

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jessica Kirby, Partners in Progress  
Phone: 250-816-3671  
Email: [press@pinpmagazine.org](mailto:press@pinpmagazine.org)



### High school sheet metal training programs increase career readiness

Young people today are experiencing more anxiety than those of previous generations when considering their future employment opportunities. Instability that arose due to the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded this problem, as reported by the report [\*Youth and COVID-19: impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being\*](#). Prospects for youth from low income families are even worse.

Two partners the sheet metal trade—the Sheet Metal Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART) and Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association (SMACNA)—are doing their part to address such issues by introducing programs aimed at high school students, parents, teachers, and career counselors. The programs educate about rewarding career opportunities available within the sheet metal industry, while—at the same time—making entry into the trade more accessible.

“Teachers today are more receptive to trade school than ever,” says Vince Alvarado, business manager/financial secretary-treasurer for SMART Local 49 in New Mexico. “They have witnessed our industry remain unaffected, and in fact thrive, through the pandemic.”

This is a very different situation than even 10 years ago. “Back then, counselors and the American Federation of Teachers thought trade schools were for dummies and they pushed all students to pursue college degrees,” Alvarado says. “There’s a realization now that higher education isn’t for everyone. After looking at our curriculum, they see us in a different light. We offer worthwhile training along with a career path that includes good pay and benefits—from healthcare to a pension.”

All that doesn’t matter, though, if it is too difficult to enter the trade. SMACNA and SMART are smoothing the process. “We realized having a prerequisite of a high school diploma to enter the trade was putting us on the back foot,” Alvarado says. “The world has changed. We are putting a career path together that doesn’t require an apprentice to have a high school diploma or GED.”

SMART Local 263’s Joint Apprenticeship Training Center in Iowa is implementing a similar program that get young people on an early career path while also providing trade school credits. “High school students who like working with their hands need to be shown there is an alternative to taking on the debt that comes with higher education,” says Ben Watson, project manager for SMACNA-member Climate Engineers. “Students can start an apprenticeship and get paid. If they realize in two years that the program is not for them, they can still go back to college.”

Neither the New Mexico training program nor the one in Iowa is unique. There are similar examples all across the country. For example:

- In Oregon, SMART Local 16 is working to implement a direct entry program for high school students
- In Ohio, SMART Local 24 and the Ohio State Apprenticeship Council have created a program

where students can interview for the school-to-apprenticeship program at the end of their junior year. If successful, they end their senior year with the first-year apprenticeship under their belt.

These programs provide the added benefit of shining a light on the realities of working in the trade. “We have people in the industry who are 20 years old and putting a down payment on their first house,” says Ben Wood, training coordinator for SMART Local 16. “There are journeypersons who are making \$100,000 a year. By joining us, kids are still getting college credits, and at the end of the five years, they have a guaranteed job and a career.”

SMART Local 33 and SMACNA contractors in Ohio have found great success working alongside vocational schools in the Greater Cleveland area, the City of Cleveland School District, and some suburban school systems to involve more students in sheet metal apprenticeships.

“It’s not common knowledge that these are paid internships, so we are getting the word out,” says Thomas E. Martin, president of T.H. Martin, Inc., who has been working alongside Al Simonitis, training coordinator at SMART Local 33’s training center. “Over the years, we have engaged more than 20 high school students, 85% of whom have entered into the trade. In fact, we have three or four individuals who became foremen for us who came through this exact route.”

---

---

The International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART) and the Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors’ National Association (SMACNA) have a labor-management partnership that is more than 75 years old. The goal of these Partners in Progress is to maintain an effective cooperative effort that demonstrates their expertise in the heating ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC), architectural metal, and industrial sheet metal markets. For additional information, visit [pinp.org](http://pinp.org)