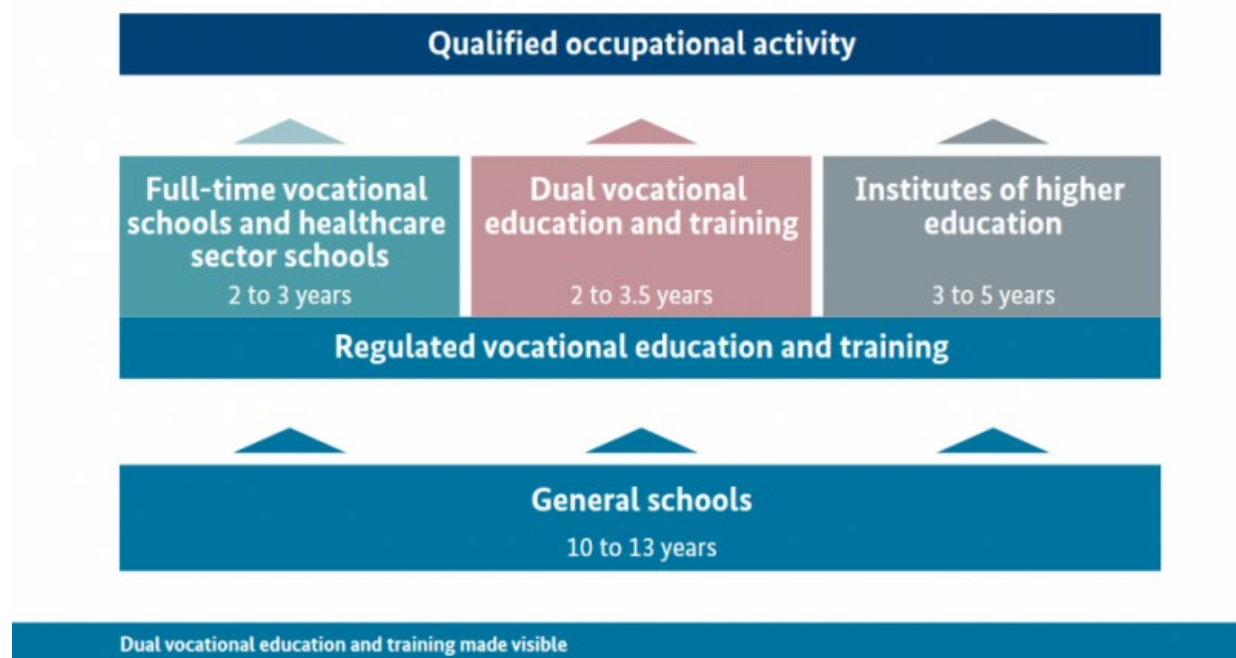
Germany's dual-track [vocational training program](#), known as the VET, is the route that [around half a million apprentices](#) in Germany take to a skilled profession every year. (There are a total of [about 1.3 million apprentices](#) training every year in Germany.)

The dual-track VET's two components are: classroom study in specialised trade schools and supervised, on-the-job work experience. Over the course of two to four years, apprentices spend a couple of days a week, or even blocks of several weeks at a time, at a vocational school (*Berufsschule*) where they obtain theoretical knowledge for their occupation of choice. (Classes also include German, English, and social studies.) At the same time, a company or public sector institution hosts the apprentices where they gain practical knowledge and hands-on experience. The novices usually spend 60 percent of their time in the workplace under supervision of a certified trainer, and 40 percent in the classroom.

The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training ([BIBB](#)) stresses that the dual system "is definitely at the heart of the German VET system," it does not cover all of its relevant aspects. The institute has put together a [detailed explanation of the system](#)'s different aspects on its website.



From school to the world of work



BIBB

More than [one-third](#) of all pupils graduating from secondary school in Germany enter a vocational training program, of which one-third go on to pursue a single-track, school-based VET and two-thirds the dual-track counterpart. Approximately [68 percent](#) of the latter system's graduates enter the workforce in the company where they were trained immediately after training.

Every year there are more than [500,000 apprenticeship](#) positions available across all sectors of the economy and public administration.

The VET boasts roughly 330 officially recognised training programs, all listed on [Planet-Beruf.net](#). The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) publishes a [list of occupations](#) and respective salaries that apprentices receive, as well as the [guide “Vocational Training in Germany.”](#)

The host companies’ pay apprentices a monthly salary, which averages nearly €800. The sum increases every year of the apprenticeship.

About [51 percent](#) of Germany’s workers are skilled workers trained in the VET. A further 11 percent of workers are master craftsmen, and vocational and technical college graduates. They are also part of the VET but not of the dual-track system. In order to enter the advanced training, one must have Berufsschule certification and several years of additional work experience. The technicians-in-training study at technical colleges (Fachschule) for two years and graduate upon passage of an examination.

Germany’s vocational schools partner with around [430,000 companies](#), and more than 80 percent of large companies hire apprentices.

According to an Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) [survey](#), 516,200 people started apprenticeships in 2015. But this left many positions unfilled. Nearly a third of businesses surveyed were unable to recruit sufficient qualified applicants for their open trainee positions. In eastern Germany, the figure was 45 percent.

NOTES

Globalism killed most of the industrial arts programs. Cheap Imports from China and countries that have figured out how to beat us are beating us. We will always have less woodworkers and welders in our country than in the past but the pendulum has swung too far. We aren't training for the future.

When an industrial arts teacher retires today most are not replaced.

We need to treat Industrial Arts like we treat sports in school.

Germany has the trades figured out.

On Shoring is changing the need for experienced tradesmen

Clients are requesting that we find import alternatives other than China.