

Eric Neal:

Welcome to State Support Team 11 Podcast. I'm your host Eric Neal. Today, we are joined by Matthew Longfellow. Matthew is the apprenticeship service provider, at Apprentice Ohio, at the Department of Jobs and Family Services. Welcome Matthew, how are you?

Matthew Longfellow:

Thank you, Eric. I'm very well, thank you for having me today.

Eric Neal:

It's great to have you on, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and the work you do at Apprentice Ohio?

Matthew Longfellow:

Yes, I'm an apprenticeship service provider within the unit called Apprentice Ohio, and we're housed within of course, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, office of Workforce Development. I personally have been with Apprentice Ohio for about six years now. And what I do specifically at this moment is I work with organizations that wish to put together what are called OSAC or Ohio State Apprenticeship Council, recognized pre-apprenticeships. These organizations can be everything from traditional high schools, career technical centers, education, service centers, or even other third party organizations. I Recognize pre-apprenticeship. It's a workforce development tool that connects education with the workforce.

Eric Neal:

Okay. So can you tell me a little bit about the apprenticeship pathway, and what opportunities the different levels provide for students?

Matthew Longfellow:

Yes, absolutely. Starting off with recognized pre-apprenticeship. This is an opportunity for students to gain a bit of technical knowledge and an official work based learning experience, which prepares them for the workforce and in hope to connect them with a registered apprenticeship, for after high school. Now, what a registered apprenticeship is as I mentioned, it is a workforce development tool that employers use to attract, train and retain their good employees. And really when you connect the two, it enables employers within registered apprenticeship to encourage these pre-apprentices, and to come to their workspace and attract them in, so that they might be able to be that next generation of skilled, qualified, motivated worker for them.

Eric Neal:

Great. So how does that work with, say there's students that do the pre-apprenticeship and they figure, "I don't want to go all the way to the full apprenticeship." Does that still prepare them for the workforce to be able to go out and do a job at a little bit higher than just an entry level?

Matthew Longfellow:

Yes, Eric, that's a great question. And there's value in a young person coming right out of high school, knowing what they don't like to do, and don't want to do, as much as them finding something they absolutely love to do. So that experience still prepares them for the workforce. They get opportunities

to interview in most cases for these pre-apprenticeships. So they're coming out of high school with a little bit under their belt already, that's prepared them to enter the workforce. So if they don't wish to continue into a registered apprenticeship, they don't have to, but their opportunity, they know it could be there for them if they wanted to. And that's what the employers want to see, is they want to see people developing that sense of where their career wants to go. Because passing through a registered, I'm sorry, pre-apprenticeship to a registered apprenticeship, really puts a person on a pathway for a future in demand career.

Eric Neal:

No, definitely. I think it's great to give people that test drive in a way also, like what is this really about? Is this something I'm interested in? And I think it's also just great because with the way that college is not necessarily for everyone, and we do have all of these, like you said, in demand career fields that need skilled workers. And to be able to set somebody up with an option to say, "If I try this out and I don't like it, maybe I do want to go to college or try something else, or maybe I want to go into another field." But then to have that connection, to be able to get into apprenticeship program where you, like you said, you're taking off on something that will be able to help you have a strong financial, stable life and be able to provide for yourself and your family throughout the rest of your life.

Matthew Longfellow:

Yeah, absolutely. The really neat thing about the apprenticeship style learning model is more or less, it's about an 80, 20. 80% hands on working, and about 20% of targeted education. So as I like to say, and I think this is important, not just for maybe the parents to the parents of high school students, to realize that apprenticeships aren't an escape from education for their children. It's a different form of higher learning. So once they leave high school, they'll continue to learn and develop themselves, but it may not feel like it because they're getting the hands on work experience, learning that trade, whatever that trade may be, and I'll be allowed to tell you about some of those, but it's going to be more meaningful for that individual because they're in a career field that they enjoy.

Matthew Longfellow:

So definitely a different form of higher education. They'll still get a little bit of classroom time, and that could even result in college credits, industry recognized credentials, sometimes even associates degrees. So there's real opportunity for someone to continue to grow if they wish. So that's why a pre-apprenticeship pipeline starting in high school, continuing on to registered apprenticeship in the workforce is a very valuable thing, for someone who's maybe not hoping to test the waters by paying money at a college, try something they may not like. So it's a really useful tool for not only educators putting their students on that pathway, the pre-apprentice, to registered apprentice person, and the employer. It's a perfect marriage of all three.

Eric Neal:

That's a great way of putting it. I hadn't really thought of it in that way, but it is just a different form of higher learning. And when you think about the jobs of the future and the positions, I'm thinking Intel coming to central Ohio and needing loads of skilled workers to first build the facility, but then operate it once it done, what are some of those apprenticeship fields that they can get into.

Matthew Longfellow:

Well I think you'll be surprised, and the folks listening will be surprised. Normally we have our big industries such as manufacturing, and construction trades, and they are kind of the staples. And they have a robust amount of participants, but we also have everything from information technology, which is rapidly growing throughout the state, healthcare occupations are taking off as well. Those are the two big ones we're seeing in growth. And beyond that, we had everything from firefighting, law enforcement and then about everything in between. So it's a pretty remarkable group. It's not your traditional envisionment of what an apprenticeship is anymore. It spans many industries.

Eric Neal:

That's great, you mentioned some of these and I'm seeing a lot of overlap with the Career and Technical Centers. What connection do you have with the work that's happening in those Career and Technical Centers?

Matthew Longfellow:

Well, most specifically is when a Career Technical Center is ready to explore putting together a recognized pre apprenticeship. I offer them a tutorial, or an introduction to recognize pre-apprenticeship, which I hold twice a month on the first Monday and the third Wednesday. So I hold those routinely to make sure I get everybody in and up to speed on their knowledge, to make the right choices. So we want them to be prepared for what they're getting into. Beyond that, I walk them through the process of putting together a very simple outline called an Operating Plan.

Matthew Longfellow:

And then once we get them to an approval point where their program is up to speed, and they're ready to launch things, I provide them technical support, if they have any. But the really great thing is when they adopt, and OSAC recognize pre-apprenticeship through us here at Apprentice Ohio, it doesn't really have to look too much different from maybe the work based learning they're already doing. We just have the special aspect involved of linking them to the workforce and connecting people to registered apprenticeships to continued learning. It's very special.

Eric Neal:

Yeah. I could see how that would be really beneficial because like you said, most of the work is already happening in there. It's really just about them kind of fine tuning or enhancing a little bit what they're doing, and it goes along with their mission. Their mission is to give students not just the skills, but then that access to those career opportunities outside of school. And this sounds like it's just a direct shot once they partner with you right out of the CTE into those apprenticeships.

Matthew Longfellow:

Yeah, absolutely.

Eric Neal:

Awesome. So how do you partner with The State Support teams to improve outcomes for students?

Matthew Longfellow:

Well I was very fortunate shortly after I came on board here at The Apprentice Ohio Unit, to get invited and to a job fair back when those were more common than they are today, but I got acquainted with

them, I wasn't familiar up to that point. And then once I learned who they were, their mission, and how they support education throughout the state, I began to develop some good connections and relationships with the State Support Teams and they were so kind, and always included me in events, such as the job fairs.

Matthew Longfellow:

I was fortunate enough to go to some of the regularly scheduled meetings to present. I think most specifically towards individuals, maybe with disabilities or limitations, speak to them about how this could still be applicable to them, because we do support and encourage organizations, schools, and employers to embrace populations with disabilities, because this is a program for everybody.

Eric Neal:

No, absolutely. You hear a lot in the news, and in the education field these days about DEI, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and what I've come to learn, and what I think a lot of organizations and businesses are learning is that, it's not something that you do just for PR, or just to be nice or something like that. But that the organizations that are truly invested in DEI and make opportunities available to people with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups. It's actually good for business as well. Employees are happier, those businesses make more money, they retain employees at a higher rate, their employee satisfaction is higher. So I think it's great to be able to show them and help them connect with some of those groups that are underserved.

Matthew Longfellow:

Yeah definitely. And I see it as a tremendous value add to employers who are seeking out these pockets of talent, who are motivated to learn, who are motivated to work. This will really help them overcome the challenges that we face today in getting people to engage with the workforce is finding these pools of talent, which maybe had once been viewed as unconventional, or uncommon, they are there. We just have to make sure we connect and encourage the thinking that we have these wonderful people in all these pockets' talent, all these human resources out there who can grow our organizations and be a huge factor in success.

Eric Neal:

Definitely. Well, I love that we're able to partner with you on that. I think it's just good for everyone. So I want to thank you again for joining us today. If people would like to know more about you and the work that you do, where should they go?

Matthew Longfellow:

Absolutely. And I would encourage everybody to go check out our website. It's apprentice.ohio.gov, very simply. And when you go there, you'll find resources for career seekers, you'll find resources for pre-apprenticeships. Now this is more geared towards maybe the organization looking to form one, but if you're a career seeker and you want to find resources for registered apprenticeships, we have that there, we have information for employers. And then also, if you want to reach out and contact me, please go to the contact section because you'll see a list of not only myself, but my teammates throughout the state. I currently handle all of the recognized pre-apprenticeship pieces. Thankfully though, we have a brand new teammate named Suzanne Gordon, which you'll be able to reach her the same way you reach me. And she will be focusing on recognized pre-apprenticeships as well, but check out our website at apprentice.ohio.gov.

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Eric Neal:

That's great. Well, thank you again. We really appreciate it.

Matthew Longfellow:

Absolutely. Thank you for having me, Eric.

Eric Neal:

Well that wraps up this episode of the State Support Team 11 Podcast. If you'd like to know more about us and the work we do here at SST 11, go to our website, sst11.org. Give us a call at 614 753-4694. Or hit us up on Twitter, we're @SSTRegion11. If you'd like to get a hold of me, I'm at E-R-I-C. N-E-A-L @ E-S-C-C-O.org. Until next time, thanks for listening.