

Explore

This section introduces methods in which industries, educators, parents, and students can become involved in work-based learning (WBL), one of the most effective ways to sharpen, strengthen, and sustain the future workforce. When industries engage directly with educators, parents, and students, they don't just support education – they actively build a reliable workforce pipeline and provide meaningful engagement that impacts the community.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

What is Work-Based Learning? 2

Mythbuster Employers 3

Mythbuster Educators 4

Mythbuster Parents 5

Benefits of Work-Based Learning 6

Introduction

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT TO ENHANCE THE WORKFORCE

Successful work-based learning programs are built through intentional partnership and engagement. Each stakeholder, including educators and parents, plays a vital role in impacting the workforce pipeline, but industry engagement through partnerships with these stakeholders is the catalyst that provides students with real-world work experience.

Industries

Provide real-world context and hands-on learning, help students understand workforce expectations and pathways, and identify in-demand skills for the future

Educators

Connect classroom learning to career readiness, prepare students for professional environments, and guide students to meaningful and impactful experiences.

Parents

Assist with career exploration, support career decisions, and encourage participation and goal setting to align with their child's or teenager's career path.

WHY INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS MATTER

South Carolina businesses are always looking for their next great employee all while balancing limited time and resources. Engaging students early through work-based learning is one of the most effective ways to build a strong and reliable talent pipeline.

Through partnerships, industries, educators, and parents can:

- Upskill the future workforce
- Strengthen the local and regional workforce
- Increase brand visibility and community credibility

Partnership and industry engagement matter because they allow employers, educators, and parents to move from reacting to the needs of the workforce to proactively enhance the future workforce through work-based learning.

What is Work-Based Learning?

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is an umbrella term for structured experiences that connect students with the workplace. With support from K-12 school districts, colleges, and universities, and encouraging parents, work-based learning provides intentional, real-world learning experiences and creates a talent pipeline of a prepared, informed, and motivated future workforce.

THREE STAGES OF WORK-BASED LEARNING

1

Learning About Work

This stage promotes career awareness and exploration, allowing participants to learn about various career paths and industries, typically through observation-focused experiences that do not require hands-on work. Participants will learn about an *occupation* by observing.

Examples:

- Worksite tours / Field Studies
- Job Shadowing
- Project-Based Learning
- Service Learning
- Mentoring

2

Learning Through Work

This stage emphasizes career preparation, providing participants with practical experience through extended, hands-on interactions with professionals. Activities in this stage often support career readiness and can be integrated into academic programs. Participants will learn by doing and rarely observing.

Examples:

- Internships
- Pre-Apprenticeships
- Clinical Experiences
- Externships

3

Learning at Work

This stage involves career training, preparing participants directly for employment through immersive, work-based experiences that occur within a workplace setting. Participants will learn by doing.

Examples:

- Registered Apprenticeships
- Non-Registered Apprenticeships
- On-the-Job Training (OJT)
- Incumbent Worker Training
- Co-Op

Employers

Addresses common misconceptions about work-based learning

Myth

Truth

There's too much liability for our company to work with minors.

WBL is a great way to gain early access to the talent pipeline and each school district has a Certificate of Insurance Coverage that provides a threshold amount of coverage for students participating in off-campus activities. Employers are still encouraged to consult with their Human Resource Department and/or legal team, but overall liability should not be a barrier to participation.

Work-based learning is only for large employers.

Small and mid-sized employers are also thriving with work-based learning. If you are interested in growing your own talent, work-based learning experiences can be flexible, scalable, cost-effective, and an efficient recruiting model for the future workforce.

If my business wants to start a work-based learning program, we have to build it ourselves.

Engagement can begin with a single experience, such as a job shadowing event, structured field study, or partnership with a school district. As capacity grows, it can be leveraged to create high-impact experiences, such as apprenticeships or internships. South Carolina also has state and regional support staff available to help industries and businesses get started.

Educators

Addresses common misconceptions about work-based learning

Myth

Truth

Students are too young to benefit from work-based learning.

When educators partner with industries, students gain career exposure, which builds career awareness and curiosity. Educators introduce work-based learning through job shadowing opportunities and structured field studies with industry-facilitated tours. These experiences expand students' sense of possibility and inspire them to explore new pathways.

Work-based learning is only for high school students.

Elementary and middle school students will benefit from low-exposure WBL experiences, such as mentoring, job shadowing, and structured field studies. In contrast, high school and college students will benefit from high-impact WBL experiences involving greater time commitment to the business; such as apprenticeships, co-ops or internships. When educators collaborate with industries across grade levels, students tend to stay more engaged and motivated throughout their K-12 and collegiate experience.

Students only choose careers based on salary.

Through direct interaction with industry professionals, students learn that workplace culture, growth opportunities, and work-life balance matter. These insights from industries support educators in guiding students to enhance essential employability skills such as teamwork, adaptability, flexibility, continuous learning, collaboration, etc...

Parents

Addresses common misconceptions about work-based learning

Myth

Truth

The workplace is too dangerous for students without industry experience.

Work-based learning opportunities are governed by federal and state labor laws and overseen through collaboration with school districts and industry partners. Therefore, students can safely and actively participate in meaningful work experiences while gaining confidence and skills needed for their future career.

Industries only want to employ students who are already skilled.

Industries are excited to train young people who demonstrate curiosity, reliability, and the soft skills they have been instilled with, just as much as technical skills. Parents play a key role in fostering these traits, all while educators help enhance soft skills, and industries help develop job-specific skills.

If my child or teen isn't interested right away, the work-based learning experience isn't worthwhile.

Not necessarily. Work-based learning is about exploration. Even if your student's interest seems low initially, the collaborative effort of industries and educators helps students discover what they enjoy and what they don't. Knowing this empowers students to be confident in their career decisions later.

Benefits of Work-Based Learning

Engagement is most beneficial when industries, educators, and parents work together to provide students with intentional work-based learning experiences. By enhancing career readiness and bridging the gap between education and the workforce, all stakeholders yield significant benefits.

BENEFITS FOR INDUSTRIES

- Increase Career Interest
- Grow a Reliable Talent Pool
- Strengthen Growth and Morale
- Develop a Positive Community Image

Testimonial

Andre Gregory, the owner and manager of Smoothie King, is passionate about staying connected to his community through work-based learning and speaking to student groups about future career paths. He and his colleague did such a fantastic job talking to students at the 8th-grade career fair that the students didn't want to leave to see the other businesses! I wish more employers were like Andre at Smoothie King - willing to impact the workforce of tomorrow!

-Upper Savannah Regional Career Specialist

BENEFITS FOR EDUCATORS

- Improve Student Outcomes
- Enhance Classroom Instruction
- Increase Academic Engagement

BENEFITS FOR PARENTS

- Increase Student Involvement and Motivation
- Improve Employability of Student
- Gain Clarity on Student Career Pathways

Testimonial

My work-based Learning experiences completely shaped my path toward becoming an engineer. I worked in machining, nuclear technology outreach, and civil engineering—running equipment, doing site visits, drafting designs, collaborating with professionals, and even contributing to local infrastructure projects. Each experience helped me understand what I loved about engineering and what work environment fit me best. WBL gave me clarity, real skills, and the confidence to pursue mechanical engineering in college and beyond.

- Aiken High School Graduate

What's Next?

Work-based learning is one of the most effective ways to sharpen, strengthen, and sustain the future workforce. When industries engage directly with educators, parents, and students, they don't just support education; in return, they actively build a reliable workforce pipeline and provide meaningful engagement that impacts the community.

Remember, it takes a community to prepare a student for work!

Interested in knowing more about the types of work-based learning opportunities and how to get started? Stay tuned for the Industry Engagement Toolkit Section 2: Engage.

Scan the QR code to view additional resources and download Section 1 of the Industry Engagement Toolkit.

