Building Stronger Pathways to Retail Careers Initiative

What is the Building Stronger Pathways to Retail Careers Initiative?

The goal of the Achieving the Dream (ATD) Retail Careers Initiative, funded by the Walmart Foundation, is to prepare students for middle-skill retail careers in their communities. Middle-skill retail positions are those that require more than a high school credential, but less than a bachelor’s degree.

Why Retail?

According to the National Retail Federation:

- Retail is estimated to create 1.1 million new jobs by 2022.
- Supporting 1 in 4 U.S. jobs.
- Employing over 15.4 million workers across the United States.
- Contributing $2.6 trillion to the annual GDP; retail is vital to the nation’s economy.

A Look at the Numbers

Findings from a 2015 Network Survey

ATD conducted a network survey of over 200 community colleges in order to gain a better understanding of the work these institutions are doing to create clearer pathways for students into middle-skill retail positions. Sixty-two percent of these colleges offer a retail program of study at their institution.

A High Demand for Middle-Skilled Workers in the Retail Sector

Colleges in the ATD network were asked about the demand for middle-skilled retail employees in their region. The results show:

- 42% high - very high
- 14% low or none
- 44% moderate

“This initiative helps students realize that retail is not just working in the mall, sales and retail is all-encompassing over a variety of industries and sectors. We are able to help our students establish great careers, and we are also able to provide our regional employers with better candidates for the roles they need to fill. It’s a win-win for all!”

Steven Gross
Professor and Program Manager
Marketing at Broward Community College
A Sampling of Employer Engagement

The following employers are collaborating with community colleges across ATD’s network to cultivate retail pathways coursework and provide on-the-job training and employment opportunities for students.

Amazon
American Eagle Outfitters
AT&T
Best Buy
Boeing
Chase
Chevron
City Furniture
Costco
CVS Caremark
Dick’s Sporting Goods
Dillard’s
Dollar General
Food Lion
Fred Meyer
Fresh Brands
General Electric
Home Depot
Hyatt Corporation
Marriott Hotels
Kohl’s
Kroger
L.L. Bean
Limited
Lowes
Macys
MGM
Nordstrom
Publix Supermarket
Ross
Safeway
Sears
Target
Time Warner
Universal Orlando
Walgreens
Walmart Stores
Walt Disney Co.
Westin Resort & Spa

“Those retail pathways and this grant show the direct connection between education and employability. By integrating stackable and corresponding credentials into the pathway, students get the confidence to keep going at their own pace after earning that first credential. As they continue to earn credits and build work experience, they see that there will be a tangible result -- a well-paying career -- at the end of the road for them.”

Gary Gray
MBA, Instructor and Program Advisor at Umpqua Community College

81% of survey respondents noted that local retail employers hired graduates from their colleges’ retail program.

Most survey respondents noted that individuals who participate in their retail programs go on to obtain middle skills level positions such as:
- Retail Management/ Supervisor
- Sales Assistant/ Associate
- Customer Service Representative

On average, these institutions offered 5 certificate or degree programs in retail.

The range was from 1-20.

Respondents reported that many students were able to go into the retail workforce and secure a middle-skills level position if they already had retail work experience.

However, individuals who did not have such experience were more likely to obtain an entry-level position after the completion of their program.

“I am so grateful for the opportunities this grant and the START program have offered me and the impact it has made on my life. It put me at the doorstep of gaining employment and helped me to get my goals in perspective. I am not going to stop exploring my educational opportunities. I am going to keep all my educational options open and I plan to pursue my bachelor’s degree – I know I can do it!”

Dwight Evans
Student at Durham Technical Community College

Highlights from the 2015 Survey