

Work-Based Learning and CTE

Work-based learning is an educational strategy that offers learners an opportunity to reinforce and deepen their classroom learning, explore future career fields, and demonstrate their skills in an authentic, real-world setting. Work-based learning provides learners the opportunity to learn and apply employability and technical skills¹ that support success in careers and postsecondary education and can culminate in recognized postsecondary credentials².

Work-based learning includes a continuum of experiences ranging from less intensive opportunities such as career awareness and career exploration to more intensive opportunities such as career preparation and career training.

Work-Based Learning Continuum



Learning **ABOUT** Work: Learners build awareness about career and postsecondary options through experiences such as field trips and career days.



Learning **ABOUT** Work: Learners explore career and postsecondary options in order to make informed decisions about their future. Learners can explore through job shadowing, mentorships and counseling.



Learning **THROUGH** Work: Learners apply learning through practical experiences such as training programs and simulated work experiences that develop knowledge and core competencies necessary for success in careers and postsecondary education.



Learning **FOR** Work: Learners train for employment and/or postsecondary education by engaging in work experiences such as internships and apprenticeships.

Types of Work-Based Learning Experiences

There are many examples of work-based learning experiences along the continuum. Here are some examples of common work-based learning experiences.

Career Awareness	Career Day	A career awareness activity where employers from a variety of industries come together at a school to share information about their company, their job, and the education and skills that are required for success in their career. ⁶
	Workplace Tour	A highly-structured career awareness experience in which learners visit a workplace, learn about the business, meet employers, ask questions and observe work in progress. ⁷
Career Exploration	Career Competition	A career exploration experience requiring learners to demonstrate mastery of career-related skills through presentations or competitions that are judged by industry professionals. ⁸
	Career Mentorship	A career exploration activity where learners are matched one-on-one or in small groups with an industry professional to explore potential careers and related educational issues. ⁹
	Job Shadowing	A structured career exploration activity in which learners are paired with an employer and observe the workday, interact with clients or customers, and attend meetings and other appointments with the person they are shadowing. ¹⁰
Career Preparation	Cooperative Education (Co-op)	An intensive career preparation experience where academic programs are connected to structured work experience through which participants acquire professional and technical skills. ¹¹
	Simulated Workplace Experience	A career preparation experience where learners engage in activities that simulate work environments. ¹²
	Student Led Enterprise	A career preparation experience where students operate school-based enterprises that produce goods or services for sale or to be used by people other than the participating learner(s). ¹³
Career Training	Apprenticeship	An intensive career training experience that generally lasts from one to six years and provides a combination of on-the-job training and formal classroom instruction. ¹⁴
	Internship	A highly structured, time-limited, career training experience in which learners are placed at a worksite to observe and participate in work firsthand. ¹⁵

West Virginia's Simulated Workplace Program³

Launched in 2013, the simulated workplace program in West Virginia transforms classrooms into business enterprises, creating an authentic environment where learners can develop and practice both technical and employability skills. As of 2018, the West Virginia Board of Education requires every CTE concentrator to complete a simulated workplace program as a capstone experience.

Washington State's Career Bridge⁴

Washington's one-stop source for career and education planning, Career Bridge helps learners find and connect to a career pathway by completing career assessments, learning data about wages and the types of training needed for certain careers, and searching available programs of study that lead to careers learners are interested in.

Northern Illinois P-20 Network's Career Pathways Virtual Trailheads⁵

Launched in response to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, Virtual Trailheads is a YouTube series that allows students to learn from professionals in a wide range of occupations. Professionals share details about their work, skills most important in their field and advice for prospective learners.



Work-Based Learning and Equity

Work-based learning provides young adults the opportunity to build **social capital** critical to accessing employment and career opportunities later in life.

One example of this is job searching, where individuals often rely on family or personal connections made through school, work or other professional and social experiences to access job opportunities. Working-class and economically disadvantaged learners are less likely to be embedded in social networks with high-value connections that can be mobilized to provide support in the job market.¹⁷ Work-based learning experiences, therefore, become crucial to these learners' ability to achieve both their immediate and long-term career goals.

Outcomes for Work-Based Learning Participants

- A 2002 national work-based learning study found that, compared to all learners, those who complete at least one intensive work-based learning experience in high school earn higher grade point averages.¹⁹
- Participation in internships during college increases the odds of post-graduation employment. In a 2014 survey, 71 percent of recent graduates who were employed had held an internship in college while 56 percent had not.²⁰
- In 2019, 78 percent of CareerWise **Colorado** youth apprentices found the content they learned on the job to be very or completely relevant to their future career.²¹
- A 2018 report found that learners with low income who participate in relationship-based work-based learning experiences such as internships or apprenticeships in high school are more likely to obtain better quality jobs as measured by wages, benefits, hours and job satisfaction than learners who do not complete such experiences.²²

Social capital is a network of relationships that can be mobilized to improve an individual's power, status and authority¹⁶

New York City's Scholars at Work Program

The Scholars at Work (SAW) program began in 2009 and was made available to high school seniors enrolled in CTE programs at participating high schools. Program participants enrolled in a career exploration module, where they developed soft skills while learning about career opportunities from industry experts, and an internship module, where they worked at a local business for approximately 13 weeks.

A 2016 Rand study¹⁸ found that SAW participants were almost three times more likely to find employment in manufacturing or transportation sectors than non-SAW participants. Furthermore, SAW participants also reported total earnings that, on average, were more than double that of non-SAW participants.

- ¹ https://www.nga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/NGA_Work-Based-Learning_Guide_final_web.pdf
- ² <https://occr1.illinois.edu/docs/librariesProvider4/ptr/wbl-brief.pdf>
- ³ <https://careertech.org/resource/west-virginia-simulated-workplace>
- ⁴ <http://www.careerbridge.wa.gov/default.aspx>
- ⁵ <https://p20network.news.niu.edu/2020/03/28/career-pathways-virtual-trailheads-exploring-careers-online/>
- ⁶ <http://wbltoolkit.cte.nyc/career-mentoring/>
- ⁷ <https://wbltoolkit.cte.nyc/workplace-tour>
- ⁸ <http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/overview/work-based-learning-experiences>
- ⁹ <https://wbltoolkit.cte.nyc/career-mentoring>
- ¹⁰ <https://wbltoolkit.cte.nyc/job-shadowing>
- ¹¹ https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/WBL_Principles_Paper_062416.pdf
- ¹² *Ibid*
- ¹³ *Ibid*
- ¹⁴ https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/WBL_Principles_Paper_062416.pdf
- ¹⁵ <https://wbltoolkit.cte.nyc/internship>
- ¹⁶ McDonald, S., Gaddis, S.M., Trimble, L.B., and Hamm, L. (2013). Frontiers of sociological research on networks, work, and inequality. *Research in the Sociology of Work*, 24. 1-41.
- ¹⁷ Stanton-Salazar, R. (2011). A social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students and youth. *Youth & Society*, 43(3).
- ¹⁸ https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2488.html
- ¹⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170125082258/http://educationalpolicy.org/pdf/WBL.pdf>
- ²⁰ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/179516/useful-internships-improve-grads-chances-full-time-work.aspx>
- ²¹ https://www.careerwisecolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/03/Annual-Report-2020_vF.pdf
- ²² https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Brookings_Child-Trends_Pathways-for-High-Quality-Jobs-FINAL.pdf