



# High School Work-based Learning:

Best Practices Designed to  
Improve Career Readiness  
Outcomes for Today's Youth

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## INTRODUCTION

### Why Work-based Learning for Younger Students?

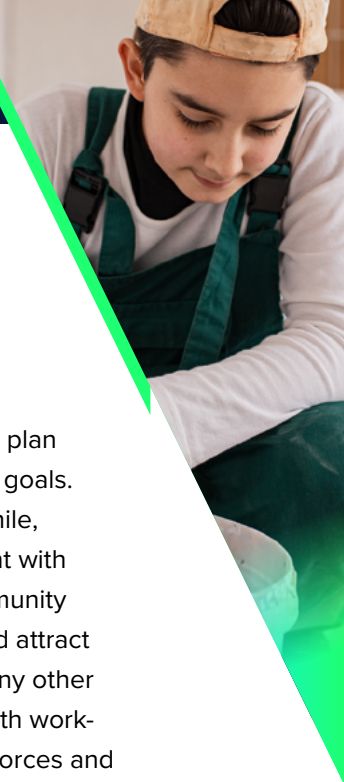
HERE IN THE US, formal work-based learning opportunities, such as apprenticeships, internships, cooperative education, entrepreneurial experiences, practicums, service learning and project-based learning, have traditionally been reserved for college students and are rarely associated with the high school student. A recent study by our organization, American Student Assistance (ASA), found that while 79% of high school students would be interested in a work-based learning experience, only 34% were aware of any opportunities for students their age<sup>1</sup> — and just 2% of students had completed an internship during high school.<sup>2</sup>

Research suggests that opening work-based learning to younger students brings tremendous benefit not only to the students, but also to employers, communities and society at large. Work-based learning while in high school helps students connect classroom learning to the real world and has positive impacts on student engagement and retention, giving students the chance to earn industry credentials before graduation, build the technical and interpersonal skills needed to succeed in the workplace, and carve a pathway into the labor market.<sup>3</sup> Students gain invaluable opportunity to explore and experiment with potential careers *before* investing thousands of dollars or hours in education and training, so they can

better craft a deliberate postsecondary plan based on passions and ultimate career goals. Businesses and organizations, meanwhile, benefit by cultivating a pipeline of talent with new perspectives, while the local community can realize reduced unemployment and attract new business and industry. Indeed, many other industrialized nations regularly use youth work-based learning to develop future workforces and embed employability skills in teenagers.

Lack of high school work-based learning participation is not due to low interest on the part of students, however. While it's true that some high schoolers view these experiences as only a college-level pursuit, most say they don't participate simply because they never hear about any opportunities. Still others report barriers like lack of transportation to get to a job site, schedule conflicts with their schooling or familial responsibilities, or the inability to participate in an unpaid work-based learning experience when they must also take on part-time work due to economic need.

***If educators, employers and policymakers work together to increase the amount of available work-based learning opportunities, boost student awareness, and put the proper supports in place to help students overcome common barriers, it is possible to dramatically raise high school work-based learning participation rates and give students a valuable learning experience to help them be career ready.***



## The Guide

IN 2021, ASA, in conjunction with Bellwether Education Partners, released [Working to Learn and Learning to Work: A State-by-State Analysis of High School Work-based Learning Policies](#). The audit revealed that states have taken a wide range of approaches to implementing work-based learning for high school-aged youth. Federal legislation, including the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), encourages and incentivizes states to implement work-based learning policies and programs at the secondary level, but still allows for considerable discretion in states' work-based learning programs. As a result, program access and quality vary greatly from state to state.

**We hope this guide provides state education leaders, educators, employers, community-based organizations and other stakeholders with the information and insight they need to expand program access and enhance program quality in their own regions.**

This guide aims to take a deeper dive on *Working to Learn's* recommendations, compiling best practices and interviews with state leaders pioneering new strategies in youth work-based learning.<sup>4</sup> We hope it provides state education leaders, educators, employers, community-based organizations and other stakeholders with the information and insight they need to expand program access and enhance program quality in their own regions.

## About ASA

AMERICAN STUDENT ASSISTANCE® (ASA) is a national non-profit with a mission of helping students know themselves, know their options, and make informed career and postsecondary education decisions. We advocate for expanding experiential opportunities for kids to gain career experience, workplace skills and an understanding of the education necessary to follow a career path prior to leaving high school. Working together with educators, employers, youth-serving organizations, state and federal policymakers and more, our goal is to increase the number of states committed to ensuring all youth younger than 18 have equitable access to robust, high-quality work-based learning programs, with policies in place to support program funding, infrastructure, quality and accountability.



## BEST PRACTICE:

# 1 ENSURE BROAD ELIGIBILITY AND WIDESPREAD EQUITABLE ACCESS

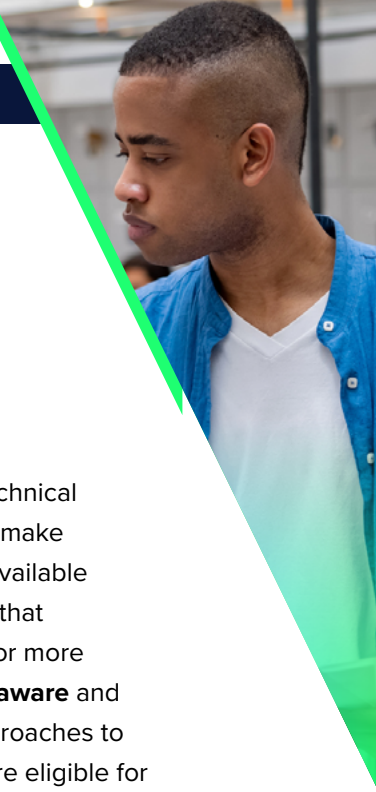
WHILE MOST STATES do not impose strict restrictions on which students can participate in work-based learning opportunities, some do set eligibility requirements that limit the number and type of students who can participate. A handful of states impose no restrictions from the state level, but allow local districts to define eligibility, creating differences in opportunity across districts and potentially confusing variability from district to district. Some states set age (typically 16+) or grade (typically 11th or 12th) requirements to ensure compliance with state labor laws. Other states have changed labor or insurance regulations at the state level to make work-based learning for younger students more possible, and to reduce barriers to employer participation.

**Ohio's** [minor labor laws](#), for example, loosen the labor requirements and explicitly exempt students participating in a career-technical or STEM program approved by the Ohio Department of Education, or in any eligible classes through the college credit plus program (Ohio's dual enrollment program) that include a state-recognized pre-apprenticeship program. Similarly, **Connecticut** created a waiver from state regulations that place age restrictions on participation in work-based learning opportunities in certain industries. These policy changes aim to make work-based learning more accessible for students and remove barriers to employer participation.

A more common way for states to restrict eligibility is by embedding work-based

learning exclusively in career and technical education (CTE) programming, or to make work-based learning opportunities available only in advanced level CTE courses that require students to have taken one or more prerequisite course. Two states, **Delaware** and **New Mexico**, have two different approaches to this problem – ensure all students are eligible for CTE and thus work-based learning, or remove CTE requirements from work-based learning. Delaware [requires](#) all students to take at least three CTE courses in a pathway to graduate and all Delaware students are eligible to participate in CTE. As a result, all students are eligible to participate in a work-based learning program. **New Mexico**, meanwhile, deliberately prioritizes building work-based learning programs for all students, and not just CTE concentrators, due to the low percentage of students concentrating in CTE statewide.

Most states — 38 — have broad eligibility for which students can participate in work-based learning. However, just because a majority of students in a state could theoretically be eligible for a work-based learning experience, it does not mean the state has committed to ensuring there are enough of these opportunities to go around. Very few states commit to ensuring that every student can access a variety of work-based-learning experiences. In other words, broad eligibility is just the first step. States must also provide enough opportunities to meet student demand and provide widespread access.



While work-based learning should ideally be offered in settings beyond CTE, as outlined above, [national data](#) on CTE program offerings can help illustrate whether work-based learning is widely available. For example, three-fourths of CTE programs offer on-the-job training, internships, practicums, clinical experiences, or cooperative education, while just 31%

offer apprenticeships or pre-apprenticeship programs.<sup>5</sup> These data suggest that access to work-based learning is not universal. No state ensures that there are enough work-based learning opportunities available to meet the needs of every student—the demand for programming far outpaces the supply of opportunities.



#### DEEP DIVE

## New Mexico

ELAINE PEREA, PhD, Director of College and Career Readiness at the New Mexico Public Education Department, believes the right thing for kids is work-based learning for *everybody*. “At least in my state, CTE concentrators are only about 12% of my student population,” she explains. “If I build all my programs for students who are in CTE, I’m missing 88% of my student population. And that means at a policy level pulling it out of CTE and making sure that the structures are there.”

One of the ways New Mexico quickly expanded work-based learning opportunities for all students, not just CTE concentrators, during the pandemic was by directing funds from the Elementary and Secondary

School Emergency Relief Fund, authorized under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, to individual counties to pay youth in summer jobs. “What we found is that the counties are actually a really good partner, because they know who the community players are at the state level. In many of our counties they went directly to the Council of Governments or the local chambers of commerce and they were able to ramp up super quickly.”

Over her more than seven years at New Mexico’s Public Education Department, Perea has seen accelerated interest in work-based learning at the high school level, particularly since the state allowed local education agencies to choose from a multitude of options, including work-based learning or certificates, to fulfill federal requirements. Perkins V, the 2018 reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, allows states to pick

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**ELAINE PEREA, PhD.**

one of three high school CTE program quality indicators for measuring success: the percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school who have (1) attained a recognized postsecondary credential; (2) earned postsecondary credits through a dual or concurrent enrollment program; and/or (3) participated in work-based learning.

Perea says that these requirements have pushed the state and individual districts to think about what kinds of experiences their district may be able to accommodate. “We’re a very, very rural state and what one district can offer is sometimes impossible to do in another district. I gave districts the opportunity to figure out what works best for them and that has generated some really interesting conversations about work-based learning. Instead of schools or districts just saying, “I can’t do it,” they may say, “Well, if my choices are certificates, dual credit or work-based learning, we actually could do some school based enterprising. That would be a good opportunity for our students and out of those three that’s actually the easiest for us.”

New Mexico prioritizes work-based learning as a solution for their students because of its potential to address broader social issues. “Work-based learning is sometimes overlooked as a solution to help address deep-seated societal structural problems like multi-generational poverty,” says Perea. “Only about 40% of eligible adults in New Mexico between the ages of 25 and 55 are engaged in work. We have generations that have never worked inside the legitimate economy. I see work-based learning as an opportunity to change that intergenerational dynamic, to give young people the simple experience of joy to work. Young people who have never experienced that joy of work are more likely to follow their families’ path. But if you can give them the experience of contributing and being paid for that contribution, it can change your societal direction.”



## BEST PRACTICE:

## 2 SUPPORT ACCESS FOR UNDERSERVED STUDENTS

**CREATING BROAD ELIGIBILITY** and ensuring universal access to work-based learning opportunities is critical. However, states must also develop structures to target high-need students and ensure their success in a work-based learning experience. Very few states have developed explicit policies or programs to ensure access and success for underserved students.

All states include nondiscrimination language in their work-based learning policies and, as required by federal legislation, identify opportunities for schools to use federal funds to support high-need groups of students. Some states also offer programming to specific groups of students that may include a work-based learning component. For example, states offer pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities through their vocational rehabilitation services and include supports such as job exploration and counseling, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy. Under [WIOA](#), these services may also include work-based learning opportunities such as internships. Other programs, such as [Jobs for America's Graduates \(JAG\)](#), a nonprofit organization that supports at-risk youth to graduate from high school and transition into postsecondary or career opportunities, may also connect students with work-based learning opportunities.

But less than half of US states – just 19 - have developed policies or programs above and beyond the minimum federal requirements that are designed with the specific goal of ensuring high-need student groups can

access and succeed in work-based learning opportunities. Those states that do take a variety of approaches to supporting underserved student groups, ranging from creating separate work-based learning programs for certain student groups (e.g., students with disabilities), to requiring that districts include in their applications to operate a work-based learning program details about the program's plan to support underserved students, to providing additional funding to ensure students have the materials they need to be successful in work-based learning.

**Georgia's** [Great Promise Partnership](#), for example, is a public-private partnership that supports at-risk students to stay in and complete high school while simultaneously developing real-world job skills and experiences through work-based learning opportunities. In Illinois, [state law](#) requires the Department of Children and Family Services to provide eligible youth an apprenticeship stipend to cover the costs associated with entering an apprenticeship, including costs such as tuition for classes, work clothes, or occupation-specific tools. Also in **Illinois**, the Youth Apprenticeship program provides students with [wraparound supports](#), like case management and counseling, and holistic upskilling in technical and soft skills.

The Chicago Jobs Council and Young Invincibles also produced a [report](#) on integrating diversity across the state apprenticeship system. Within it are practices that high schools and school districts can implement to diversify their student pipeline. Other states [provide](#) paid



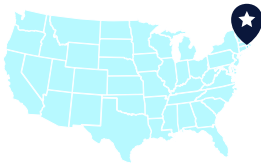


internship opportunities, which can help ensure that students who may otherwise need an after-school job to earn money are able to participate in work-based learning that will allow them to learn through work. **Rhode Island**, for example, is experimenting with year-round paid internship opportunities.

Additionally, the **Minnesota** Department of Education’s [WBL reference guide](#) provides for six types of work experience programs, four of which are explicitly tailored to disadvantaged and handicapped students. **New York**’s Work Experience and Career Exploration Program is designed for at-risk students ages 14 to 15<sup>6</sup>; its community-based work-based learning programs are particularly suited for students with disabilities and include explicit guidance and considerations; and its [Summer Youth Employment Program](#)

(SYEP) allocates funds to each district to provide summer employment for youth ages 14 to 20 who are Family Assistance or Safety Net Assistance recipients, or eligible under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families 200% of federal poverty guidelines. **Texas**, meanwhile, uses [dedicated funding](#) to ensure lack of access to transportation is not a barrier to student participation in work-based learning.

States can take the lead in developing explicit programming or supports to ensure high-need student groups have equitable access to career connected learning. Policymakers should take into consideration how all students — rural versus urban communities, students with disabilities, students from all socioeconomic backgrounds, etc. — can take advantage of work-based learning opportunities.



#### DEEP DIVE

## Rhode Island

**LESS THAN 45 PERCENT** of Rhode Island residents currently have a post-secondary degree or industry-recognized certificate, yet 70 percent of jobs now require those credentials. To help fill this crucial need, then Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo, who is now US Secretary of Commerce, launched the statewide initiative [Prepare Rhode Island](#) (PrepareRI). The PrepareRI Internship program, designed, developed and implemented by the statewide career readiness intermediary [Skills for Rhode Island’s Future](#) (SkillsRI) and supported by the nonprofit American Student Assistance and the Rhode Island Governor’s Workforce Board, places high school students into high-quality internships with top local employers during the summer between junior and senior years. It represents a strategic collaboration between the Rhode Island government, private industry leaders, the public education system, universities, and nonprofits across the state.

“

**There’s no better victory to strengthen our education system, meet families where they are, and make sure students are earning and learning.”**

**NINA PANDE**

At least 50% of students participating in the Prepare RI Internship program are opportunity youth coming from lower-income households and under-resourced schools. Many lack access to reliable broadband internet or devices. To help mitigate this issue and keep kids engaged, program administrators established career enhancement services to prepare them for what the world of work will look like. “Classes in Excel and Power BI are being provided in English and Spanish to make sure students have the knowledge of the programs they will use to do their work,” explains Nina Pande, SkillsRI Executive Director. SkillsRI also has begun bilingual focus groups at three of the state’s priority schools to better understand students’ needs, challenges and interests.

Another innovation Rhode Island is piloting to better support underserved students is year-round work-based learning opportunities. As Pande explains, “Many employers think students can only participate in a program part of the year, but year-round programming is an especially critical element of learning for opportunity youth. As we run focus groups in many of Rhode Island’s urban core schools, we’re hearing that many students, especially in the wake of COVID, aren’t showing up during school traditional hours because they need to work to support their families. If we can build year-round work-based learning opportunities, connecting students virtually to local employers while they’re physically at school, we can help them move towards economic mobility while still learning in their areas of interest. There’s no better victory to strengthen our education system, meet families where they are, and make sure students are earning and learning – not working instead of learning.”

SkillsRI is currently piloting virtual work-based learning during the next academic year at three high schools. These opportunities are being provided in an after-school format or as a supplement to advisory periods.



## BEST PRACTICE:

# 3 ADDRESS COMMON BARRIERS

**MORE THAN HALF** of states provide stakeholders with a centralized work-based learning resource or manual that contains information and guidance about relevant laws and policies. Fewer states have taken active steps to address known barriers, such as safety, liability, child labor laws, or workers' compensation.

Often, states fail to identify barriers because they are not collecting enough data on their work-based learning programs. This can make it difficult to identify trends in work-based learning participation and understand how those trends might be driven by existing laws and policies that act as barriers to certain communities, districts, student groups, or employers.

But some states are actively working to identify obstacles and provide solutions. For example, one of the major barriers to work-based learning in **New Jersey** was ensuring students are participating in a safe working environment. In response, the state launched the [New Jersey Safe Schools Project](#), a collaboration between the New Jersey Department of Education and Rutgers University, to mitigate liability concerns for schools and employers as well as improve the workplace conditions of students participating in work-based learning. This project has resulted

in training sessions for educators and an alliance among the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, New Jersey Division of Wage and Hour Compliance, New Jersey Department of Labor, US Department of Labor, New Jersey Department of Education, and Rutgers, which meet four to six times per year to focus on student safety in work-based learning placements.

In **South Carolina**, a [review of work-based learning enrollment data](#) pointed to several barriers facing districts that were leading to a decline in work-based learning enrollment, including COVID restrictions due to social mitigation strategies; bell scheduling conflicts between high schools and local career and technology centers; new privacy laws and age restrictions with business/industry liability insurance coverage that impact the work-based learning opportunities that are available for high school students; and expensive transportation costs for districts. To combat this decline, the South Carolina Department of Education partnered with the state's Regional Career Specialist Team, CTE administrators, and school counseling/career guidance personnel to develop and implement solutions to those challenges.





## DEEP DIVE

## South Carolina

“

**I'm finally seeing building supervisors and superintendents ... say ... if I make this change in the bell schedule or master schedule, how's it going to affect our CTE students doing internships or clinicals?"**

KAMA STATON

IN SOUTH CAROLINA, efforts to overcome many of the common barriers to high school work-based learning have been years in the making – and are starting to see results. For example, a typical barrier is scheduling differences between schools. In South Carolina, students can study CTE courses at their comprehensive high schools, but some also receive supplemental CTE programs at separate Career and Technology Centers. These centers either operate as part of a larger school district or are independent, multi-district centers that provide CTE programs to students from districts that do not have their own career centers. Students who split time between a traditional high school and a career center often faced difficulties because the high school followed a bell or period schedule while the career center adhered to a block schedule, which reorganizes the school day into longer periods for in-depth learning.

“We started tackling scheduling differences 10 years ago and we are still tackling it today,” explains Kama Staton, Education Associate over work-based learning within the Division of College and Career Readiness at the Office of Career & Technical Education and Student Transition Services in the South Carolina Department of Education. “I can tell you this, though...10 years later, I am finally seeing some traction. I'm finally seeing building supervisors and superintendents who come into that role, say, ... if I make this change in the bell schedule or master schedule, how's it going to affect our CTE students doing internships or clinicals?"

Another common barrier to work-based learning at the high school level is a lack of course credit for the experience. Says Staton, “When you're the school counselor and career specialist — conducting the Individual Graduation Plan (IGP) with the student and parents, reviewing career program pathways and course offerings — and you share ‘we want Johnny to go do this internship at the hospital’ — how do you sell that to the student and parent if they're not going to get credit that will positively impact their GPA?"

So, South Carolina has started to expand assistance in efforts to help districts build a course for non-CTE pathway students, centered around work-based learning such as internship and apprenticeship, where the student can get course credit. South Carolina has had a CTE work-based learning state-approved credit bearing course for each cluster of students in place for years. However, with work-based learning tied





**When you include work-based learning in the state’s accountability system with a positive impact on a high school’s report card rating, with legislative support and recognition, you automatically get school administrators’ buy-in.”**

**KAMA STATON**

to the state’s accountability system and the state’s Seal of Distinction initiative, it was time to provide the same opportunities to all students participating in an apprenticeship, internship or co-op. South Carolina has assisted many districts in writing course standards for a locally designed course and building in an employability soft skills credential (Microburst EmployABILITY Certification) to meet the demands of workforce needs, while also bringing business and industry representatives to sit on state standards committees, local advisory councils, and regular meetings with state and local stakeholders.

Additionally, South Carolina’s general assembly and legislators added work-based learning completion as a career ready qualifier to the state accountability system that affects high school report card ratings. “When you include work-based learning in the state’s accountability system with a positive impact on a high school’s report card rating, with legislative support and recognition, you automatically get school administrators’ buy-in,” says Staton. “When businesses think about coming to South Carolina, they say, ‘show me your skilled workforce, show me what you have in the pipeline,’ and you can hand them a school’s report card rating with a career ready data breakdown to provide evidence to support their workforce in need.”

As in many other states, transportation to work-based learning job sites can be an especially difficult obstacle for students in South Carolina. “South Carolina is a smaller state, but we have some districts and schools that are so spread out from business, it might take 15-20 miles to get to a business that’s able to support work-based learning efforts for local school districts,” explains Staton. “Thus, we continue to allow transportation as an allowable expenditure into our Perkins V federal funds and State Education Improvement Act funds. It doesn’t cover students’ gas, but it does cover a district-provided bus. In addition, we do have some businesses in parts of our state that have their ‘business bus or shuttle’ pick up the students at the Career Center and get them back and forth. It’s not going to solve everything, but at least helps a lot of students who would not have a way to get to the job site.”

Another thorny issue surrounding youth work-based learning is liability. “Before you place a student, you have to make sure your legal team looks at liability on all issues,” says Staton. “I encourage our school counselors, our career specialists and our work-based learning coordinators, when they are working directly with business and industry, to make sure that the sponsoring worksite’s HR folks are sitting down with the school district’s legal team – to make sure that the parent/legal guardian, the student, the supervisor, and the principal all agree that all areas are covered.”



**Ultimately, South Carolina has been successful in overcoming many common barriers just by raising awareness they exist. Changing student and parent perceptions and biases are also key.**

When businesses consider liability too big of a barrier to their participation, it can be an opportunity to engage them in different flexible options for work-based learning participation, such as job shadowing, structured field studies or industry tours of a worksite. “Everybody gets so hung up on internships,” says Staton. “But in South Carolina, we have 10 state-approved work-based learning experiences and internships are only one of those.” Each business looks different, and each can bring value to

work-based learning in various methods of exposure. South Carolina recognizes service learning, mentors, school-based enterprises, virtual job shadowing, and others as work-based learning opportunities with flexibility to meet the business/industry needs.

A lack of professional development for teachers can also hamper work-based learning efforts. Many educators and school administrators may be hesitant to start a program if they don’t know where to start. South Carolina has developed the [South Carolina Work-Based](#)

[Learning Implementation Guide](#) that provides steps and best practices in implementing a robust program. States interested in building a similar manual should reach out to Kama Staton at [kstaton@ed.sc.gov](mailto:kstaton@ed.sc.gov) for a template. “I encourage every state to develop structure with guidelines in place and sell it to your state level and your state superintendent,” she states. “Take one step at a time.”

Another common barrier can be a lack of funding, but South Carolina is fortunate to have dedicated funding in the state budget. State funds go to support salaries of regional career specialists, whose primary role is to build business and industry connections with the schools, assist with work-based learning implementation, and serve as a liaison with chambers of commerce and pivotal stakeholders.

Ultimately, South Carolina has been successful in overcoming many common barriers just by raising awareness they exist. Changing student and parent perceptions and biases are also key. To that end, the state invested by creating CTE videos focusing on work-based learning success highlighting student interns. “Each Wednesday is ‘Work-Based Learning Wednesday,’ a day set aside to highlight, via social media, email blasts, websites, etc., the awesome work we are doing in South Carolina to meet the needs of business/industry,” says Staton.



## BEST PRACTICE:

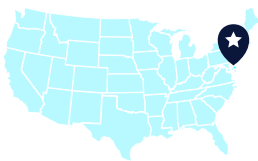
# 4 PROVIDE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION

JUST OVER HALF of all states offer financial incentives like tax credits to offset high school work-based learning costs on the employer side and encourage businesses to partner with schools to offer work-based learning opportunities. However, these programs are often limited to employers offering certain types of work-based learning (most commonly [apprenticeships](#)), rather than being available to employers participating in all types of work-based learning.

A few states have programs that include a broader set of work-based learning experiences. **Delaware's** [Learning for Careers Initiative](#) provides grant funding to engage Delaware's business community in a planning process that results in the creation or expansion of paid work experiences for youth and adult learners

in the state. **New Jersey's** [Career Accelerator Internship Program](#) provides participating employers with up to 50% of wages paid to new interns, up to \$3,000 per student.

The [Vermont Training Program](#) provides performance-based workforce grants for pre-employment training, training for new hires, and training for incumbent workers. Grants may cover up to 50% of training costs. The program includes employers that partner with a school or education program to employ and train high school students participating in work-based learning experiences. In addition, the Vermont Department of Labor's [Vermont Internship Program](#) provides grants to organizations that support or connect Vermont employers with student interns from regional technical centers or postsecondary educational institutions.



## DEEP DIVE

## Delaware

BACK IN 2011, the Harvard Graduate School of Education released the report "[Pathways to Prosperity](#)" that made the case for refocusing high school education on preparing students for both college and career. In 2012, Jobs for the Future joined with HGSE and states and regions around the country to create the [Pathways to Prosperity Network](#), a national initiative to foster partnerships between education and business that result in better pathways for young people to learn employability skills and prepare for career success. In 2017, the book [Learning for Careers: The Pathways to Prosperity](#) reported on the initial activities of the Pathways to





**The strategy is to essentially put systems around summer youth employment, K12, and higher education to scale work-based learning efforts.”**

**LUKE RHINE**

Prosperity Network and inspired the Delaware Departments of Labor and Education to join forces to create the Learning for Careers Initiative, a series of state-funded grants designed to increase employer participation in student education, training, and employment programs. “The strategy is to essentially put systems around summer youth employment, K12, and higher education to scale work-based learning efforts,” explains Luke Rhine, Director, Career & Technical Education and STEM Initiatives for the Delaware Department of Education.

#### LEARNING FOR CAREERS SEEKS TO BOOST THE NUMBER OF:

1. Youth served through summer youth employment or other Department of Labor funded programs
2. Secondary school students participating in work-based learning and/or co-operative education programs
3. Postsecondary students participating in work-based learning and/or clinical/experiential learning programs
4. Employer-led efforts to recruit youth (ages 16-24) into the workforce and/or to expand the capacity of employers to offer clinical, internship, apprenticeship, or other types of cooperative education programs

Learning for Careers grants are awarded to employer associations, employer chambers, employer groups, a state agency acting on behalf of a group of employers, or labor unions, who act as the Lead Provider. Each Lead Provider must then devise a plan to work with at least three employers or other entities, such as community-based organizations, postsecondary institutions, government, regional or local economic development entities, labor unions, local education agencies, industry associations, philanthropic organizations, or other education and training providers.

The source of funds for the Learning for Careers grants are Delaware State General Funds appropriated to the Department of Labor, Division of Employment and Training for the Learning for Careers Program.





## BEST PRACTICE:

# 5 DEDICATE FEDERAL AND STATE FUNDING

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT provides dedicated funding for work-based learning at both the secondary and postsecondary level through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (reauthorized as the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, or Perkins V) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Under [Perkins](#), states receive block grants of funding that can be allocated to financially support all facets of career and technical education (CTE) programs of study and career pathways programs, including costs associated with work-based learning. [WIOA](#) funds employment and training services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth.

In 2020, each state was required to submit a [Perkins V State Plan](#) to the US Department of Education covering FY 2020-23. Perkins V gave states the option to select one or more program quality indicators in their plans; 29 states selected “the percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school having participated in work-based learning.” These metrics are then reported back to the federal government on an annual basis. While Perkins funds can be used to support work-based learning whether or not the state selected work-based learning as a program quality indicator, selection of this indicator suggests that work-based learning will be a focus of states’ CTE programs and thus those states will use their Perkins funds explicitly to support and expand work-based learning. For some states, like **Connecticut**, participation in work-based learning is the only performance quality indicator they will report as part of their Perkins V

plans. Other states, such as **West Virginia**, plan to report multiple indicators, including attainment of postsecondary credentials and attainment of postsecondary credits.

In addition to federal funding, some states use state categorical and foundational per-pupil funds to pay for work-based learning efforts. About half of all states also use grant funds or other time-bound sources of funding for work-based learning. While these programs can provide an important infusion of cash to support schools, districts, or other organizations to launch work-based learning programs, these funds are not a consistent source of support, meaning that districts and organizations may have difficulty sustaining work-based learning programs beyond the duration of the grant period.

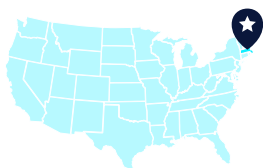
A smaller handful of five states have taken the additional step of inserting a line item in the state budget or creating dedicated funding streams solely or primarily focused on creating and expanding work-based learning opportunities. In **Washington**, the 2019 [Workforce Education Investment Act](#) authorized \$25 million in dedicated state funding to operate initiatives that support and scale work-based learning and other career-connected learning opportunities, as well as \$11 million in capital and transportation funding to support these initiatives.

**South Carolina** [provides dedicated funding](#) to districts to support work-based learning. With these funds, districts can hire a work-based learning coordinator, integrate academic and CTE programming, provide staff development related to work-based learning, transport



students, and more. In **Rhode Island**, the state's three-year action plan, PrepareRI, is supported by philanthropic grants and by \$2.5 million per year by the Governor's Workforce Board to coordinate paid work-based learning experiences for high school juniors. In **Iowa**, the Legislature appropriated \$1.45 million to the Iowa Department of Education to develop and implement a statewide network comprising 15 regional work-based learning intermediary networks (one for each community college). In addition, districts can access funding

through the governor's [STEM BEST program](#). Most recently, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds announced [two grant opportunities](#) to create or expand registered apprenticeships. In **Massachusetts**, the state provides annual funding to its [Connecting Activities](#) initiative — a statewide network of 16 workforce boards charged with supporting work-based learning and other career development education activities for students — through a line item in the state budget.



#### DEEP DIVE

## Massachusetts

Career-focused education has become a more prominent focus for many states in recent years, but in Massachusetts, it has received dedicated attention for much longer. One of the longest running programs, since 1998, is [Connecting Activities](#), a statewide network of 16 workforce boards charged with supporting work-based learning and other career development education activities for students, led by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Through this program, regional workforce boards serve as intermediaries and liaisons with schools and employers. They work to increase the number of high-quality internship opportunities, ensure that students are getting equitable career development education experiences, and work to grow the future workforce in Massachusetts.

Dedicated state funding through a specific long-term line item in the Massachusetts state budget has been pivotal to Connecting Activities' success and longevity. Appropriations for the program have risen from approximately \$3.8 million to \$7 million over the past five fiscal years. Explains Dr. Kerry Akashian, Career Development Education Lead at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "It's had a really big impact in terms of signaling that the state is committed to this work. Massachusetts also has an employer wage match requirement, so Connecting Activities leaders are required to recruit employers that will actually pay the students and bring more funding into the system.

“

**Demand for career and technical education in Massachusetts has increased in recent years and vocational high schools can't meet demand.”**

**DR. KERRY  
AKASHIAN**

Sometimes the money supplied by the employers can be four times the actual budget line item.”

During the pandemic, Massachusetts workforce development boards combined Connecting Activities funding with federal funding to employ 800 high school seniors as tutors at K-8 schools to help accelerate the learning of the students and to support teachers. “The students benefited from work-based learning experiences and were paid for their work, they contributed to their community, and they received professional development from a group called [Educators Rising](#),” says Akashian. “It was a wonderful project that had never been done before, and something that other states might be interested in. It’s a concrete example of how the intermediaries at the workforce boards worked with schools, placed the kids on the payroll quickly, and in turn provided for the communities.”

Connecting Activities funding has also invested in staffing and recruitment, with funding given to each workforce board in the past year to hire an employer engagement specialist who can focus on building up relationships with local business and industry.

Connecting Activities works closely with another initiative in Massachusetts, [Innovation Pathways](#), to expand access to high-quality career pathways in the Commonwealth’s comprehensive high schools. The idea behind Innovation Pathways is to give more Massachusetts students a chance to benefit from career and technical education and hands-on learning experiences. The program allows academic and comprehensive high schools, once granted the designation by the state, to restructure the learning experience to offer coursework and experience in a specific regional high-demand industry, such as information technology, engineering, healthcare, life sciences, and advanced manufacturing. All IP programs are required to partner with a local MassHire Board and employer(s); participating students take the necessary coursework, engage in 100 hours of a career immersive experience, internship or Capstone project, and earn industry credentials and/or college credit.

“Demand for career and technical education in Massachusetts has increased in recent years and vocational high schools can’t meet demand,” relates Akashian. “They have long waiting lists and turn away more than 3,000 students each year. IP is an inventive solution to this problem, and the quandary of student engagement, by putting hands-on learning experiences and career exploration opportunities directly into general education schools. Another great aspect of the program is that a student doesn’t necessarily have to be pigeonholed into a particular job or know everything they’re going to do when they’re only 15 years old. IP allows students to develop their skills, which will be transferable in any sector.”



## BEST PRACTICE:

## 6

**STRENGTHEN STATEWIDE  
INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS**

**WORK-BASED LEARNING** infrastructure remains in the early stages in most states. Many states have adopted a “work-based learning coordinator” model and tasked those coordinators with communicating among stakeholders about work-based learning programs and opportunities. This approach to communications, though, relies heavily on the capacity and networks of a single person, rather than leveraging the collective capacity and networks of stakeholders statewide.

Several states also have built websites to help match young people with work-based learning opportunities. In **Nevada**, [Life Works](#) is a work-based learning hub for in- and out-of-school youth and young adults statewide where users can find internships, apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and CTE programs, as well as learn about in-demand occupations and skills. LifeWorks utilizes strategic partnerships among Nevada government agencies, K-12 public education, business and industry leaders, and the Nevada System of Higher Education. **North Carolina’s** [Navigator](#) and **Rhode Island’s** [Work-Based Learning Navigator](#) allow employers to post available work-based learning opportunities and educators to search and track those opportunities across the state and request resources based on their needs.

Another common approach is the development of an intermediary or public-private partnership, which can play a critical role in connecting schools and businesses and ensuring students can access work-based learning opportunities. The [North Carolina](#)

[Business Committee for Education](#) (NCBCE) is a business-led, education nonprofit organization that operates out of the Office of the Governor. The organization works to link business leaders and the state’s education decision makers to create connections between the education curriculum and the overall work readiness of citizens across the state. In addition to the NCBCE, North Carolina has a system of [local advisory councils](#), which are public-private partnerships that support the planning and development of CTE programming, including work-based learning. **Washington** state’s [Career Connect Washington](#) (CCW) is another example of a statewide initiative and public-

**States have developed many approaches to work-based infrastructure: websites to help match young people with work-based learning opportunities and public-private partnerships have both been successful.**

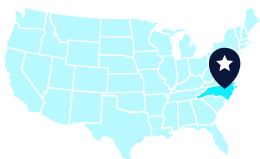
private partnership that facilitates work-based learning opportunities through a system of regional networks, intermediaries, and local coordinators. To date, [CCW](#) has nine regional networks established to serve as “career-connected learning” (CCL) hubs in their regions; 60 intermediaries funded to expand or develop programs; 150+ employers engaged in career explore, prep, and launch programs; and 13,000 enrolled students in Career Launch programs, among other accomplishments.



Another example of a statewide intermediary is the nonprofit Skills for Rhode Island's Future, which connects unemployed and underemployed Rhode Islanders to jobs with socially responsible, civic-minded employers. The organization runs the [PrepareRI Internship Program](#) for both high school and college students, facilitating job opportunities with its 180 corporate partners throughout the state.

In **Massachusetts**, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's [Connecting Activities](#) initiative establishes public-private partnerships through 16 local MassHire Workforce Boards to provide work-based learning experiences for students. The workforce boards also coordinate One Stop Career Centers, YouthWorks programs, labor market research programs, and several other workforce training and educational programs. In **Delaware**, the Delaware Technical Community College's (DTCC) [Office of Work-based Learning](#) serves as an intermediary

between education agencies and business and industry partners to facilitate and scale career connected learning opportunities across the state. Staff from the DTCC work with school districts, employers, and community-based organizations to expand and build upon regional employer engagement and help to coordinate the supply and demand of work-based learning opportunities. **Iowa's** Intermediary Network comprises 15 regional intermediary networks designed to connect business and education by offering work-based learning activities to students in their region. In addition, the [STEM BEST](#) program launches school-business partnerships that engage students in relevant, authentic work-based learning in communities across the state. Since 2014, the [Iowa Governor's STEM Advisory Council](#) has awarded 75 STEM BEST programs, which involve a significant public-private match.



#### DEEP DIVE

## North Carolina

**THE NORTH CAROLINA** Business Committee for Education, a business-led, education non-profit 501(c)(3), started 39 years ago, before the phrase “work-based learning” was widely used. Initially focused on STEM pathways, the NCBCE was a way to bring employers into the conversation with educational systems, so they could help share information about what employers needed and workforce opportunities for students, as well as provide educator professional development.

Nearly 15 years ago, the NCBCE was an innovator in the work-based learning space, implementing its “Students@Work” program. Every March, the program sent students as early as middle school from all over the state to spend time at employers in their community, from data centers

to the state police credit unions, advanced manufacturing, the NASCAR speedway, hotels, and more.

In 2017, the NCBCE board began to think of ways to build upon Students@Work. “We spent a ton of time workshopping it with career and technical education, community colleges, employers, teachers, and coordinators with businesses,” recalls Caroline Sullivan, NCBCE Executive Director. “Eventually we came up with something where teachers could see employers and basically order them as a resource for speakers at career days.”

The end result was the Navigator, a free, first-of-its-kind tool where employers post work-based learning opportunities like job shadowing and internships, and educators search for, request, and track those resources in an open market environment. The Navigator enjoyed heavy utilization upon its launch. “We thought our challenge would be getting educators to go on the platform but that was wrong,” recounts Sullivan. “There are

**North Carolina’s Navigator is a free, first-of-its-kind tool where employers post work-based learning opportunities like job shadowing and internships, and educators search for, request, and track those resources in an open market environment.**

about 100,000 teachers in North Carolina and very quickly, we got to 50,000 teachers on the Navigator. At last count, there were 87,000, which is pretty much almost all of them. The success of that is probably because it’s integrated into their ‘ED cloud,’ so where they might find all their learning management systems, the Navigator’s there.”

New features include an updated interface for teachers so they can specifically request employer resources for a particular lesson, or a subject matter expert or a guest speaker for a career fair only on one certain subject. Other improvements include better collection of non-student identifiable data, like the number of student participants, their gender, race, age and the career cluster of the work-based learning experience. The Navigator’s new employer interface, due soon, will also allow teachers and employers to schedule events via chat rather than email.

While other work-based learning platforms charge the schools or employers, North Carolina’s Navigator is provided free of charge, funded through a blend of nonprofit philanthropy and different government entities, such as the Department of Commerce and pandemic relief dollars provided through the CARES act.

Technological solutions like the Navigator are one example of the benefits of having a strong infrastructure or intermediary in place, but entities like NCBCE can offer value in other ways, too. The ability to convene multiple parties and act nimbly, especially during a crisis, is key.



“

**Being this hybrid model of a nonprofit with connections to business and business leaders, plus we work with the government educational systems and departments, is a big value add.”**

**CAROLINE  
SULLIVAN**

“Being this hybrid model of a nonprofit with connections to business and business leaders, plus we work with the government educational systems and departments, is a big value add,” says Sullivan. Right as the COVID pandemic began, the NCBCE was able to bring board members who were Internet Service Providers together with the Department of Public Instruction and superintendents, to quickly put into place buses that could act as Wi-Fi hotspots, as well as deliver meals and homework packets to students and families.

The NCBCE also innovated a pilot program, using CARES act funding, to solve the problem of tech assistance during the pandemic. The committee formed the North Carolina Student Connect Tech Team, a comprehensive framework for North Carolina schools and districts to access resources for starting, implementing, and scaling a student technology support desk. NCBCE worked with leaders of North Carolina tech companies to develop a list of industry-developed credentials that students and teachers can access. Since its launch in 2020, 10 pilot districts have developed programs to support Tech Teams, which give students valuable work-based learning, a stipend and credential attainment.



## BEST PRACTICE:

## 7 SET CLEAR QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY EXPECTATIONS

ALTHOUGH MANY WORK-BASED learning programs are developed and implemented at the local level, states have an important role to play in setting quality expectations and holding schools and employers accountable. States are at varying places in their development of quality expectations. Many states offer lists of roles and responsibilities for various parties, including the teacher or work-based learning coordinator, the employer partner, and the student, that can provide a framework for program design

**States have an important role to play in setting quality expectations and holding schools and employers accountable.**

and establish expectations. For example, **Iowa's** [work-based learning guide](#) states that work-based learning teacher-coordinators are responsible for program planning, development, and related classroom instruction; on-the-job instruction and coordination; guidance and advice; program administration and management; community and public relations; and development in their professional roles and activities. Employers “provide instruction in the specific tasks students are expected to complete on the job, as well as information about safety and the general operation of the business.”

This delineation of expectations is an important first step. However, states should also define what high-quality implementation of these responsibilities looks like. For example, **Georgia** [has developed](#) multiple standards for

high-quality work-based learning programs. Each standard has an accompanying rubric to evaluate the extent to which a given program meets the standard. For example, Standard 14 sets expectations for how work-based learning sites are selected and how mentors at those worksites are trained, while Standard 20 sets an expectation that work-based learning coordinators conduct site visits and ensures what is happening at the work-based learning site is integrated into classroom instruction.

Even less states have taken the further step to develop processes to hold either schools or employers accountable to quality expectations. Just six states have developed a quality framework and accompanying accountability for the school-based elements of a work-based learning program (e.g., standards for the instructor or coordinator, expectations about student evaluation, etc.). **New York** has defined in its [work-based learning manual](#) the quality expectations for career connected learning programs and holds them accountable by requiring that they re-register every few years. Registered work-based learning programs must have: a certified teacher or guidance counselor to serve as work-based learning coordinator, an industry advisory committee, safety training prior to placement at a worksite, supervised on-the-job training, related in-school instruction, a memorandum of agreement between schools and employers, a student training plan, and an employer evaluation. Programs must have their applications approved by the state Department of Education, and then reapply after the





registration expires every few years, ensuring programs meet minimum expectations.

**Pennsylvania's** work-based learning activities require schools to meet certain requirements to qualify for the [Industry-Based Learning Indicator](#) of the [Future Ready PA Index](#), the Commonwealth's public-facing school progress report. In addition, their [work-based learning toolkit](#) provides program guidance and implementation support.

**Washington's** [Career Connect Washington](#) (CCW) initiative also offers an example of a robust quality and accountability system for work-based learning programs. In Washington, any community and technical college, training center, university, or K-12 school (in partnership with a higher education institution)

in Washington can offer a work-based learning program, called [Career Launch](#). In order to operate a Career Launch program, however, the sponsoring organization must complete an application, undergo a [rigorous review](#) process, and receive an endorsement from CCW. Endorsements last for three years, and programs must undergo a review process to renew their endorsement. Programs with worksites that do not meet expectations may not be re-endorsed. Without these kinds of clear and consistent expectations, the quality of both schools' work-based learning programs and the experiences provided by participating employers likely varies considerably both within a district and across the state.



#### DEEP DIVE

## Pennsylvania

**THE FUTURE READY PA INDEX** was launched in November 2018 to move beyond standardized test scores as the only metric of student success. The tool is a public-facing dashboard that tracks student and school success in three areas: academic performance, student progress, and college and career readiness.

One of the measures in the college and career readiness bucket is the Industry-Based Learning Indicator. The Industry-Based Learning Indicator identifies the percentage of high school 12th graders who meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Score competent or advanced on Industry Standards-Based Competency Assessments;
- Earn at least one industry-recognized credential; or
- Complete a work-based learning experience.

Work-based learning experiences generally include job shadowing, internships/practicums, cooperative education, career mentoring, paid





**If a student decided to help out with an emergency disaster and it tied into their humanities class at school, and the experience was valuable for their future career, it could meet Indicator requirements.”**

**LAURA  
FRIDIRICI,  
M.Ed.**

apprenticeship, community-based work programs and community service. In order for a work-based learning experience to be counted towards the Industry-Based Learning Indicator, it must meet certain requirements.

For example, for the job shadowing category, a student would need to complete three different experiences for a minimum of three hours each, and must complete pre, during, and post documentation connecting the shadowing experience to student interest and career planning (e.g., research the experience, develop questions for experience, interview career mentor, reflect on experience and key learnings). An internship, meanwhile, must be at least six weeks or 60 hours, and must include not only an evaluation of the work experience by both educator and employer, with input from the student, but also a learning plan and a contract that details learning objectives and roles of all parties.

Cooperative education programs, which combine school-based classroom learning with work-based learning, must include one on-site visit per month by appropriately certified professional school personnel because school credit is to be awarded for this experience. Similar to internships, cooperative education teacher-coordinators must also complete a written training agreement and training plan.

More informal career mentoring experiences are also allowed activities under the Indicator, but must incorporate clear, written policy and procedures materials for all parties and the total time commitment must be at least six hours. Unpaid community service can even count toward the Indicator requirements, as long as it meets similar requirements to an internship: at least six weeks long or 60 hours, supervised and evaluated by an agency representative, an assigned teacher advisor and the student, and including a learning plan and a contract. “So, if a student decided to help out with an emergency disaster and it tied into their humanities class at school, and the experience was valuable for their future career, it could meet Indicator requirements,” says Laura Fridirici, M.Ed., Career Readiness Advisor and Special Consultant to the Secretary for Career Readiness at the Pennsylvania Department of Education.



## BEST PRACTICE:

# 8 USE DATA TO DRIVE EQUITY AND QUALITY

COLLECTING DATA ON work-based learning experiences is key to spotting trends, highlighting promising practices, and identifying and addressing gaps. The vast majority of states collect and disaggregate data on CTE programming to meet the data reporting expectations outlined in Perkins V. These data often include work-based learning opportunities, especially in states where work-based learning courses have unique course codes that enable states to collect participation data and disaggregate it by student demographics. However, many states offer work-based learning opportunities outside of CTE programming that are not measured in this CTE data reporting, meaning that CTE-based work-based learning data tell just a portion of the story.

Just 20 states collect comprehensive data on work-based learning participation, including student outcomes. **Virginia**, for example, offers 11 types of work-based learning experiences and collects data on all types, including demographics and special populations, three times a year through its [Master Schedule Collection](#) and [Student Record Collections](#) processes. **Tennessee** has created the [WBL Student Placement Portal](#), in which all work-based learning programs are required to share information about work-based learning student participation and outcomes.

States need to be able to disaggregate data to ensure high-quality work-based learning opportunities are accessed at similar rates across different student groups, with no equity gaps. Most states can disaggregate

CTE program data, which frequently includes work-based learning program data. Fewer have comprehensive data systems that allow them to both capture and disaggregate data for all work-based learning programming, in and out of CTE courses. To identify trends in work-based learning participation, just 11 states can disaggregate that comprehensive data by gender, ethnicity, income, geography, and type of experience (e.g., industry sector, internship vs. apprenticeship, etc.) at a minimum. For example, Virginia's [Master Schedule Collection](#) referenced above captures work-based learning participation by gender, ethnicity, English learners, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged, military connected, unaccompanied homeless, youth in foster care, single parents, nontraditional students, and out of workforce. School districts can access subgroup-level student data for each work-based learning experience.

As part of its annual CTE [report](#), **Iowa** disaggregates work-based learning participation data over time by school size and service area, student grade level and gender. The report also makes comparisons across the same categories for work-based learning participation and general CTE participation. **Maryland** collects work-based learning data through its [accountability system](#) and disaggregates those data by student demographics. In addition, Maryland collects some student-level data through a work-based learning survey system and disaggregates the data by gender, race, and experience type, among other factors. The



Maryland Department of Education is in the process of developing a dashboard to make its survey data publicly available.

The use of disaggregated data to identify gaps and barriers at the state and/or local level is a critical component of a continuous improvement feedback loop. A handful of states use work-based learning data to inform state planning efforts related to CTE programs as part of their Perkins plans, while just two states have developed comprehensive, statewide program improvement processes using work-based learning data. **South Carolina**, for example, produces an [annual work-based learning report](#) that uses data to identify gaps in and barriers to work-based learning programming statewide. The state uses these data to inform policy and

program changes to strengthen the state's approach to work-based learning. Washington's [Career Connect Washington](#) captures disaggregated data for all of its Career Launch programs and uses those data to identify gaps in programming, inform its overarching strategy, and provide additional support, resources, and assistance to individual programs as needed.

Without strong data collection, reporting, and analysis processes, it is impossible for states to identify trends in work-based learning participation and outcomes or to understand how current policies and practices may create opportunities or challenges for certain communities, districts, student groups, or employers affecting participation and outcomes.



#### DEEP DIVE

## Tennessee

**TENNESSEE STATE LEADERS** implemented the Work-based Learning Student Placement Portal (the Portal) in the 2016-17 school year. The impetus for its creation, which was introduced at the same time as the [WBL Student Exit Survey](#) (the Exit Survey), was to gather more detailed information about the types of work-based learning student placements statewide, the duration of placements, the nature of the placements, alignment with students' areas of elective focus, and placement outcomes. Prior to the 2016-17 school year, student enrollment data, which includes disaggregated demographic information by State Student ID Number, was the only data source used by the department.

The overarching goal of adding the Portal and the Exit Survey was to gather additional data to paint a clearer picture of what work-based learning looks like locally, regionally, and statewide. The Portal tracks all types of work-based learning experiences, including Apprenticeship, Health Science Clinical, Internship, Paid Work Experience, School-Based Enterprise, School District Placement, Service-Learning, Supervised

**The overarching goal of adding the Portal and the Exit Survey was to gather additional data to paint a clearer picture of what work-based learning looks like locally, regionally, and statewide.**

Agriculture Experience, Cooperative Education and Special Education Transition. The data collected through enrollment reports, the Portal, and the Exit Survey identifies enrollment numbers, demographics, gaps in services, alignment to academic focus, continued employment and more, helping to answer the following questions:

- a. How many students are enrolled in work-based learning courses?
- b. What are the demographics of the students enrolled in work-based learning courses (students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged, Black/Hispanic/Native American, CTE concentrators, English Language Learners)?
- c. What gaps exist in special populations, and how can we close those gaps?
- d. What percentage of students' work-based learning experiences align with their area of elective focus? (Tennessee defines a capstone work-based learning experience as any work-based learning experience that is aligned with a student's program of study or concentration, equates to a full-time equivalent credit, and facilitates intentional progress toward the attainment of knowledge and skills necessary to pursue the student's postsecondary and career goals.)
- e. How many students continue their employment at their work-based learning placement beyond the end of the term/course, and are there trends by demographic/LEA/region in these outcomes?
- f. (Specifically through the Exit Survey) Are students' documented experiences congruent with work-based learning coordinators' depictions of student experiences/quality of their programs?
- g. Which employers are continuing/growing partnerships with work-based learning programs? Which employers are not?

Matthew Spinella, Director of Work-based Learning & Industry Engagement in the Division of College, Career and Technical Education at the Tennessee Department of Education, says that with this information, the department is examining which LEAs/regions outperform others and why; how the department can leverage successful implementation strategies in these LEAs/regions to build capacity statewide; which employers are most involved with work-based learning; and what specific components of work-based learning should be areas of focus for future work-based learning coordinator trainings. "The department requires work-based learning coordinators to complete an initial certification training before they can oversee a work-based learning program and complete a



recertification training every two years,” explains Spinella. “Data collected from enrollment reports, the Portal, the Exit Survey, and feedback from LEAs dictates what new content is included in recertification trainings to keep the content relevant and useful.”

According to Spinella, Tennessee measures success in its high school work-based learning programs through three main measures: climbing enrollment trends; steady growth in capstone work-based learning experiences, both overall and by demographic; and increasing numbers of participating employers.

Tennessee has used the data collected to inform changes in both work-based learning policy and programming. For example, an increase in demand for student hours has led to State Board of Education Rule updates, increasing the number of work-based learning credits a student can earn in a school year from two to three. Additionally, a new State Workforce Development Board policy codifying [Tennessee Certified Pre-Apprenticeships](#) was approved in 2021 to increase the number of capstone work-based learning experiences. Spinella says in terms of shifts in programming, his department has implemented targeted trainings, focused on improving outcomes for student subgroups and/or highlighting promising practices based on data, at several Tennessee educator events, including the Summer Institute for CTE Educators, the School Counselor and Administrator Leadership Institute, the Partners in Education Summit, and Work-based Learning Certification and Recertification Networking Events.

Beyond data collection and analysis, Spinella reports there is more broadly a lot of momentum behind work-based learning in Tennessee as a result of inter-agency and public-private collaboration, including four major initiatives:

1. The State Workforce Development Board has a specific workgroup dedicated to improving apprenticeships and work-based learning statewide.
2. The Tennessee Chamber of Commerce has created [TN CAPS](#), a resource that helps connect local businesses with K-12 LEAs by providing educators with resources that promote career awareness within the community, leading to an increase in work-based learning opportunities.

**Beyond data collection and analysis, Spinella reports there is more broadly a lot of momentum behind work-based learning in Tennessee as a result of inter-agency and public-private collaboration.**



3. The state has created [Innovative High School Models Grants](#), which promote forward-thinking collaboration between LEAs and employers.
4. The state has created [School-Based Enterprise, Middle School STEM, and Middle School CTE Start-Up and Expansion Grants](#), which help students with barriers to accessing off-campus work-based learning placements gain access to school-based capstone work-based learning experiences.



## DEEP DIVE:

## 9

**WASHINGTON – APPLYING  
MULTIPLE BEST PRACTICES**

THE STATE OF WASHINGTON is a leader when it comes to many of the best practices laid out in this playbook. In a relatively short period of time, Washington has established dedicated state funding and a policy framework, strong infrastructure and supports, and clear quality and accountability expectations for its work-based learning programs.

In Washington, only about 40% of students go past high school to complete a credential or a degree, but the state’s economy and job market demand that about 70% of students do so. So in 2017, Governor Inslee launched the Career Connected Learning initiative, inspired by a trip to Switzerland where he brought together a cross sector delegation of leaders from business, education, labor, nonprofit and philanthropy to observe the Swiss apprenticeship system. Leaders came away impressed by a Swiss system that is high quality, seen as equivalent to academic pathways, is choice-based, and is permeable so that when students leave high school, they can continue academically or hop right into the workplace.

Career Connected Learning started with the goal of connecting 100,000 Washington youth over five years with career connected learning opportunities that prepare them for high-demand, high wage jobs. A Career Connect Washington (CCW) Task Force was formed to perform a year of strategy work in 2018, meeting with key stakeholder groups, conducting focus groups with parents and students, and presenting at conferences and meetings around the state. The Task Force’s learnings

were then the basis of Washington’s plan for the vision, framework and strategic approach to implementing career connected learning statewide.

In 2019 Washington passed legislation, the Workforce Education Investment Act, a policy framework for a three-step continuum of career connected learning: Explore, Prep and Launch. As of spring 2022, WEIA also provided \$46 million in state operating and capital funding over the FY19-23 period to make CCW a reality.

Today, CCW coordinates nine regional networks to lead career connected learning efforts across the state. CCW also provides state and federally funded performance-oriented grants to program intermediaries to help with start-up funding, technical assistance, and program design parameters for “Career Launch” programming. These intermediaries work backwards from real jobs in the current labor market to build curriculum based on required skillsets and design programs that will work for both students and employers. Career Launch work-based experiences are meaningful, paid, connect to a real job, and also give the student either an industry credential or at least a year’s worth of college credit. Career Launch programs include, but are not limited to, State Registered Apprenticeship programs. Washington has the ambitious goal of ensuring that 60 percent of the class of 2030 will participate in a Career Launch program by age 29.

CCW is also committed to equitable access and ensuring work-based learning pathways are available to each Washington student.





They strive to reach students furthest from opportunity, particularly those who have been disenfranchised already in the education system. “Centering equity is really both challenge and best practice for us,” says Maud Daudon, CCW Executive Leader. “We have been steadfast in our effort to try to build this as an anti-racist system. Our goal is to ensure that not only do all demographics enroll in our programs at the same pace as their portion of the general population of students, but that they also complete and continue into family-wage jobs or academic pathways.”

In just its first few years, the CCW effort has achieved some major milestones: establishing nine Regional Networks to serve as career connected learning hubs in their regions; enrolling nearly 13,000 students under the age of 30 in Career Launch; and funding approximately 60 intermediaries to expand or develop career connected learning programs in manufacturing, agriculture/food processing, automotive maintenance, construction, health care, hospitality, information technology, and maritime trades. To date, over 100 programs have been endorsed as Career Launch, including 33 Registered Apprenticeship programs. CCW also has supported virtual career exploration during the pandemic by launching [CareerConnect@Home](#), which featured one or more employers each day for six weeks during the start of the pandemic. The virtual series garnered 8,500+ viewers.

In many ways, what sets CCW’s approach apart is its focus on being a movement rather than a lone entity or organization. CCW leaders are intent on integrating existing players in the



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**MAUD DAUDON**

work-based learning space into their efforts, recognizing the substantial work many of them have done in this arena over the years. “We want to empower the people who are closest to this work in the state, who already love and support and want to engage in it and then therefore want it to continue and grow,” explains Daudon. “A best practice, for us, has been a dynamic combination of a distributed, decentralized leadership model and high-quality rigor, because it’s resulted in so much buy-in across so many different sectors. The way we’ve approached things in Washington has been to employ all the assets the state already has and not try to reinvent anything, so we look at ourselves as a gap filler rather than a holistic new thing. We stress that we are here to help by elevating things to the relevant agencies, by helping bring employer partners to the table, by bringing additional funding resources, by even enshrining legislation terminology, and so on. Another benefit of our decentralized approach has been that we now have hundreds of champions, literally, who live and breathe career connected learning and Career Connect Washington in their work.”



## LOOKING AHEAD

THE PAST TWO years in a worldwide pandemic threatened to disrupt work-based learning on a wide scale, at a time when it's more important than ever to find ways to engage students in learning and ensure they are future ready. But educators, employers and students instead showed tremendous resilience, innovating virtual work-based learning experiences that, unconstrained by geographic proximity, actually expanded student access. Pioneering work-based learning programs took advantage of the pandemic as a learning opportunity and engaged students to develop solutions to real-world problems. Many students made significant contributions at their workplace and had meaningful interactions with their employers, learning valuable remote work skills for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workplace. Virtual work-based learning opportunities will no doubt continue to exist side-by-side with in-person offerings in the years ahead.

Now, work-based learning stands on the precipice of an even larger period of expansion and growth. Educators struggling to re-engage students after the pandemic “lost” years are turning to career-connected education as a tool to energize and retain students with hands-on learning, showing them the connections between classroom and the real world. Simultaneously, federal COVID relief funding provided to schools and states may be just the catalyst needed to spark robust investment in work-based learning as an education and workforce development tool. ASA will continue to monitor states’ progress in work-based learning policy and programming over the upcoming months and years, and we look forward to working together with you – the educators, employers, youth-serving organizations, state and federal policymakers who make it all possible - to increase the number of states committed to ensuring youth have equitable access to robust, high-quality work-based learning programs.



## Notes

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- 1 Johnson, K. “High School Internships: A Field Overview.” American Student Assistance research, July 2020.
- 2 “Spotlight on High School Internships.” American Student Assistance, 2020. <https://www.asa.org/research-study/spotlight-on-high-school-internships/>
- 3 Martha Ross, Richard Kazis, Nicole Bateman, and Laura Stateler. “Work-Based Learning Can Advance Equity and Opportunity for America’s Young People.” Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, 2020. [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20201120\\_BrookingsMetro\\_Work-based-learning\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20201120_BrookingsMetro_Work-based-learning_Final_Report.pdf).
- 4 Some descriptions of best practice state examples are based on the initial state-by-state research conducted in 2020 for the *Working to Learn* report. Updates on state processes or progress made on work-based learning initiatives since that time can be reported to ASA at [advocacy@asa.org](mailto:advocacy@asa.org), for inclusion in future reports.
- 5 “Bridging the Skills Gap: Career and Technical Education in High School.” US Department of Education, September 2019. <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/cte/index.html>
- 6 As of September 2022, WECEP will be consolidated into New York’s existing General Education Work Experience Program: <http://www.nysed.gov/memo/career-technical-education/updates-registered-work-based-learning-wbl-programs>

