SAW
Interactive Skills and Career Development for the Advancement of Frontline Entry-Level Health Care Workers

MODEL SUMMARY
The School at Work (SAW) program is a blended adult education and career development program designed to equip frontline, entry-level health care employees with the skills needed to advance in the industry. Over the course of six months, SAW participants, led by a coach, learn and apply life management and employment skills (reading, math, writing, communication, etc.) that are critical to their success in the health care industry. Participants simultaneously define their career goals and develop a career and learning plan that outlines the training and education necessary to meet their goals.

BACKGROUND
The SAW program was developed as a series of four projects between 1998 and 2000 with the goal of increasing education for noncollege-educated adults. The Commonwealth of Kentucky provided funding for the program, and partners included Jefferson Community & Technical College and Catalyst Learning. Jefferson Community & Technical College developed the curriculum and led student instruction while Catalyst Learning provided employer recruitment and arranged the facilities needed to deliver instruction directly to the worksite. The success of the SAW Kentucky projects demonstrates the power of employer support for educating noncollege-educated adults and employee interest in participating in personal skills development and that technology is an effective means of providing adult education.

Building upon the Kentucky SAW projects, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration expressed interest in applying the model in a multistate, sector-specific environment. In 2002, the School at Work: Building a Career Ladder in Healthcare program was born. The program was designed to provide low-wage workers in entry-level hospital positions the training, educational opportunities and support to upgrade their skills and provide pathways to higher-paying health care positions. Examples of entry-level positions include food services, housekeeping and serving as administrative associates. Maryland’s Anne Arundel Community College developed the health care-specific curriculum. Catalyst Learning recruited employers and provided the technology services needed to distribute the curriculum. The model blends multiple types of interactive learning — from interactive videos, which feature group exercises, to online training and instruction modules — with support from adult education experts and coaches from the hospital staff to teach the necessary skills for career advancement for entry-level employees.

“Who touches and impacts the patient? It’s our frontline co-workers. Who has one of the largest impacts on patient experience? Again, it’s the frontline co-workers. When we invest in these co-workers, we enhance the learning and productivity of the organization.”
— Sister Claudia, RSM, specialist, Mercy Talent Development and Optimization Division

KEY ELEMENTS OF MODEL
- Mentorship
- Self-confidence
- On-the-job training
- Common employability skills
- Gateway toward future health care credentials and postsecondary degrees

KEY:
- A: Apprenticeship
- C: Certification
- E: Cooperative Education/Co-op
- CR: Credentials
- CT: Clinical Training/Practicum
- E: Externship
- H: Hands-on Training
- I: Industry Tour
- IT: Internship
- M: Mentorship
- OJT: On-the-Job Training
- OB: Online and Blended Classroom Training
PARTNERSHIP

Key SAW partners include Catalyst Learning, hospitals and health systems that offer the SAW program, and in some instances workforce boards and foundations that provide financial support.

NUTS AND BOLTS

Health care is a field in which people with different skill levels work side by side — an ideal environment for work-and-learn programs. The SAW curriculum teaches participants the life management, medical terminology, patient safety, and workplace communication and common employability skills needed for upward mobility. It can be effective for health care systems of any size. Among the health systems using the model, for example, is a national hospital system — Mercy health care system — which includes 32 acute care hospitals, four heart hospitals, two children’s hospitals, three rehabilitation hospitals, one orthopedic hospital and nearly 700 clinic and outpatient facilities.

A designated employee leads the program at each hospital and serves as the coach for the SAW program. The coach is typically a human resources team member or a rising supervisor within the hospital. The coach supports program recruitment through communication about the program to frontline supervisors and managers. These supervisors and managers provide justification for the nomination of an individual to the SAW program. After nomination, the applicant must agree to complete the six-month program and pass the entrance test.

Over the course of six months, a cohort, typically of 10 participants, completes the SAW program. The cohort meets as a group with their career coach once a week for two hours. During the first hour, coaches guide students through online interactive videos, group activities, group discussions and individual exercises within their workbook. The second hour of the class is dedicated to the development of a career and learning plan.

This SAW program includes:

- **Learning, Skills and Self-Reflection**: SAW participants complete health care career development coursework and group learning, which includes mastering communication in the workplace.
- **Development of a Long-Term Career and Learning Plan**: Students begin the career identification process by completing a self-reflection questionnaire with 286 questions. The questionnaire helps SAW participants determine whether they would be better suited for technical or nontechnical school and provides job recommendations, gives an overview of daily job tasks and responsibilities for recommended jobs, and details the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in those jobs.
- **Job Search Support**: A career coach helps identify future openings within the health care system in the recommended job areas. The coaches also help the participants identify local schools that provide continuing education needed to secure a job in a given preferred job area.
- **Development of SMART Goals**: Working with their career coach, SAW participants develop achievable goals that align with their chosen career path. They also identify the potential hurdles in meeting these goals and develop strategies to address and mitigate these risks.
- **Time Management Skills**: SAW participants receive the training needed to manage the demands of going to school while working. Time management is essential for SAW graduates as they pursue the education needed to achieve their career goals.
PROGRAM BENEFITS, RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

SAW participant benefits and outcomes include:

- **Improved Self-Confidence.**
- **Preparation for Continuing Education and Career Advancement:** Through training and support, program participants gain the confidence to advance in their careers. For example, a graduate at Mercy reports the program provided her the tools, confidence and skills to obtain her GED and go on to nursing school to become a registered nurse.
- **Mentorship:** SAW career coaches serve as the participants’ mentors and help guide them in developing a plan to meet their career goals. Prior SAW graduates often become career coaches.
- **SAW Graduation Ceremony:** Most SAW programs end with a graduation ceremony attended by family members as well as members of the health care system management team. This celebration provides SAW graduates the opportunity to share their success with their family and fellow co-workers.

SAW employer benefits and outcomes include:

- **Reduced Employee Turnover:** At Tri-Health Inc. in Cincinnati, OH, turnover was 5.7 percent for SAW participants versus 19 percent for non-SAW participants annually.
- **Reputation as Employer of Choice:** By investing in employee development programs like SAW, Yale-New Haven Hospital in New Haven, CT, has strengthened its reputation as employer of choice.
- **Improved Employee Engagement:** Health care systems report that employees who have completed the program are more engaged, leading to improvements in employee performance and work productivity.
- **Support for Health Care Safety Practices and Patient Satisfaction:** Frontline workers have more face time with patients than many in leadership positions in the hospital, allowing the SAW participants to contribute substantially to both patient safety and satisfaction.
- **Succession Planning:** The SAW program includes a tool that health care systems use to track the participants’ success in continuing education, advanced placement and retention rates.
- **Program Applicability to Clinical, Nonclinical Support and Clerical Health Care Areas:** As designed, the program is flexible and can be adapted to a range of health care areas.

SUSTAINABILITY AND OVERCOMING IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The Commonwealth of Kentucky and DOL grants, as well as the option to offer a free trial of the program to willing employers, were essential to getting the program up and running. The SAW health care program is now in its 13th year and has been financially self-sustaining since July 2005. Revenue is generated from health care employers that wish to make the SAW career development system available to their employees. Funding streams within a health care system include an operating budget, internal foundation or partnership with a local public workforce system.

The Catalyst Learning team believes the keys to their success are employer support, a cohort model centered on small in-person group meetings at the work site, and a dedicated and trained coach/facilitator. The team works closely with SAW customers to provide support for return on investment analysis, using the Kirkpatrick four levels of evaluation model. Through the SAW Success Tracking system, customers are able to track student completion rates, knowledge mastery, and the number of students enrolling in local colleges and attaining promotions.
WORDS OF WISDOM

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

- **Make It Simple:** Employers do not have the resources to manage a complicated program. Their purpose is to produce goods and services and manage an appropriately skilled staff to support those efforts, not to manage a complex and time-intensive training program.

- **Keep It Fresh:** Regular updates and product and process improvements are important. Catalyst Learning is actively engaged in updating the materials to align with user feedback and changes in the health care system. The Catalyst team is currently working to make the content available in multiple formats to expand how the training is used within the industry.

INFORMATION, TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- **Catalyst Learning Blog**
  http://catalystlearning.com/blog

- **School at Work — Catalyst Learning**
  http://catalystlearning.com/products/school-at-work

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Descriptions of Common Work-and-Learn Models

A Glossary of Key Terms

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
• National Network of Business and Industry Associations: Grads of Life ROI Calculator http://bit.ly/1X6yKMP
• U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship www.dol.gov/apprenticeship
Contributors

The National Network acknowledges the contributions of the following companies, associations and educational institutions whose time, ideas and feedback made this guidebook possible.