

# WHSAD Students Become More Marketable for the Workforce

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For the past five months, a dozen students at the Williamsburg High School of Architecture and Design (WHSAD) have been working diligently to prepare themselves to break into the manufacturing industry. In a first of its kind partnership for the school, WHSAD teamed up with the family-owned and operated manufacturing firm Architectural Grille for a semester long work study program.

Based out of Gowanus, Architectural Grille specializes in making custom linear bar grilles, perforated grilles, and egg crate grilles and is known for its work in the areas of construction, fabrication and interior design.

Students involved in the program, which meets twice a week at Gowanus in the studio that doubles as the firm's manufacturing plant, take a hands-on approach to learning.

Students have been taught how to operate state-of-the-art computerized fabrication machinery and working on lasers, water-jets and turret shapers.

Fred D'Antoni, Director of Special Projects at Architectural Grille, and a former high school principal in New Jersey, oversees the program with WHSAD. He had a conversation with the owners of Grille last year at which they discussed the paucity of trained individuals available for manufacturing jobs.

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D'Antoni recalled that while he was still in school, students were taught a number of practical skills such as woodworking and basic construction techniques. But he says all that has now stopped in favor of academic rigor and training students for Ivy League schools.

“We should offer kids choices,” he said. “Schools should continue to focus on academics of course, but they should have opportunities like this too. So often we find students graduating from the best colleges with no marketable skills.”

D'Antoni reached out to Gill Cornell, the Principal at WHSAD to initiate the program. The Grille had had an intern from the school at their firm who was so successful that they offered him a job upon graduation. He chose to pursue his college education first, and today continues to work for the firm in between his classes at the New York City College of Technology.

And WHSAD is not the only beneficiary of the program; the early job training helps employers as well. D'Antoni noted that his company is forced to spend a significant amount of time and money to train new employees to get them up to speed with the work at the Grille.

“High school students, and even college students don't get enough job training and real life experience so when they graduate it's very hard to find jobs,” said Cornell. “We want to expose our students to environments like this so they are better equipped to navigate their own way in the professional world.”

In addition to designing grilles for their own school, they have also been asked to design a classroom at the 55,000 square foot space that the Grille occupies in Gowanus. The classroom will serve as a future workspace for the next batch of students that joins the work-study program, which is now set to become a regular semester offering due to the success of the current program.

Brooklyn Deputy Borough President Diana Reyna was present at the workshop Tuesday and was instrumental in making the program come to fruition.

“Borough President Adams and I are grateful for the partnership between the Williamsburg High School of Architecture and Design and the Architectural Grille,” said Reyna. “This program is creating a template that can be mirrored to forge partnerships between private enterprise and Brooklyn students who are deserving of real-world professional experiences occurring in their backyard.”