

Engage

This section introduces conversation starters and methods industries, educators, parents, and students can use to work together to create work-based learning (WBL) opportunities. When industries connect with educators, parents, and students, they don't just support work-based learning; they actively build meaningful relationships with the future workforce.

Table of Contents

Conversation Starters	1
WBL Checklist	2
WBL Support Activities	4
Types of WBL	5
Why Engage in WBL?.....	6

Conversation Starters

Educators refer to work-based learning (WBL), as grade level appropriate opportunities that are school coordinated with businesses/industries. Employers more commonly know these activities as internships, job shadowing, or mentoring. Regardless of the terms used, the benefits to employers, educators, parents, students, and our community are the same: developing a solid foundation for the workforce.

Starting the conversation about work-based learning begins with understanding why industry engagement and partnership are important. Knowing this helps industries engage with local stakeholders, such as school districts and educators, thereby supporting the growth of the prospective workforce.

Build Your Future Talent Pipeline

When employers connect with schools, students gain awareness and can explore career options. A simple way to begin the conversation about work-based learning is to meet with students to discuss roles and responsibilities within the industry. If hosting students on-site doesn't seem feasible, consider visiting local schools or participating in career exploration events. These early connections can inspire students to pursue a specific industry and enhance the industry's future talent pipeline, reduce recruitment costs, lower training costs, and improve employee retention over time.

Technical & Interpersonal Skill Development

Motivating students to pursue a career path involves showing the relevance of their coursework to real-world application. By allowing students to shadow employees and observe technical and interpersonal skills, this practice serves as a corporate refresher for existing employees and impact the future of the workforce. If students aren't allowed on the job site, consider virtual sessions or classroom visits to ensure students can still learn about the company culture and the skills needed for industry success.

Boost Employee Leadership & Retention

Participating in work-based learning opportunities boosts company morale by engaging staff with the students' experiences. When a staff member mentors a student, they often feel a sense of pride and renewed purpose in their work. Pairing a student with a skilled or emerging leader is a simple way to introduce mentorship, a type of work-based learning opportunity for students, while helping employees gain more leadership and communication skills.

Cost-Savings & Productivity Gains

Work-based learning doesn't have to require a large financial investment. Industries can lower overhead costs by exploring a mentorship program without a massive financial commitment. Through mentorship programs or project-based learning, students can typically experience shorter, more flexible opportunities while gaining skills in data entry, social media, or research, thereby freeing senior staff to focus on higher-level work.

Invest in Local Community for Maximum Impact

Investing in local students enables industries to directly contribute to their community's economic health by strengthening the workforce of tomorrow. When businesses invest in students by engaging with educators, they provide a unique pathway to retain local talent in high-paying, meaningful careers. Work-based learning can help keep talented young people connected to their local area and will encourage them to find their future in South Carolina.

Work-Based Learning Checklist

An essential list to organize, reduce errors, and improve productivity for WBL experiences.

Industries

- Brainstorm as a team what a WBL opportunity can look like to determine what is best in your organization, including registered and unregistered options.
- Review South Carolina rules and regulations on child labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and the Fair Labor Standards Act, including pay when required.
- Decide which staff member(s) will implement and supervise the WBL experience.
- Identify the skills students will learn from the WBL experience and any skills needed to participate in the WBL program.
- Determine an appropriate work schedule for WBL participants.
- Prepare the workspace or obtain the tools needed for the WBL opportunity.
- Establish an agreement and understanding with educators and district stakeholders.

Tip: Orientation for a WBL experience is a great way to set the tone and expectations for students. Whether in a group or virtual setting, identifying the WBL program goals early and stating them clearly helps sustain the WBL opportunity.

Testimonial

Through my AutoCAD WBL experience, I strengthened my technical skills and confirmed my desire to pursue mechanical engineering rather than electrical or civil. The real-world repetition, enhanced 2D software use, and design and redesign work completed during my internship prepared me for college-level expectations and future career demands.

-Rock Hill School District WBL Student

Work-Based Learning Checklist

An essential list to organize, reduce errors, and improve productivity for WBL experiences.

Educators

- Set clear goals and expectations for WBL students and help align experiences with identified career pathways.
- Prepare students with workplace readiness skills such as confidentiality, policy and procedures, communication, and professionalism.
- Identify local industry partners that are interested in offering WBL experiences or have workforce development programs.
- Establish communication systems that include methods for collecting data and assessing outcomes from student WBL experiences.
- Provide all required training agreement, evaluation plans, and reflection assignments that allow students to connect their experiences to their future careers.

Tip: Keep consistent records of students' WBL experiences and the industries in which they are engaged with. Doing so creates a ready-to-engage list of industry stakeholders for future WBL experiences.

Parents

- Encourage students to explore careers and choose WBL experiences that align with their career goals.
- Talk to the educators and industries about WBL opportunities.
- Assist with preparation and understanding of program, guidelines, and expectations set by school and business.
- Support both the school district and industry partner by clearly communicating expectations to the student. Reinforce key requirements for WBL participants, including dress code, transportation, scheduling, cell phone use, and established deliverables for the WBL experience.
- Provide encouragement and feedback for students during their WBL experience and establish a routine check-in to stay abreast of the students' WBL experience and skills being gained.

Tip: Anticipate the soft skills required for the workforce and encourage students to practice them daily, such as prompt arrival, time management, teamwork, and a willingness to learn.

Activities That Support WBL

The best way to start the conversation about work-based learning (WBL) is through career guidance activities. WBL often begins with small awareness activities before moving into hands-on experiences. Below are a few activities that industries, educators, and parents can use to engage in work-based learning preparation.

Career Exploration Activities

Programs where industry professionals connect with students to introduce careers, skills required, and career paths for various career fields.

- Awareness (Grades K-5): career days, guest speaker or industry presentations, etc.

Career Fairs and Industry Presentations

Events where industries show available career and/or skill enhancement opportunities to gain the interest of students.

- Exploration (Grades 6-8): hands-on demonstrations, career fairs/expos, panel discussions, etc.

Career Assessments

Tools that evaluate a student's interest, strengths, and potential career pathways.

- Assessments (Grade 8): interest inventories, skills assessments, career mapping, goal setting, etc.

Career Counseling and Career Planning

Experiences to help students identify career interests, goals, and pathways through intentional conversations and planning for the future.

- Experience (Grades 9-12): job shadows, field studies, internships, apprenticeships, etc.

Types of WBL

Awareness: Learning About Work

Worksite Tours/Structured Field Study

- Industries allow students to visit their facility to witness workplace activities and see jobs in action.

Job Shadowing

- A short-term, school-coordinated experience where students can watch and learn from an employee in the workplace. Experience can be provided on-site or virtually.

Service Learning

- A method where students engage in community-service work or develop solutions for projects addressing real-world programs as part of class assignments.

Mentoring

- An experience that engages a student with an industry professional who possesses the workplace skills and knowledge to be mastered by the student.

Exploration: Learning Through Work

Internships

- Industry-supported and school-sponsored work experience that places students on worksites to practice job-related skills and gain experience.

Pre-Apprenticeships

- A custom-designed program to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in registered apprenticeship programs, providing knowledge and skills training needed for specific jobs and industries.

Clinical Experiences

- Supervised learning activities within a clinical setting where students will gain hands-on experience.

Externships

- Week-long or month-long experiences that involve hands-on tasks, learning about careers by observing, and often resemble a short-term job shadowing program.

Experience: Learning At Work

Registered Apprenticeships

- Industry-driven, “earn-while-you-learn” registered program that combines classroom instruction, on-the-job training, and a scalable wage progression for students.

Non-Registered Apprenticeships

- Informal, industry-led training programs that combine on-the-job learning with instruction for students but are not government-recognized.

On-the-Job Training (OJT)

- Industry-led hands-on training with guidance at an employer worksite or facility.

Cooperative Education (Co-Op)

- Multi-work term agreement with an employer, typically placements for college students with full-time paid positions.

Why Engage in Work-Based Learning

Work-Based Learning (WBL) helps students transition from learning about careers to gaining hands-on experience on the job. WBL experiences are most successful when industries, teachers, and parents work together to guide students through each stage. To build a pipeline of future talent, shape workforce skills, and ultimately invest in tomorrow's workforce employers offer WBL and bridges the gap between classroom instruction and career preparation.

Through WBL experiences, students can explore industries, develop skills, and better understand their career goals. Whether it's starting with career activities and learning about work or learning through work and learning at work, work-based learning and industry engagement is the formula for workforce success. Together, industries, educators, and parents play an important role in preparing students for in-demand careers, helping students explore growing industries, and learning the skills that are relevant and applicable for South Carolina's workforce.

Testimonial

I had to adapt and learn new skills since I was faced with tasks that forced me to step outside of my comfort zone. The intricacy of the work occasionally felt overwhelming to handle, but with perseverance and the right support, I was able to get over challenges and advance both professionally and emotionally.

All things considered, the internship deepened my understanding of the energy industry and reinforced the value of collaboration, problem-solving, and lifelong learning. I thank Dominion Energy for this opportunity because I know how much competition there was for this internship and I am grateful for being given the opportunity.

-Ridge View High School WBL Student

What's Next?

Starting the conversation and getting youth involved in the workforce is the first step toward offering work-based learning (WBL) opportunities. As one of the most effective ways to sharpen, strengthen, and sustain the future workforce, work-based learning and industry engagement actively builds a reliable pipeline of talent and has a positive long-term impact on its local community.

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

Interested in knowing how to expand work-based learning experiences? Stay tuned for the Industry Engagement Toolkit Section 3: Expand.

Scan the QR code to view additional resources and download Section 2 of the Industry Engagement Toolkit!

