



# Heavy Equipment Pathway in Vidalia

## Heavy Equipment Operator Pathway in Vidalia: Real Students Gain Real Skills

The Heavy Equipment Operator Pathway in the Toombs County School District is a prime example of the public sector and private businesses coming together to solve some of the most pressing workforce needs facing their community. During the Summer of 2020, stakeholders in Toombs County came together around a small table to discuss how they could best develop high school students who didn't intend to go to college but still had potential to work in and give back to their rural community. Coming out of this meeting, McClendon Enterprises, a family-run construction firm that has deep roots in the area, became the standard bearer for a new effort to implement a new CTAE Pathway that would prepare graduating students with many of the skills and experience needed to jump straight into a career as an industry certified technician in a variety of hands-on occupations. This partnership has flourished, with twelve students who participated in the program involved in McClendon's operations within two years of its creation and even more exploring other opportunities to bring their sought-after skills to.

### Keys to success:

- Build strong relationships with local stakeholders, including the school district and other large employers in the area
- Look to other organizations or states for curriculum or ideas rather than starting from scratch
- Remember that pathways are a group effort

### Getting Started

When attempting to establish a new Pathway or otherwise get involved in Pathway support, it is vital to find the right partners in your community. For example, when McClendon and Toombs County Schools first began exploring options for a new Pathway, they had to rely on connections with CEFGA, the Construction Education Foundation of Georgia, to create a curriculum that would satisfy the State Board of Education's standards. Using CEFGA's resources, the partnership was able to adopt a curriculum from an existing program in another state to modify for use in Toombs County. Additionally, the pathway was developed so it could serve the needs of multiple industries in the area, such as a local air conditioning manufacturer, and result in greater educational effectiveness and usefulness in meeting local workforce needs.

### Advanced Preparation

Once the new pathway has been approved, you should ensure that your facilities and industrial partners are prepared to helping students learn. McClendon leverages good relationships with contractors, such as Caterpillar, to bring in actual heavy equipment for students to train on. Without these partners willing to lend a hand, the pathway would not be able to provide sufficient hands-on experience to prepare students for industry roles. McClendon experienced a slight "learning curve" among crews when dealing with their first cohort of students but they have remained flexible and learned from the experience, leading them to develop strategies on what crews receive students to train and how occupational knowledge can best be passed down. Now, students are placed directly with crews that show them the ropes on everything from knowing how to use a tape measure to repairing tractor trailers.

### Program Execution

Once pathway operations begin, it is key to offer consistent support and to continue to communicate with partners about the evaluation of current program offerings and how they can best serve your local community. Both McClendon Enterprises and the Toombs County School District have taken the time to market this program to other businesses in the community. While hesitant to accept the new Pathway at first, the community has bought in and other industries are beginning to see how it can help them with their own workforce struggles, while allowing them to give back to the young adults and community around them.