



Work-Based Learning Made Easy

A Toolkit to Maximize Opportunities in Your Community

Created in partnership with FourPoint Education Partners



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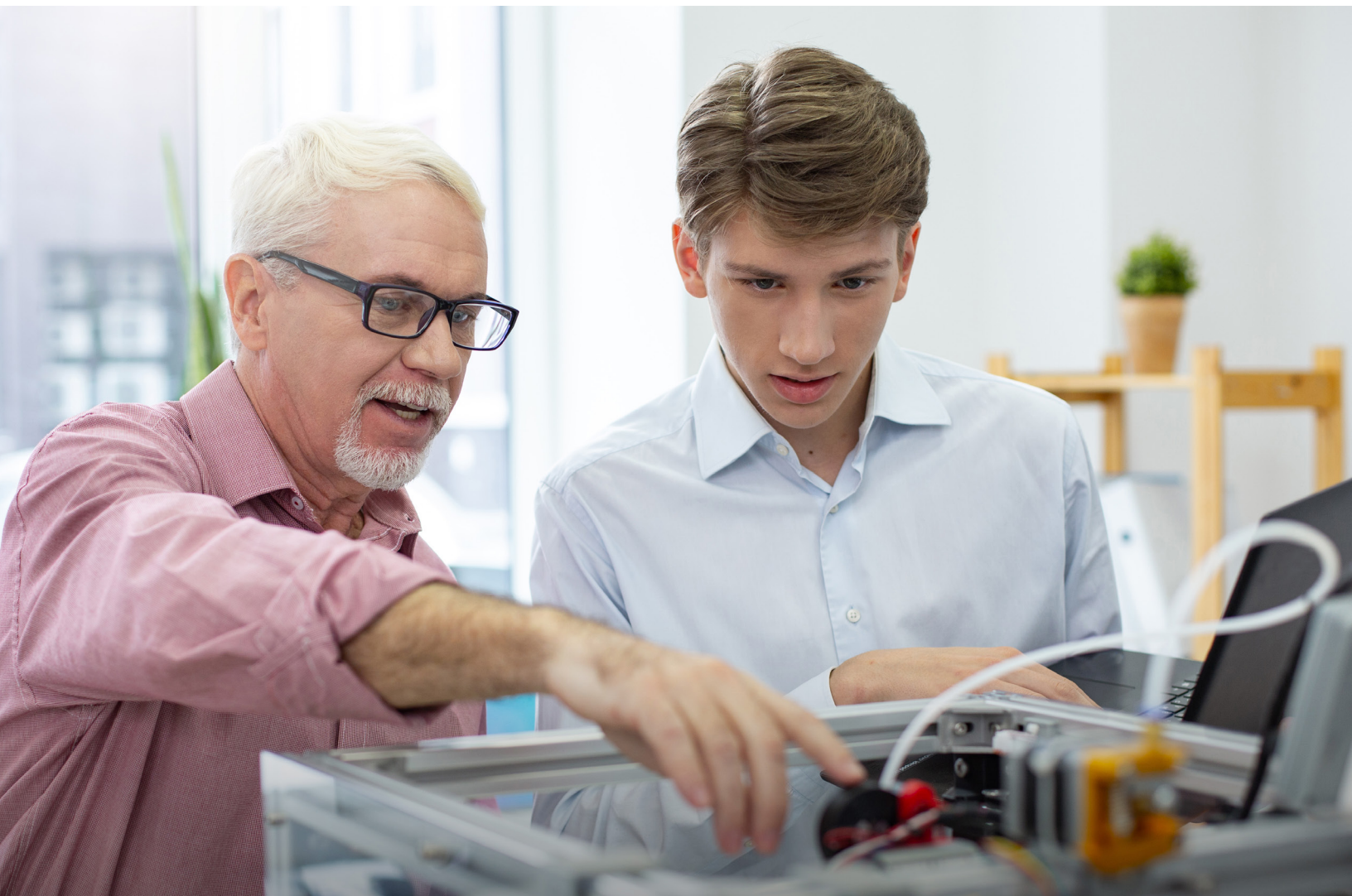
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Defining Work-Based Learning (WBL)

The Value and Importance of Career Readiness

According to the latest U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report, there are 7.4 million unfilled jobs in the United States.¹ Many employers across the country report that there is a skills gap for middle skilled jobs, with an insufficient number of applicants having the qualifications, training, or education needed to fill those roles.

Developing a combination of technical, academic, and employability skills is the best way to prepare students for fast-growing and high-earning jobs (Orrell, 2018).

A 2020 report by [Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce](#), "Workplace Basics: The Competencies Employers Want," revealed the five most in-demand competencies across the labor market. **These competencies may be better learned through work-based learning (WBL), rather than in-classroom learning alone.**

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Sales and customer service
- Leadership
- Problem solving and complex thinking

7.4M

unfilled jobs
in the U.S.¹

61%

of employers face
challenges filling skilled
worker vacancies²

8M

workers lack
necessary
credentials³

Sources:

1. US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025
2. National Skills Coalition, 2017
3. National Skills Coalition, 2017



What is WBL?

According to [Jobs for the Future](#), WBL is the completion of "meaningful job tasks in a workplace that develop readiness for work, knowledge, and skills that support entry or advancement in a particular career."



WBL: A Continuum

WBL supports a continuum of learning and hands-on skill development experiences, from career exposure and career engagement to real-life work and career experiences.

1. Career Awareness

Grades 4-8

Low-Cost Exploration for all Students in Grades 4-8

- Worksite tours, job shadowing, and information interviews
- Career presentations and connections to classroom learning
- Guest speakers in the classroom

Outcome: Early exposure to high-growth, high-wage career pathways

2. Career Preparation

Grades 9-12

Connecting In-School HS Learning with Work-Based Learning

- Career mentorship
- Career-related dual enrollment
- Youth internship
- Project-based learning with employers
- Summer employment
- Pre-apprenticeship

Outcome: Academic credit and career connection

3. Career Launch

HS +
Postsecondary

Meaningful On-the-Job Experience and Aligned Classroom Learning

- Registered apprenticeships
- College internship programs
- Youth registered apprenticeships
- Career training programs

Outcome: Postsecondary credential, paid work experience, career connection

Benefits of WBL for Students

Access to WBL opportunities allows **students to enhance their career research and planning**, ultimately paving the way for them to meet their future career goals.

WBL offers the capability to present the opportunities to help students determine if their interests lead to a **good career fit**.

When planned and implemented thoughtfully, WBL delivers compelling, integrated experiences for students to gain early exposure to career pathways, promoting relevant skills development. When provided equitably in a community, WBL also creates a strong, critical bridge to economic self-sufficiency. Students of all backgrounds can get a head start on postsecondary programs, including opportunities to earn college credits and industry certifications before graduation.



An Approach to Closing the Opportunity Gap

As recently as August 2020, the [Brookings Institution](#) affirmed, "The labor market doesn't have a 'skills gap'—it has an opportunity gap."

Brookings and others advocate for cultivating and investing in diverse talent to "unleash innovation, economic growth, and community well-being" through **long-term, holistic solutions including:**

- Information about quality jobs and career navigation assistance
- Affordable education and on-the-job learning
- Professional networks and peer support•
- A foot in the door to a new field, including first jobs, internships, and apprenticeships
- Equitable hiring, mentoring, and management practices



WBL Can Help Close Equity Gaps

A growing body of research demonstrates the importance of providing career-connected learning experiences by the middle grades for students to develop a positive self-concept of their occupational prospects (Callahan, Ito, Mizuko, Rea, Wortman, & Wortman, 2019).

Marginalized youth often get social cues that engagement in high-value fields is not for youth like them. **Communities can address this barrier by providing students with opportunities to engage in activities** parallel to professional practices in educator-guided projects and hands-on experiences, and exposing adolescents to role models, media, and related content.

Lateefah Durant, who helped build and lead college and career readiness efforts in Prince George's County Public Schools and now works full-time to expand high-quality WBL opportunities for youth as **Vice President of CityWorks DC**, shared her perspective:

“Work-based learning is a critical enabler for students to secure meaningful work that can support a family. Inequitable access to career-building work-based learning is an oft-ignored barrier which prevents young people, especially low-income students of color, from getting key things we know are needed for a more secure economic future: paid work experience, industry-based and postsecondary credentials, and a supportive professional network—all things which their wealthier peers acquire through other means.

Embedding work-based learning into the K-12 curriculum for all students **addresses equity challenges and gives all young people access to the experiences and social networks** necessary to propel their early career outcomes.”



LATEEFAH DURANT | Vice President, CityWorks DC

Win-Win-Win: Building Partnerships with Employers & Postsecondary Training Partners

The Value of WBL: Student Perspectives



“Internships are powerful, and helped me learn that a career in education was my life's direction, not medicine. But I was only able to do that through mentorship and work-based learning. I needed to explore, identify, reflect, and filter through things with another human who was there to support me. With my high school mentor who guided me to look into interning at a school, it would have taken me a lot longer to know that there's power in teaching.

Throughout my high school experience, we were tasked with finding internships during our Independent Learning Time. As I explored different internships, I was oftentimes confused because people in my home didn't do internships. While confused on what internship path to take, I was able to do research and locate a mentor I still talk to today. He helped me go through internship descriptions and answer critical questions about my expectations for specific internships.

Continued on next page >

“Originally my search started with an internship at hospitals and medical facilities because I wanted to be a medical doctor. After experiencing one, I knew that was not for me. A year later, I started an internship at a school, and it was made clear my love and passion were students. So, I continued that internship and later interned at schools and the Mayor’s Office of Education. Since that moment, I have started to explore different internships in education because now, after having internships in different fields, including criminal justice, I know working and advocating with students is my life direction.”



TAMIR HARPER | Frederick Douglass Distinguished Scholar, American University, Class of 2023, School District of Philadelphia, Class of 2021





“During my high school years, I’ve worked with my local middle school to help with teaching and coaching math as an opportunity in work-based learning.

Through this program, I have gained a lot of skills in teaching and mathematics, as well as helping the school team place consistently in the top five on the state level. Almost all of the opportunities which I’ve had since then are due in part to this experience, and I highly recommend everyone look into a similar program for a subject they are interested in.”



PATRICK CORREAL-WINTERS | Centennial High School, Class of 2021, Howard County Public Schools, MD, Intended College Major: Education

The Value of WBL: Educator Perspectives



“Providing internships is one of the most important things you can do for students. There is no better motivator for high school students.”



THERESE TIPTON | Principal, Raisbeck Aviation High School in Highline Public Schools (WA) where students have the opportunity to participate in internships with Boeing and other valued employers

“Our community knows that the better educated our students are, the more we can grow as a community. So work-based learning partnerships are very important to help our students understand the opportunities that are available to them.”



DIANA L. GREENE | Former Superintendent, Duval County Public Schools (FL)

The Value of WBL: Employer Perspectives

WBL is also a win for employers. **Nancy Fishman, Co-Global Director of Ready Nation**, tells us business leaders are united in their concerns regarding their future workforce. She says, "Business and industry face a looming gap between available positions and workers with the skills to fill those positions. Partnerships between businesses and education are an important factor in building a strong workforce."

In responding to the notion of the "Return on Investment" (ROI) for businesses thinking about partnering with schools to provide WBL, **Sarah Kapellusch, Manager of Business Partnerships and Development at Gateway Technical College (WI)** says, "I call it Return on Relationship. Businesses must understand that having youth in their talent pipeline process is a must and will not drop off. Take time to help educate teachers on your needs and they will give back to you a career- or college-ready individual."

Benefits for Employers

- Develops diverse, robust talent pipeline
- Reduces hiring costs
- Increases retention through strong student connections



Effective WBL Practices



WBL Requires Effective Coordination with Partners

Career readiness is a primary task for school counselors, but it is difficult to provide individualized instruction due to high student-to-counselor ratios (ASCA, 2020).

However, by aligning existing assets and efforts, communities can establish broader and more equitable access to WBL opportunities, so that every young adult will have multiple pathways to economic self-sufficiency, fulfillment, and access to meaningful career opportunities leading to improved outcomes.

Successful WBL coordination leverages the expertise of employers, postsecondary education, and training providers, including out-of-school time programs, as well as teachers and other educators to ensure programming connects learning across schools and the community.

Keys to Effective Internal (Cross-Departmental) Collaboration

Coordination between staff members focused on college and career readiness (e.g., school counseling and CTE)

- Collaborate to arrive at shared definitions of WBL opportunities, processes, and measures (e.g., credit earning options and requirements)
- Team up to maximize partnership opportunities and resources

Coordination between CCR staff and teachers

- Create communication materials to make it easy for teachers to promote WBL opportunities

Coordination with transition coordinators supporting students with disabilities

- Special education departments have a lot of expertise

Collaboration with External Partners

- Employers often field WBL requests from a variety of school and district staff. Internal collaboration should streamline this outreach to make it easier for external partners to understand WBL partnership opportunities and processes
- Create a master list of WBL partners, including those providing apprenticeships and internships for CTE programs, transition programming for students with disabilities, and any other school-led work-based learning
- Add a prospective partner list, including any CTE program advisors not yet providing WBL, the local chamber of commerce and any other workforce development groups, professional associations, or employer partners, particularly those in the region's high-growth sectors
- Make an accessible WBL partnership webpage that provides simple instructions on how to provide a WBL opportunity with answers to FAQs



Key Attributes of a Thriving WBL Community

After a decade of developing them across the state, [Colorado has found](#) that thriving WBL communities share the following elements.

- **Leadership:** A partner has devoted a full or partial FTE to manage the initiative and guide the work of the leadership team and committees
- **Needs Analysis:** Data analysts are identified and work together across partners to regularly review relevant information
- **Asset Mapping:** Assets are documented and made public and updated on a regular basis
- **Stakeholders:** Capacity building activities take place regularly, and a governance structure is in place for decision making
- **Resources:** A sustainable business model is in place that supports a lead agency to drive this work forward on an ongoing basis
- **Communications:** A strategic communications plan is in place that keeps all partners informed on a regular basis, as well as sharing stories to generate further involvement
- **Evaluation & Continuous Improvement:** Indicators are regularly reviewed, and progress is reported publicly—surveys are conducted regularly to identify improvement opportunities



		Exploring	Emerging	Demonstrating	Thriving
Evaluate and Continue Improvement	Leadership	An individual or an entity is a champion of this effort	A leadership team has been established with representation from multiple partners	A leadership team meets regularly, and committees are in place as needed for specific projects	A partner has devoted a full or partial FTE to manage the initiative and guide the work of the leadership team and communities
	Needs Analysis	Labor market information and needs of businesses has not been analyzed or reviewed	A leadership team meets regularly, and committees are in place as needed for specific projects	Full analysis of data and needs has been conducted and the right solution has been picked for the identified problem	Data analysts are identified and work together across partners to regularly review relevant information
	Asset Mapping	Community assets or programs are understood based only on past experiences	A partner has devoted a full or partial FTE to manage the initiative and guide the work of the leadership team and communities	Assets and resources of all community stakeholders are documented and used in decision making and strategic planning	Assets are documented and made public and updated on a regular basis
	Stakeholders	At least two to three key stakeholder groups are at the table and ready to engage in this project. The three stakeholder groups are Business, Education, and Workforce/Community.	Labor market information and other data sources are identified and used to inform the direction of the initiative	Partners from all three stakeholder groups actively engage in conversations and initiatives together. Work is aligned and duplication of services is not occurring.	Capacity-building activities take place regularly, and a governance structure is in place for decision making
	Resources	Financial resources to support the work are unknown	Full analysis of data and needs has been conducted and the right solution has been picked for the identified problem	Financial resources are contributed by multiple partners as they are available. A strategy is in place to coordinate funding opportunities when they arise.	A sustainable business model is in place that supports a lead agency to drive this work forward on an ongoing basis
	Communications	The champion communicates as needed with engaged stakeholders	Data analysts are identified and work together across partners to regularly review relevant information	A communications lead is identified and develops messaging that informs stakeholders and expands the partnership	A strategic communications plan is in place that keeps all partners informed on a regular basis, as well as sharing stories to generate further involvement
		Process outcomes are defined and considered to be successful	Assets and resources of engaged stakeholders are documented and used in decision making	Multiple outcomes are identified, and indicators are tracked and reported regularly	Indicators are regularly reviewed, and progress is reported publicly. Surveys are conducted regularly to identify improvement opportunities.

Connect Education and Career with PowerSchool



Work-Based Learning in Naviance

Staff View:

Bring together all the tools needed for an effective and impactful work-based learning program. With Naviance CCLR, you can bridge the gap between classroom learning and the workplace, giving students a clearer understanding of their chosen career fields, helping them build industry-relevant skills, and preparing them for future success.

Naviance

Home Self-Discovery Courses Careers Colleges Planner About me

Log Out

Careers / Work-based learning

Work-Based Learning

Your suggested opportunities

Explore opportunities based on your career preferences and interests.

IRONWORKERS OF CALIFORNIA

Welding Intern
Ironworkers of California

Career Work experience

123 Iron Point Parkway
Folsom, CA 95630

Dec 7, 2025 - Mar 10, 2025

Maryann Phillips

luminous

Future Careers Expo
Luminous

Job fair

Oak Ridge High School Gym

Dec 15, 202 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Terra

Youth Leadership Seminar
Terra

Internship

Cleveland, OH

Jan 20, 2025 - May 15, 2025

Access a comprehensive work-based learning experience in Naviance CCLR that helps students apply classroom knowledge to real-world settings and enhance their skills, employability, and industry connections.

- An employer portal that makes it easier to connect students with organizations by allowing staff to invite their employer network for free.
- Personalized opportunity recommendations for students based on their career interests and preferences
- Comprehensive work-based learning management, including tracking for engagement, hours, and digital signatures
- Easy to access reporting for engagement and hours tracking and data alignment to support state mandates

The screenshot displays the Naviance website interface. At the top, the Naviance logo is on the left, and navigation links (Home, Self-Discovery, Courses, Careers, Colleges, Planner, About me) are in the center. User icons (eye, heart, mail, GS) are on the right. Below the navigation bar, a breadcrumb trail reads 'Careers / Work-based learning'. The main content area features a dark header with the Valiant logo, the title 'Nursing job shadow', a 'Career match' badge, a 'Job Shadow' badge, and an 'Apply now' button. Below this, the location 'Folsom, CA' and dates 'Dec 7 2025 - Mar 10, 2025' are shown. The 'Job description' section includes a paragraph about the program and a list of highlights: Hands-On Observation, Covenant HealthCare, Diverse Clinical Settings, and Professional Mentorship. A 'Why it's for you' section on the right explains how the opportunity aligns with a student's Realistic trait and provides a list of criteria: Path (4-year degree), Location (Within 10 miles of your school), Career cluster (Architecture and construction), and Type (Work-based learning). At the bottom, there is a 'Ask PowerBuddy about this opportunity' button and two links: 'Am I a good fit for this opportunity?' and 'Help me tailor my resume to this opportunity'.

Sources

Orrell (2018). STEM without fruit: How noncognitive skills improve workforce outcomes, American Enterprise Institute.

ASCA (2020) American School Counselor Association. Retrieved from: <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/>.

Callahan, Ito, Mizuko, Rea, Wortman, & Wortman (2019). Influence on Occupational Identity.



PowerSchool

Personalized Education for Every Journey

www.PowerSchool.com