

## EXEMPLARS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

U.S. employer involvement in the education and training of young adults beginning in high school is still fairly rare, especially in contrast to the extensive engagement of employers in countries like Germany and Switzerland. Even so, in recent years, several programs have emerged that demonstrate not only that it can happen here—but that when it does, the payoff can be enormous. The following four programs illustrate what's possible:

**U.S. FIRST** was co-founded in 1989 by Dean Kamen, one of America's most prolific inventors, to expose students to the excitement of engineering. FIRST offers four programs, beginning with students in early elementary school, and culminating in its FIRST Robotics Competition for high school students. In the robotics competition, teams of students work with adult mentors to assemble robots, and then take the finished robot to competitions where they compete against rival teams. Kamen launched the competition in a gym in Manchester, N.H. in 1992. Just 28 teams showed up. In 2011, 55,000 high school students are expected to take part. The growth has been fueled by over 3,000 corporate sponsors—including some of America's best-known companies—and 70,000 adult volunteers. It's clearly having an impact in hooking students on engineering. Surveys suggest FIRST participants are three times more likely than non-participants to major in engineering in college.<sup>41</sup>

**THE WISCONSIN YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM** began in the early 90s, and has since matured into the nation's largest apprenticeship opportunity for high school students. Under the two-year program, high school juniors and seniors complete up to 900 hours of work-based learning and related courses. Many also earn college credits. Apprenticeships are now offered in fields ranging from healthcare and manufacturing to IT, hospitality and agriculture. Apprenticeships are available in nearly half of Wisconsin's school districts, and the program serves about 2,000 students at a time. Over 75 percent of youth apprenticeship graduates enroll in a technical college or university, and over 60 percent complete their degrees, which is far higher than the national average. What's more, over 85 percent of graduates are employed after leaving

high school, and a stunning 98 percent of participating employers say they would recommend it to others.<sup>42</sup>

**THE NATIONAL ACADEMY FOUNDATION** has become a leader in exposing students to career options through its national network of some 500 career academies serving more than 50,000 students in 41 states. NAF academies focus on one of four themes: finance; hospitality and tourism; information technology; and engineering. The capstone of the NAF experience is a paid internship, typically lasting 6 to 10 weeks. The internships are provided by more than 2,500 corporate partners. NAF's track record is truly impressive. Some 90 percent of its students graduate from high school, 23 percent higher than the overall graduation rate in the schools in which they operate. More than 80 percent go on to college, and 52 percent complete their degrees in four years. Perhaps most striking, a long-term study of career academies by MDRC found that students who attended career academies earned 11 percent more per year than those who did not attend.<sup>43</sup>

**YEAR UP** is an excellent example of a small program that engages employers to help prepare students who have already completed high school. It is aimed at young adults aged 18-24 who have a high school degree or GED, but currently aren't in college or a meaningful job. Participants receive 6 months of intensive technical, academic and professional skills training that prepares them for jobs in fields like IT and financial services. They then are placed in a 6-month internship, often with major employers, at salaries averaging about \$30,000 a year. The results have been impressive: 83 percent of students complete the program, and over three-fourths have managed to find a full or part-time job within 4 months of graduation. Students also earn credits at colleges that partner with Year Up. Begun in Boston a decade ago, Year Up has now expanded to seven other cities, and serves over 1,000 youths a year, the vast majority of whom are African American or Hispanic. The program is supported by over 100 employers, who contribute over \$20,000 for each intern. And virtually all participating employers say they plan to take additional interns, and would recommend the program to other employers.<sup>44</sup>