



FIELD HEARING: INNOVATIONS IN THE SCHOOL TO SMALL BUSINESS PIPELINE

Small Business Subcommittee on Innovation and Workforce Development

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Testimony: Noel Ginsburg, CareerWise, founder & CEO

Good afternoon. Thank you for all coming here today to learn about apprenticeship. My name is Noel Ginsburg. I'm the Founder and Chairman of a local manufacturing company, Intertech Plastics and Intertech Medical. But I'm also the founder and CEO of CareerWise. Four years ago, CareerWise set out to build a youth apprenticeship system here in the United States.

The reason I founded CareerWise is the same reason you're here today—and if you take anything away from today's field hearing it should be this: apprenticeship—in particular youth apprenticeship—can be transformational. It can transform our workforce and talent pipelines. It can transform our economy and middle class. And, most importantly, it can transform the lives of our young people through opportunity.

Today, as a society we are all-in on the four-year degree as an unobstructed path to the middle class. But the reality is that there are lots of challenges along that path—it only successfully serves about 25 percent of our young people, and with the rising cost of higher education and skyrocketing student debt, it's clear those numbers aren't going to get better anytime soon.

Meanwhile, industry cannot find enough skilled workers to hire into their early-career roles. This is true of the construction trades, but it's also just as true in fields like IT, financial services and business operations. Even the workers hired from prestigious schools—graduates with the baseline theoretical knowledge in their fields—take tens of thousands of dollars and months and months to train in the practical execution of the job.

Don't misunderstand: higher education is important and valuable for many people and many professions. But not all of them.

Youth apprenticeship offers practical learning, and with it an illuminated and prestigious path to the middle class that may or may not run through college. A CareerWise apprenticeship is designed to intersect with higher ed. Apprentices graduate the program with the opportunity to earn up to a semester's worth of debt-free college credit and a focused perspective on how additional education can further their career and life goals.



The system we're building at CareerWise is more than just an education program that turns the workplace into an applied-learning environment (though it is that, too). Modern youth apprenticeship in America is smart business. It's not philanthropy—employers aren't just writing a check and leaving the details to someone else. Apprenticeship changes the paradigm of early workforce development; industry takes an active role in shaping their future workforce.

Starting as juniors in high school, apprentices spend part of the week in school in their academic pursuits, and part of the week in the workplace, learning by doing, and producing meaningful, valuable work for the employer.

Apprenticeship is different from internship. Whereas interns are often only in their roles for a short amount of time, performing low-value tasks, apprentices are trained over multiple years to step directly into early-career positions—in the CareerWise model, those roles are all high-growth, high-wage positions.

The occupations in a CareerWise apprenticeship and the integration of higher-ed coursework are intended to ensure that there are no dead ends. Apprenticeship can take a young person from the workplace to a PhD, or from the classroom to a corner office.

Apprenticeship is an options multiplier. The opportunity it presents to industry and students is made possible only through true partnership and dynamic collaboration.

Evidence that collaboration between these two very different institutions is not only possible but incredibly fruitful, is this building we're in right now. The Cherry Creek Innovation Center is the physical manifestation of just such a partnership—as well as the leadership of these pioneers in work-based learning, Scott Siegfried, Cherry Creek's superintendent, and Sarah Grobel, Cherry Creek's assistant superintendent of career & innovation.

It's in this building that the practical and the theoretical are coming together to offer more educational opportunities and strengthen America's workforce. It's career-focused centers like this one that represent the systems change—a new bridge between industry and education—that is beginning to take root across America. Finally, when students that attend the Cherry Creek Innovation Center are matched with apprenticeships, their success in their future career will be significantly enhanced and the return on investment for the participating business will skyrocket.

During the last two years CareerWise has hosted delegations from across the country to learn about our program design, to hear about the collaborative groundwork that we established through a Governor-appointed Business Experiential Learning commission, to find out about our early challenges and how they were overcome, and to see apprentices at



work and hear from their employers like Pinnacol Assurance, Home Advisor and Frontier Airlines.

These trips aren't simply fact-finding missions. The learnings the delegations take home are being put to good use. As a result, the CareerWise model has been implemented in vastly different local economies across the country. Today CareerWise New York has 85 apprentices working for companies like JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America and Amazon, and CareerWise Elkhart County in Indiana—where 80 percent of the RVs on the road today are manufactured—has apprentices working in those advanced manufacturing facilities. After the first of the year, CareerWise DC will launch as well.

A few months ago, I was moderating a panel of apprentices that work at Pinnacol Assurance in Denver. Towards the end of the session, I asked one of the apprentices how she viewed her future prior to her apprenticeship. She is African American, and attends one of the poorest performing schools in her district that has a free and reduced lunch percentage of over 90 percent.

After thinking about the question for a moment, she simply said, "I didn't think I had one." She continued: "But, I've learned that I bring value to this company and in turn, they are giving me an opportunity to build a real career and future that I couldn't have dreamed of."

You could have heard a pin drop as many of us were wiping away tears from our eyes. This young lady was just hired as a full-time employee at Pinnacol, and will earn her associate degree by the third year of her apprenticeship. Her story represents the promise of youth apprenticeship and why I believe this is a strategy that can change education and workforce in this country.

The transformation made possible by youth apprenticeship spans the macro: the economy, growing the middle class and helping America maintain the most innovative workforce in the world, as well as the micro: setting a young person on a course that may not have otherwise been available to them, and creating the space in someone's workday so that they may impart their wisdom to the next generation of workers.

Thank you for your time, and your interest in making these kinds of transformations available to every American.