

Work Based Learning



A comprehensive guide that outlines the best practices and principals behind a quality Work Based Learning program.



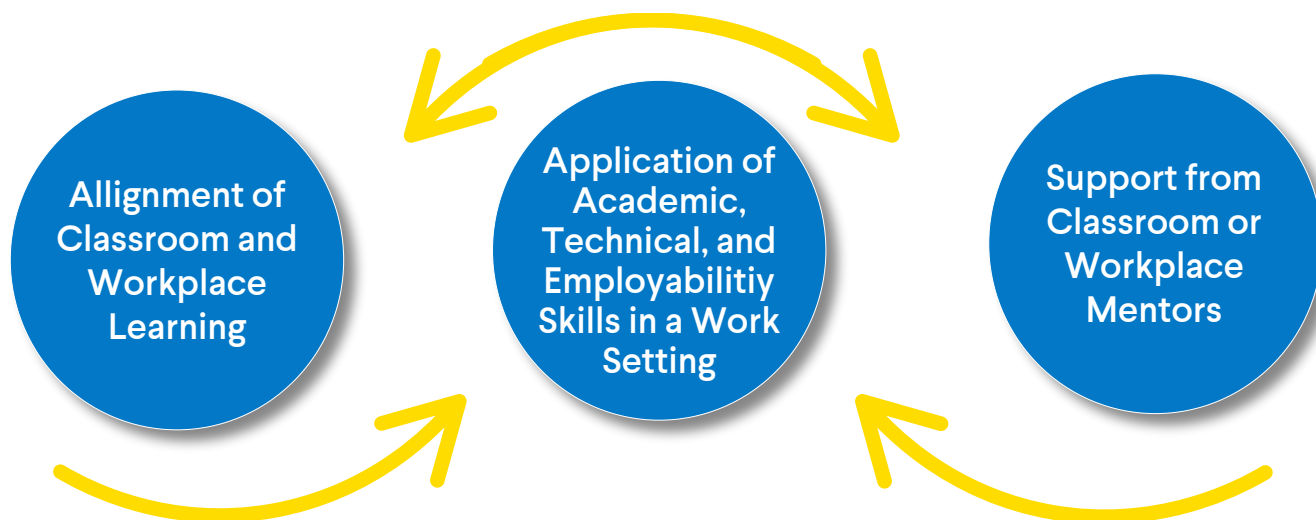
WORK BASED LEARNING ROADMAP

✔ LETS FIND OUT MORE

What is Work Based Learning: a teaching method that allows students to gain real-world experience by participating in activities related to their future careers. It is designed to bridge the gap between classroom instruction and practical work experience, giving students the opportunity to apply what they have learned in a real-world setting. WBL is often part of career readiness programs and helps students develop both technical and soft skills.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, **WBL is comprised of three components:**

- Alignment of classroom and workplace learning (pre-activity).
- Application of academic, technical, and employability skills in a work setting.
- Support from classroom or workplace mentors upon reflection of experiences (post-activity).



Adapted from the U.S. Department of Education,
“Creating a State Work-Based Learning (WBL)
Strategy”





DEFINING WBL OPPORTUNITIES

Which Work-Based Learning model
best suits your school?

Traditional WBL

Offers hands-on experience
but may require more
resources.



School-Based WBL

Integrates with school
curriculum, enhancing
academic relevance.

Virtual WBL

Provides flexibility and
accessibility through digital
platforms.

Work-based learning (WBL) provides students with real-world career experiences in different settings. **Traditional WBL** occurs in-person at a workplace, such as internships, apprenticeships, or job shadowing, where students gain hands-on skills under professional supervision. **School-Based WBL** takes place within the school environment through career labs, simulations, or school-run businesses, allowing students to apply workplace skills in a structured setting. **Virtual WBL** uses online platforms for remote internships, mentorships, or simulated job tasks, offering flexibility and access to industries beyond a student's local area. Each approach helps students develop essential workplace skills and career readiness.



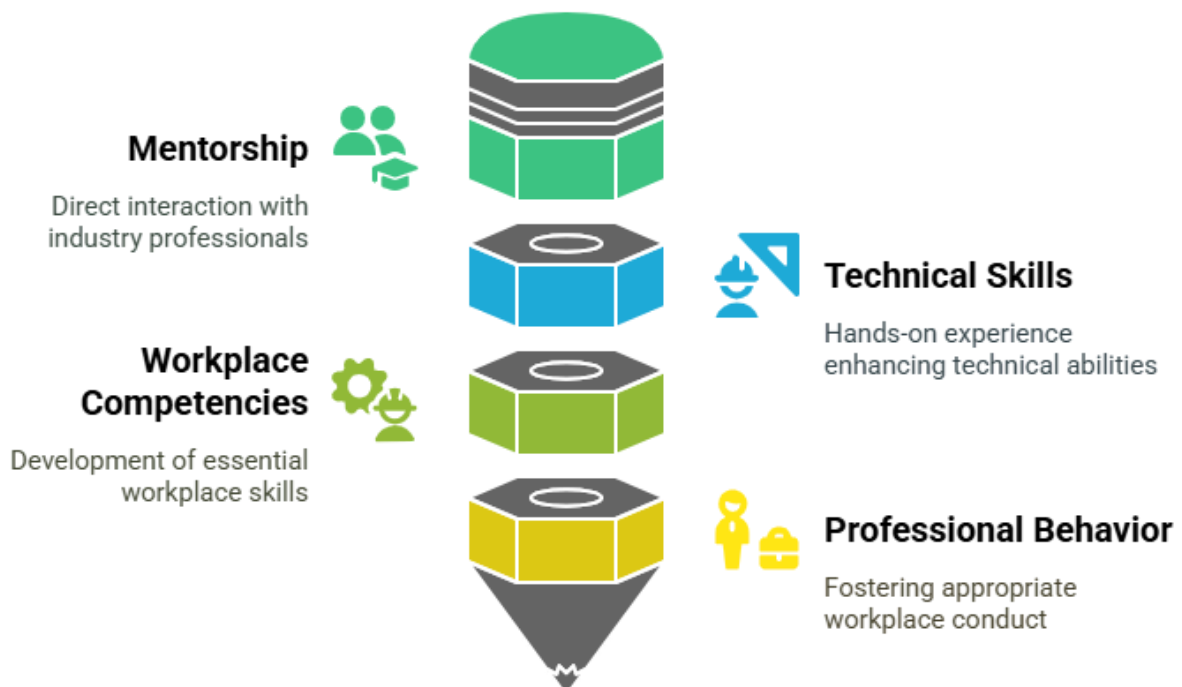
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TRADITIONAL WBL OPPORTUNITIES

Traditional work-based learning opportunities are in-person, hands-on experiences where students gain real-world career skills in a physical workplace under the guidance of industry professionals. These opportunities include internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and cooperative education programs, allowing students to apply classroom knowledge in a professional setting, develop workplace competencies, and explore career paths through direct engagement in job-related tasks.

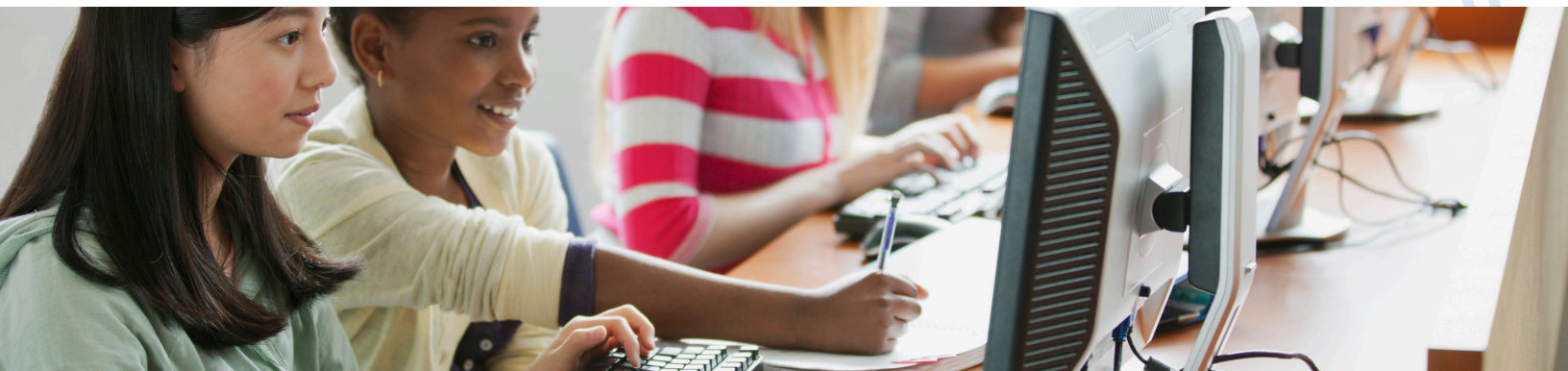
- ✓ **Internships:** Students work for a company or organization in a role related to their career interests, gaining hands-on experience in a professional setting.
- ✓ **Apprenticeships:** A structured training program where students learn a trade or skill while working under the supervision of skilled professionals. Apprenticeships often include both on-the-job learning and classroom instruction.
- ✓ **Job Shadowing:** Students observe professionals in their work environment to gain insight into the daily tasks and responsibilities of a particular career. This allows students to ask questions and learn about the profession directly.
- ✓ **Cooperative Education (Co-op):** A partnership between schools and employers that allows students to work in a career-related job while earning academic credit. Students alternate between working and taking classes, gaining practical experience while continuing their education.



VIRTUAL WBL OPPORTUNITIES

Virtual work-based learning opportunities offer students a chance to gain real-world career experience through online platforms, making it possible to explore various industries without leaving home. These opportunities include virtual internships, job shadowing, simulated work environments, and workplace tours, allowing students to engage with professionals, complete tasks, and gain insights into different careers remotely.

- ✔ **Internships:** A virtual internship is a remote work-based learning experience where students complete job-related tasks online under the guidance of industry professionals. It provides flexibility, access to global opportunities, and valuable career skills through digital communication, project collaboration, and online mentorship.
- ✔ **Job Shadowing:** Virtual job shadowing allows students to observe professionals in their field remotely through video calls, recorded work sessions, or interactive online platforms. It provides insight into daily job responsibilities, workplace expectations, and industry skills without requiring in-person participation.
- ✔ **Simulated Work Environment:** Use of digital platforms to replicate real-world job settings, allowing students to practice workplace tasks in a controlled, interactive space. These simulations provide hands-on experience in various industries, enhancing problem-solving skills and career readiness without requiring a physical workplace.
- ✔ **Virtual Workplace Tours:** Allow students to explore a company's work environment remotely through video or interactive online platforms. These tours provide insight into the workplace culture, job roles, and daily operations, helping students understand potential career paths and industry settings.



SCHOOL-BASED WBL OPPORTUNITIES

School-based work-based learning opportunities provide students with the chance to engage in career-related activities within the school environment, bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world applications. These opportunities, such as career labs, simulated job tasks, and school-run businesses, allow students to develop practical skills while receiving structured guidance from educators. Students can explore different career paths, experiment with various job roles, and enhance their problem-solving abilities in a controlled setting.

- ✔ **Mentorship:** Involves a relationship where an experienced professional provides guidance, advice, and support to a less experienced individual. It helps students develop skills, gain industry insights, and navigate their career paths with personalized advice.
- ✔ **Service Learning:** Combines community service with academic learning, allowing students to apply classroom knowledge to real-world social issues. It helps students build leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving skills while making a positive impact in their communities.
- ✔ **School-Led Enterprise:** Student-run businesses or projects within the school setting that provide hands-on experience in entrepreneurship and management. They allow students to develop practical skills in business planning, marketing, and operations while fostering creativity and teamwork.
- ✔ **Career Discovery Days:** Events where students explore various professions through interactive sessions, workshops, and presentations from industry professionals. These events help students learn about different career paths, required skills, and potential job opportunities.





✓ BENEFITS OF WORK BASED LEARNING

Real-World Experience

Students apply classroom learning to practical situations and learn new skills.

Career Exploration

Students get a clearer understanding of various careers and industries, broadening their horizons.

Skill Development

Students develop both technical (hard) and interpersonal (soft) skills that are crucial in the workplace.

Networking Opportunities

Work-based learning allows students to build relationships with professionals in their field.

Increased Employability

Having work experience on a resume can make students more attractive to future employers.

Work-Based Learning (WBL) helps students gain real-world experience by applying what they learn in the classroom to actual jobs. It builds important skills like teamwork, communication, and problem-solving while also teaching job-specific skills. Through internships, job shadowing, and mentorships, students explore different careers and connect with professionals who can guide them. WBL also makes students more employable by giving them hands-on experience that sets them apart. Overall, it prepares students for the workforce by boosting their confidence, skills, and career readiness.

WBL EXPERIENCES



Industry
Connection



Interpersonal
Skills



New Career
Interests

4 STAGES OF WBL



A thorough WBL program consists of four transitional stages, guiding students from early career exploration to career training. Throughout this process, students should be enabled to freely explore their career interests and obtain opportunities aligned to their interests, skills, and work values.

Early Career Awareness: Early career awareness helps students make informed decisions about their future by exposing them to different career paths and the skills needed for success. It keeps them engaged in school by showing the real-world relevance of their education and helps them plan high school courses, extracurriculars, and post-secondary options. Early exposure also reduces career anxiety, encourages goal-setting, and fosters workforce readiness by teaching essential skills.

Career Exploration: Career exploration activities help students discover their interests, strengths, and potential career paths in a hands-on, engaging way. These activities make learning more meaningful by connecting classroom lessons to real-world applications, increasing motivation and confidence. They also build essential skills like problem-solving, teamwork, and communication while exposing students to various industries.

Career Preparation: Career preparation activities equip students with the skills, knowledge, and experience needed for future success in the workforce. They help students develop essential soft skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving while also providing hands-on experience with industry-specific tasks. By preparing early, students gain a competitive edge and transition more smoothly into high school, college, or the workforce.

Career Training: Career training activities prepare students for employment by teaching them job-specific skills, workplace expectations, and professional behavior. Hands-on experiences, such as internships, simulations, and skill-building exercises, help students apply their knowledge in real-world settings. These activities also strengthen critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills, making students more adaptable and confident.



Time to Reflect: What career training activities are available at your school or what would programming you like to add? Who would need to be involved in order to make this dream come true?

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Regardless of the current WBL program at your school or district, there are standard fundamentals to consider. Check below to see if you are prepared.

Create Inclusive Opportunities:

- How will the WBL experiences in your school offer inclusive opportunities for all students?
- What supports would you need to expand programming to ensure they are inclusive?

Promote Student Choice and Autonomy:

- How does your school currently enable students to explore career interests?
- What support do you need to achieve great student autonomy in choosing the CTE or career training program they participate in?

Create Collaborative WBL Ecosystems:

- What departments, staff, outside resources, or partners help collaborate on your WBL program?
- What support do you need to achieve great collaboration for WBL programs?

Provide Quality, Sustainable WBL Opportunities:

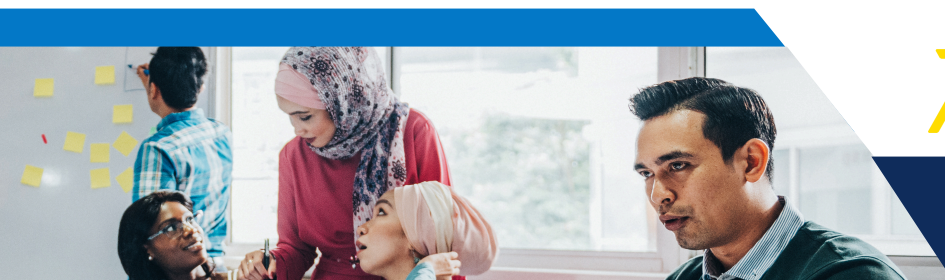
- How would you define a high-quality work experience?
- What partners or resources do you need to ensure that your WBL program is providing on-going, well thought through opportunities?

Have Clearly Defined and Tracked Measurements:

- What WBL goals does your school have? Are they communicated to stakeholders?
- How does your school track WBL activities and is there a defined team to help support data collection and management?

Help Participants Develop Transferable Skills:

- What programming can you implement to ensure students are graduating with valuable knowledge?
- What supports are needed to ensure your students are career ready?





✓ WBL ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The suggestions below offer activities to engage your students based on your current state and support for WBL within your school. Whether you are looking to begin exposing students to WBL or advancing your existing programs, there are always considerations to be made to make programs more equitable to all.

BUILD

- Bring in classroom speakers
- Job shadow a family member/guardian
- Hold a career fair and allow students to participate
- Career workshops with an industry partner
- Employability workshops for the workplace

GROW STRONGER

- Informational or mock interview with industry professional
- Job shadow aligned to career interest following career assessment
- Simulated workplace skills training

ELEVATE

- Engage students in an immersive career experience, such as with virtual reality
- Industry credentials, school organizations like FFA, apprenticeships, and summer camps
- Community based work programs



Time to Reflect: If you were to build out your career training program, who would need to be involved? What supplies or supports would you require?

SETTING ACTIONABLE GOALS

✓ S.M.A.R.T. GOALS

Using the following SMART Goal framework, you can build goals with a higher chance of success. As you evaluate your school's WBL opportunities, consider your student's interests, current partnerships, potential partnerships, and growth possibilities.

	Example	Create Goal
INITIAL GOAL	Provide at least one WBL opportunity to students at my school	
S Specific	Bring in a local industry speaker	
M Measurable	Track attendance of students in classes and utilize activities to track engagement	
A Achievable	Work with current district partners to build additional partnerships	
R Relevant	Students will get to choose to participate in a WBL in a career that interests them	
T Time Based	By the beginning of the next school year measures will be in place to run the program	
SMART GOAL	By the beginning of the next school year, we will engage local partners to provide WBL projects to three classrooms. Student engagement and attendance will be tracked.	

New WBL Program Checklist

Setting the Stage with Stakeholders

- ☐ Identify key WBL stakeholders within your district.
 - These may include Curriculum Directors, Principals, WBL Coordinators, Counselors, Educators, and more.
 - Create a set, recurring time for program review with key stakeholders.
- ☐ Define WBL for your school district, aligned to state guidelines.
- ☐ Develop SMART goals for WBL within your school district.
- ☐ Create a vision statement for offering WBL within your school district.
- ☐ Decide what types of WBL opportunities you will begin offering students aligned to your goals.
- ☐ Decide who will be supervising each WBL program planned within your district.
 - Make arrangements for WBL and CTE teachers to obtain any necessary certifications.
 - Determine who will be providing job coaching to students on the work site.
 - Increase flexibility for awarding credits and acknowledge various paths to teacher certification to allow for nontraditional teachers in WBL programs.
- ☐ Identify WBL participation barriers currently in place within your school district.
- ☐ Identify funding sources that may be available to support your goals, if needed.
- ☐ Write a concise pitch of your goals for WBL in your district to gain buy-in.
- ☐ Secure approval from key stakeholders and administrators to move forward.
- ☐ Complete necessary documentation to formalize your WBL programs, especially those with credentialing opportunities.

Connecting Classroom & Career Learning

- ☐ Connect classroom learning to employment and careers.
- ☐ Select core classes that WBL projects can be incorporated into to expose all students to WBL opportunities throughout their high school experience.
- ☐ Determine how skills training will be incorporated into curriculum and CTE classes to support WBL opportunities and equitable access for all students.

New WBL Program Checklist

Business & Community Partnerships

- ☐ Identify necessary community partnerships to be developed.
- ☐ Reach out to local businesses to gain buy-in on participation with identified WBL opportunities.
- ☐ Determine, if applicable, which other community agencies and services (ACCES-VR, Pre-ETS, etc.) may support students in meeting goals for their WBL experiences.

Data & Opportunity Management

- ☐ Determine who will collect and maintain data on WBL experiences.
- ☐ Determine how and what data will be collected on WBL experiences.
- ☐ Identify technology solutions to streamline WBL programs and reporting.
- ☐ Identify how students will enroll in WBL opportunities.
- ☐ Create a process for student enrollment in WBL opportunities, ensuring equitable access.

Student Considerations

- ☐ Accommodate large blocks of time off-campus (or even locate courses in employer facilities).
- ☐ Arrange for transportation.
- ☐ Determine how families will be communicated with related to students' WBL opportunities and progress.

Grow Your WBL Program Checklist

Data & Opportunity Management

- ☐ Create a systematic approach to address WBL barriers to maximize reach and equitable access.
- ☐ Identify tracking measures and key performance indicators to review program impact and effectiveness year-over-year.
- ☐ Implement a software to seamlessly track WBL opportunities and student enrollment for clear reporting if a district-wide program is not currently in place.

Student Considerations

- ☐ Empower students to explore their career interests.
- ☐ Prepare students for their WBL opportunities with classroom lessons.
- ☐ Create a positive and supportive learning environment in which students feel safe to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from them.
- ☐ Review opportunities with students to ensure the right fit.
- ☐ Personalize approaches to allow each student to earn certifications at the pace appropriate for them rather than on timelines prescribed by semester and yearly schedules.
- ☐ Connect students to the right opportunities.

Connecting Classroom & Career Learning

- ☐ Move toward competency-based approaches to assess at the level of skill rather than the level of the course.
- ☐ Create a high quality WBL training plan to assist the student in making a successful transition from student to trainee/employee.
- ☐ Empower staff to identify and incorporate WBL activities within their classes to enhance curriculum and improve access for all students.
- ☐ Identify areas to expand and enhance existing WBL opportunities for students.

Grow Your WBL Program Checklist

Business & Community Partnerships

- ☐ Visit work site prior to placing students.
- ☐ Visit work site regularly while a student is participating in an on-the-job WBL experience.
- ☐ Conduct post-opportunity evaluations and reflections to measure outcomes and success.
- ☐ Check in with case managers, transition specialists, or other educators as necessary.
- ☐ Evaluate existing WBL experiences for age-appropriate relevancy.
- ☐ Ensure key stakeholders are aware of all WBL activities/initiatives available within your school district and document these for annual review.
- ☐ Coordinate an internal team to ensure WBL program sustainability despite any identified barriers.
- ☐ Ensure WBL is facilitated by trained, qualified, and credentialed professionals.

Elevate Your WBL Program Checklist

Revisiting Program Essentials

- ☐ Identify policy and financial levers for expanding access to WBL programs through partnerships and funding.
- ☐ Implement a collaborative IEP/Vocational Rehabilitation/Disability services team to provide student WBL support needs.
- ☐ Provide team members with ongoing professional development opportunities to ensure the highest level of career advising can be provided to students.

Data & Opportunity Management

- ☐ Utilize data to reflect on the following aspects of your WBL program to make systematic improvements and revisit WBL goals for your school district:
 - Participation barriers.
 - Program completion.
 - Opportunity types to expand upon based on student requests

Student Considerations

- ☐ Survey students to learn what opportunities they'd like access to in the community.
- ☐ Create a process to address individual student support needs to encourage participation in WBL experiences.
- ☐ Encourage collaboration and communication between students and WBL leaders in your school.

Connecting Classroom & Career Learning

- ☐ Evaluate core class projects to ensure all students have the opportunity to gain exposure to career readiness and WBL activities throughout their education.
 - Review this process for elementary, middle school, and high school students aligned with the four stages of career readiness to set students up for success from an early age.

Elevate Your WBL Program Checklist

Business & Community Partnerships

- ☐ Expand your WBL opportunities by determining which businesses and community partners best meet the needs of the student and their particular interests.
- ☐ Foster relationships with local business partners and community leaders to keep a pulse on emerging trends in your local economy to engage students in meaningful WBL experiences.
 - Ensure that the employer (immediate supervisor) implements a training plan to include the following:
 - Identify tasks for which training can be provided at the workplace.
 - Adding tasks to the training plan that are unique to the workplace.

CURRENT WBL PROGRAM EVALUATION

Evaluation Scale:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 - Poor (Needs Significant Improvement) | 3 - Satisfactory (Meets Basic Expectations) |
| 2 - Fair (Below Average) | 4 - Good (Above Average) |
| | 5 - Excellent (Highly Effective) |

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Program Accessibility – How accessible is your work-based learning program to all students regardless of background or academic level? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Curriculum Relevance – How well does the curriculum align with real-world careers and industry needs? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Hands-On Learning Opportunities – How effectively does the program provide hands-on experiences such as internships, job shadowing, or project-based learning? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Industry & Community Partnerships – How strong are the partnerships between the school and local businesses, colleges, or industry professionals? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Career Exploration & Guidance – How well does the program help students explore different career paths and make informed decisions about their futures? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Integration with Core Academics – How well does the career program integrate with traditional subjects like math, science, and language arts? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Student Engagement & Participation – How engaged and motivated are students in career-related activities and courses? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Skill Development – How effectively does the program equip students with technical, soft, and employability skills? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Graduate Outcomes – How successful are students in securing internships, certifications, college admissions, or jobs after participating in the program? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Overall Satisfaction – How satisfied are students, teachers, and parents with the career education offerings at the school? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |