



# Labor Relations Bulletin

FROM THE NATIONAL ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION

January 22, 2024

## Inside Apprenticeship Standards

On March 31, 2023, the electrical training ALLIANCE National Committee voted unanimously to define and register a 720-hour related instruction Inside Apprenticeship with the United States Department of Labor. This initiative was jointly supported by NECA National and IBEW International leadership. Since the inception of this plan and subsequent submittal for approval to the United States Department of Labor, numerous questions have been raised at various NECA meetings and in direct correspondence to the NECA Executive Committee.

### **Will the adoption of the 720-hour plan be optional or mandatory for a Local JATC program?**

The new standards will have a minimum of 720-hour related instruction. Adoption will be mandatory. The OJT hours have not changed from the current Inside Apprenticeship Standards.

### **What type of needs-based assessment was performed, and was the impact on each jurisdiction studied?**

NECA and IBEW leadership, alongside the NECA District Vice President's discussions at District Council meetings have gathered that over half the Local JATC programs are doing the current 900 hours of related training in four years. Many local JATC Trustees and industry leaders voiced a desired ability to do so but are challenged to have their apprentices in school for the additional contact hours to complete the program in four year's time.

Many of the programs running a four-year plan today are utilizing an accelerated model with 900 hours of related instruction (classroom time). "Years" is a misnomer; it is related instruction/contact hours.

The etA Trustees realize this is a fundamental change to the business model of utilizing the apprenticeship programs, thus the 720-hour plan is only a minimum number of related instruction hours. The etA Trustees also support the etA's goal of providing improved outcomes by utilizing their expertise to deliver modernized teaching methods, integrating technology, and providing updated curriculum.

An in-depth review of each program was not performed prior to the Trustee's decision.

### **What is the timeline for approval with the DOL?**

The standards have been submitted to the Department of Labor for approval. NECA does not expect a response before March 2024. Once approved the new standards will be available for local programs to adopt and send to etA for sponsor approval. Then the local programs can send to local registration agency for approval.

### **What are other means to deal with temporary worker shortages of electricians than modifying the length of the Inside Apprenticeship program?**

NECA, IBEW and etA leadership are in alignment—this is not a temporary shortage of electricians due to the current economic outlook and impending attrition numbers. There has not been a singular definitive long-term solution brought forth by any party. Creating a viable long-term solution will take numerous efforts. This change to a 720-hour related instruction apprenticeship model is aimed to be one of these efforts to create a safe, skilled, and career Journeyman Wireman while still in the best interest of the NECA-IBEW apprenticeship model.

NECA continues to support alternate workforce development tools being utilized in various local areas across the country.

### **Does the change to a four-year apprenticeship model guarantee an increase in the number of Journeyman Wireman for an area?**

The success of this change in model will be dependent not only on programs expediently adopting the new standards should they experience no delays from external approval agencies; i.e. state DOL issues, but the trustees agreeing to increase the number of apprentices indentured once resources from a 5th year class no longer structurally in the program are available. NECA, IBEW, and etA leadership encourage each local JATC to pursue a 25% increase in first year apprentices with the new training model implemented. If neither of these two items occur, it will not provide any increase in the number of Journeyman Wireman.

NECA believes a primary goal of each local JATC should be to maintain or increase the number of apprentices within each JATC in response to local attrition data and long-term industry growth.

### **Are there structural changes to the curriculum forthcoming? And how should a Local JATC plan to teach more apprentices in a shorter time within existing program resources?**

There will be no reductions to the curriculum as courses will be combined into 612 core hours and 108 advanced hours. Many of the courses 108 advanced hours will be chosen by the local JATC to focus on local training needs in their area. The etA is developing 300 optional advanced courses which will allow local JATC flexibility and autonomy.

Local JATCs will need to be intentional in their strategy to best model their program to the new program and within the confines of their program resources. The utilization of Computer Mediated Learning (CML) if adopted will also ease Instructor time constraints and classroom size needs, allowing for more hands-on lab work which continues to be highlighted as the most successful teaching mechanism for apprentices.

Historically, two-thirds of an apprentice's time at the JATC is in the classroom, and one-third is in a lab environment. With the use of CML and the 720-hour program as intended, most of the classroom time is shifted to at-home completion by the apprentices, in exchange with apprentice current homework time requirements. This should re-allocate time for apprentices and Instructors to lead hands-on labs and expanded JATC indentured-class size.

The 1st year courses are currently available. The etA is targeting to have most of the 2nd and 3rd CORE ready to utilize by April 2024 with all the 2nd and 3rd year courses complete by July 2024. 4th year courses are expected to be available by the start of 2025.

### **Is the quality of a Journeyman Wireman completing a four-year program expected to remain the same as a five-year graduate?**

Yes. There is not a reduction in the requirement of 8,000 OJT hours. The etA Trustees believe the quality of training provided at the local JATCs has increased dramatically since the implementation of the five-year model in 1987, and reducing to 720 hours will not impact that quality.

### **How can an area ensure a successful transition to the 720-hour plan?**

The success and timeliness of changing the plan will be contingent upon a Local JATC adopting the revised standards and providing a course outline for the 720-hours of related instruction. The Local JATC Trustees need to collaborate on plan program goals and needs for the area.

Trustees, Training Directors, Instructors, and anyone working closely with the JATC should attend NTI, etA regional training seminars, and other etA provided training opportunities.

NECA has asked the etA to provide formal guidance on the process of Inside Standards adoption, related material development, and best practices. Additional information on these requests will be provided when made available.

### **What issues does NECA see with State Departments of Labor, licensing requirements, and applicable state laws/statutes?**

This is and has been an issue, even with the Inside Standards update in 2019, which remained a five-year model. Programs will have to comply with State & Federal regulations just as they do now. The 720 hours is a minimum. There are programs currently requiring more than the 900 hours of related instruction and NECA expects these local areas will continue to exercise their right to require additional related-instruction hours beyond etA approved standards.

### **Will the reduction of a 5th year step lead to increased labor costs?**

Yes, the NECA Executive Committee and etA Trustees did consider this as an outcome.

Ratio utilization remains more impactful than steps of apprenticeship from a blended rate perspective. The local parties should pursue competitive realistic utilization ratios, realizing you must have journey workers to employ apprentices and other classifications. Attrition studies performed by NECA have proven that ratios between Journeyman to apprentices and alternative classifications are not being utilized, even in areas with progressive ratios available and the ability to indenture more apprentices.

### **Is the change to a four-year apprenticeship model a shift from encouraging and utilizing CW/CE classifications?**

No. On October 1, 2023, the IBEW's inside organizing policy was updated to mandate that all Local Unions are to implement the CW/CE classifications. The etA trustees are hopeful local programs will adopt the hybrid Inside model to indenture the CW/CE classifications into a registered program should that be the path the individual wishes to pursue. Agreeing to and expanding CW/CE programs remains a key Labor Relations initiative for NECA.

### **What modifications to Category I Apprenticeship language will be impacted?**

The current language allows for six or 10 steps of apprenticeship which will not be modified. There is no change in the required 8,000 OJT.

### **Will a JATC be able to move apprentices currently enrolled in a five-year program into a four-year program?**

Moving apprentices into the new training model will be a decision the local JATC committee and apprentice make together. They can do either—transfer existing apprentices into the new training model if the apprentice agrees or complete the existing apprenticeship structure in place today.

JATC's can elect to move all, or some of the classes over to the new 720-hour program. They may also elect to simply start all future apprentice classes on the new 720-hour program.

### **Will guidance be provided to the local parties on how to establish new wage rates and benefits for consolidated apprentice periods?**

The number of OJT hours along with six or 10 periods will not change, so fundamentally speaking, a modification is not necessary. However, the local parties will need to convene labor management and adjust contract language if tier advancement is contingent upon completion of a "year" of school in addition to OJT, and any other modifications the local parties feel best represents the needs of their market.

## **Labor Relations Bulletin** / *Inside Apprenticeship Standards*

NECA supports negotiations that maintain or improve the total package labor rates for Apprentice classifications within each jurisdiction.

Continuing dialogue is important to the NECA Executive Committee and Labor Relations department. If your Chapter has additional questions, please submit them in writing to [LR@necanet.org](mailto:LR@necanet.org) and every effort will be made to answer them.

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