



Education Industry Consortium – March 2026 Meeting Summary

Date: Tuesday, March 31, 2026

Location: Associated Builders and Contractors Central Florida

Address: 651 Danville Drive, Ste. 200, Orlando, FL 32825

Convened by: CareerSource Central Florida and University of Central Florida

Purpose of the Meeting

The Education Industry Consortium meeting focused on the growing construction workforce crisis and the urgent need for stronger alignment between education, training, and industry. The discussion addressed labor shortages, skills gaps, and strategies to strengthen pipelines for current and future construction talent in Central Florida and beyond.

Speakers

Welcome and Closing Remarks

- Marcela DeFaria, Vice President of Development, CareerSource Central Florida

Panel Moderator

- Pam Nabors, President & CEO, CareerSource Central Florida

Panelists

- Andrew Albu, Co-Chairman, Albu & Associates
- Ken Keese, Director of Client Services, Crawford Thomas; Greater Orlando Builders Association
- Debbie Rodriguez, Owner, Competitive Edge Partners & Consulting; Quality Labor Management
- Corey Schoenfelder, Apprenticeship & Emerging Workforce Director, Associated Builders & Contractors Central Florida

Meeting Overview

- Participants discussed a significant labor shortage in construction, with approximately 390,000 unfilled jobs nationally.
- A critical challenge is the experience gap: for every new worker entering the field, three experienced workers are retiring, taking decades of knowledge with them. This is compounded by long-term impacts from the 2008–2011 recession, which pushed many mid-career workers out of the industry and discouraged younger generations from pursuing construction careers.
- The importance of a strong academic foundation, including math and technical skills such as geometry, algebra, and applied physics, was highlighted for preparing future construction professionals.
- Training pathways are accelerating, with pre-apprenticeship programs addressing both technical and soft skill gaps.

Key Themes and Takeaways

Effective Training Models & Partnerships

- Apprenticeship programs through CareerSource, ABC, and iBuild were highlighted as successful models.
- Correctional system training initiatives demonstrated high success rates in preparing participants for construction careers.
- CareerSource Central Florida's High School Career Express program continues to provide hands-on exposure to career pathways for students.

Recruitment & Retention Strategies

- Competitive starting wages, clear advancement pathways, and targeted outreach to underrepresented populations, such as women and returning citizens, are becoming key strategies.
- Employers emphasized that workplace culture, mentorship, and visibility of career pathways are critical for retaining workers.

Economic Impact of Workforce Shortages

- Construction shortages affect housing, infrastructure, healthcare facilities, and the expansion of data centers and technology systems.

- Competition for talent from industries like aerospace further strains the labor pipeline.

Opportunities for Education & Industry Alignment

- Urgent need for more CTE instructors and expanded student exposure through field trips and career exploration.
- Increased engagement with parents, counselors, and community stakeholders is critical to building interest in construction careers.
- Programs such as High School Career Express remain in high demand, with some districts reporting waitlists.

Looking Ahead

- The meeting concluded with opportunities for continued engagement, including industry events and awareness initiatives.
- Action steps include deepening collaboration between education and industry partners, expanding training capacity, and sustaining successful programs that expose students to high-demand construction careers.