Big Picture Learning has received a three-year, $1.2 million grant from Harbor Freight Tools for Schools to design and test a new form of apprenticeship for youth who wish to pursue a high school and postsecondary pathway in both new and traditional trades and crafts.

The Harbor Freight Fellows Initiative (HFFI) will target youth who have exceptional knowledge and skills in a trade or craft, but who often languish in traditional high schools and career and technical education programs. HFFI will help these Fellows develop the competencies and accomplishments needed for success in the workplace, in postsecondary learning, and in life.

The HFFI design will build on BPL's successful Learning Through Interests and Internships program used in over 65 Big Picture Learning schools and scores of other high schools throughout the United States. Harbor Freight Fellows will develop deep and sustained relationships with adults who serve as mentors and coaches. The mentors will help the Fellows find and enter both formal and informal communities of practice to advance their trades and build valuable social capital.

HFFI will use a range of technology tools to support collaboration with mentors, progress tracking, and linking with communities of practice. BPL will also use its cloud-based proprietary learning management platform – ImBlaze – to help schools and students design, conduct, and assess their apprenticeships.

An HFFI prototype will be completed by spring 2017, followed by further piloting in several cities throughout the country during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years. In each city, BPL will pilot HFFI in at least one Big Picture Learning school, a Career and Technical Education school, and a youth or workforce development program.

“We will deepen and broaden our successful BPL design to serve young people who need something different and better,” states Elliot Washor, BPL Co-Founder and HFFI Director. “The Harbor Freight Fellows Initiative will move youth along a pathway to trades and crafts mastery, making them leaders in their professions and communities.”

“This grant is an extension of the deep respect Harbor Freight Tools and its CEO and founder, Eric Smidt, have for the skilled trades, for the men and women who achieve mastery in these fields, and for excellent teachers and craftspeople investing in students,” said Robin Kramer, Executive Director of Harbor Freight Tools for Schools. “We hope the learning that comes from this inventive initiative will inform education and work practices and help grow support for this sector so important to our communities and future.”

The project evaluation, supported by a grant from the Stuart Foundation, will feature deep and rich case studies drawn from the prototype and pilot stages. From this work and through these case studies, HFFI will broaden our collective understanding of what it takes to properly invest in skilled trades education by expanding access, boosting quality, and heralding their positive impacts on students’ lives and the larger national economy.

ABOUT BIG PICTURE LEARNING Big Picture Learning’s mission is the education of a nation, one student at a time. As a non-profit organization dedicated to the fundamental redesign of public education, Big Picture’s vision is the generation of innovative, personalized learning environments that work in tandem with the real world of their greater community. At the core of Big Picture Learning’s mission is a commitment to equity for all students, especially historically marginalized populations, and the expectation that these students can achieve success. For over 20 years, the Big Picture network has served over 26,000 students in over 23 states and thousands of additional students internationally.

ABOUT HARBOR FREIGHT TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS Harbor Freight Tools is a family-owned retailer with nearly 20,000 employees that sells “quality tools at ridiculously low prices” in now more than 700 stores in 47 states, with a new store opening about every 3 days. The company, headquartered in Calabasas, California, was co-founded in 1977 by CEO Eric Smidt. Harbor Freight Tools for Schools is at the core of the company’s community investment strategy. It stems from Eric’s goal of supporting the advancement of the skilled trades sector of CTE in American public high schools by fostering and shining a light on excellence, through stimulating support and investment by public entities and others. Harbor Freight Tools for Schools is a family and company-driven initiative, built upon a strong belief in the dignity of the skilled trades and the need to give students opportunity and a reason to stay in school, a path to good jobs in their communities, and a workforce our country needs.