ProStart
Providing High School Students the Necessary Skills To Be Future Restaurant and Foodservice Leaders

MODEL SUMMARY
The ProStart program is a nationwide, industry-driven career and technical education program for high school students interested in pursuing a career in the foodservice industry. Through two years of classroom instruction and 400 hours of paid training, students learn the essential tools and techniques of the industry, including safety, food preparation, cooking, nutrition, ordering, inventory, restaurant management and marketing.

BACKGROUND
ProStart is the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation’s (NRAEF) cornerstone program. The program is a two-year career and technical education culinary and restaurant management program for high school students. It provides the skills needed to succeed in the foodservice industry to more than 118,000 high school students in 1,700 high schools across 50 states, the territory of Guam and Department of Defense Education Activity schools (located in Europe and Asia).

The program is administered through NRAEF in partnership with state restaurant associations and members of the restaurant industry, including the world’s leading casual dining restaurant company, Brinker International (owner of Chili’s® Grill & Bar and Maggiano’s® Little Italy®), and third-generation restaurant owner Peter Sclafani, executive chef and co-owner of Ruffino’s Restaurant in Baton Rouge and Lafayette, LA. Bob Sabina, area director for Chili’s Grill & Bar in San Antonio, TX, led the implementation of ProStart at Brinker International. At the time of implementation, Sabina was based in Colorado, where he led ProStart engagements at Colorado Chili’s restaurants. Sabina’s son even participated in and completed the ProStart program.

PARTNERSHIP
The ProStart program succeeds due to the strong national and local community partnerships among ProStart businesses; industry partners, including Brinker International and Ruffino’s Restaurant; educators; and the NRAEF and its respective state restaurant association partners.
Key elements of the program include:

- **400 Hours of Paid and Mentored On-the-Job Training:** Restaurant industry training from professional chefs provides ProStart students the skills necessary to succeed in the foodservice industry. These skills include knife skills, cost control, culinary techniques, marketing and customer service.

- **Classroom Instruction on Basic Foodservice Skills and Techniques:** Over the course of two years, students complete coursework in nutrition, kitchen essentials, culinary arts, safety and sanitation, communication, teamwork, nutrition, restaurant management, purchasing, and inventory and cost management.

- **Exploration of the Foodservice Industry:** ProStart business partners work closely with program teachers to align coursework with career exploration events. At participating Chili’s restaurants, students receive job interview training from the general manager, learn techniques for effective restaurant marketing, and take lessons in culinary tools and techniques from working members of the kitchen staff.

- **Opportunity To Participate in ProStart Competitions:** Competitions begin at the state level in two areas: restaurant management and culinary arts. In the management competition, students develop a restaurant business proposal and present it to a panel of industry judges. In the culinary challenge, students must complete a three-course meal in 60 minutes with only two butane burners and no access to running water or electricity. Business partners, like Ruffino’s and Maggiano’s, help students prepare for these competitions. Teams that place first in the culinary and management competitions are invited to the National ProStart Invitational, where approximately 350 students compete for scholarships to the nation’s premier postsecondary culinary and restaurant management programs.

“The getting staff involved in the program is easy. Once employees spoke to a ProStart class, they loved it and were hooked!”
—Bob Sabina, Area Director, Chili’s in San Antonio, TX

- **Common Employability Skills:** Through classroom training and application of that training on the job, students learn critical skills that apply in all jobs, including teamwork, problem-solving, customer service, public speaking, interviewing and accountability.

- **Pathway to Long-Term Careers in the Foodservice Industry:** Peter Sclafani knows firsthand the time and dedication required to complete the ProStart program, as he serves as a judge in ProStart competitions. Of those students he has polled in the ProStart competition, Sclafani has noted that about 80 percent plan to pursue a culinary or restaurant management career. When interviewing to hire for new positions, he often gives preferential treatment to applicants who have completed the program.

- **College Credit:** Premier culinary arts and hospitality management colleges in the nation have articulation agreements with ProStart, which allow students to earn credit toward introductory college courses.

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**Program Benefits, Results and Outcomes**

The ProStart program teaches students the basic skills in foodservice, the art of cooking and restaurant operations.

Student benefits include:

- **ProStart Certificate of Achievement (COA):** Students who pass the end-of-year exams covering both culinary arts and restaurant management practices and demonstrate at least 400 hours of industry work experience receive an industry-recognized ProStart COA award. This certificate signals to employers that the student has the skills needed to succeed in the industry.

- **Scholarships Toward Future Training and Education:** Students placing at ProStart competitions receive scholarships for culinary programs at top institutions, including The Culinary Institute of America; Johnson & Wales University; and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.
“The ProStart program is communicating to today’s youth that the restaurant business is a great place to build a long-term and rewarding career. All you have to do is work hard and be passionate.”
— Peter Sclafani, Executive Chef and Co-Owner, Ruffino’s Restaurant

Confidence: The program empowers young students to pursue career paths in the foodservice industry — and beyond.

The ProStart program benefits foodservice businesses of all sizes and provides students basic culinary skills, allowing managers to spend their time training employees on advanced skills that drive business success. ProStart students are exposed to the principles of food safety, equipping them with knowledge of the temperature danger zone (the range in which food-borne bacteria can grow), proper hand-washing techniques and the importance of avoiding food cross-contamination. With the ProStart program available in communities across the nation, it is an easy and cost-effective way for employers to develop talent.

After beginning its participation in the ProStart program, Chili’s experienced the added bonus of an increase in community brand loyalty. Many parents of ProStart students started regularly visiting the restaurant and thanking staff for their commitment to the program. “The parents became a part of the extended Brinker family,” said Sabina.

According to Peter Sclafani, the program is also a great way to build strong relationships with local schools and provide them insight into the skills needed in the foodservice business.

Sustainability and Overcoming Implementation Challenges

Both Sabina and Sclafani believe that, after volunteering for a ProStart event, a person is hooked. Although the restaurant business requires long hours, Sabina has more than enough volunteers ready to spend at least one hour speaking with a local class. Sclafani, who is president of the Greater Baton Rouge Chapter of the Louisiana Restaurant Association, asks all 30 board members to pledge an hour to speak to ProStart students. He believes this commitment is important to help further students’ career development and expose them to various restaurant industry segments.

At Brinker, the program has been such a success that ProStart teachers were invited to attend the upcoming Brinker all-hands general management meeting to discuss ways to take the ProStart and Brinker relationship to an even higher level. For Brinker, the goal is to further expose students to the Brinker business and more actively involve students through summer programs at Chili’s and Maggiano’s. Through these efforts, Sabina hopes students will remember the impact the company had on their education and consider Brinker a place to build their careers.

Words of Wisdom

Words of wisdom for businesses interested in creating a similar program include:

Give an Hour: No matter how busy you are, you can find an hour to serve as a mentor through a program like ProStart. “Students in these programs are so hungry for more information and interaction with professionals in their desired career area,” said Peter Sclafani.

Make Participation Voluntary: For the experience to be valuable to both the student and the employee, the program must be voluntary and grow naturally. At Brinker, participation in ProStart is voluntary and bears no weight on an employee’s professional development or career plan. According to Sabina, “Employees must want to participate and understand the importance of growing their local community and future workforce for the experience to be worthwhile to the students and the individual.”

Information, Tools and Resources

• NRAEF Meet ProStart www.nraef.org/ProStart

Contact

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Following are descriptions of the most common and effective work-and-learn models that are a part of business and industry programs nationwide.

**Apprenticeship**
An apprenticeship is a unique, flexible training system that combines job-related technical instruction with structured on-the-job learning experiences. It provides a unique combination of structured learning with on-the-job training from an assigned mentor. Related instruction, technical training or other certified training is provided by apprenticeship training centers, technical schools, community colleges, and/or institutions employing distance and computer-based learning approaches. The goal is to provide workers with advanced skill sets that meet the specific needs of employers. In many cases, these programs provide apprentices the opportunity to simultaneously obtain secondary and postsecondary degrees, as well as credentials issued by third-party industry organizations. (Source: U.S. Department of Labor)

**Clinical Training/Practicum**
Clinical training combines classroom learning with supervised hands-on immersion experiences in specific fields, mostly in industries that involve human services. In health fields, clinical training is founded on actual observation and lab instruction and/or treatment of patients, as distinguished from theoretical or experimental training. The training is usually highly specialized and includes coursework specific to performing functions and tasks in an actual workplace. (Sources: Siemens Clinical Training & Continuing Education; Clinical Training Institute)

**Cooperative Education/Co-Op**
Cooperative education is the integration of classroom theory with practical work experience, through which students alternate attendance at school with periods of professional employment. At the high school level, the periods of classroom and work-based experience are usually half-days. In higher education, the alternation is most often on a longer time scale. Cooperative education programs enable students to apply technical skills already acquired through the education institution in a real-world workplace setting. Traditionally, cooperative education has been used to aid a student's transition from school to work, while providing participating employers an opportunity to attract, evaluate, train and ultimately employ a ready source of educated and skilled employees. (Sources: Center for Manufacturing Excellence, University of Mississippi; University of Cincinnati)

**Career Fair, Career Expo, Job Fair**
A career fair, also called a career expo or job fair, is an event held for employers and recruiters to meet with potential job candidates. Industry representatives set up exhibition booths — usually at a secondary or postsecondary institution — where students and job seekers can find information about different career fields, training opportunities and jobs currently available. Career fairs give employers an opportunity to interact with future job candidates and make direct contact with students who are making decisions about what education, training and career to pursue. Quality career fairs offer hands-on activities to participants, allowing them to see firsthand what a job in the industry entails.
**Externship**
An externship is typically a training program offered by educational institutions and private businesses that gives students brief practical experiences in their field of study and insight and knowledge in a particular career field. Often shorter term than internships, externships are intensive career learning experiences that typically range from two days to two weeks. Although more immersive and structured than job shadowing, these experiences provide the opportunity for students to see firsthand the work activities and responsibilities in various professions and industries. The experience should provide the learner a greater sense of the knowledge, skills and attributes of people who thrive within that given career pathway and industry sector and a complete experience of day-to-day work life.

**Hands-On Training**
Hands-on training provides student learners an opportunity to use their hands to perform tasks. This training aims to simulate conditions that are as close as possible to real work conditions while avoiding the risks commonly associated with a new employee. In hands-on training, participants typically have the opportunity for repeated practice.

**Industry Tour**
Companies offer guided tours of their facilities to let students, parents and the general public witness firsthand the day-to-day operations of the business. Typically lasting up to two hours, tours are led by knowledgeable staff members who show and describe the companies’ processes, products and protocols, as well as point out the skills and training needed for different jobs. Quality industry tours typically result in greater awareness of the company and the industry and increased engagement with the local community, schools and future employees.

**Internship**
An internship is a formal program that provides practical experience for learners in an occupation or profession, during which the learner is immersed in a work situation for a limited period of time. Internships can be paid or unpaid and usually accompany or relate to academic coursework or training. A quality internship provides the learner an increasingly thorough grasp of the career field, extensive experience in specific job functions, application of education and training to specific duties, and a feel for what it is like to work on a daily basis in the industry. While not always intended to result in employment at the sponsoring company, internships help employers expose potential workers to their workplace and industry and recruit, screen and test-fit future job candidates before they are hired full time.

**Job Shadowing**
Job shadowing is a work experience option through which students learn about a job by walking through the working day as a shadow to a competent worker. The job shadowing work experience is a temporary, unpaid exposure to the workplace in an occupational area of interest to the student. Students witness firsthand the work environment, employability and occupational skills in practice, the value of professional training, and potential career options. Job shadowing is designed to increase career awareness, help model student behavior through examples, and reinforce for the student the link between classroom learning and work requirements. Almost any workplace is a potential job-shadowing site. (Source: Paris, K., and Mason, S. (1995). Planning and Implementing Youth Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, Center on Education and Work)

**Mentorship**
Mentorship is the coupling of a novice with an older, more experienced professional wherein the expert shares knowledge and experience with the novice over the course of time. Mentorship can be either formal or informal and can happen face to face; online; or in conjunction with other work-and-learn opportunities, such as internships and job shadowing. Mentorships help mentored youth improve their overall academic achievement and develop the necessary skills to enter or continue on a career path. They also provide guidance for decision making. Quality mentorships usually involve mentee training and alignment to the company’s culture and goals.
On-the-Job Training (OJT)
OJT is training by an employer that is provided to a paid participant (either an incoming or incumbent employee) while engaged in productive work in a job that provides knowledge or skills essential to the adequate performance of the job. OJT is usually limited in duration, as appropriate to the occupation for which the participant is being trained, taking into account the content of the training, the prior work experience of the participant and the service strategy of the participant, as appropriate.
(Source: Workforce Investment Act)

Pre-Apprenticeship
Pre-apprenticeship is defined by the Employment and Training Administration as “a program or set of strategies [that is] designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a Registered Apprenticeship program and has a documented partnership with at least one, if not more, Registered Apprenticeship program(s).” Since the pre-apprenticeship model is meant to prepare learners to enter a registered apprenticeship, a quality model provides sufficient applied academic training, as well as industry-based technical skills training and practice, to ensure that students transition successfully into an apprenticeship.

Registered Apprenticeship
A registered apprenticeship encompasses the details and benefits listed in the “Apprenticeship” definition. Additionally, it meets national apprenticeship standards outlined by the registration process with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Apprenticeship or through a state apprenticeship agency. Upon completion of a registered apprenticeship program, participants receive a portable credential (provided by DOL or the state apprenticeship agency) that certifies occupational proficiency as a journey worker for the selected occupation. For more information on the DOL registered apprenticeship program, please visit: www.dol.gov/apprenticeship. (Source: U.S. Department of Labor)

Returnship
A returnship is an internship specifically designed for older professionals who have been out of the workforce for an extended period of time to re-enter a career. In many cases, they are designed to help these individuals refresh their skill sets and learn new technologies before returning as full-time employees. Often lasting around 10 weeks, a returnship provides individuals with an opportunity to sharpen their skills in a given career path or pursue new areas of expertise in a work environment that may have changed significantly since their last experience as an employee. Returnships also give employers the opportunity to screen returning experienced applicants before hiring them full time.
(Sources: Goldman Sachs; CareerBuilder)

RESOURCES

- 21st Century Competency-Based Apprenticeship Resources
  http://bit.ly/1RcO4Uh
- Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce: Learning While Earning: The New Normal
  http://bit.ly/1XJMXzw
- National Network of Business and Industry Associations: Common Employability Skills
  http://bit.ly/1KCBUUP
- National Network of Business and Industry Associations: Grads of Life ROI Calculator
  http://bit.ly/1X6yKMP
  http://bit.ly/1NesrCd
- Change the Equation: Work-Based Learning: An Employer’s Guide
  http://bit.ly/1jDn6du
- U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship
  www.dol.gov/apprenticeship
Contributors

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