

THE HISTORY OF



OHIO CONSTRUCTION ACADEMY



Ohio Construction Academy (OCA) is a thriving school in Columbus, Ohio which gives students opportunities to earn essential industry credentials while receiving a quality education. This school can tout numerous successes; however, it had humble beginnings. Barton Hacker, the current President and CEO of Associated Builders and Contractors of Central Ohio (ABC) had a vision in 2012. Barton recognized the crucial need for workforce development. There were critical shortages of skilled workers in construction, electric and carpentry, and he took action to address the job crisis in these industries. How could ABC train individuals and develop a pool of certified workers? His answer was to open a charter school. This idea seemed like a logical solution. It was a unique concept, but he needed the support of the ABC Board of Directors.

Barton introduced the school concept by facilitating conversations on workforce development during regional meetings with contractors. In one of the meetings, he polled the room by asking, “Who would like their kids to follow in their footsteps?” No one raised their hand. The consensus was that college was the answer. Barton knew that college was not for everyone. Therefore, he continued to have important dialog with the ABC Board of Directors and stakeholders to shed light on the need to foster workforce development by giving students the opportunity to be trained in the trades. ABC had the following advantages:



- The charter school movement was flourishing in Ohio.
- The ABC Central Ohio Chapter was located in an urban area which was recognized as one of the major 8 urban school districts.
- The urban population in Columbus covered a wider demographic spectrum, in comparison to other cities.
- The ABC Central Ohio Chapter had an 18,000 sq. ft. building which was only used in the evenings.

The Associated Builders and Contractors Board of Directors supported the vision and gave Barton permission to pursue the opening of a school which is now known as Ohio Construction Academy. The original plan of instruction was to create a hybrid learning option in which students would complete academic coursework online, and ABC would use its facilities to conduct on-site training for high school students during the day. ABC would continue to train adults in the evenings. Construction, carpentry and electric were the foci of training along with NCCER certification.

Students would earn credentials and graduate with 2 years towards a 4-year apprenticeship program. Further, ABC endeavored to create a farm system in which certified students would only be hired by companies with ABC memberships. Any other companies who were interested in hiring the students would be required to become members of ABC.

The membership of ABC contributed \$300,000 to renovate the building to create a conducive learning environment for the students. The National Association gave the school a \$50,000 grant to assist with start-up costs, which was the single largest grant ever awarded by the Tremor Foundation at that time. ABC worked with community organizers composed of retired police officers and firefighters to recruit potential students. ABC employed strategies to foster active involvement and recruitment. They went into the communities to compel students to take advantage of a life changing opportunity. The school's founding Board members were comprised of the following leaders: Greg Davis, Clyde Rainey, Matt McClellan, Brian Haughn, Chuck Fenske, Andy Coen and Barton Hacker.

Upon guidance from Ohio Department of Education, it was a consensus that OCA would be a dropout prevention and recovery school. The plan of operation was set, and the school enrolled 25 students from various areas in Columbus. Ohio Construction Academy officially opened in 2013 with Barton Hacker as the school leader.

The concept of a school designed to target urban students, teach industry trades and foster employment upon graduation was inventive, but it was met with many challenges.

There was significant opposition from unions which spawned frequent compliance meetings with ODE to defend the existence of the school. For two years, the school endured obstacles of staff recruitment and retention, student transportation, adverse management companies, trial and error, disciplinary issues and low enrollment. Nevertheless, the school Board of Directors refused to relent.

In 2018, the OCA Board of the Directors forged a partnership with the Educational Empowerment Group (EEG) to manage the school. Since its partnership with EEG, the school more than tripled its enrollment. Ohio Construction Academy demonstrated academic strides by increasing the Progress component on the Ohio School Report Card from Does Not Meet Standards in 2018 to Exceeds Standards in 2019. In 2021, Ohio Construction Academy was designated a High Performing Community School. In the category of Achievement, over half (60 %) of students met the test passage rate, outperforming other dropout recovery program schools in Ohio by 23%. The graduation rate continues to increase, and 12 students were offered and accepted construction or electric jobs upon graduation. Many construction and electric companies seek to partner with OCA, as the industry credentials earned by the students place them at the top of the list for employment. Ohio Construction Academy is on a positive trajectory. Its accomplishments motivated ABC to re-locate and allow the school to have full operation of its former headquarters. Associated Builders and Contractors of Central Ohio courageously stimulated a change in the community by offering youth a better option while increasing workforce development. ABC persisted in the face of opposition and created a paradigm shift in the lives of urban students, and the legacy continues.