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A Promising Work-and-Learn Model: A Case Study of the TranZed Academy for Working Students

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Introduction

In fall 2019, Maya Ramirez was starting her senior year in a Maryland high school.¹ Maya worked at a nearby retirement community 20 hours a week, and this job gave her immense satisfaction. She enjoyed the residents, and the experience aligned with her career goal of becoming a social worker. The traditional high school model of spending seven periods a day in class, taking mostly elective courses at this point, seemed like a waste of her time when she was already engaged in career exploration and gaining experience to prepare her for the next phase of her life. Frankly, Maya was tired of what she called “high school drama” and wanted to move beyond it.

James Ellison was shy around most people, but he came alive when he was pursuing his passion — photographing sports teams in action. This hobby became a paid job when James began shooting photos in various high schools

¹ Maya Ramirez and James Ellison are personas used to preserve the anonymity of the participants interviewed as part of this case study. The stories reflect a combination of actual experiences of TAWS students as described during interviews.

and universities. He may not have seen this as career exploration at the time, yet sports photography became James' career dream. However, James' situation at home was less than ideal. His parents were divorcing, and his mom lost her job. James had to add a part-time job at an electronics store to his already busy schedule to support his family. He struggled with depression and anxiety as he tried to balance full-time high school and two part-time jobs. He wanted and desperately needed to find a way to continue working without derailing his plans to finish high school on time.

In most schools, Maya and James would face no choice other than to move through a prescribed high school pathway not suited to the realities of their complicated lives. However, Maya and James both live in Montgomery County, Maryland, where the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) became the first school district to partner with The Children's Guild Alliance (TCGA) to offer a solution for high school students balancing the complexities of simultaneous work and learning. TCGA developed an innovative work and learn model, the TranZed Academy for Working Students (TAWS), which allows working teens to persist in their high school studies without disruption.

To enroll in the program, Maya and James needed to have a part-time job and a letter from their employer. In the TAWS program, students have choices about how they will finish their coursework. Maya chose to finish her credits online, which meant she could complete coursework at her own pace. Because her online teachers graded her homework within 24 hours and gave feedback to improve her learning, Maya finished her math requirement in a month instead of the typical three months at her brick-and mortar-school.

James chose to enroll in face-to-face courses at his home high school, but only attended school for the periods when his classes met. James could then work additional hours if extra shifts at the electronics store became available or new sports photography opportunities arose.

For both Maya and James, TAWS provided extra flexibility for their busy lives and offered additional support tailored to their unique needs. Beyond the flexibility of schedule, a key aspect of the model includes career coaching for students. Maya's coach expanded her career exploration and suggested she approach her employer to arrange meetings with some medical staff members. By learning more about healthcare, Maya realized she was more interested in nursing than social work. James struggled with his math course, so a TAWS tutor met with him and several of his peers to provide academic support; James surpassed his expectations and earned an A in math that semester. For Maya and James, TAWS made it possible to pursue both their career interests and a high school diploma.

When TAWS was first implemented in Maryland, about 20 percent of Maryland teens aged 14–17 were in the labor force (i.e., about 65,000 of a possible 312,000 teens).² Our nation has approached an era where learning and work must become deeply integrated to prepare individuals for a successful future. Programs like TAWS help teens establish experience in a field that interests them while acquiring the learning necessary to prepare them for their future. The TAWS model is powerful and effective, as evidenced by the experiences and outcomes of its graduates.

This paper is a case study of TAWS. It encompasses many hours of interviews with key stakeholders, including six students, four TAWS administrators/staff, four high school counselors, MCPS administrators, two potential employers, and several other stakeholders. The case study also incorporates a rigorous and comprehensive review of TAWS source documents. The paper describes the norms of the high school culture and proposes that the time of “unbundling” high school learning and support services is upon us, and takes the point of view that TAWS is an example of this conscious unbundling. This case study explores the origins of the TAWS model and the operational aspects of the program. Common themes that repeatedly arose as success factors in the TAWS model are

² TranZed Academy for Working Teens, “High School for Working Teams: Student Survey Results,” December 2014, accessed at <https://tranzedacademy.org/how-does-taws-work/>.

described and supported with examples throughout this paper. Finally, as TAWS moves into its third year, the paper explores the planned integration of the TAWS model with the burgeoning youth apprenticeship movement.

Why Now is the Time for the TAWS Model

Decades ago, education pathways and careers followed a linear trajectory. Young children would attend elementary school, move through middle school, and then in late junior high school, choose to take the college prep or vocational route in high school. In the 1960s and 1970s, baby boomers filled classrooms, and post-World War II financial incentives made college-going a dream within everyone's reach. As status and income accrued with a college education, parents' desire to see their children do well and surpass their socioeconomic status spurred thinking that attending college immediately after high school was the right choice for those who wanted upward social and economic mobility. College going became the preferred pathway to a more privileged life.

Rising tuition costs and college value are increasingly questioned;³ this comes when learning and career trajectories are moving in new directions. Increasingly, as high schools seek to serve students from more diverse backgrounds and with broader aspirations, so too are high schools broadening parents' awareness of promising careers with family-sustaining wages that spring from technical trades, as well as college degrees. Moreover, as a society, we are moving away from the idea that college is only for the 18 to 22-year-old student. Today, we know that everyone must continuously learn over a longer career and lifetime as we "surf" waves of enormous change.⁴ Work and learning are not "either-or" propositions; they are increasingly "both-and" over a longer lifespan.

Today, an individual's life trajectory is more likely not to follow a prescribed and linear path, instead, it integrates work and postsecondary learning. A

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³ The Economist, "Not what it used to be." Published on December 1, 2012, accessed at <https://www.economist.com/usa/2012/12/01/not-what-it-used-to-be>

⁴ Heather E. McGowan and Chris Shipley, *The Adaptation Advantage: Let Go, Learn Fast, and Thrive in the Future of Work*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2020.

teenager may begin working during and immediately after high school and then enroll in a community college certificate program that allows her to advance in a technical career. When she reaches a certain level, she may decide to pursue an associate degree part-time to enable her to move into supervisory roles. This may be followed by a bachelor's degree to specialize in her industry. At times, career trajectories will be horizontal or vertical and completely discontinuous — moving from one type of career to a completely different one.



Supporters of TAWS expressed the need to prepare students for this future of rapid change and discontinuity. Students that are not being well-served by traditional high schools are, by definition, not being well served by a one-size-fits-all high school experience. Instead, some students would be better served by “unbundling” the services traditionally offered by high schools and “re-bundling” in a personalized way to individual students, says Burck Smith, CEO of Straighterline. Smith is an educational entrepreneur who has created two companies that have helped lead the unbundling of education and support services in colleges — one a tutoring services company called SmarThinking, the other, Straighterline, a low-cost general education course provider with ACE® credit recommendations. According to Smith, to better serve some types of students, high schools should follow colleges’ lead, and unbundle education services such as tutoring, advising, and college counseling. In his view, students have individual needs; unbundling the monolithic high school experience allows each student to choose the services aligned with her specific support needs.

High school students lead increasingly complex lives. Some are recent immigrants to the US and must work to help their parents with necessary expenses. Others have a compelling interest in pursuing a subject outside of the high school curriculum. Some have children of their own. The common thread is that these students seek a model that meets their specific needs, allowing them

to balance their responsibilities to pursue an education and a job, while neither prioritizing nor jeopardizing one or the other.

Indeed, in the interviews with TAWS students, most referred to a fundamental disconnect with the normative high school experience. Some experienced discomfort being in the building all day with peers they have outgrown. Others are no longer connected to the high school culture and are more interested in life after high school. For a few students, a successful career already competed for their time. One student, a professional soccer player, was living in and completing his high school work from another country. There was a common theme among all of the students we interviewed. While in high school, all of them needed to work and had a strong desire to finish high school, and all of them needed a support system to help them accomplish both. All of the students interviewed were already working towards a career, education, and life goals after high school. TAWS met their needs in a way no other program could.

High schools already offer a plethora of work-and-learn models. For example, today's Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs place an increasing emphasis on internships and apprenticeships, and credit for work-based learning. In these models, "work" fits around education. With TAWS, education fits around and supports a student's work life. TAWS offers a fundamentally different approach for high school students who are already on a career trajectory.

Origin of the "High School for Working Teens"

As a proponent of dual enrollment, middle college high school programs, and other flexible, low-cost ways for Marylanders to gain an education to move into better jobs and improve their economic circumstances, State Senator Jim Rosapepe believed that the concept of a "High School for Working Teens" could be useful to the state. He formed a High School for Working Teens Working

Group with high-level leaders from education, government, philanthropy, and the private sector. The members of the Working Group brought a wide range of experience and relationships across these sectors. This group worked closely to form the High School for Working Teens (referred to as TAWS or “the TranZed Academy for Working Students”).

With a planning grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, this working group led focus groups and survey research to assess such a program’s need and desire.⁵ By late 2014, the Working Group had received input from hundreds of people, including 514 working teens, employers, and trade associations. Interested student respondents represented all social classes (14% were from families making less than \$20k per year, 31% were from families making more than \$100k per year, with a range in between), and living in every Maryland region. High school students from all socioeconomic classes reported working at part-time jobs.

The data were compelling. About 21 percent of the teen respondents overall were “very interested” in such a program, which translated to a possible 14,000 students across Maryland. At the time of the survey, about 65,000 high school students worked at least part-time and so the number of potential students was potentially larger. Not surprisingly, the number of hours students worked correlated positively with their level of interest. The majority who expressed interest also wanted an online option, reflecting a high interest in creating a flexible model. Many wanted to speed up or slow down their learning based on other life and work commitments, and a large percentage wanted the option to earn college credits while still in high school. A large majority (85%) wanted flexible hours. Career coaches were a popular option, with 78% of respondents reporting wanting one. Seventy-five percent wanted to go to school with like-minded students who have jobs.

Based on this research, the Working Group approached Duane Arbogast, chief

⁵ TranZed Academy for Working Teens, “High School for Working Teams: Student Survey Results,” December 2014, accessed at <https://tranzedacademy.org/how-does-taws-work/>.

of strategy and innovation at The Children’s Guild Alliance, which runs various youth services and programs, including charter schools and apprenticeship programs under the TranZed name. Running a high school for working teens would be a new project for the Alliance, but very much aligned with their work. Arbogast embraced the model.

The Working Group transitioned into the Founding Board of Directors of what became TAWS. One of the Founding Board members was Kathy Oliver, who at the time was the Assistant State Superintendent for Career Technology and Adult Learning at the Maryland State Department of Education. Oliver was instrumental in driving the expansion of career and technical education in Maryland to include 21st-century occupations such as broadcast communications, graphic design, environmental science and pharmacy technician. As an early proponent of TAWS, Oliver shared, “As a high school student, my summer/after school jobs, first as a clerk in a produce stand, helped me develop the people skills, the sense of responsibility and confidence that propelled me to success in both school and my profession.” She has spent her career developing a new form of working-learning so that students can prepare for “a bright future,” adding, “TAWS offers its students the platform to similarly capitalize on their early work experiences.”

Finding a school district to support such a charter school, however, would prove somewhat challenging. The biggest obstacle to creating the High School for Working Teens was the traditional school system culture and structure. High school programs are designed to serve multitudes of students, thus are less flexible than students might desire. Students are expected to be on-site, moving from class to class. If a senior has only a few required courses, her schedule is filled with electives to create a full course load. The concept of showing up to the school only for the required classes is possible but not always easy; several counselors interviewed reported that students who request this flexibility might have difficulty getting approval for it.

During the research for this paper, many respondents expressed a need to “warm up to the idea” of TAWS before becoming advocates for it. TAWS is not a traditional high school program, and therefore, some of the school counselors wanted to see how other students would benefit before referring their students. One parent mentioned her initial hesitancy about the program, concerned that her son would be unsupervised much of the day. Some educators wanted the students to focus more on learning, not a part-time job. Rosapepe and Arbogast approached several school systems and found pockets of interest, but no action, until they talked to Jack Smith, superintendent of MCPS in Maryland.

Superintendent Smith had been Maryland’s Deputy State School Superintendent and then Interim State Superintendent before taking the leadership role of MCPS. After a lifetime in secondary education teaching and administration, Smith knew a lot about high school students’ needs. As a first-generation high school and college graduate himself, Smith could relate to working students’ struggles in Montgomery County.

Smith reported that 90 percent of MCPS students graduate from high school in four years, and 95 percent graduate within five years. Of the approximately 11,500 MCPS students who graduate each year, 7,000 enroll in a postsecondary institution, but the remaining 4,500 students do not enroll in college; they pursue other training or jobs. He feels strongly that the needs of the high school population in Montgomery County are shifting, and the school system has to shift with them.

Smith saw the possibility of serving more students as the impetus for the High School for Working Teens. In 2018, MCPS contracted with TranZed Alliance to overlay services and support for working students who remained enrolled in their home high school within the county. At this point, the TranZed Academy for Working Students (TAWS) found its first partner and enrolled its first cohort of students. While MCPS serves as the initial TAWS prototype, TAWS

leaders believe school districts across Maryland and the country will find value in the model.

TAWS: The Model

A recent TAWS brochure explains TAWS “Launched in Montgomery County for hard-working high school students,” and that “TAWS is built on their strengths and turbo-charges their career path.” If a student is interested in TAWS, she must have a job and be a rising senior with a C or higher average. The student must get a letter from her employer stating that she has a job and is in good standing with the employer. Demetra Crawford, the TAWS program director, interviews the student to ensure the program and student are a good match. Parents or guardians must approve as well.

TAWS is built on several pillars. These include:

- Flexible study options and scheduling, including online, face-to-face, early college classes, or a combination;
- Self-paced curriculum for students to learn at their pace;
- Career coaching to help students explore and navigate their career options even as they learn and earn; and
- Assisting students in developing and learning to utilize social capital or the networks of individuals who can help them identify and benefit from education and career opportunities.
- On-demand academic support through tutoring.
- Support in navigating the complexities of work, school, and relationships as young people become adults.

Students are concurrently enrolled at their home high school and in the TAWS

program, allowing them to benefit from the education and support services of their home high school and TAWS. These students can take courses to complete their high school diploma in one of three ways: (1) through one of the online education providers approved by the State of Maryland, (2) through face-to-face or online courses at Montgomery College, the county's community college, or (3) by completing the courses face-to-face at their home high school. Given their responsibilities and workloads, the students are provided with more support through TAWS than a traditional high school student might otherwise receive.

As Arbogast implemented the program, he realized that students who work while completing high school might have some social capital due to their employment relationships. However, if they live in a distressed or impoverished household, they may not have the skills to benefit from their networks. Though there is no widely accepted single definition of social capital, "social relations that have productive benefits" has emerged as a common definition in the literature.⁶ Those who have the strongest social networks are likely to reap the benefits of increased access to information, resources, and influential people outside of their network. The importance of developing social capital is expressed through the adage, "it is not what you know; it is who you know." Nevertheless, knowing how to capitalize on the opportunities that arise from social capital is also critically important. Students from working-class families may not have such skills.

To remedy this, TAWS students have a career coach who meets with them early in the enrollment process to complete an individualized career exploration and development plan; coaches also help students stay accountable for their plan. This resource is critical to helping the students view their part-time work as an intentional and complementary component of their education and career exploration. The career plan is based on students' career interests and outlines a step-by-step plan they are responsible for completing. The plans are revisited

6 Tristan Claridge, "Social Capital and Natural Resource Management: An important role for social capital?" (Unpublished Thesis, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia), 2004.

and updated 3-4 times per year. The development of social capital and how to benefit from these networks is built into the plan.

As an example, one student was interested in a career in the pharmaceutical industry. His plan included exploring various career goals in the pharmaceutical field, such as a pharmacist or a pharmaceutical sales representative. He then decided to pursue a part-time job in a local pharmacy to learn about the field more closely. His career coach helped him find individuals in the pharmaceutical industry to interview for more information. Finally, he pursued dual enrollment with Montgomery College to take a biology course to start his college career as a science major. For TAWS students, college credits are a bonus; TAWS covers the cost of courses taken at Montgomery College.



The student's career coach also helps him with any employment issues he might face and will intervene with employers if the student is being asked to work too many hours or too erratic a schedule. The career coach also meets with employers once a year to evaluate the student's work abilities, including promptness, responsibility, critical thinking, and many other skills essential to a successful career. A plethora of evidence shows that aligning the curricular experience with essential employability or career-ready skills (also referred to as soft skills or 21st Century skills) enhances graduates' outcomes.⁷

Research by Robert Lerman, an Institute Fellow in the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population at the Urban Institute and emeritus professor of economics at American University, suggests that models such as TAWS make good sense. Based on his review of the research literature over the past 30 years, he concludes that young people's work experience has positive long-term consequences. But, the number of high school students with work experience

⁷ Steven C. Taylor and Catherine Haras, *Beyond Classroom Borders: Linking Learning and Work through Career-Relevant Instruction*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 2020.

has declined over time. Lerman believes that the role of employability skills is increasing in importance because not enough people are equipped with these skills when they enter the workforce.

The TAWS Student

In each of the interviews conducted for this paper, respondents were asked, “What type of student is the right candidate for TAWS?” With each interview, the answer was similar. TAWS is not for the faint of heart, the student who is not interested in working hard, or the student who has demonstrated a lack of discipline in the classroom. According to those interviewed, the student who excels in the TAWS model embodies specific characteristics.

- Has a strong work ethic
- Demonstrates grit and resilience
- Is a proactive problem-solver
- Is emotionally prepared for life after high school

For the 2019–2020 school year, 137 students applied to TAWS, and about half of the applicants were accepted based on having the characteristics that experience shows are necessary to succeed. This third cohort’s student composition is diverse: 53 of the 74 students are female, 42 students are Hispanic, 12 are African-American, 10 Asian, and nine are Caucasian. This cohort is spread across 13 home high schools in the MCPS, and students are working in hospitality, education, retail, childcare, construction, and sports. Although TAWS students have several commonalities in terms of ambition and work ethic, each TAWS student has a unique set of circumstances. Among the



“TAWS is a great program. I believe in it. It’s about unleashing potential, not fixing people.”

Jack Smith,
Superintendent of Montgomery
County Public Schools

primary reasons students gave for their need to work while in high school, many families needed their help to pay necessary living costs. Some students had undocumented parents and, therefore, the parents were working in low-paying jobs, which necessitated students supplementing the family income. In other cases, parents had divorced, and the custodial parent required more assistance from their son or daughter. Some students were already living independently and supporting themselves, and others were in families facing housing or food insecurity. In other cases, students already had careers in sports (i.e., soccer) or the arts (i.e., dancing) or were raising their children.

It is easy to make assumptions about a person based on one piece of data. For example, a student who wants to work a great deal at a job while still in high school could be perceived as not interested in pursuing college. Alternatively, if a high school student is interested in attending college, she could be perceived as wanting to take a full day of in-person courses at her high school. Time and again, students attending TAWS defied stereotypes. There is no one type of student who is interested in TAWS, nor are these students one-dimensional. This was evident in every interview.

These students were already juggling adult responsibilities and, therefore, already focused on their future and career. Their part-time job is a means to make money for necessary expenses in the short-term, yet it also provides a means to help them think about a career and gain skills along that pathway. Despite not following the “typical” high school student path, these students have a great deal going for them. It is possible to see the students’ transformation and how TAWS creates a positive pathway for achieving their goals.

It is also essential to underscore that their struggles are real and often more daunting than most might imagine for some of them. TAWS does more than select students who are resilient for the program: they support and sustain them

during their journey as needed. For the students interviewed, the support from staff was critically important. The students felt they could reach out to staff any day or evening to seek assistance. They reported getting more attention and guidance than they otherwise would in a large high school setting where one counselor might have a caseload of 300 students. One student noted that TAWS “felt like a family,” reflecting a sense that the social support ran deeper than might be possible in a program at a larger school.

Success Factors

While TAWS is only beginning its third year, apparent success factors emerged from the interviews demonstrating what makes the program so important to its students.

STRONG LEADERSHIP WITH A CLEAR VISION

From Senator Rosapepe’s initial idea and ongoing support to Duane Arbogast’s leadership to Superintendent Smith’s early adoption of the model, TAWS has benefitted from high-level vision and continued support at multiple levels of leadership in the state. As Smith noted in his interview, “TAWS is a great program. I believe in it. It’s about unleashing potential, not fixing people.” This support and enthusiasm are felt by the TAWS staff and the students who benefit from the model.

DEDICATED STAFF COMMITTED TO SUCCESS

Though the TAWS team is small, they create a demonstrable impact on the lives of students and their families. The comments from students and counselors in the students’ home high schools were uniformly positive. They can be summed up by a quote from Genevieve Floyd, supervisor of Career and Postsecondary Partnerships at MCPS, who manages the relationship between MCPS and TAWS. She works across the 25 comprehensive high schools in MCPS and ensures the high school counselors know about programs like TAWS. Floyd

summed up her view of TAWS by noting the obvious level of care for students by TAWS staff, saying, “I can’t say enough about the commitment of the staff to the students.”

STRONG INTEGRATION WITH THE HOME HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS

One of the success factors for TAWS was not planned; it happened by circumstance. TAWS was initially designed to be a standalone charter school.

When MCPS decided to sponsor TAWS, the decision was made to create TAWS as a program, managed by The Children’s Guild Alliance, and allow students to maintain their home high school connection and overlay resources from TAWS staff. Instead of a competing charter school, this model set up an equal playing field for the counselors at the home high school and the TAWS staff, where both were responsible for students’ success and worked together toward that outcome. For



students and other external stakeholders, the MCPS school counselors and TAWS program director and staff played very complementary roles. One school counselor noted that TAWS staff “goes above and beyond,” while another called the staff “amazing.” With large caseloads at their schools, counselors were happy to have the extra support of staff to support TAWS students.

Relationships are essential in a school district. Counselors who were interviewed have several programs at their disposal to refer students who need additional support. They are not likely to guide students to a program if they do not believe they will benefit. As they engaged with TAWS, they tended to start slowly, only referring one student at a time until they knew more about the program. Based

on initial students' success in TAWS, the counselors came to believe in TAWS deeply, often noting they would be referring more students to TAWS in the years ahead. While at times frustrating for its leaders, this slow but steady acceptance of TAWS paved the way for broader acceptance and future growth within MCPS.

THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES

One of the more prominent success factors of the TAWS program emerged from the interviews: the students themselves. The students in TAWS want to work, and many need to work. Home high school counselors told stories of students who worked in factories alongside their parents. One student covered her shift and then her mother's shift at a convenience store while her mother received cancer treatment. While a job was important to them, so was preparing for further education after high school.

While balancing jobs and school, a third of the graduates managed to earn a 3.5 or higher GPA. Many passed Advanced Placement courses, including calculus and English literature. Some of the occupations that graduates aspired to include criminal justice, dance and choreography, teaching, medicine and healthcare, engineering, plumbing, mathematics, biology, law, cybersecurity, physical therapy, and fashion design. This list of achievements could be representative of any high school class in America. Impressively, these achievements represent a group of students who are also working many hours at a job while completing high school. As one of the home school counselors stated, "I have seen a new level of growth in the TAWS students. It really allows them to thrive."



TAWS 2020 graduates were accepted to a variety of universities, including:

University of Maryland; Columbia University; Wellesley College; American Academy of Dramatic Arts; Howard University; Montgomery College; Morgan State University; Loyola University of Maryland; Salisbury University; Washington Adventist University; Bowie State University; Towson University; and Temple University.

Role of Employers

The leadership team of TAWS plans to engage new industries and employers more deeply in the program in its third year of operation. Healthcare is an important industry for partnerships because talent managers see the potential of high school students as a pipeline strategy. Hospitals hire thousands of new employees every year, with a significant proportion of new employees starting in entry-level jobs. According to the professionals interviewed for this paper, these entry-level jobs may start at \$16 an hour and require little training. These jobs also offer growth opportunities. Employers can look to high school students to fill shifts in the evening and on weekends that are otherwise hard to fill. Hospitals have high turnover in these positions, so it is beneficial to hire strong candidates early in their careers and train and retain them. Staff members from TAWS believe their students can be a foundational element to the talent pipeline strategy for critical industries. As Arbogast noted, “TAWS is about building a loyal employee over time.”

John Petrov, vice president of human resources for CommonSpirit Health in Kentucky, already views high school student workers as a potential talent pipeline and hires several high school student workers. Petrov stated,

“The healthcare industry and, in particular hospitals, are facing increased challenges with recruiting front line staff, especially nurses, radiology techs, lab techs, nurse aides, facility workers, and environmental services, to name a few. These are good-paying jobs with benefits. It is critical that we, healthcare employers, create opportunities for our youth interested in healthcare careers and a pathway to them. Our future workforce and ability to provide care depends on it.”

Healthcare is not the only industry that can benefit from a pipeline of talented high school students. Norm Augustine, who served as the Under Secretary of the Army and former chairman and CEO of the Lockheed Martin Corporation,

was an early supporter of TAWS. He believes strongly that sectors such as construction and manufacturing need a talent pipeline that begins with high school student workers. Augustine noted that although the manufacturing sector has shrunk in recent years, “...it still provides over ten million people with well-paying, quality jobs.” He further remarked,

“From a corporation’s standpoint, TAWS serves as an avenue to reach highly motivated young people eager to learn new skills and become loyal employees. As I learned from my experience in industry and as Under Secretary of the US Army, one important indicator of promising team members is their work ethic, as indicated by their motivation to graduate from high school, particularly when backed with certifications in specific skills. By supporting TAWS programs, employers can save money, save time, build a quality workforce, and enhance people’s lives.”

The Future is Apprenticeships

To more deeply engage with employers for students’ benefit, TAWS leadership sees the promise and potential in apprenticeships. The work to begin establishing apprenticeships with employers began just before the COVID-19 pandemic brought the nation to a standstill. Indeed, many of the TAWS students were temporarily unemployed in the spring of 2020, and some lost their jobs in the retail and hospitality sectors. TAWS leadership wants to reduce the instability of such part-time work for their students, and an apprenticeship model may be the answer.

The TAWS program aims to help students with a strong work ethic get started in their careers, and Arbogast sees the strategic shift to apprenticeships as a natural next step. He explained that apprenticeships are a structured combination of on-the-job training and education, sponsored by employers who seek a steady pipeline of talent for in-demand jobs. For students enrolled

in the TAWS program, an apprenticeship can provide training, education, and a paycheck, helping them get a head start on their career while still in high school. Apprenticeships bring part-time work and education closer together, this is at the heart of the TAWS model.

In Maryland, apprenticeships can take one of two forms, both governed by the Department of Labor. Youth Apprenticeships for high school students with part-time jobs are one avenue. The other, Registered Apprenticeships, are tailored to high school students and graduates. Apprenticeship opportunities will allow TAWS students more time to explore career pathways and choose one without committing too early (i.e., age 14) to a particular career and technical education pathway.



Arbogast hired an employer engagement manager in late 2019 to recruit employers to sponsor apprenticeships for TAWS students. The occupations most often associated with apprenticeships in the past include electrical, plumbing, and HVAC. As the apprenticeship model becomes mainstream, opportunities arise in hospitality, education, and the medical and healthcare fields. Conversations with employers are intended to help them see the value of apprenticeships as a talent pipeline strategy to fill in-demand job openings. Apprenticeships can also be a potential cost-saving mechanism for employers. By partnering with high school and community colleges to provide apprenticeships, the associated training is subsidized through tax dollars.

At the same time, high schools have not worked as directly with employers as one might hope or imagine when developing apprenticeships. The key to successful apprenticeships for high school students requires integration between employers and educators to create explicit, transparent models and a “win-win” for all concerned, including the student apprentices.⁸

8 Gail Heriot, “Apprenticeships: Useful Alternative, Tough to Implement,” Policy Analysis, No. 805, Published November 17, 2016, accessible at <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/apprenticeships-useful-alternative-tough-implement>.

Arbogast and his team are also talking with CityWorks DC, a new nonprofit in Washington, DC, focused on innovating and growing new education-to-workforce pathways. Lateefah Durant, Vice President of CityWorks DC, is launching CareerWise DC, a modern youth apprenticeship program. She agrees they have had issues in communicating the value of apprenticeships to employers. This is especially true for small- and medium-sized companies, for whom the resources to sponsor an apprenticeship may be daunting. Durant agrees that positioning apprenticeships as a talent pipeline solution for employers is the right strategy to pursue. It is not that employers are not interested in apprenticeships—they simply need support to implement them. Given Maryland’s proximity to Washington, D.C., Durant and Arbogast are exploring how TAWS and CityWorks DC might collaborate to expand the TAWS program into the nation’s capital.

This move toward Apprenticeships is in direct alignment with the main recommendation from the Maryland Commission on Innovation & Excellence in Education, a comprehensive, multi-year study and set of recommendations to build a world-class education system in Maryland, in order to power a vibrant economy with equitable outcomes for all. The preliminary report was released in January 2020, just before the pandemic’s onset. A central recommendation is to increase college and career readiness among high school students, with a particular emphasis on apprenticeships and similar forms of work-based learning. In their report, Commissioners shared,

“We envision a Maryland economy in which, by 2030, close to half our students are in apprentice and apprentice-like programs that involve much work-based learning supported by classwork tied to what is being learned in the workplace. Students will constantly apply in the workplace what they are learning in class, using state-of-the-art equipment under the supervision of expert practitioners.”⁹

⁹ Maryland Commission on Innovation & Excellence in Education, Interim Report, January 2019, Retrieved from <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5300/sc5339/000113/023600/023691/20190075e.pdf>

Opening up apprenticeships to high school students is an initiative through the Maryland Apprenticeship Program, a youth apprenticeship model offering students a graduation pathway, of which MCPS is now participating. By setting goals for student apprenticeship experiences and expanding school accountability to include work experiences and traditional college-readiness metrics, the legislature is creating the context in which apprenticeship opportunities for young people can grow.

Challenges

Despite the many successes and positive student outcomes associated with TAWS, Arbogast and his staff understand the need to continually improve the model and types of student support. The interviews shed light on four areas where the TAWS model could be improved.

MORE SOCIAL CAPITAL

According to Mary Jo Madda, creative strategy manager for Google, social capital is as essential to a career as attaining skills and knowledge.¹⁰ In her experience, for high school students to succeed, they need the resources that networks of connections can provide. She argues that a “meritocracy” is not really how society operates. According to Madda, those who are more skilled or educated do not achieve more social capital on their own merits alone. In her own experience, the networks of relationships in her life have helped her attain much of her success. She explained what schools should do to build social capital, including learning from examples such as the Cristo Rey Catholic High School System and its corporate work-study program for student interns.

A recent book entitled “Who You Know: Unlocking Innovations That Expand Students’ Networks,” by Julia Freeland Fisher, director of education research at the Clayton Christensen Institute, discusses several important ways that school systems can connect students to real-world social capital. Without a

10 Mary Jo Madda, For Students to Succeed, Social Capital Matter Just as Much as Skills—Here’s Why. Edsurge, Published on Jan 9, 2019, <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2019-01-09-for-students-to-succeed-social-capital-matter-just-as-much-as-skills-here-s-why>.

strategic approach to social capital, Fisher argues that students' social capital "remains largely determined by random luck: the luck of where children are born, whom their parents know, and whom they happen to end up sitting next to in class." Her premise is that schools must find ways to restructure and free up time for students to form relationships that create social capital, especially for underserved populations who tend to lack these important networks. Key factors include using technology to broaden students' networks, using online education for flexibility, providing credit for out-of-school work experience, and appropriately training mentors to provide students with connections to build their social capital.

While TAWS has identified the need to build more ties to social capital for their students, some of the key ideas in Fisher's book might be used as a core strategy for the program. It may be advantageous to refocus the model around "building social capital for students with a strong work ethic," giving it even greater significance in shaping their future success. That is not to say that working and learning are less important, but driving all activities from one framing question, "How can we increase students' social capital?" could be a game-changer for these students.

The core focus on social capital would be advantageous for all students from all backgrounds in a world where social capital is increasingly a cornerstone to greater success. Furthermore, building it as a core strategy would differentiate TAWS from other programs that simply provide high school students with a work-study program. TAWS does not merely add a job and career coaching to high school education; TAWS designs a working/learning/career coaching model around motivated students. Building deep connections to a social capital network, and the tools and behaviors to benefit from these networks would be transformative for TAWS students.

SERVE YOUNGER STUDENTS

Currently, TAWS only serves rising seniors. However, students as young as age 14 can begin working with a permit, and these younger students may also benefit from a more flexible schedule as sophomores and juniors. A carefully planned introduction of the TAWS model to younger students may increase participation and potential impact. When this idea arose in interviews, some concerns were raised that younger students may not have the social or emotional maturity to succeed in TAWS. While not dismissing the idea to move TAWS to sophomores and juniors, Arbogast wants to take a thoughtful and slower approach to any expansion of the model.

Many would argue that blanket statements about age groups are not useful; instead, each student's ability and desire should be assessed for fit into the program, no matter the student's age. Early and Middle College Programs at Prince George's Community College, also located in Maryland, serve high school students who wish to pursue college programs early. Through a dual enrollment pathway beginning in the ninth grade, motivated high school students can earn their high school diploma, specialized certification in healthcare, teaching, or IT, and an associate degree by the time they graduate high school. This allows high school graduates to move directly into a higher-paying job with a head start on college.

CAREER COACHES WITH MORE INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

Not too long ago, making a career choice entailed choosing from among occupations that were similar to those of our parents and neighbors. Those who grew up in farming communities often chose farming or a related field to pursue. Women could select from a gender-prescribed set of roles that included nurse, teacher, or homemaker. Choosing a career outside of one's familial experience was still limited to relatively well-known occupations such as physician, accountant or lawyer.

As the drivers of our economy change rapidly, new careers that integrate current skill sets with whole new fields are on the rise. For example, a 2019 article described 42 careers that will be popular in the future that are unheard of today.¹⁰ Some of the more intriguing careers include “algorithm bias auditor,” “tidewater architect,” “machine risk officer,” and “haptic interface designer.” In these titles one can see a hint of an available career today (e.g., architect, auditor), yet, these may be integrated into fields for which most of us know very little.

When careers are changing so quickly, career exploration must move beyond merely interpreting interest or aptitude assessments for students. Increasingly, career counselors must hone the skills of career coaches, helping students explore, assess, and experience a variety of information about themselves and about the possible career pathways they may choose to follow. Career coaches themselves must be futurists, learning about the emerging pathways and associated skill sets to help guide young persons’ career pathways in a rapidly changing period.

TAWS envisioned career coaches as a combination of career counselors and industry professionals who can lead students to explore and create a future pathway. The TAWS career coaches may benefit from a more comprehensive framework to drive their work, with deeper connections to industry and the social capital so crucial to success. Increasingly, the career coaches must spend time “in the field” learning about career paths of the future so they can help today’s students plan for a rapidly changing world. This is a challenge for career coaching at all levels nationally; as careers transform almost in real-time, the effective career coach has to teach the process of career self-development more than content: how to continuously stay on top of trends, gain additional skills, and find tomorrow’s opportunity that builds on today’s strengths and skills. Simply knowing about a large number of careers is not sufficient.

¹⁰ Teodor Teofilov. *Careers of the Future: 42 Professions of Tomorrow*. Medium, Published July 31, 2019 at <https://medium.com/swlh/careers-of-the-future-42-new-professions-of-tomorrow-5d3905f8513>.

BETTER MARKETING OF THE PROGRAM

Most of the people interviewed for this paper agreed that more students could benefit from the program if only more parents, counselors, and students knew about TAWS. The primary way that students learned about TAWS was through a conversation with a counselor at their home high school. Counselors situated at students' home high schools learned about the program through in-service days when new programs were introduced to them by staff from MCPS or by a presentation from a staff member from TAWS directly. Now, with two years of successful TAWS graduates, word-of-mouth is growing among students as well.

Although word-of-mouth is one marketing method, it does not reach parents or students early enough, according to those interviewed. Students were often referred to TAWS as a crisis solution when a schedule conflict arose between school and the job. A more intentional, comprehensive, and proactive communication plan that informs parents, counselors, and students directly and earlier in high school could help those students who can proactively join the program to make the education and career progress they desire.

Specific tactics to strengthen the marketing of TAWS might include:

- Communicate early to students and parents via email, brochures in the postal mail, invitations to webinars describing the program, and even phone calls might help more students benefit from TAWS.
- Expand employer outreach to increase demand for the TAWS program as more students are hired by employers who recommend the program.
- Communicate directly to students who seek early work permits via a brochure or letter.
- Build a database to link students' interests with employers offering work aligned to students' areas of interest. TAWS can serve as a conduit between student interest inventories and aptitude assessments.¹²

12 One such notable aptitude assessment is the US military's Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). Every year, almost a million high school students complete the ASVAB to help identify a good occupational fit for the military. Access the ASVAB at <https://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/asvab>.

- Create more direct connections between students interested in the military and the TAWS as a high school option that might benefit them most.¹³

Conclusion

If there were any doubt that rapid and far-reaching changes in education and the workforce are here to stay, COVID-19 cleared them away. Most K-12 school systems, colleges and universities rapidly converted to online or remote teaching earlier this year, and this shift to a remote learning environment continues into the 2020-21 academic year.

Millions of Americans are out of work and seeking rapid re-training to prepare for a new career. Those who have kept their jobs are increasingly working from home if their roles allow. Essential workers are keeping the services running that allow the rest of us to isolate. What was unimaginable less than a year ago is referred to as “the new normal.”

This backdrop frames the future for all of us, including high school students. Students in TAWS are no exception; in fact, they are often juggling responsibilities at the very crossroads of COVID-19 and the resulting economic downturn. TAWS was prescient in supporting students in ways that uniquely prepare them to surf the waves of obstacles that the current pandemic heralds. Indeed, TAWS pre-dated, by two years, a report by the Urban Institute entitled “Making Education and Employment Work for High School Students.”¹⁴

In this paper, the authors provide a toolkit for school systems that wish to support high school students with adult responsibilities. The authors of the report conclude that new models like TAWS will have benefits for all. Especially at a time when equity concerns are growing in the United States, it

¹³ In 2018, Maryland’s governor signed the *Career Preparation Expansion Act* into law to allow a student or their parent/guardian to release their ASVAB scores to certain apprenticeship programs and employers.

bears repeating this sentiment from the Urban Institute report, “Putting the systems in place to facilitate better access to employment for young people with adult responsibilities would have the added effect of better preparing whole generations to succeed in the economy and could reduce the substantial racial and ethnic inequalities in early access to employment.”

By investing in our youngest working learners in America, we can help grow a new, more diverse, and inclusive middle class through promising programs like TAWS even as we recover from COVID-19. Economists and policy experts on both ends of the political spectrum believe that a growing and more diverse middle class is in everyone’s best interests. The economic pie expands as more individuals are at the table. Jim Tankersley, economics reporter for the New York Times, in his recent book that explored how to bring back the middle class, concluded that we need efforts toward “...building a nation where every child is invested in, where hard work is rewarded, where talent rises freely and easily, unhindered by discrimination.”¹⁵

The TAWS case study comes as America faces the dual crises of the COVID-19 epidemic and the racial reckoning in cities across the country, both of which are exacerbated by deep persistent inequities in social and economic achievement. At a time when we need to reduce barriers to success for high school students with adult responsibilities, the barriers increased mightily. The need for TAWS as a model that can provide a ray of hope to young adults, who desperately need supportive pathways to a brighter future, is greater than ever.

Students in more school districts across the country could find a program like TAWS beneficial. It will take significant resources to grow the TAWS model; this includes educating policymakers, school personnel, employers, parents, and students about its potential. The authors concur with the Urban Institute report, “...we are hopeful that schools can emerge from these extraordinary circumstances with stronger will and capacity to serve students who need

14 Molly M. Scott, Jessica Shakespeare and Kristen Porter. *Making Education and Employment Work for High School Students: A Toolkit for Systems That Support Young People with Adult Responsibilities, with Benefits for All*, Urban Institute, 2020.

15 Jim Tankersley. *The Riches of this Land: The Untold, True Story of America's Middle Class* (Public Affairs, Hachette Book Group. New York, 2020).

more support and flexibility to succeed.” But resources to support students are dwindling due to a depressed COVID-19-impacted economy and withering tax base. The TAWS “high touch, high tech” program has so much potential to benefit more young adults with adult responsibilities but will increasingly have to compete for scarce resources. If philanthropic organizations and other sources of funding would invest in programs like TAWS, many more young people with adult responsibilities will have a fighting chance to work, learn, and succeed.





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