

Developing High-Quality State Work-Based Learning Programs

A PLAYBOOK FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS

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About *ExcelinEd*

Launched by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush in 2008, *ExcelinEd* supports state leaders in transforming education to unlock opportunity and lifelong success for each and every child.

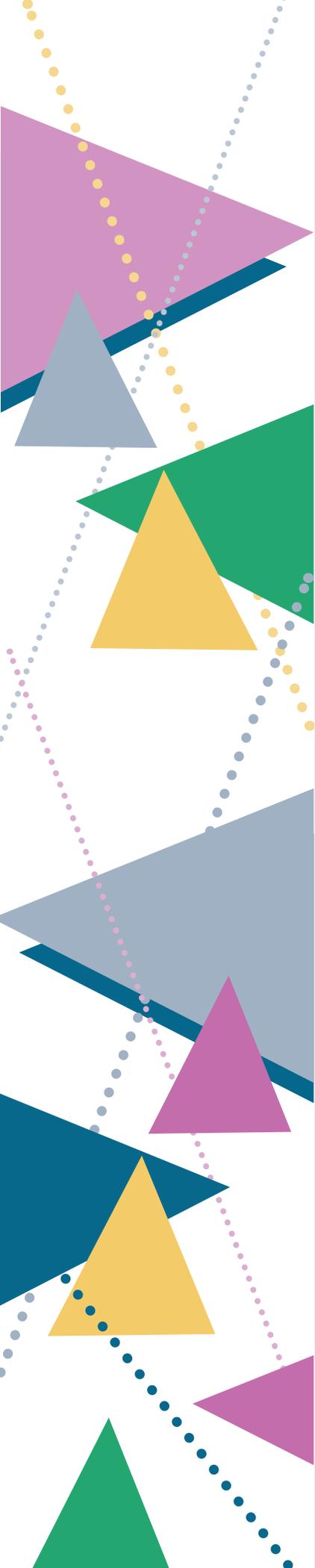
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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *ExcelinEd*'s playbook on work-based learning.

Your state has likely already developed an education-to-workforce platform to support statewide economic growth and ensure the future prosperity of your citizens. Given that work-based learning (WBL) can – and should be – a key driver of student career readiness in these efforts, it is essential that all states have a robust work-based learning continuum of experiences and exposure that spans K-16.

Too often, work-based learning is associated only with capstone internships completed by high school juniors and seniors, yet it should offer much more. High-quality WBL programs are implemented along a continuum of progressive experiences across K-12 and postsecondary, allowing students to engage with employers and industries throughout a strategic career exploration and planning process. In fact, WBL is an essential element of career and technical education (CTE), and *ExcelinEd*'s [CTE Playbook](#) series highlights a state-promoted WBL continuum as one of eight non-negotiables of a high-quality state CTE program.

Work-based learning is not a new concept for states and policymakers. Most states have policies intended to encourage young people and adults to gain pre-employment work experiences within various industry sectors. These state policies are often coupled with federal supports through the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—all of which are intended to weave student career and workforce readiness into more formalized processes at the state and local levels. In fact, many states are selecting WBL participation as their preferred measure of secondary CTE program quality under the new Perkins V accountability system.

Where state work-based learning programs begin to differ is in **how** states further develop, support and implement their WBL programs. High-quality state WBL programs should fully reflect and align with state education-to-occupation pathway priorities and be braided across state agencies' initiatives and funding priorities. They should also go deeper by ensuring all stakeholders—students, teachers, business partners and parents—are fully informed and ready to produce meaningful, relevant experiences. This approach ensures greater participant access and success as well as greater workforce impact.

What Can Work-Based Learning Look Like?

- ▶ Apprenticeships
- ▶ Industry-Led Projects
- ▶ Internships and Clinicals
- ▶ Job Shadows
- ▶ School-Based Enterprises

Policymakers interested in expanding and improving their state’s work-based learning program should also be aware of the complexities of the various policies that can support or inhibit high-quality WBL.

Statewide policies that can directly affect WBL include, but are not limited to:

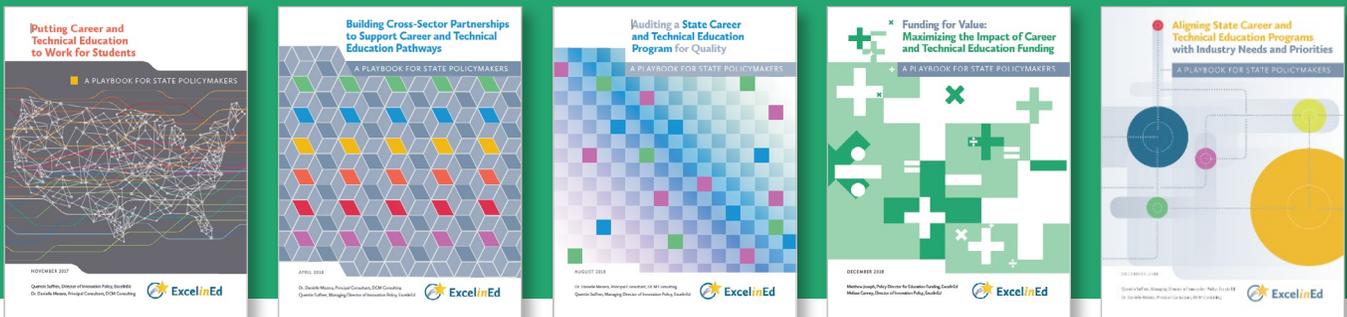
- ▶ Student advisement, scheduling and graduation requirements or distinction;
- ▶ Student transportation and supervision during out-of-school experiences;
- ▶ Educator preparation/licensure, professional development and support; and
- ▶ Legal, liability and financial impacts on businesses that employ or host minors in the workplace.

Due to the nuances and interrelatedness of these policies, certain long-standing policy barriers negatively affect the overall quality and impact of state promoted work-based learning programs.

This playbook includes the following recommendations and resources to support states in developing and implementing high-quality WBL programs.

- ▶ Steps for states to establish or strengthen a cross-sector vision, leadership structure and strategy for continuous improvement to support high-quality state WBL programs.
- ▶ Core principles and models for a statewide WBL program definition and continuum that states can customize to meet their unique contexts and priorities.
- ▶ Common longstanding barriers to high-quality WBL program implementation at the state and local levels as well as strategies for how to address them.
- ▶ Steps to refine and strengthen existing state WBL policies and programming, along with current examples from a variety of states.

Click on the cover images to view other playbooks in ExcelinEd’s Career and Technical Education playbook series.



Adopting a Statewide Vision for Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning is an inherently cross-sector strategy. Education systems must create structures that support student preparation and access, employers must buy into WBL as a priority workforce development strategy, and labor/economic development agencies must ensure that their policies and initiatives support WBL implementation and evaluation.

In many states, however, responsibility for the WBL program rests almost exclusively with the education agencies. While this single-agency leadership approach does not necessarily preclude a high-quality state WBL program, it creates the potential for additional challenges and inefficiencies related to: interagency coordination and communications; duplication of resources/services; misalignment of initiatives and investments; employer recruitment and engagement; and incomplete or low-value data to evaluate the state's WBL program effectiveness.

In contrast, **states can establish a cross-agency, cross-sector, stakeholder-inclusive leadership body with the charge of establishing and monitoring progress toward the state's vision for WBL.** Rhode Island's [PrepareRI initiative](#), for example, is a cross-agency task force that oversees the state's education-to-workforce strategy, which includes multiple workstreams dedicated to WBL. States that take this approach are poised to ensure their WBL programs are high-quality, supportive of the state's larger education-to-workforce goals, responsive to state industry needs and setting students up for successful careers.

Key Questions for Developing a Vision for Work-Based Learning

1. What role does WBL play in achieving the state's overall vision/goals for a talented and educated workforce?
2. What are the challenges the state currently faces that a high-quality statewide WBL program will help address?
3. What should WBL intend to do in the state, and what should it not intend to do?
4. What should be the intended student outcomes for a high-quality WBL program? Are these outcomes measurable?
5. What agencies and leaders should be responsible for developing and implementing the state's work-based learning programs? Are all appropriate stakeholders involved?

POLICY PLAN

Adopting a Statewide Work-Based Learning Vision and Strategic Plan

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1. Convene or direct a permanent body to oversee, evaluate, report and recommend policy, program and funding changes to support continuous improvement of WBL in the state.

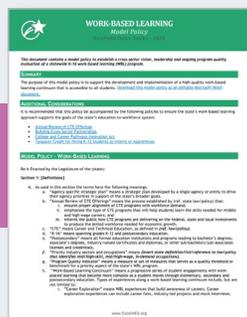
- a. This can be codified through executive order, legislation, policy and/or formal addition of the responsibility to an existing cross-sector partnership (e.g., standing cross-sector subcommittees, ongoing CTE audit leadership, stand-alone committee dedicated to WBL).
- b. Membership should reflect the state’s population in terms of geography, priority industry sectors, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability and other student groups and include:
 - i. Cross-sector leadership from state and local agencies/organizations that oversee K-12, postsecondary, labor/workforce development, industry associations/chambers and local government.
 - ii. Representatives of stakeholder groups involved in implementation, including businesses, educators (teachers, counselors/advisors and administrators), students and parents.

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2. Establish a framework for, and then conduct, a WBL program quality evaluation.

(ExcelinEd’s CTE playbook [Auditing a State CTE Program for Quality](#) outlines the process to design and implement a strong program evaluation framework.)

- a. Develop a guiding purpose and framework of questions that will be used to evaluate the extent to which the state’s WBL program meets the state’s vision, goals and definition criteria for high-quality WBL experiences along the state’s continuum.
- b. Ensure the WBL program quality evaluation framework and identified data incorporate measures of program equity by student access, experiences, success and outcomes.



View ExcelinEd's
[Work-Based Learning Model Policy.](#)

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3. On a recurring basis (at least every three years), the permanent body should:

- a. Develop, refine or affirm the state’s WBL vision, definitions and continuum—articulating how it fits within the state’s larger approach to workforce education.
- b. Evaluate the quality and impact of the state’s WBL program—incorporating feedback from all stakeholder groups and data on student access, student success and outcomes, employer engagement, etc.
- c. Review the state’s landscape of policies, initiatives and funding streams impacting WBL.
- d. Develop recommendations to remove identified barriers that continue to limit high-quality WBL.
- e. Reset goals and measurable objectives that reflect ambitious progress toward the state’s vision for WBL.
- f. Revise strategies and action steps to achieve the identified goals and objectives.
- g. Communicate the statewide WBL strategic plan with all stakeholder groups.

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4. On an annual basis, the permanent body should:

- a. Measure and publicly report progress toward the state’s WBL goals and objectives.
- b. Identify gaps in access, participation, success and student outcomes and recommend strategies to close those gaps.

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5. Identify and publicly celebrate local WBL programs and employers that demonstrate excellence in program quality and/or demonstrate substantial achievement/growth in terms of student and special population participation, success and outcomes.

Defining Work-Based Learning

Defining work-based learning is not as straightforward as one might imagine. At both the state and national levels the term work-based learning (WBL) carries varying nuances depending on the source and the intent of that source in promoting WBL. A 2018 [report](#) by the College and Career Readiness Center (CCRS) at the American Institutes of Research (AIR) highlights the various WBL definitions, noting:

28 SEAs [state education agencies] have formal definitions of WBL, 14 SEAs have informal definitions, and nine SEAs have no formal or informal definitions ... In addition to SEAs ... only two states' departments of labor or workforce (Illinois and New Hampshire) had a formal definition of WBL. The CCRS also identified 19 national policy organizations that promoted publicly available definitions of work-based learning.

Given the increasing emphasis placed on WBL programs by states, the low number of state agencies providing formal definitions should be a halting moment for policymakers. Without clear definitions and consistent terminology, determining program quality can be an exceedingly difficult exercise for any state and should call into question any reported data provided on program effectiveness.

At the federal level, work-based learning terminology and guidance differs depending on the federal act and intended outcomes. See the [Appendix](#) for a sample of federal language as it pertains to WBL.

How Do States Define Work-Based Learning?

States define work-based learning differently. Consider the following examples of WBL definitions which contain many of the core WBL principles contained in this playbook.



Delaware

“Work-based learning is a progressive approach to bridging the work-skills gap between school and high-demand, high-skill careers in Delaware. Through structured employer engagement and settings, students build on their classroom-based instruction by developing and strengthening technical and employability skills in preparation for future careers.

“WBL activities begin as early as elementary school and continue through postsecondary education. Experiences should align with student interest and provide exposure to professional work settings and expectations. Student contributions and work are judged by professional standards, and students hone their skills through constructive feedback from workplace supervisors, employees, and clients. WBL experiences culminate with work site placements at the high school level with students earning postsecondary credit at the conclusion of their placements.”



Rhode Island

“The Governor’s Workforce Board (GWB) defines a work-based learning activity as a planned, structured learning experience that provides (in-school and out-of-school) youth ... with real-life or simulated work experiences where they can develop and apply academic, technical, and essential skills; and contributes to the achievement of their postsecondary and employment goal(s). The GWB is employing a flexible definition of WBL, encompassing [internships, apprenticeships, service-learning, school-based enterprises, and industry projects].

“These experiences are often credit-bearing opportunities that provide students with rigorous opportunities to pursue career and industry-connected learning both during and outside of the traditional school day. Work-based learning experiences can occur through a variety of delivery mechanisms, including but not limited to expanded learning opportunities (ELOs), summer youth employment programming, in-school courses, dual enrollment, Advanced Course Network courses, and online or blended learning options ...

“The GWB recommends that high-quality work-based learning activities be designed in order for youth to develop and apply the following essential skills [collaboration and teamwork; communication; critical thinking and problem solving; initiative and self-management; professionalism].”



South Carolina

“Work-based learning is a school-coordinated, sponsored, coherent sequence of workplace experiences that are related to each students’ career goals and interests, while based on instructional preparation, and are performed in partnership with local businesses, industries, or other organizations in the community. WBL enables students to apply classroom instruction in a real-world business or service-oriented work environment.”

Articulating a Continuum of Progressive Work-Based Learning Experiences

Formally defining work-based learning is an essential first step. However, if states just define WBL without accompanying expectations for high-quality experiences along a progressive WBL continuum, their actions will likely result in varied experience quality and lower program impact and student outcomes. WBL program definitions should be accompanied by clear experience descriptions across a robust K-16 WBL continuum.

A progressive continuum of career- or work-related exposures and experiences is essential to any state promoted WBL program. As noted in the following section, *students' WBL experiences are intentionally progressive and become more complex as a student moves through formal education—affirming and reinforcing a solid exposure to career-based learning and skills development.* Often, specific WBL experiences along this work-based progression are categorized into larger buckets that reflect the depth of experience, such as career awareness, career exploration and career immersion. These categories can also include recommended grade spans to assist local districts and postsecondary institutions in planning and sequencing the experiences for their students.



The most important consideration for any state policymaker during the development of this robust program approach is ensuring that all WBL experiences are designed to achieve the intended student outcomes and growth.



These experiences should be implemented strategically rather than being viewed as “plug and play” activities devoid of meaningful student learning experiences and environments.

After scanning various state and federal WBL definitions and continuums along with resources developed by national policy organizations, ExcelinEd identified the following core principles that states should consider incorporating into the development and implementation of any high-quality state WBL program.

Core Principles for a High-Quality, Statewide Work-Based Learning Program

- ▶ **Student Engagement:** All students have access to authentic WBL experiences that are relevant and consistent for each student as well as aligned with each student’s interests and career goals.
- ▶ **Integrated Curriculum- and Skills-Based Learning:** Students are active participants in holistic WBL learning experiences that integrate academic, technical and employability skills.
- ▶ **Active Employer Engagement:** Students’ WBL experiences are interactive, provide opportunities for students and employers to build relationships, and are led by employer/industry sector engagements across a continuum of work setting experiences.
- ▶ **Progressive Career/Work Experience Continuum:** Students’ WBL experiences are intentionally progressive and become more complex as a student moves through formal education, affirming and reinforcing a solid exposure to career-based learning and skills development. Each WBL experience should reflect:
 - **Student Age/Grade:** WBL experiences are sensitive to the age and academic maturation of each student.
 - **Student Career Exposure and Experience:** WBL experiences and worksite placements align with each student’s prior WBL exposure and lead to varied degrees of experiences and responsibilities.
 - **Student Academic Curriculum:** WBL experiences build upon each student’s acquired academic and technical learning and career pathway.
 - **Student Skill Level:** WBL experiences and worksite placements match each student’s acquired technical and employability skills.
 - **Student Career Interests and Preparation:** WBL experiences support the identification of and align with each student’s demonstrated interests and aptitudes.
 - **Targeted Program Quality Indicators (PQIs):** WBL program quality measures are identified and embedded in the continuum as program priorities; outputs are used to support identified PQI outcomes.
- ▶ **Educator Professional Development and Support:** All educators are equipped—through educator preparation and ongoing professional development—to embed WBL into instruction across all content areas and grade spans.
- ▶ **High-Quality WBL Data:** States can measure, monitor progress toward and make decisions to support high-quality WBL continuum implementation using state-level and local-level data that includes information related to student access, participation and outcomes/success.

Model Work-Based Learning Program Continuum – Progressive Student Development

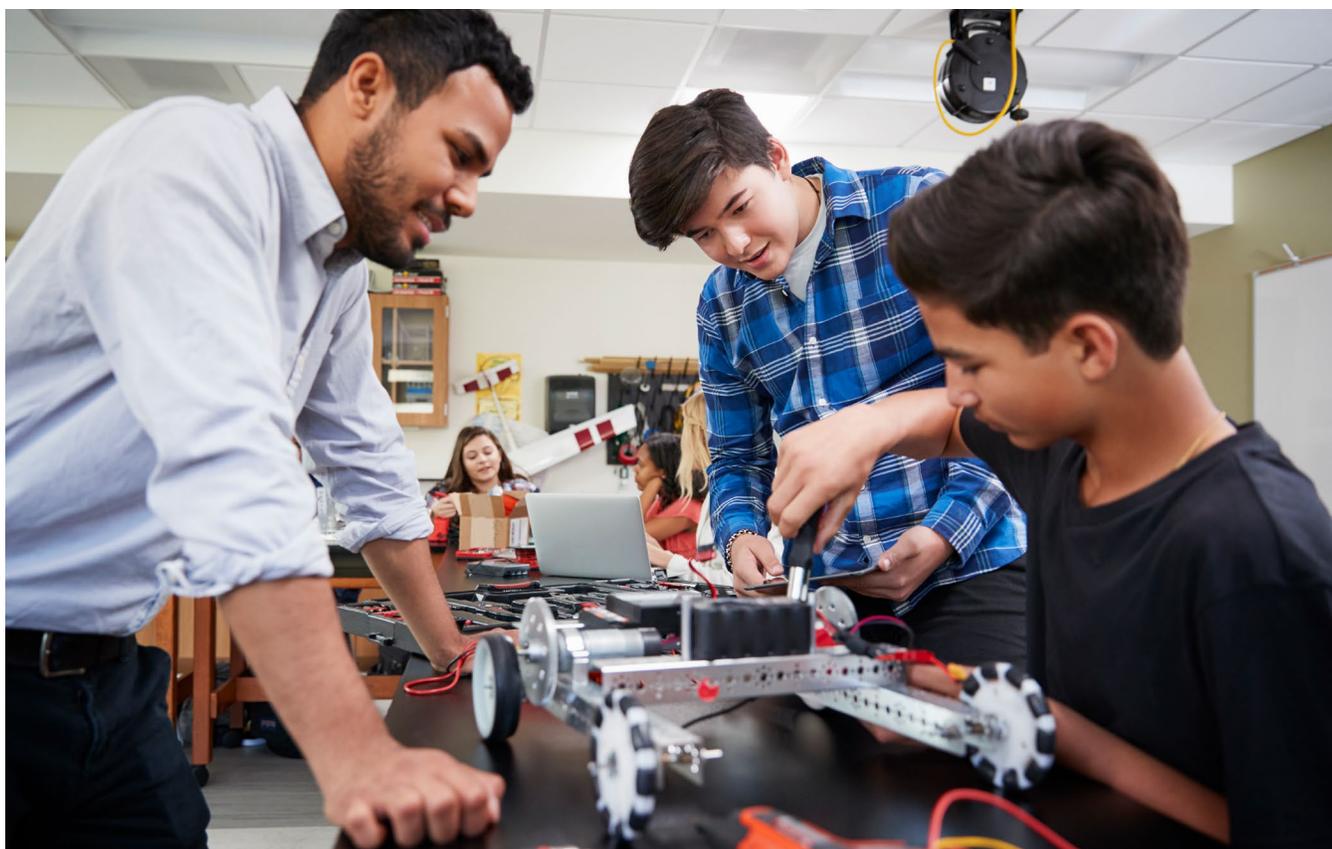
	Career Awareness 	Career Exploration 	Career Immersion
Education Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grades 3-12 Postsecondary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grades 5-12 Postsecondary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grades 9-12 Postsecondary
Career Development Across the WBL Continuum (during each phase, students develop the skills to):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the landscape of career opportunities and related wages or advancement potential in a region or state. Identify personal interests, skills and talents related to potential careers. Explain rationale for pursuing potential careers based on general skills and interests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articulate the knowledge, skills, credentials and experiences required for success in a chosen career pathway. Explain the rationale behind personal career aspirations and education/training plans based on specific skills and interests. Professionally engage with and develop relationships with representatives from the business community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate evidence of authentic work products completed within an occupation or industry. Articulate and reflect on experiences in the workplace that required the application of academic, technical and employability skills. Evaluate their own progress toward mastery of the academic, technical and employability skills required in their chosen career. Model the behaviors expected by employers in their career field of interest.
Types of WBL Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guest speakers Career fairs Online career exploration Workplace tours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job shadows Industry-led projects Informational interviews Mock interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internships Clinicals School-based enterprises Cooperative education Apprenticeships
Experience Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short, stand-alone experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intermittent or repeated experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustained, ongoing experience
How do students engage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole-class or large-group experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small groups or identical experiences for every student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual, personalized experiences

Note: [Delaware’s Employer Playbook](#) provides a strong example of how to communicate with employers regarding expectations and outcomes for each of Delaware’s defined WBL experiences.

Defining Work-Based Learning Experiences Along the State's Continuum

The following key components should be embedded in each WBL experience definition.

- ▶ Description of experience.
- ▶ Where the experience fits within the state's WBL continuum.
- ▶ Governing policies, guidance and other requirements, if applicable.
- ▶ Prerequisites, such as age, grade level, prerequisite courses or WBL experiences, skills, etc.
- ▶ Specific WBL experience requirements, such as participation hours, secondary and/or postsecondary credits earned or compensation.
- ▶ Educator requirements and supports, including licensure or endorsement, student supervision and professional development.
- ▶ Employer requirements and responsibilities, including communication, feedback, supervision and experience design.
- ▶ Intended student outputs and outcomes for students (i.e. What should students know and be able to do at the conclusion of a high-quality experience?).
- ▶ Description of how student participation, skills growth or mastery and experience quality are measured, evaluated and reported, if applicable.





POLICY PLAN

Definition of High-Quality Work-Based Learning

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1. Adopt a formal state definition of a high-quality WBL program.

This definition should:

- a. Fully represent the workforce values and priorities of the state in concert with federal language and supports;
- b. Reflect a continuum of progressive learning and experiences; and
- c. Address program equity in support of all students.

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2. Review the state's existing promoted WBL program, policies, funding support and guidance to confirm full alignment with state's definition of a high-quality WBL program and continuum of WBL experiences.

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3. Revise and/or create new program, policy and funding supports to reflect full alignment and remove any unintentional limitations.

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4. Develop WBL program quality indicators (PQIs) and a WBL PQI rubric that will be used to measure program achievement against the established program quality measures.

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5. Emphasize clarity and transparency, including accurate descriptions for each promoted WBL experience, appropriate implementation procedures and supports as well as expected goals and outcomes for all participating stakeholders.

Translating Policy into Practice

Empowering Educators to Reinforce Student Progression Along the Work-Based Learning Continuum

Ensuring students experience a high-quality work-based learning continuum requires more than a scheduled series of events or activities—regardless of how well the continuum and experiences are defined at the state level.



The pivotal moment of quality in WBL rests with the ability of each educator to meaningfully embed experiences across the WBL continuum into instruction to facilitate ongoing deep student learning and career development.



WBL comes alive and becomes relevant for students when it is embedded into instruction in a progressive way throughout each course and grade. WBL experiences should be woven into the fabric of each course, supported by strategic preparation and follow-up instruction to help students connect their experiences and interests with the course content and the expertise of the engaged employer(s). For example, rather than inviting a dietician to give a presentation on general dietary issues during a unit on diabetes, a health science teacher could engage the industry partner to lead an interactive discussion or mini-project that reinforces and contextualizes the application of different dietary management concepts used to treat diabetes.

One of the risks of a WBL continuum is that, without appropriate and clear expectations and support for educators, WBL can translate to a “checklist” of career-related activities that may or may not complement course content – but purportedly supports general career readiness. **This checklist-based approach perpetuates a disconnect between classroom learning and careers, rather than facilitating a deeper understanding and application of the technical knowledge and skills learned in the classroom through the lens of a specific industry or occupation.**

State policymakers should consider how to support educators in embedding WBL into instruction in meaningful, ongoing ways. State-level strategies to support educators include:

- ▶ Setting and communicating clear expectations for integrating WBL into instruction across the state-defined continuum;
- ▶ Providing ongoing professional development for both teachers and administrators on how to design high-quality instructional WBL experiences in lessons and units—including prior to, during and following a specific WBL continuum experience (i.e. career fair, workplace tour or job shadow); and
- ▶ Updating teacher preparation standards and policies to support high-quality embedded WBL instruction.

Work-Based Learning in Action: Charting a Student’s Path to Career Readiness

Consider through a student’s journey to career readiness. What should the student know and be able to do? What policies and supports does he or she need to be successful?

Cybersecurity Career Pathway *Knowledge, Skills and Experiences Leading to Career Readiness*

	Academic	Technical	Work-Based Learning
Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops grade-level proficiency in math and reading. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops basic digital literacy skills. Participates in Code.org’s Hour of Code. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joins worksite visits and employer presentations. Conducts informational interviews. Identifies IT, Engineering, and Healthcare as areas of interest.
Middle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completes Algebra 1. Maintains proficiency in all content areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds digital proficiency. Learns basic app-building programming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job shadows at a local company. Creates a 10-year education-to-career goals plan.
High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earns college credit through AP math, science and computer science courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completes a Cybersecurity CTE program of study. Earns CompTIA Network+ and Security+ industry certifications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completes industry-led projects in CTE courses, resulting in presentations to employer partners. Builds relationships with IT-industry mentors. Completes a capstone internship with a local cybersecurity company.
Postsecondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earns an A.S. degree early because of credits and certifications earned in high school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earns higher-level cybersecurity industry certifications valued by employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works for local companies through the campus IT co-op program. Creates a portfolio of projects completed and skills developed.
Career Advancement Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins career at an above-entry level position because of credentials and work experience and advances within the company. Earns a dual B.S. in cybersecurity and M.B.A. in business administration with plans to open a cybersecurity consulting company. 		

Work-Based Learning in Action: Charting a Student’s Path to Career Readiness

Electromechanical Career Pathway *Knowledge, Skills and Experiences Leading to Career Readiness*

	Academic	Technical	Work-Based Learning
Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops grade-level proficiency in math and reading. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops basic digital literacy skills. Joins school robotics club. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joins worksite visits and employer presentations. Participates in mock interviews. Identifies Manufacturing and Engineering as areas of interest.
Middle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintains proficiency in all content areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds digital proficiency. Earns high school credit by completing Foundations of Manufacturing course. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job shadows at a local company. Creates a 10-year education-to-career goals plan.
High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earns college credit through dual credit math and science courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earns postsecondary Electromechanical Technology certificate through dual credit manufacturing courses. Earns NIMS and Snap-On measurement industry certifications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds relationships with manufacturing industry mentors. Completes simulated WBL experience with employer partners.
Postsecondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earns an A.A.S. degree in Electromechanical Technology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earns higher-level Electromechanical certifications valued by employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is employed as an Industrial Engineering Technician while working toward A.A.S. Creates a portfolio of projects completed and skills developed.
Career Advancement Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is promoted to Mechanical Engineering Technician within current company upon receipt of A.A.S degree. Earns a B.S. in Electromechanical Engineering Technology. 		

Work-Based Learning Program Data Collection and Reporting

Policymakers who establish their state's vision, strategic plan, definitions and continuum for statewide work-based learning programs with an eye toward desired data elements and systems will be best poised to effectively monitor, evaluate and publicly report the outcomes and impact of the state's WBL program.



As states increase their focus on college and career readiness, it is critical that states develop the ability to measure the impact and effectiveness of their WBL programs.



This increased interest in WBL and urgency to improve WBL data collection and reporting are underscored by the reauthorization of Perkins V, which includes WBL as one of the secondary program quality indicators within its accountability framework.

Many states struggle to develop data-driven strategies to improve and expand WBL programs for the simple reason that most states collect very limited, if any, data related to WBL. In fact, most states that collect WBL data are limited to data-reflecting capstone WBL/ internship course enrollment. Typically, there are no WBL program data measures specific to program quality, student progression along a WBL continuum or student participation in WBL experiences that do not result in high school credit. This lack of data makes it impossible for a state policymaker to determine whether students received equitable opportunities across the program continuum and whether those opportunities were of equal and consistent high-quality.

States that fully embrace WBL as a strategy to support career readiness and workforce development will be faced with the challenge of prioritizing the data elements most critical to measure program quality, student success and long-term impact.

POLICY PLAN

Collecting and Evaluating Work-Based Learning Data

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1. Identify and analyze existing data related to WBL participation, completion outcomes and program quality.

Identify misalignments or gaps in program quality and across student groups. Determine underlying causes and identify necessary changes to existing policies and program guidance.

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2. Evaluate whether existing WBL data accurately represents and can measure progress toward the state’s vision and goals for high-quality WBL programs and outcomes.

Identify where there are critical gaps in data availability.

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3. Prioritize the development of new WBL-related data elements based on the consideration of:

- a. Alignment with the state’s WBL strategic plan goals and measurable objectives;
 - b. Measures of outcomes that differentiate levels of quality rather than inputs/ participation, when possible;
 - c. The value added by the new data element(s) to inform WBL program decisions, when weighed against the administrative burden of reporting the new elements on educators, students or employers;
 - d. The level of data (e.g., student-level, school-level, career cluster-level, state-level, etc.) necessary to fully measure WBL program and experience quality and outcomes as well as how they contribute to the state’s goals; and
 - e. The original source of the new data elements (e.g., student, educator or employer surveys; the addition of new elements into student information systems; district-level program evaluations; or integrating data elements from multiple systems in new ways, such as integrating career exploration data from a an online statewide resource into a larger statewide dataset).
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4. Make WBL program quality and outcomes data accessible to all stakeholders.

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5. Provide support and update guidance related to any new data reporting requirements, and build capacity for educators and employers to use the data reported to support local implementation.

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6. Incentivize district and employer participation in state WBL program continuum, including the provision of data reflective of state-identified program quality indicators.

Persistent Roadblocks to High-Quality WBL Implementation and Expansion

Long-standing challenges related to work-based learning persist across states. These thorny issues have varying levels of policy complexity and are often deferred or only partially addressed by policymakers. Yet these common roadblocks must be addressed and overcome to ensure WBL is evenly implemented and provides students with the most robust set of experiences possible.

There are four major policy challenges facing statewide WBL programs.

- 1. Student Access and Equity**
- 2. Employer Engagement**
- 3. Legal Barriers: Liability Insurance, Workers' Compensation and Age Restrictions**
- 4. Transportation and Travel Time**

The following sections introduce each issue, provide policy considerations and identify promising practices being taken by states to resolve each issue.



Challenge 1

Access and Equity

Student access and equity are underrecognized issues when it comes to work-based learning exposure and experiences. Notable gaps begin to emerge when WBL participation, experience type and completion rates are broken down by student groups, geography, industry sectors and prior academic performance. This difficulty may be due in part to states lacking any clear policy and program guidance on what defines program equity through the lens of program quality and what program quality measures should be used to measure equity.

For example, a state may find that students from low-income families participate in WBL internships at lower rates than their wealthier peers, and that their capstone internship placements tend to be aligned with lower-wage occupations, such as culinary vs. cybersecurity. Policymakers should investigate the possible conditions that may contribute to equity gaps in access and participation.

Students could be unable to participate, for example, because they lack transportation to or from a work site or they need to prioritize work outside of school to support their family above an unpaid internship in the student's future career field. At a more systemic level, equity gaps could be addressed by improving student advisement and course selection practices or adjusting course and program of study offerings.

As policymakers dig into access and equity challenges in WBL, they should engage stakeholders (e.g., students and families representing various student groups, educators and administrators, employers, etc.) to identify and understand the—often interrelated—underlying causes of inequitable access to and variable-quality of WBL program experiences. Only by understanding the context for why these gaps may exist can policymakers identify and mitigate these barriers through policy, program and funding.

Analyzing Work-Based Learning Data to Support Equity

State-level data often can mask program inequities, particularly for statewide programs. The disaggregation of student demographic and experience data to drive program quality and equity measures should include, at a minimum, the following:

- ▶ Gender
- ▶ Race/ethnicity
- ▶ Economically disadvantaged
- ▶ Geography (rural, suburban or urban and local or regional)
- ▶ Disabilities
- ▶ Other special populations, including students involved with foster care, justice system, homelessness and military families
- ▶ Student educational experiences, such as CTE concentrator status and program completion by career cluster as well as program of study and prior academic achievement
- ▶ Type of WBL experience and industry sector, occupation and job function, where applicable

POLICY PLAN

Access and Equity

1. Codify policy and program guidance on what defines program access and equity through the lens of program quality.
2. Incentivize district participation in state WBL program continuum, including the provision of data reflective of state-identified program quality indicators.
3. Encourage the development and expansion of WBL experiences that reduce barriers to equitable access for under-represented student groups, such as simulated workspaces to provide scalable training opportunities, centralized facilities or paid internships.

From the States

Strategies to Increase Access and Equity in Work-Based Learning

Potential Challenge	Policy or Program Solution	State Examples
The state wants to increase the number of students completing WBL while reducing access and equity gaps.	Fund education system incentives and require public reporting.	Colorado provides incentives for schools or districts based on completion of WBL. The state also requires reporting on participation by type of WBL experience, career cluster and student demographics.
Students with disabilities may not have the resources they need to participate in high-quality WBL.	Allocate funds to support specific student groups' access to WBL.	Minnesota's Access to CTE Fund for students with disabilities reimburses schools or districts for contracted services or equipment expenses needed to support a student's participation in general education CTE, including WBL.
Some student groups are under-represented in WBL experiences (generally or within specific industry sectors).	Prioritize underrepresented student groups and/or industry in recruitment and student selection processes.	Tempe Chamber provides paid summer internships (\$13/hour, 15 hours/week for 8 weeks) and employability skills development for low-income students interested in business services.
Students enrolled at some schools have less access to high-quality WBL experiences.	Leverage cross-sector partnerships to increase access for students who attend schools with limited WBL opportunities.	Skills for Rhode Island's Future promotes equity by giving preference to applicants enrolled in priority schools.

Challenge 2

Employer Engagement and Capacity Building

There are countless employers who see the value of being actively engaged in a work-based learning program and have the capacity to support that engagement. Yet there are just as many employers who do not. Though some reasons can be traced to company policies, the majority of employers who opt out of participating in formal WBL programs point to internal staffing capacity, challenges in providing meaningful learning experiences and a lack of incentives to compensate them for their lost productivity due to the supervising and/or mentoring of students.

Additionally, as highlighted in ExcelinEd's CTE playbook [Building Cross-Sector Partnerships to Support Career and Technical Education Pathways](#), employer disengagement can also boil down to the simple fact that “the education and business sectors speak different languages or value different priorities [with] partners struggling to find common ground on which all parties achieve mutual returns on investment.”





POLICY PLAN

Employer Engagement

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1. Incentivize employers, particularly small- and medium-sized, to engage in a local or regional WBL program.
.....
- 2. Provide reductions in tax or insurance costs for employers through legislation based on WBL placements and the successful completion of those placements.**
.....
- 3. Engage employers in the review and revision of state WBL policies and guidance.**
 - a. Identify program quality indicators that would represent employer-valued returns on investment for employer recruitment and engagement and sustainability.
 - b. Identify state policies—existing or perceived—that inhibit employer engagement and modify accordingly.
.....
- 4. Promote the creation and/or appointment of regional intermediary organizations to facilitate employer recruitment and engagement.**
.....
- 5. Develop and disseminate clear, transparent guidance and communication that can serve as marketing, onboarding and supportive program documents for employers.**

From the States

Strategies to Support Employer Engagement

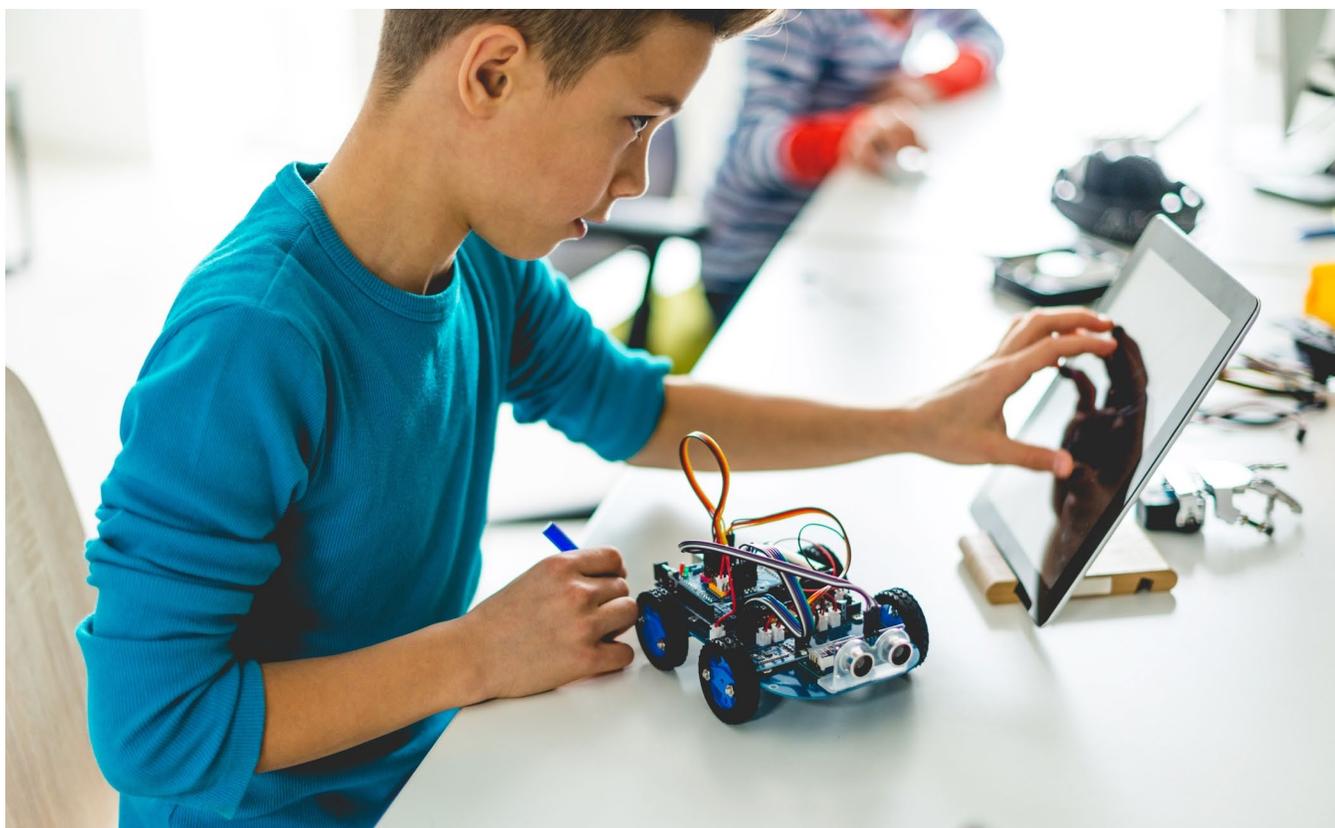
Potential Challenge	Policy or Program Solution	State Examples
Employers do not know the best way to engage with schools or districts in their region. Employers receive many identical requests from multiple school systems.	Develop and fund a statewide network of regional intermediaries to support regional WBL and career pathway programs that meet the unique needs of each regional economy.	Iowa's Statewide WBL Intermediary Network connects business and the education system to offer relevant, WBL experiences to students and teachers throughout Iowa. Rutherford Works and San Antonio Works are regional chambers of commerce that convene industry partners to support career pathways, especially through WBL and internship programs.
Employers need support in determining how to support local WBL programs.	Implement an employer-focused recruitment and communications strategy.	Delaware's Employer Playbook provides detailed information about the types of WBL experiences and the employer commitment/requirements for each.
Not enough employers are participating in state/local WBL programs.	Leverage public recognition and employer networks to celebrate and expand employer engagement.	New Hampshire Governor's WBL Champion Awards elevate the stories of students, educators and employers who demonstrate excellence in WBL to help families see WBL as an integral component of college and career readiness.
Employers are not hosting WBL placements because of real or perceived costs/losses associated with hosting WBL students.	Provide funding/cost savings to incentivize employers hosting WBL placements.	Tennessee allows employers to apply for up to \$5,000 in state grant funds to offset WBL costs (passed 2019). South Carolina employers can receive up to a \$1,000 tax credit for each apprentice. Georgia employers are eligible for up to a 5% (max \$2,500) workers' compensation premium credit, based on the number of WBL students employed.

Challenge 3

Legal Barriers – Liability Insurance, Workers’ Compensation and Age Restrictions

All too often employers cite liability insurance, workers’ compensation or age restriction policies as reasons for not participating in a formal work-based learning program. More times than not, these stem from either internal company policies or confusion over what federal and state regulations deem allowable. In some cases, state labor laws on age restrictions are found to be more restrictive than federal laws. This can be due, in part, to language and cited conditions, which are still in state code, but are outdated or no longer exist in modern worksites.

Though states are taking a variety of approaches to address this issue, it remains one of the most prominent, longstanding barriers to student participation in fully immersive, onsite WBL experiences as part of a formal WBL program.



POLICY PLAN

Legal Barriers

1. Incentivize paid WBL placements with employers as a means to ensure student liability is covered by workers' compensation.
2. Support development of regional intermediary organizations and temp agencies as employers of record to provide a layer of protection for employers and centralize the process for hiring and ensuring student eligibility.
3. Promote employer-insurance carrier consultations to review existing coverage policies regarding formal WBL experiences and placements.
4. Require districts and postsecondary institutions to possess appropriate insurance policies to cover students while at worksites as part of a formal WBL program placement.
 - a. Recommend education partners review their existing coverage policies to determine if high-risk accident insurance (such as sporting activities) can extend to cover students participating in a formal WBL program placement.
5. Review existing state labor laws addressing age-restrictive placements, working conditions and occupational hazards. Modify state language deemed outdated and insert appropriate language reflective of modern working conditions, and align with federal laws, allowing youth placements at worksites as part of a formal WBL program and which are supported by employers.
6. Identify and revise, where needed, all existing state agency information and guidance on liability insurance, workers' compensation and age restrictions to ensure consistency, conformity and transparency across state agencies for all participating stakeholders of a formal WBL program.

From the States

Strategies to Minimize Legal Barriers

Potential Challenge	Policy or Program Solution	State Examples
Employers are unwilling to host unpaid interns because of concerns about liability.	Ensure state law provides appropriate protections for employers hosting WBL students.	Iowa law prohibits unpaid students injured on a worksite from filing suit against employers because they are covered under the school workers' compensation policy.
Employers are unwilling to host unpaid interns because of concerns about workers' compensation coverage.	Allow or require a school or district to act as the employer of unpaid WBL students for purposes of workers' compensation.	Kentucky and New Hampshire allow schools or districts to act as the employer of unpaid WBL students in order to provide workers' compensation coverage. Utah students completing unpaid WBL placements are considered volunteer government workers.
Employers are unwilling to host any interns because of concerns about accident and liability insurance coverage and/or premium increases.	Allow or require a school or district to provide medical, accident and/or liability insurance for students in WBL placements.	Tennessee districts are required to provide student accident insurance that covers WBL placement. Texas allows public and charter schools to buy accident and liability insurance to cover student internships. Kentucky provides statewide medical and accident insurance (secondary) for all students enrolled in state area CTE centers, which covers WBL placements.
Employers are unwilling to host interns because of concerns about medical insurance coverage.	Allow companies to purchase additional insurance to cover WBL placements.	Washington allows employers to purchase medical-only insurance for student volunteers (includes unpaid interns).
Employers believe they cannot hire students under age 18.	Ensure state code allows reasonable WBL exemptions from child labor laws related to age, hours worked and/or hazardous occupations.	Washington does not require a work permit for unpaid interns under 18 and allows special variance applications for exemptions from age/hour and hazardous occupation restrictions.
Employers are unwilling to host interns because of real or perceived concerns about liability and the administrative burden of hiring minors on a recurring or temporary basis.	Intermediary organizations hire and place students in WBL experiences with employer partners to reduce employer liability and decreased the administrative burden on employers.	Skills for Rhode Island's Future employs and pays all students participating in the PrepareRI Statewide Internship Program. Kentucky and Ohio leverage contracts with employment agency Adecco to hire and students as temporary employees for WBL to reduce employer liability. Cristo Rey assumes the role of an employee leasing agency through the separately incorporated Corporate Work Study Program. Employers partner to lease full-time positions, which can be filled by one or more student-employees. (Multiple students may fill a single position on part-time basis.)

Student Transportation and Travel Time

Like liability, the ability for a student, particularly in rural and inner-urban communities, to travel and fully participate in an offsite work-based learning experience, is one of the more overt issues facing state promoted WBL programs. Whether due to a lack of public or private transportation options or lack of available employers, too many qualified students are shut out of meaningful WBL experiences because of their inability to travel to employer worksites.

Relatedly, state policies on [seat-time](#), attendance reporting and teacher-of-record requirements—along with and district’s course scheduling policies—can negatively impact the ability and overall time a high school student can arrive and remain at a worksite during a typical school day. State and local policies can exacerbate transportation issues, further reducing the number of students who can participate in WBL experiences.

Simulated Work-Based Learning: A Promising Approach for Rural Areas

States could consider creating robust, meaningful simulated work experiences with employer or educator stakeholders in order to address situational conditions when student access to employer worksites is limited. When fully developed and supported through state policies and programming, these alternative experiences can achieve similar results as with offsite placements.





POLICY PLAN

Transportation and Travel Time

1. Incentivize districts to provide transportation or provide fare subsidies for public transportation.
2. Incentivize districts and public transportation providers, where public transportation is available, to revise existing routes leading to increased student mobility to and from employer worksites.
3. Incentivize employers and districts or postsecondary institutions to partner in the development of real or simulated WBL experiences on campus.
4. Review and revise state policies pertaining to [student seat time](#), teacher-of-record requirements, attendance reporting and credit for out-of-school experiences that may inadvertently restrict student participation in meaningful immersive WBL experiences. If appropriate, consider developing innovation programs or [waiver processes](#) to increase flexibility and expand student access.
5. Review existing state guidance on high school course scheduling. Revise or develop guidance on course scheduling that will support more conducive scheduling for students participating in WBL experiences.
6. Develop or revise resources for districts and postsecondary institutions highlighting opportunities to align local policies and practices with the state's vision for WBL and review or remove unintended local barriers to student WBL participation.

From the States

Strategies to Mitigate Transportation and Travel Time Barriers

Potential Challenge	Policy or Program Solution	State Examples
Students do not have transportation to worksite placements.	Identify new or existing sources of funds that can be used to provide student transportation to WBL placements.	<p>California CTE Incentive Grant funds can be used to transport students to WBL.</p> <p>Maryland WIOA funds can be used to provide transportation assistance for WIOA-eligible youth.</p> <p>South Carolina includes WBL in guidance on state funds for use of school buses.</p> <p>Minnesota's Access to CTE Fund for students with disabilities reimburses schools or districts for contracted services or equipment expenses needed to support a student's participation in general education CTE (including WBL).</p>
There are insufficient WBL placements within a reasonable distance to support a school's WBL program.	Develop models, guidance and program quality indicators for school-based, employer-driven WBL experiences.	<p>Tennessee is implementing a model for employer-developed onsite worksites on secondary or postsecondary campuses.</p> <p>Rhode Island has adopted Industry-Based Project Standards.</p> <p>Alabama and West Virginia have developed simulated workplace models and guidance.</p>
Students who travel to WBL experiences do not meet seat-time requirements and/or generate full FTE funding in the state's funding formula.	Establish pilot programs and waiver processes to support high-quality WBL experiences.	<p>Colorado's High School Innovative Learning Pilot program allows pilot schools to offer innovative learning opportunities (such as WBL) that count participating students as full-time pupils—regardless of whether they meet the required number of teacher-pupil instruction and contact hours for full-time enrollment.</p>

What's Next?

An effective work-based learning program continuum can deeply benefit states and students—but the opportunities it can offer won't just magically appear. States must act strategically to provide all students—and employers—with the opportunities that WBL offers.

Assessing and improving state WBL programs and policies is hard work that requires effective leadership, a clear vision and sustained collaboration from a variety of public and private stakeholders. When done well, all the hard work is worth the investment and challenges: a strong state WBL program will allow states to be truly responsive to the needs of both employers and students.

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Federal Definitions and References to Work-Based Learning

At the federal level, work-based learning terminology and guidance differs depending on the federal act and intended outcomes. Below is a sample of federal language as it pertains to WBL.

Federal Act	WBL-Related Language/Reference
Perkins V	“... Sustained interactions with industry or community professionals in real workplace settings, to the extent practicable, or simulated environments at an educational institution that foster in-depth, firsthand engagement with the tasks required of a given career field, that are aligned to curriculum and instruction.” WBL is further defined under innovative delivery models, stating, “... including school-based simulated work sites, mentoring, work site visits, job shadowing, project-based learning, and skills-based and paid internships.”
ESSA	“... Provide students in-depth interaction with industry professionals and, if appropriate, academic credit ...” ESSA also lists WBL as a possible indicator of career competencies at the secondary school level.
WIOA	<p>As defined by Job Corps Ctrs: “...Provide opportunities for [WBL] experiences (including internships, short-term employment apprenticeships, and fellowships), and opportunities for pre-employment transition services.”</p> <p>As defined by Youth Workforce Investment Activity: “Paid and unpaid work experiences that have as a component academic and occupational education, which may include ... (ii) pre-apprenticeship programs; (iii) internships and job shadowing; and (iv) on-the-job training opportunities.”</p> <p>As defined by Vocational Rehabilitation’s Pre-Employment Transition Services - “... Experiences may include in-school or after school opportunities, or experiences outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that are provided in an integrated environment to the maximum extent possible.”</p>
IDEA	Referenced in requirements associated with transitional services for students with disabilities; collaborative language in WIOA under Vocational Rehabilitation.