



# Training Tomorrow's Chefs

BY MATT AMIS

AS DELAWARE AND THE NATION continue to reboot their economy in a COVID-19 world, never has it been more important to focus on meaningful, relevant job training.

And if any state is positioned well to make the necessary pivots, it's Delaware.

Thanks to some forward-thinking state leaders from across the public and private sectors, the First State is seen as a first-class example of nimble, on-the-ground youth job training. Delaware Pathways, the official partnership launched by former Governor Jack Markell in 2016, is seen as one of public education's biggest success stories of the last decade.

"Pathways" is an official stamp for a concept that isn't necessarily new—that is, partnerships between schools and local businesses that help high school-aged students gain real, on-the-job experience and expertise.

But Pathways' best strength is its network of partners, which encompasses

an array of state-level government and private-sector employers and the commitment from the department of education. The partners work hand-in-hand with schools to tailor student pathways to real-time job demands through the Delaware Office of Work-Based Learning.

Each industry-specific pathway—like IT, health sciences, manufacturing, teaching—comes with its own sequence of classroom courses along with common, consistent benchmarks for knowledge and skills based on specific, ever-evolving employer needs.

Along the way, students participate in various real-world career experiences that insiders call "work-based learning." Depending on the school and program, work-based learning can cover everything from traditional internships to job shadowing to guest classroom lectures, and more.

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## *The benefits are obvious: Students get hands-on experience and a network of potential job prospects, while employers get a front-row connection into its own future workforce.*

of potential job prospects, while employers get a front-row connection into its own future workforce. Members of the business community can connect into Pathways on a variety of levels, and can help inform everything from classroom curriculum to the nonacademic “soft skills” students are taught in school.

“Work-based learning is an innovative approach for enhancing classroom learning by connecting it directly to the workplace,” says Bryan Horsey, who runs Delaware’s Office of Work-Based Learning. “It works so well in Delaware because we’re so closely knit, enabling our students to be more competitive—a solution that’s a win-win for employers, students, and teachers. That’s going to become so important moving forward in the context of COVID-19 as people begin preparing for some version of returning to school and work.”

More than 8,000 students earned credit in a state model career pathway in 2017-18. Officials expect around 20,000 enrolled in 2020. The Culinary and Hospitality Management pathway is by far the most popular among students, comprising about 28 percent of that enrollment.

The culinary pathway, available at 18 of Delaware’s high schools, is bolstered by the presence of the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation and the Delaware Restaurant Association. That means our future chefs, cooks, and kitchen managers all receive the venerable “ProStart” curriculum designed by restaurant pros, which trains students on industry-specific skills that can be used in all aspects of the hospitality industry, along

with the employability skills like leadership, accountability, and teamwork.

Students can earn a handful of professional certifications and up to nine credits at Delaware Technical Community college—all before graduating high school. Critically, the curriculum includes ServSafe training and its slate of health and sanitation COVID-19 precautions.

While honing their chops, students get

to work and learn alongside some of Delaware’s most legendary chefs. The DRA’s network of chefs and restaurateurs help out by offering job shadowing and mentorship—which often blossoms into internships and job offers.

“I began my passion for cooking when I was in high school, but there were no cooking classes,” says Tom Hannum, the longtime Hotel du Pont chef who today owns Buckley’s Tavern in Greenville. “Even to have an outlet like this to find something to be passionate about—that’s the point right there.”

Hannum helps mentor the Caesar Rodney High School ProStart competition team—who go up against high schools across the state (and with enough victories, the country) in a Food Network-style cook-off. He’s one of many respected insiders involved: SoDel Concepts works with students at Seaford High School, with its top chefs giving in-school cooking demonstrations and tours of their many restaurants. Chefs from the Big Fish Restaurant Group have judged ProStart competitions.

The business community involvement is a big reason why Delaware is now seen as a national leader in connecting our young people to the range of growing industries. Want to learn more or get your organization involved? Visit [www.deowbl.org](http://www.deowbl.org). ■



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