

AACC, Labor Dept partner with industry to expand, scale apprenticeships



By Autumn A. Arnett

Nov. 21, 2017 <https://www.educationdive.com/news/aacc-labor-dept-partner-with-industry-to-expand-scale-apprenticeships/511440/>

- A forthcoming Memorandum of Understanding between four major companies, the U.S. Department of Labor and the American Association of Community Colleges will expand apprenticeship programs for students around the country.
- Officials from IBM, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and Lincoln Electric said they are eager to work with community colleges to help close some of the skills gaps that exist and build a stronger, more diverse pipeline into the workforce.
- The increased emphasis coincides with the Trump administration's growing focus on apprenticeships, which included the inaugural convening of the President's Task Force on Apprenticeship Expansion November 13.

The day after the president's task force convened, U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos called for a "major shift" in higher education that would include a greater emphasis on apprenticeship programs at the Wall Street Journal CEO Council conference in Washington. DeVos said "we have stigmatized" career and technical education programs for years, when in reality, many students could benefit from such programs — and so could the workforce.

Neither higher education nor the workforce can afford to continue operating in silos. Community colleges have traditionally had stronger ties to the workforce, and the renewed interest from the White House provides an opportunity for four-year institutions to be more forward-looking about the ways they collaborate with industry to provide a more diverse, better qualified pool of candidates. If private industry could better trust colleges and universities to prepare graduates with the skills they need to succeed in the workforce, higher ed would face fewer attacks on relevance and ROI. Collaboration between the sectors, such as that which is developing in the Dallas region, would save both sides time and money and promote a stronger regional and national economy.

However, while an expanded emphasis on apprenticeships is good for everyone — particularly one that involves higher ed and industry working together, rather than leaving the education component totally to local unions or corporate schooling — it is important to ensure such programs don't result in a sort of tracking that perpetuates the idea of a definite worker class versus manager class along racial and socioeconomic lines. Or, in the words of California Community Colleges Chancellor Eloy Oakley, we don't want to create a situation in which people with degrees are making decisions about who does and doesn't need to obtain one.