

Apprentice Learning

FOUNDED: 2012

CURRENT ORGANIZATION BUDGET: \$1,800,000

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The work of Apprentice Learning (AL) responds to the inherent brilliance of young people. At Apprentice Learning, Boston middle grade youth are welcomed at the intersections of curiosity and possibility, creating real-world career exploration that invites them to try, stretch, and imagine beyond limited narratives.

Research shows that middle grades are when identity, self-concept, and future orientation take shape. Yet these students are often omitted from meaningful, work-based learning, which results in a consequential gap: young people at a critical developmental stage without access, networks, or the chance to see themselves reflected in the world of work.

Apprentice Learning exists to close this gap. The organization partners with a diverse array of career mentors and surfaces buried histories of brilliance to remind youth they come from lineages of *makers*, *healers*, *builders*, and *visionaries* across all fields of practice.

Apprentice Learning approach:

- Passion-driven, project-based apprenticeships
- Skill-building, communication, teamwork, problem-solving
- Identity-affirming workplaces
- Stipends to honor youth's contributions and time
- Sustained pathways for alumni beyond middle school

Two-Year Goals

- More than double middle-grade participation to 2,500
- Enhance staffing and provide robust staff training
- Refine AL's methodology, program models, and tools
- Create an AL-affiliate network
- Deepen partnerships with schools, worksites, and community organizations
- Launch *Community Electives* alumni program
- Pilot one new site beyond Boston

Investment Opportunity

Apprentice Learning seeks \$2M over 2 years to add 4 Boston schools as pilot sites, move 2 current school pilots to full partner sites, and begin offering programming beyond the City of Boston, increasing the number of 8th grade apprentices served from 400 to 800 annually. It will also expand its programming for 6th and 7th graders and launch a dedicated initiative for AL alumni, to reach an additional 1,100 young people. To support this growth, it will focus on strategic planning, curriculum refinement, hiring additional staff, training staff and mentors, and purchasing new equipment.

Ways to Invest

- \$360,000 to hire 4 FT program staff
- \$250,000 for youth stipends
- \$100,000 for IT upgrades, strategic planning, professional development
- \$95,000 to hire a FT grant writer
- \$45,000 for equipment
- \$20,000 "Future of Us" quarterly workforce convenings
- \$15,000 to launch a school pilot site
- Become a worksite partner

Apprentice Learning's Model



Career Exploration

The middle grades remain a largely unclaimed space for meaningful, life-affirming, work-based learning. Research reveals this is an age when identity, self-concept, and future orientation begin to crystallize. Yet, there are few invitations for young people to have access into the world of work at this crucial stage. As a result, middle grade youth are in what AL regards as a *'rite of passage'* period without exposure, networks, or representation that confirm they belong there, too.

Apprentice Learning has used career exploration to nurture the personhood of over 3,700 middle grade students. AL approaches work as a language—a way of seeing and trying on the world. Career exploration begins with curiosity: *What moves me?* Apprentices learn by doing, observing, and asking questions beyond the classroom. They earn stipends—because real-world work deserves real-world pay, and their time is honored.

School-Day Apprenticeships are the core model. 8th graders examine themselves, their interests, and various career fields over 6 weeks. Then spend another 6 weeks entering workplaces, guided by career mentors across 60+ partner sites—from hospitals to studios to labs.

Passion-Focused Apprenticeships bring skill-building into community spaces. Groups of five apprentices work closely with career mentors, diving into things they love and transforming passion into practice.

Career Extravaganza is a one-day event—hundreds of 6th and 7th graders engage hands-on with professionals, discovering new fields and possible future selves.

City Summer Internships offer rising 9th graders immersive entry into Boston's STEAM and other growing sectors. Young people engage in intensives, mentorships, and guided explorations of city worksites as classrooms.



Extended Connections

Apprentice Learning is deepening its commitment to the middle grades as a ‘rite of passage’ period by building a continuum from grades 6–9 and by creating intentional pathways for alumni, grounded in partnerships with organizations, guilds, businesses, and industries that allow young people to develop in their emerging passions. AL is advancing a vision of career exploration as a transformational tool for positive youth development in Boston and beyond.

Community Electives (Alumni Program): Alumni (ages 15–30) are connected with AL partners on a structured pathway providing them with access to continued learning, credentials, internships, and career opportunities aligned with their interests.

Future of Us: AL holds quarterly convenings of employers, mentors, and community members to share best practices for engaging middle-grade youth in developmentally appropriate, inclusive, and impactful workplace experiences.

Middle School Awareness & Thought Leadership: Apprentice Learning seeks to advance a national conversation on middle-grade career exploration as essential to identity, agency, and future readiness.

“It gave me a sense of what a real job would look like. I am into real estate so the fact that I got an apprenticeship in Blue Hub Capital made me realize how much I loved that field of work.”

— Maneyris Brea, AL Alum

Leadership & Governance

Led by Executive Director Letta Neely, Apprentice Learning is guided by a values-driven leadership team and a Board of Directors rooted in purpose, access, and possibility. Chaired by Brenda Kirouac, the board brings cross-sector expertise—from finance and education to mental health, workforce development, and philanthropy. The board is majority people of color (60%) with balanced gender representation (50/50). Members reflect a shared belief that early exposure, meaningful work, and trusted relationships can shift trajectories and shape futures.

Financial Stability

Apprentice Learning has experienced notable growth in recent years, reflecting both the need for middle grade programs and the trust placed in its operational integrity. It receives philanthropic support from corporations, foundations, and donors, as well as generates income through contracts, services, and events. AL’s partners are committed to providing opportunities for youth to thrive.

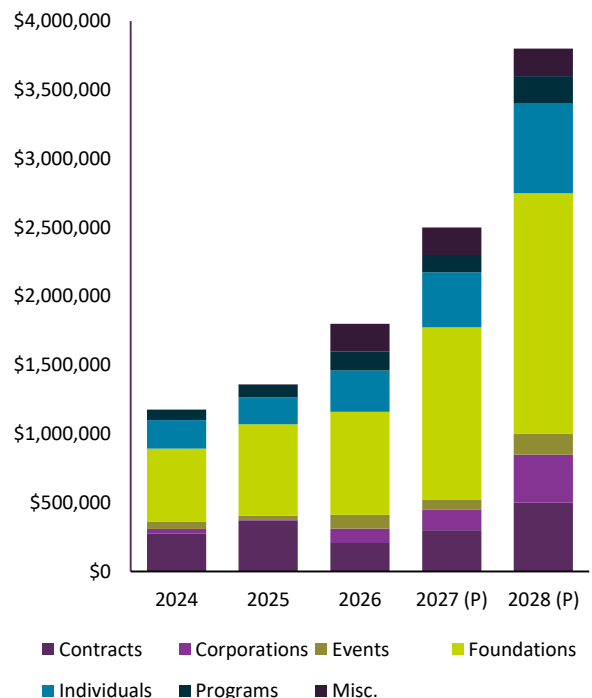
KEY INVESTORS

- Cummings Foundation
- EdVestors
- Jinny Chalmers Fund
- Liberty Mutual Foundation
- MassCEC
- Office of Workforce Development, City of Boston
- Orville W. Forté Charitable Foundation
- Rodman for Kids
- Someone Else’s Child
- Timothy & Deborah Moore Charitable Foundation

KEY PARTNERS

- ALLready
- Boston Public Schools
- Design Studio for Social Intervention
- Elma Lewis Center, Emerson College
- Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston
- GMO, LLC
- MA Chamber of Commerce
- NorthStar Asset Management
- The Loop Lab

Revenue by Source





Success Story

SHANTEL MERCEDES

When she was in the eighth grade at Mission Hill School, Shantel Mercedes apprenticed at a local business, JP Knit & Stitch. That experience sparked a desire for more learning and work opportunities.

With AL’s support, Shantel secured a summer internship at Brigham and Women’s Hospital through its Summer Science Academy. This was a pivotal moment, offering Shantel her first paid work opportunity and laying the foundation for a future in health equity.

She is now a first-generation college graduate, having earned a Bachelor’s in Public Health and Health Equity from Mills College and a Master’s in Public Health from Simmons University. She works full-time in the field of health equity, striving to make a lasting impact on her community.

Shantel credits Apprentice Learning with helping her build confidence, responsibility, and a sense of purpose.

Program Performance and Organizational Health

Apprentice Learning stewards its work with care and accountability—measuring what matters, questioning its practices, and responding in real time. This ensures that its programs remain rigorous, relevant, and in service to young people’s development and communal wealth.

	FY 2026	FY 2027 (P)	FY 2028 (P)
Program Performance			
Middle-grade youth served in Boston schools	1,000	2,000	3,000
Apprenticeships completed by 8th graders	331	450	500
Career Extravaganza participants (6th and 7th graders)	575	750	1000
Alumni remaining engaged with Apprentice Learning	65	100	200
Organizational Health/Capacity-Building			
Full-time staff	10	14	18
Worksite partners & career mentors	135	250	300
Training & professional development sessions for staff and career mentors	10	15	30
Total Revenue	\$1,800,000	\$2,500,000	\$3,800,000

Social Impact

Apprentice Learning measures its social impact through indicators that reflect the building of communal wealth—strengthening identity, expanding access to careers and aligned resources, and increasing pathways to future opportunity for middle-grade youth, while cultivating mentors and worksites that are better prepared to engage, support, and invest in young people.

Indicator	Current Numbers	2028
Youth reporting increased confidence	95%	97%
Youth who identify at least one career mentor	90%	95%
Youth exploring 2 or more career pathways	75%	85%
Youth reporting increased sense of belonging	92%	95%
Youth demonstrating real-world skills application	85%	95%
Youth identifying multiple trusted adults/professionals	75%	80%
Alumni engaged in self-chosen continued pathways	---	40%
Alumni making informed, aligned decisions about their futures	---	75%
Worksite partners/mentors who return or deepen engagement	70%	90%
Worksite partners/mentors reporting increased confidence in working with youth	82%	95%