



Planning and Developing Work-Based Learning Programs

Work-based learning is the planned and supervised *connection* of classroom experiences with the expectations and realities of work. Work-based learning experiences provide all students the opportunity to develop and apply knowledge, skills, and *employability attitudes and behaviors* leading to *better informed career choices* and productive employment. Clarifiers include:

- **Connection:** integrating academic studies with career development and applied field experience opportunities which may be internal or external to the school. All students can learn and participate in work-based learning experiences.
- **Better informed career choices:** work-based learning enables students to learn about careers, reflect on their interests, set career goals, and develop the skills and understanding needed for a productive future.
- **Employability attitudes and behaviors:** traits such as punctuality, communication skills, honesty, teamwork, quality orientation, and customer orientation. Curriculum should be developed with the involvement of partners such as business, labor, industry, education, and other community groups.
- **Location:** varies for work-based learning and includes community-based worksites as well as worksites at school.

By following a relevant training plan that provides both school-based, occupationally-related instruction and an actual workplace experience, students learn what the world of work is like and are better prepared to take their place within it. Classroom activities and work training are jointly planned and supervised by qualified school personnel.

The [National Research Center for Career and Technical Education](#) (NRCCTE) published a report in February 2013, *Work-Based Learning Opportunities for High School Students*, that makes the following recommendations:

- Provide a clear, substantive purpose for and stated value of WBL, emphasizing the learning component in the work experience.
- Offer resources and information about components of high-quality WBL programs.
- Provide professional development for teachers and WBL coordinators to develop instructional strategies, including for cognitive transfer of problem-solving skills.
- Convene meetings with employer associations and labor unions to achieve buy-in for the creation of more meaningful WBL programs connected to school curriculum.
- Provide resources and guidelines for employer mentor selection, training, and continued engagement.

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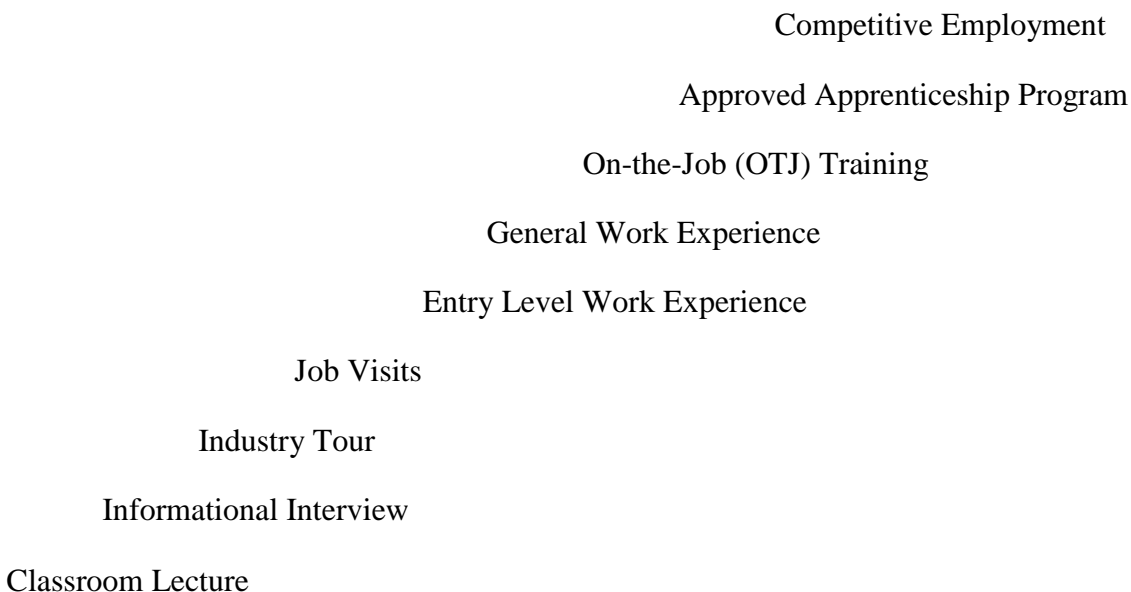


- Support teachers to work closely with WBL coordinators and employer mentors to construct detailed student training plans.
- Require the broadening of selection criteria and provisions for access so more students can participate in WBL.
- Demonstrate strategies for involving academic and CTE teachers in the WBL process so that WBL is connected to classroom learning.
- Provide better guidelines for accountability for student learning in WBL programs.
- Fund WBL coordinators for each project with adequate support and resources.

In Iowa, work-based learning may be developed in areas as identified in Iowa Code 256.11.

The Continuum of Work-Based Learning Experiences

Work-based learning applies to all levels of learners, from elementary school through postsecondary, and covers a continuum of awareness and activities that increasingly move students from school to workplace. Each step on the continuum represents a growing involvement in an occupation and/or at a worksite. Beginning with classroom activities about jobs, vocations, or the expectations of the work world, this continuum ultimately ends with acceptance of competitive employment.



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Establishing the Need for Work-Based Learning

The primary reason to establish a work-based learning program is to increase educational engagement and career readiness and attainment for all students in the school.

Justification for the program should be supported by information about a wide range of individuals and their needs. Consider the following strategies for collecting information:

- Collect and evaluate data from district advisory committees, parents, students, and employers.
- Survey graduates and dropouts after one, three, and five years to gather reliable and valid data about their employment histories. Identify positions held by graduates and ask about any difficulty in making satisfactory occupational adjustment.

Initiating a work-based learning program may be justified if responses show unmet needs and issues such as:

- Periods of underemployment or unemployment after leaving school.
- A series of unrelated entry-level jobs.
- Insufficient income relative to cost of living.
- Training needs that could have been met through work-based learning.
- Current skill enrichment needs which are best learned through work-based learning.

Student Needs

The need for a work-based learning program may become clear as students begin occupational exploration and develop basic criteria for planning their own career development. Structured career development programs, such as the student core curriculum plan and the career information and decision-making system, developed and administered in Iowa Code under section 279.61, may provide indicators about opportunities students need for self-knowledge and exploration. Counselors and faculty are also key sources of information because they are likely to know student strengths and challenges, as well as who would benefit from practical learning experiences. Work-based learning experiences may be the most beneficial for students who have:

- Occupational plans and interests that are best learned through work-based learning.
- Plans for further education.
- Interest in occupations for which training can be provided.
- Interest in part-time employment (where supportive employers can provide a range of hours worked and income earned).
- Perceived relevance of school offerings to personal needs.
- Financial need while in school or for obtaining further education.

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Needs of Pre-Graduation Leavers

Former students whose employment needs were not met through traditional education can be an extremely valuable source of information. Work-based learning has shown great promise for students who would otherwise leave school before graduation. Such early school leavers may have abandoned traditional education to seek employment prospects, only to become frustrated by a lack of specialized occupational training or skills necessary for long-term job success.

Occupational / Employer Needs

Employer interest and support is essential to the success of a work-based learning program. Measure it very early in planning because a work-based learning program cannot exist without employer interest and support. Employers provide [training stations](#) and [training sponsors](#). They must understand the purpose of work-based learning, the benefits and advantages to them, and their role in its efficient and effective operation. Employers must perceive the program's potential source of trained workers for full-time positions as a return on their business investment. Employers must also view the program as an opportunity to fulfill a social obligation and a community responsibility, rather than as a way to get cheap, part-time labor. Whenever possible, coordinate employer visits and information requests with professional business and association activities to determine:

- Who can provide suitable training opportunities;
- Types of related occupations in the community;
- Potential short-range and long-range needs for trained full-time employees;
- Training needs for occupations or for competency areas;
- Number of students for whom employers could adequately provide learning experiences; and
- Willingness to provide training, regardless of the availability of full-time employment opportunities within their organizations.

Key Characteristics of a Quality Work-Based Learning Program

At both secondary and postsecondary levels, work-based learning experiences effectively and efficiently prepare students for successful transition to the world of work, especially when they include the following quality components:

1. The program is coordinated by a qualified and dedicated teacher-coordinator.
2. Students are enrolled based on aptitudes, needs, interests, and occupational goals.
3. Counselors and [teacher-coordinators](#) work closely in the work-based learning effort.
4. Worksite [training stations](#) are developed by [teacher-coordinators](#) to provide on-the-job experiences that are directly related to students' career needs and goals.
5. Career counseling includes information about traditional and non-traditional occupations.
6. [Related instruction](#) ([general](#) and [specific](#)) is planned and correlated directly with students' on-the-job experiences and occupational needs. All career and technical education programs are used for related instruction.



7. Well-defined rules, as outlined in the [training agreement](#), have been developed and appropriate responsibilities have been assigned to guide the program.
8. Evaluation activities are used by teacher-coordinators to monitor the program.
9. A gender-balanced [advisory committee](#), representative of community occupational and ethnic groups, advises and assists in planning, developing, and implementing the work-based learning program.
10. Written [training agreements](#) and [student training plans](#) are carefully developed and agreed upon by the employer, training sponsor, student, and coordinator.
11. Employers pay compensation and schools award credit to students for successfully completing on-the-job learning experiences.
12. [Training stations](#) adhere to all state and federal laws regarding employment practices.
13. Adequate time (a minimum of one-half hour per student per week) is provided for teacher-coordinators to coordinate and supervise training station experiences.
14. Teacher-coordinators are provided an extended contract to assist training sponsors, develop training plans, update records, supervise students, and handle other program operation and development activities.
15. Results of follow-up studies conducted by teacher-coordinators and counselors are used to improve the current program and plan for future work-based learning opportunities.
16. Adequate facilities are provided for teacher-coordinators, including an office, a telephone, and a related-instruction classroom.
17. Teacher-coordinators understand the advantages of work-based learning and promote work-based learning experiences to various audiences, including students, parents, schools, employers, and their communities.

Work-based learning helps students develop social, academic, and personal skills needed to live as productive members of society; explore and participate in actual work experiences; develop sound and realistic work habits; and develop entry-level skills in an occupation. As a result, students, schools, businesses, and communities benefit.

Follow Program Guidelines and Components

Local schools and the businesses in their communities are the heart of work-based learning. Schools provide classroom instruction and program coordination, while businesses provide willingness to participate in the program and specific on-the-job training.

Collaboration

The teacher-coordinator, student, and employer should jointly arrange each student's educational plan to meet desired occupational outcomes. Through the use of [training plans and agreements](#), teacher-coordinators individualize student's instructional programs and work one-on-one with each student for at least one-half hour per week, generally during time that coincides with his or her working schedule. Training plans and agreements for each student should be on file with everyone involved in the process: student, parents, teacher-coordinator, and employer.



Students

Class size should be no more than twenty-five (25), with students enrolled in:

1. A related class that parallels the employment experience for a recommended minimum of 200 minutes per week;
2. Approved skill-related course(s) based on occupational choices discovered before or during the work-based learning experience; and
3. A cooperative employment work-based learning experience.

Coordinators who work full time at placement (are not responsible for related instruction) for exploration and training can assist more students than the recommended loads identified above. Work experience and cooperative training involving training plans and agreements require coordinators to monitor experiences regularly over greater periods of time to establish the work skills as identified in the plans.

Teacher-Coordinator

[Teacher-coordinators](#) plan, organize, and operate the work-based learning programs. They provide both general-related and specific-related classroom instruction with assistance from training sponsors, businesses, and other educators. Coordinators also work with training sponsors to develop [training plans](#) that list skills and attitudes students develop through work-based learning.

Employers

As “[training stations](#),” employers work closely with teacher-coordinators to identify and support [training sponsors](#) within their facility who will supervise the work-based learning experience for students placed there. Employers are also responsible for compliance with federal and state laws applicable to their business, including wage-and-hour, child labor, and safety requirements identified by OSHA, the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and IOSHA, the Iowa Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Advisory Council

A community [advisory council](#), representing current and potential occupational areas for which training is provided, should meet regularly to help schools develop and assess program outcomes. When establishing the council, also consider gender balance, minority populations, individuals with disabilities, and local media liaisons.

Student Organizations

Considered an integral part of work-based learning programs, [student organizations](#) can complement and enhance classroom instruction and on-the-job experiences through group projects and activities. Student organizations focus on skills needed for successful employment, including professional, social, and leadership development. The teacher-coordinator may serve as advisor to the local organization. Annual budgets should provide reimbursement to coordinators and instructors for approved travel.



School Support and Facilities

Classroom, office space, and appropriate equipment are key components of program success that should be provided by the local school. The optimal arrangement is a classroom for [general-related instruction](#), located next to the coordinator's office. The office, which should be equipped with at least one telephone, will be used for conferences with students, parents, employers, and for other activities related to the educational outcome of the program.

Schools should also establish management practices to administer and operate a work experience/cooperative program that provides for student recruitment and acceptance, classroom scheduling, medical and liability insurance, transportation of students, school credit for work experiences and related instruction, recordkeeping, coordinator resources and responsibilities, and minimum requirements for training stations, among others.

A Difference for Postsecondary Programs: Instructional Load

The primary difference between work-based learning programs at the secondary level and those at postsecondary institutions deals with instructional load. Postsecondary instructional load for on-the-job coordination is usually calculated on the basis of assigned semester/quarter credit hours.

Iowa Administrative Code 281-24.5(2) states that the full-time teaching load of an instructor in career and technical education programs shall not exceed 6 hours per day, and an aggregate of 30 hours per week or the equivalent. An instructor may also teach the equivalent of an additional 3 credit hours, provided the instructor consents to this additional assignment. Teaching load may be adjusted based on the number of students enrolled and the location of training stations.

Advantages of Work-Based Learning

[Work-based learning](#) effectively prepares students to enter and make progress in the world of work. However, no instructional method can perfectly simulate the real world job environment.

Student Advantages

- Increases motivation and improves student retention.
- Develops responsibility and maturity by strengthening resourcefulness, problem-solving skills, self-confidence, and self-discipline.
- Provides opportunities for occupational exploration prior to making long-term and costly investments in more training or education.
- Offers an organized plan of training on the job under actual business conditions.
- Develops interpersonal skills through professional interactions in job settings.
- Provides skilled professionals to help students make the transition from school to work.
- Increases awareness of civil and social responsibilities.
- Improves job entry and advancement.

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- May contribute to financial resources.
- Provides technical education beyond that available at most schools.
- Makes academic instruction relevant and applicable to the workplace.

Employer Advantages

- Provides a better employee candidate pool, which may reduce turnover and future training costs.
- Shares employee screening function with school.
- Provides opportunity to evaluate workers before offering full-time employment.
- Produces workers with better attendance records.
- Exempts employers from paying unemployment compensation taxes on student wages.
- Provides workers who bring new ideas, fresh approaches, and enthusiasm for work.
- Offers direct input into education and training provided by schools.
- Improves the image and prestige of the industry and/or business among student-learners and community members.

School Advantages

- Develops working partnerships between the school, business and industry and the community.
- Makes curriculum relevant by integrating theory and practice to classroom experience.
- Keeps faculty better informed and aware of current trends in business and industry.
- Provides faculty with access to knowledgeable people working in a variety of fields.
- Builds positive public relations that attract students and enhance the school's reputation in the community.
- Upgrades quality of school's graduates.
- Provides training facilities in business and industry that would otherwise be difficult for schools to finance.
- Creates greater flexibility to meet individual student needs and goals.

Community Advantages

- Increases employment prospects that allow graduates to remain in their home communities.
- Involves the community in meeting its own immediate training needs.
- Encourages more young people to remain in school, thereby reducing community problems associated with at-risk students.
- Produces citizens who are more likely to financially support themselves and their families at earlier ages.
- Improves local economy by increasing student buying power.
- Promotes a closer relationship between the community and school.