



**Alabama Department of Youth Services School District  
Career & Technical Education Work-Readiness Training Program**

Background

The Alabama State Department of Education provides educational services to adjudicated youth through the Alabama Department of Youth Services (DYS) School District 210. Over the past five years, DYS has provided services for an average of 1800 students, approximately 80% of whom are male, statewide each year. The majority of these young men are between 16-17 years of age and a percentage of them will be housed at the Mt. Meigs Campus in Mt. Meigs, Alabama. Mt. Meigs Campus students attend Lurleen B. Wallace School and have opportunity to participate in career and technical education (CTE) programs. The typical Wallace School student is a 17 year old ninth-grader, academically two grade-levels below average performance, with a median adjudication of 6-9 months. All students who have attained their high school diploma or general education diploma (GED) are enrolled full-time within a CTE program. Likewise, those students still working towards their high school diploma are eligible to enroll in a CTE elective.

Over the last six years, Wallace School has experienced more than a 50% decline in CTE program offerings. The loss of programs has continuously challenged the district to find new and creative solutions to common educational problems experienced by many districts across the nation. In 2012, the Youth Services CTE Coordinator conducted a programmatic needs assessment and shared the findings and concerns with the superintendent of schools and the CTE advisory council. The major question was how to best provide high quality training and transition services according to the unique needs of our special population in the midst of increased student-teacher ratios, limited funding and reduced programming, all while addressing academic deficiencies, behavioral challenges and student apathy? The inquiry yielded two requests from the CTE Coordinator on behalf of the local CTE programs:

- 1) For the School District to assist in development of curricula that would supplement our CTE programs by providing continued basic academic instruction, in addition to job-readiness skills, for our adult education students; and
- 2) For the Youth Services CTE Advisory Council to support the development of a new comprehensive instructional model that would maximize our limited resources through cross-curricular collaborations.

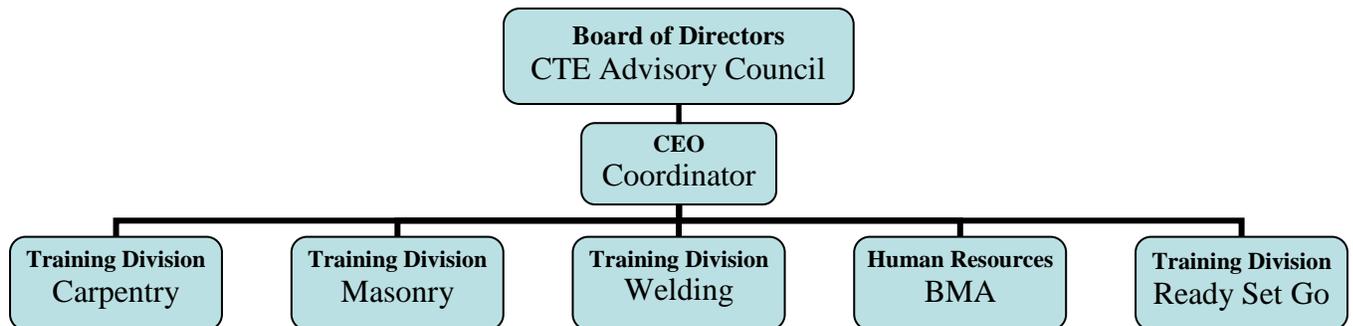
The responses resulted in a new two-prong CTE curriculum approach through a unique simulated workplace model named CraftTrain©.

## CraftTrain©

CraftTrain©, a Youth Services’ student incentive work-readiness training program officially rolled out at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. The CTE Coordinator presented the conceptual model for CraftTrain© to the Youth Services CTE Advisory Council and it was adopted as part of the council’s continuing program of work. The primary goal of the council is to help prepare DYS students for transition from school to work and/or postsecondary academic opportunities. This is accomplished partly through development of program operational strategies that will help students become well-adjusted members of society who contribute to meeting the economic and social demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The core belief behind the CraftTrain© student incentive work-readiness program is that learning is optimal when students can readily see its value.

As shown in Fig. 1 below, CraftTrain© is specifically designed to operate under a company model that combines both academic and technical instruction, using nationally recognized third-party curricula, and hands-on training within a value-added workforce environment. The company model allows for programmatic structures that create quality connections between high-demand, high-wage occupations and students seeking gainful employment and/or continuing education. The design also helps students to learn at their optimum rate through engagement in an authentic learning environment allowing demonstration of employability skills, leadership attributes, and financial literacy.

**Figure 1:** CraftTrain© Company Model



## Ready Set Go (RSG)

In efforts to develop positive student engagement while supporting work-readiness skill-attainment, the Ready Set Go (RSG) curriculum provides students with applied soft-skill development that complements their technical training, academic enrichment, and transitional service needs. Students are guided through formal processes of employment and school applications, learning workplace behaviors and expectations, and personal goal-setting. As illustrated in Fig. 2 on the next page, all career tech students participate in the RSG activities as part of the CraftTrain© continuum. The continuum of services begins with student interest in an

identified career tech program, company orientation, simulated on-the-job training, continuing education, and company post-orientation.

**Figure 2:** The CraftTrain© Continuum Model



Prior to enrollment [hire] in a CraftTrain© division, the new student [prospective employee] must attend new employee orientation, complete the new hire packet, and complete and submit all relevant forms to Human Resources. All students [employees], both new and returning, must attend CraftTrain© Orientation before they may advance from their entry level of employment. Students [employees] will be notified of the time and day they are scheduled for the orientation class.

All new employees will be paid [earn CraftBucks] at the current minimum wage level during completion of their entry-level probationary period. Positions of advancement that require specific levels of skill attainment will be paid at the appropriate level according to current Labor Market Information Wages and Salary data for the respective position by trade. Employees will receive their earned bi-monthly pay on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of each month. Accumulated CraftBucks may be redeemed for CraftTrain© company incentive items and activities. Each employee is responsible and accountable for being present, on-time, and actively engaged during their work shifts [scheduled classes], and is responsible for scheduling their 9-week performance management review [progress report] with their program supervisor. Upon program completion [attainment of technical certification(s), credentials, and/or prior to release from Youth Services],

each employee will return to the RSG division for post-orientation services and preparation for transition back to home, the workforce and/or postsecondary education.

### Certification and Credentialing

By the summer of 2013, Youth Services CTE had established the Wallace School as a WorkKeys training site, an Accredited Training and Education Facility (ATEF) by the National Center for Construction and Education Research (NCCER), and a Microsoft IT Academy site. The broad components and core competencies of these adopted third-party business and industry certifying agencies set the curriculum framework for CraftTrain©. Additionally, the curriculum seeks to address the current employability demands of business and industry; provide daily classroom instruction centered on project-based learning, real-world application, and evidence-based practices, and meet the collective and individual needs of students through transition services, differentiated entry-level competencies for instruction and promotion, and motivation through incentives. The model incorporates design elements that would: (1) meet standards of national certification and credentialing for students, (2) allow at minimum, attainability of entry-level certification/credentialing within 6 months of adjudication or clearly describe rationale for longer or shorter matriculation, (3) emphasize the importance of employability skills, leadership, teamwork, and financial literacy, (4) facilitate seamless transition for students from DYS to school and/or the workforce, and (5) maximize students' successful transfer of knowledge and skills from the classroom to the workplace.

### CraftTrain© Aftercare Mentorship

Select students participating in the Aftercare Mentorship program will have accomplished and exhibited most or all of the following attributes:

- Received a high school diploma or earned a general education diploma (GED)
- Obtained a technical and/or work-readiness credential
- Identified as academically prepared to enter a post-secondary institution
- Shown propensity to exhibit model behavior in the presence of their peers and the DYS community
- Received official notice of their pending release from Youth Services

The mentorship program represents the culminating hallmark experience for a CraftTrain student, the provision of mentorship through seamless transition from Youth Services to a high-skill, high-wage, high-demand workforce opportunity and/or postsecondary education. Aftercare students are placed within specific business and industry partnerships where they are supervised and mentored by a pre-identified worksite mentor that reports regularly to the CraftTrain© supervising mentor. Determination of the length of the aftercare mentorship is decided on a case-by-case basis as to what best responds to the unique needs of each student. At the heart of the success of CraftTrain© is its attention to the needs of the whole child. Full cooperation and input from all stakeholders such as DYS agency personnel, school district personnel, the CTE advisory council, program advisory committees, parents/guardians, and the juvenile courts systems, help to foster the personalized success stories for our adjudicated youth.

As CraftTrain© continues to strengthen its training components, increase business and industry partnerships, and expand transitional support services for its at-risk population, we gratefully acknowledge the tireless efforts and contributions of the Youth Services CTE Advisory Council, the Alabama State Department of Education Office of Career and Technical Education & Workforce Development, and the support of the Alabama Department of Youth Services and Robins & Morton.

For more information about CraftTrain©, Youth Services' career and technical education work-readiness training program, please contact:

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