



## MEASURING SECONDARY CTE PROGRAM QUALITY

### WORK-BASED LEARNING

When the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV) was reauthorized in July 2018 as the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), it was with an intentional push toward data-driven decisionmaking at both the state and local levels. One of the major changes in Perkins V is that states can now select from among three options for the indicator to measure secondary Career Technical Education (CTE) program quality in their accountability systems:



- The percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school **having attained a recognized postsecondary credential.**<sup>1</sup>



- The percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school having **attained postsecondary credits in the relevant CTE program or program of study** earned through a dual or concurrent enrollment program or another credit transfer agreement.



- The percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school **having participated in work-based learning.**

This series of briefs draws on data from a 2018 national survey of State CTE Directors to help states adopt robust methods for measuring secondary CTE program quality. It explores the pros and cons of each of the three options and examines different ways states are measuring and validating them. This brief is the fourth in the series and explores strategies for measuring work-based learning completion.

#### Key Considerations for Measuring Work-Based Learning

States that select work-based learning as their secondary CTE program quality indicator should think about:

- How to build upon the work-based learning definition in Perkins V to set clear parameters around what does and does not count;
- Opportunities to align this indicator with other accountability indicators for related programs;
- How to encourage alignment between work-based learning and learners' programs of study;
- Different ways to collect information on work-based learning participation and completion that is consistent across the state; and
- How to set expectations around measuring skill attainment and performance for work-based learning completers.

## Why Measure Work-Based Learning?

Work-based learning should be a core component of any high-quality CTE program of study. These experiences offer students opportunities to reinforce and deepen their classroom learning, explore future career fields, and demonstrate their skills in an authentic setting. They also often lead to employment opportunities, which are correlated with high school completion, labor market success and increased earnings for youth.<sup>2</sup>

The value of work-based learning is not only that it allows learners to develop and hone skills in an authentic work setting but also that it connects learners with professional mentors who can guide and support them along their career pathway. Research shows that relationship-based experiences that allow learners to interact with adult mentors and supervisors as teenagers are correlated with job quality by age 29.<sup>3</sup>

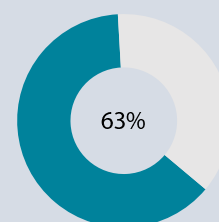
Policymakers at the federal and state levels are increasingly prioritizing work-based learning as a strategy to foster economic growth and prepare learners for career success. In 2018, 26 states passed policies related to industry partnerships and work-based learning.<sup>4</sup> And 12 states are counting work-based learning in their state or Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) accountability systems for high schools.<sup>5</sup>

With such growth and support for work-based learning, Perkins V could allow state leaders to further integrate these opportunities into their CTE programs and set the expectation that all learners complete work-based learning in high school.

## Defining Work-Based Learning

One of the biggest challenges with measuring work-based learning is first figuring out how to define it consistently. As of 2018, less than two-thirds of states have a statewide definition of work-based learning, according to a survey of State CTE Directors. Yet at the same time nearly 90 percent of states say they are actively collecting data on secondary work-based learning completion.<sup>6</sup> This mismatch means that in a lot of states information is being collected inconsistently across schools, districts and centers that are providing work-based learning opportunities.

States With a Statewide Definition of Work-Based Learning



One significant change under Perkins V is that the law now includes a concrete definition of work-based learning. According to the law:

*The term “**work-based learning**” means sustained interactions with industry or community professionals in real workplace settings, to the extent practicable, or simulated environments at an education institution that foster in-depth, first-hand engagement with the tasks required of a given career field, that are aligned to curriculum and instruction.*

States do not have to adopt this definition word for word, but it does set a baseline for how they define and measure work-based learning. The definition is flexible enough to allow states to hone it even further and set additional parameters to meet their own priorities and needs, such as:

- Encouraging alignment between the work-based learning focus and the learner’s program of study;
- Measuring skill gain in addition to participation in work-based learning; and
- Recognizing and valuing more intensive work-based learning experiences.

In **South Carolina**, for example, state leaders have created robust business rules for measuring work-based learning that emphasize alignment with CTE and classroom instruction. This measure is part of the state’s “Prepared for Success” indicator for the ESSA accountability system. To ensure consistent measurement across schools and districts, South Carolina defines work-based learning as *“a school-coordinated, sponsored, coherent sequence of workplace experiences that are related to each student’s career goals and interests, while based on instructional preparation, and are performed in partnership with local businesses, industries, or other organizations in the community.”*<sup>7</sup>

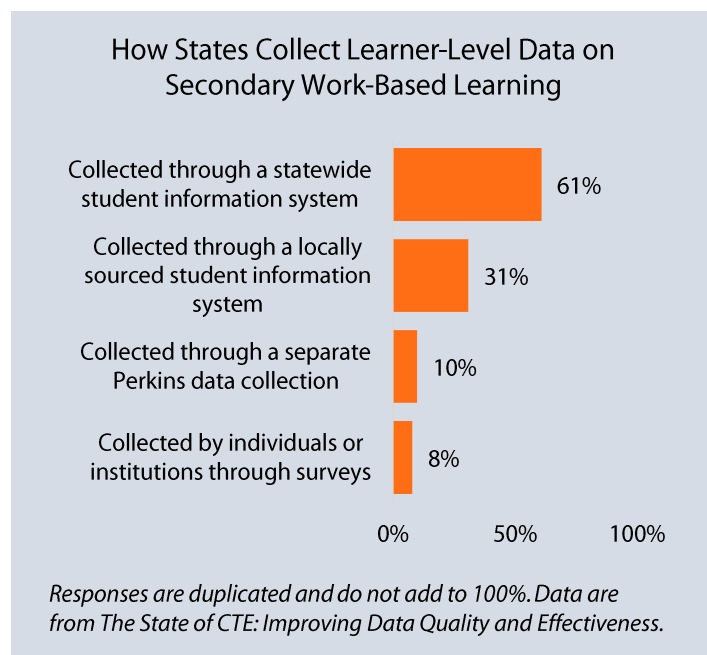
This definition allows South Carolina to be precise in its guidance for measuring work-based learning. Learners in the state are counted only after they:

- Successfully complete a state-approved work-based learning exit evaluation from an employer for a program that:
  - Includes a training agreement and a minimum of 40 practical experience hours,
  - Is aligned with the state’s Career Clusters®, and
  - Includes an industry evaluation that is created from the training agreement and includes the world-class skills from the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate; and
- Earn a minimum of one unit in the career pathway related to the work-based placement or complete a personal pathway of study.

By requiring learners to complete a minimum number of hours and an exit evaluation, South Carolina can guarantee a level of consistency across the state, ensuring the data are more accurate and reliable. Additionally, the state helps minimize random acts of work-based learning by requiring activities to be aligned with a recognized Career Cluster and ensuring that students earn credit in an aligned career

pathway. This approach ensures that what South Carolina measures and counts is aligned to the state’s priorities and vision for work-based learning.

State leaders should also note that the language for the work-based learning option under the Perkins V secondary program quality indicator is limited only to participation in — not completion of — a work-based learning experience. To promote meaningful experiences and ensure that learners are developing skills that are aligned to their program of study, states should consider setting exit conditions for work-based learning and counting only those students who complete their program. Such exit



conditions could include completing a student portfolio, taking an assessment, or receiving an evaluation from the supervisor.

### Collecting and Validating Work-Based Learning Data

The primary way states collect work-based learning data is through a statewide student information system. In total, 61 percent of states say they use this approach. In many states, work-based learning data are measured

on the student's transcript using specific course codes and captured through the student information system that way. In **Georgia**, for example, the state board prescribes the specific coding system for work-based learning activities that allows instructors to specify the program area, the year of work-based learning enrollment, the number of credit hours and more. In addition to collecting standardized work-based learning data through course codes, the Georgia Department of Education maintains a separate student information portal that captures more information, such as the name of the employer and whether the experience is paid or unpaid.

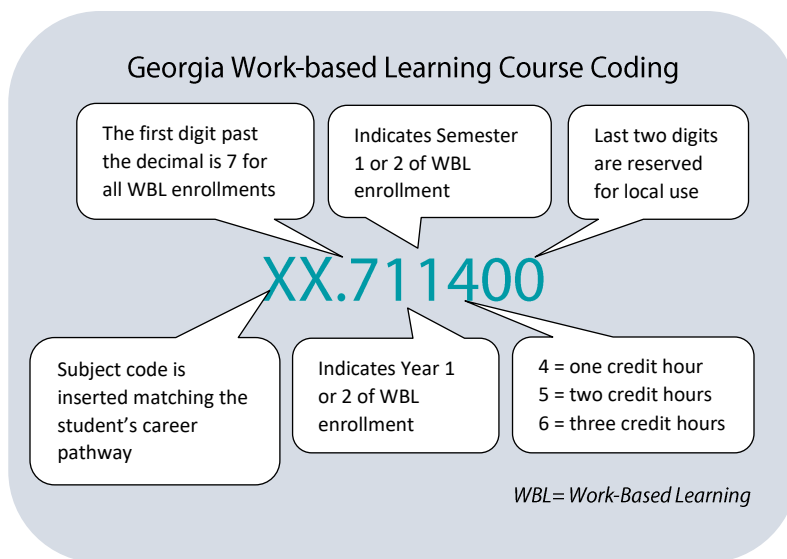
Other states use a separate data system to track learner participation and success in work-based learning. **Tennessee** has a separate statewide portal for educators to submit information about learners who are placed in work-based learning, which includes details such as the name of the employer, the duration of the experience, and whether the experience is paid or unpaid.<sup>8</sup>

Validating work-based learning data can be just as hard as — or even harder than — collecting the data in the first place. To the extent possible, states should build out robust data collection processes to ensure that they can trust their data. Meeting this goal means being as specific as possible at the entry stage about expectations and capturing validations — such as an employer evaluation — to confirm that learning has taken place. School and district officials should carefully document these experiences and maintain records so the data can be audited and verified when necessary.

**Arkansas** captures validations of work-based learning by requiring employers to complete a skill assessment for the learners they supervise. Before they even begin the program, learners identify specific skills they want to develop and how they want to be assessed by their worksite mentor. Once the work-based learning experience has been completed, the supervisor submits documentation to validate that the experience was completed as described.

### Parting Thoughts

Choosing a secondary CTE program quality indicator is a decision state leaders should not take lightly. This choice will send a clear signal to the field about state priorities for CTE and create an incentive structure that will be in place for years. While work-based learning is one option, states should set clear expectations and criteria for high-quality work-based learning experiences through a statewide definition. State leaders should also examine the way they collect and validate work-based learning data to ensure that they — and the communities and stakeholders they serve — can trust the data.



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<sup>1</sup> Perkins V defines a CTE concentrator as:

- At the secondary school level, a student served by an eligible recipient who has completed at least two courses in a single CTE program or program of study; and
- At the postsecondary level, a student enrolled in an eligible recipient who has earned at least 12 credits within a career and technical education program or program of study or has completed such a program if the program encompasses fewer than 12 credits or the equivalent in total (Sec 3[12]).

<sup>2</sup> Child Trends. Youth employment. Retrieved from <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/youth-employment>

<sup>3</sup> Ross, M., Anderson Moore, K., Murphy, K., Bateman, N., DeMand, A., & Sacks, V. (2018). *Pathways to high-quality jobs for young adults*. The Brookings Institution. Retrieved from [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Brookings\\_Child-Trends\\_Pathways-for-High-Quality-Jobs-FINAL.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Brookings_Child-Trends_Pathways-for-High-Quality-Jobs-FINAL.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Advance CTE & Association for Career and Technical Education. (2019). *State policies impacting CTE: 2018 year in review*. Retrieved from <https://careertech.org/resource/2018-year-in-review>

<sup>5</sup> Advance CTE, Education Strategy Group, Achieve & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2019). *Making career readiness count 3.0*. Retrieved from <https://careertech.org/resource/making-career-readiness-count-2019>

<sup>6</sup> Advance CTE, Council of Chief State School Officers, Education Strategy Group, Data Quality Campaign & Workforce Data Quality Campaign. (2019). *The state of Career Technical Education: Improving data quality & effectiveness*. Retrieved from <https://careertech.org/resource/state-cte-improving-data-quality-effectiveness>

<sup>7</sup> South Carolina Oversight Committee and South Carolina Department of Education. (2018). 2017-18 accountability manual. Retrieved from <https://ed.sc.gov/data/report-cards/sc-school-report-card/files/accountability-manual/>

<sup>8</sup> Tennessee Department of Education. Work-based learning. Retrieved from <https://wbl.tnedu.gov/Account/Login?ReturnUrl=%2fHome%2fWelcome>