

BIG PICTURE LEARNING AND EASTERN ATLANTIC STATES REGIONAL COUNCIL OF CARPENTERS JOIN BLOOMBERG PHILANTHROPIES \$90 MILLION INITIATIVE TO CONNECT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIPS AND SKILLED TRADE CENTERS

Initiative will serve thousands of students annually across New Jersey through the development of Skilled Trade Apprentice Readiness Training (START) Centers

NEW JERSEY – June 11, 2026 – Big Picture Learning (BPL), in partnership with the Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters (EASRCC), announced today they are part of a new \$90 million Bloomberg Philanthropies initiative designed to change how high school students prepare for and enter Registered Apprenticeships and high-wage, in-demand skilled trade careers. The initiative is the first national program to connect high school students directly to apprenticeship and career pathways in the skilled trades. It will launch in nine regions across the country, including New Jersey, where labor market data shows significant workforce shortages and long-term demand for skilled trades professionals.

As the primary apprenticeship and industry training partner for the New Jersey initiative, the EASRCC will help connect students to world-class training opportunities, paid work-based learning experiences, and Registered Apprenticeships that lead directly to family-sustaining careers. Over the next three years, more than 300 graduates are expected to enter Registered Apprenticeships.



"We are proud to partner with Big Picture Learning (BPL) and Bloomberg Philanthropies on this transformative initiative because we know the future of the skilled trades depends on creating clear, accessible pathways for the next generation of workers," said Anthony Abrantes, Assistant Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters. "Across our region and throughout the country, demand for highly trained union carpenters continues to grow as we modernize infrastructure, expand housing, and build the clean energy economy. By introducing young people to the trades earlier and providing hands-on experience alongside industry partners, this initiative addresses critical workforce shortages and ensures access to stable, high-tech, high-demand careers that strengthen communities and the economy."

The initiative, which is free for students, will focus on multiple in-demand roles, including carpenters, millwrights, floor coverers, pile drivers, dockbuilders, and cabinetmakers. It responds to both growing student interest in skilled trades careers and the rising national demand for qualified workers in these fields. According to construction industry workforce forecasts, the industry continues to face significant workforce shortages, with employers needing hundreds of thousands of additional skilled workers to meet projected demand in the coming years. This work is building a sustainable pathway into apprenticeships as early as age 18, dramatically earlier than the current average of 29.

“The New Jersey Department of Labor has been proud to partner with the Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters to help grow apprenticeship in New Jersey, and we look forward to the impact this expansion of their training programs will have,” said Acting Labor Commissioner Kevin D. Jarvis. “Apprenticeship remains one of the most effective pathways to a good job, a family-sustaining wage, and long-term economic opportunity. As New Jersey continues to grow its workforce, creating pathways from the classroom to the jobsite is critical. This initiative – and smart partnerships like this – will help young people gain valuable skills, earn while they learn, and enter careers that can support a family for decades and strengthen New Jersey for generations.”

The New Jersey START Center initiative is a growing, statewide effort to redesign how young people move from school into high-wage, high-demand careers in the skilled trades. START Centers serve as coordinating hubs that bring together schools, unions, industry partners, and workforce systems—while students engage across multiple locations for internships, training, certifications, college coursework, and paid summer employment. Through the START Centers, students will have opportunities to earn industry-recognized credentials, participate in paid work-based learning experiences, explore multiple skilled trades, and transition directly into Registered Apprenticeships upon graduation.

Led by Big Picture Learning, it is already moving beyond pilot into early scale thanks to key partners such as EASRCC, Associated Construction Contractors of NJ, Barringer High School, Camden County Technical Schools (Gloucester and Pennsauken campuses), Carpenter Contractor Trust, Essex County Schools of Technology (Essex County Tech, West Caldwell Tech, Donald M. Payne Sr. Tech), the state of New Jersey and a broad network of education and workforce partners.

Bloomberg Philanthropies’ investment will support students’ on-the-job training, transportation needs, stipends, required tools and equipment, mentorship, development of technical coursework, creation of mobile shops to deliver training, hiring of expert staff, support for graduates through their first year of union apprenticeship, and measurement of the program’s success.

“New Jersey’s future depends on creating more opportunities for young people to succeed,” said New Jersey Governor Mikie Sherrill. “Through this partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies, BPL and the EASRCC are helping students build in-demand skills and connect directly to careers that strengthen our economy and our communities. This investment in the next generation of skilled workers will ensure young people see a clear path from their high school classroom to a rewarding career.”

“Students begin shaping their career interests at a young age, which is why early exposure to the skilled trades is so important. As an industry, we have a responsibility to showcase the opportunities available in union construction and help students understand the trades offer a rewarding alternative to a traditional four-year college path. By investing in these experiences, we are strengthening the workforce pipeline and helping young people discover meaningful careers with excellent opportunities for growth and success,” said Jack Kocsis, President and CEO of the Associated Construction Contractors of New Jersey.

“The New Jersey START Center initiative has the potential to redefine how young people transition from high school into apprenticeship opportunities—first in New Jersey and ultimately across the country,” said Elliot Washor, co-founder of Big Picture Learning.

“Millions of good-paying jobs are going unfilled, and too many students never get a chance to learn the skills necessary to get them. This new initiative will help change that,” said Michael R. Bloomberg, founder of Bloomberg LP and Bloomberg Philanthropies and three-term mayor of New York City. “By bringing schools, unions, and employers together as partners, we can offer students free training and credentials that lead directly to rewarding careers. Jobs in the skilled trades helped build America’s middle class, and now they can help a new generation enter and strengthen it.”

Bloomberg Philanthropies has been committed to creating sustainable, long-term models of workforce development and economic mobility. Since 2016, Bloomberg Philanthropies has supported innovative Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs around the country to create strong career opportunities in high-growth industries for over 300,000 students. Students have gained relevant experience and recognized credentials through internships, apprenticeships, academics, and work-based learning. In 2024, Bloomberg Philanthropies announced the creation of high schools around the nation that pair public education systems and hospitals to directly graduate students into high-demand healthcare jobs with family-sustaining wages. This initiative is now in 13 communities.

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About Big Picture Learning (BPL)

Big Picture Learning (BPL) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to transforming education through personalized, student-centered learning that connects young people to real-world experiences, careers, and community opportunities. As a partner in New Jersey's START Center initiative, BPL supports the expansion of high-quality career pathways in the skilled trades by helping schools and communities design work-based learning experiences, strengthen employer partnerships, and create opportunities for students to explore and prepare for careers in high-demand industries. Through its expertise in internship-based learning and career-connected education, BPL helps ensure that students gain the skills, experiences, and professional networks needed for success in the skilled trades workforce. For more information, visit www.bigpicture.org.

About The Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters (EASRCC)

The Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters (EASRCC) is one of the largest regional councils of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBC), representing more than 42,000 skilled union carpenters, millwrights, floor coverers, pile drivers, dockbuilders, cabinetmakers, and other trade professionals across Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., Virginia, and West Virginia. The Council supports 2,500 signatory contractors through 25 Local Unions, 17 Training Centers, 15 regional offices, and nearly 4,500 apprentices. Through industry-leading training, strong labor-management partnerships, and a commitment to safety, productivity, and craftsmanship, the EASRCC helps develop the highly skilled workforce needed to build and maintain the region's infrastructure, commercial facilities, residential communities, and energy projects. As part of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, which represents more than 500,000 members across North America, the EASRCC is dedicated to creating career opportunities, strengthening communities, and advancing excellence in the construction industry. For more information, visit www.eascarpenters.org.

About Bloomberg Philanthropies

Bloomberg Philanthropies invests in 700 cities and 150 countries around the world to ensure better, longer lives for the greatest number of people. The organization focuses on creating lasting change in five key areas: the Arts, Education, Environment, Government Innovation, and Public Health. Bloomberg Philanthropies encompasses all of Michael R. Bloomberg's giving, including his foundation, corporate, and personal philanthropy as well as Bloomberg Associates, a philanthropic consultancy that advises cities around the world. In 2025, Bloomberg Philanthropies distributed \$4.3 billion. For more information, please visit bloomberg.org, sign up for our [newsletter](#), or follow us on [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#), [Threads](#), [Facebook](#), and [X](#).