



Work-Based Learning

Turning Classrooms into Career Launchpads

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Introduction

The Office of Career-Technical Education collaborates with multiple education stakeholders to develop a system of supports for Accel schools and students. Staff are available to provide technical assistance, information and resources to help successfully implement career-technical education programs.

5+

Years of operations

12+

States Served

8,500+

Students

Career Technical Education provides courses that integrate technical training and academics to help students develop the knowledge and skills needed for transitioning to career training, post-secondary education and the workforce. This educational philosophy balances academics with real-world problem solving and relevance in multiple industry sectors.



At its heart, Career and Technical Education is about giving every student a real chance to discover their purpose and their potential. Our team believes in meeting students where they are, equipping them with the skills and confidence to change the trajectory of their own story.

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What is Work-Based Learning?

Work-Based Learning (WBL) transforms education from something students sit through into something they experience — whether that experience happens in a workplace, inside the school building, or online.

WBL connects classroom learning to real-world career experiences. Students apply what they are learning in math, English, science, technology, and career courses to authentic professional situations — while still receiving structured support from educators and, when appropriate, industry mentors.

Strong WBL programs include these core elements:

- Alignment between classroom instruction and career experiences
- Application of academic, technical, and employability skills
- Reflection and guidance from teachers or workplace mentors
- Opportunities for students to explore career interests
- Structured supervision and support from educators, coordinators, or workplace mentors

WBL = Learning + Doing + Reflecting



In Person



On Campus



Online

Why WBL Changes Everything

When students understand why they are learning something, their engagement changes immediately.

Work-Based Learning:

- Makes school relevant
- Increases motivation
- Builds confidence
- Develops professional communication skills
- Expands career awareness
- Strengthens resumes and college applications
- Builds digital professionalism in virtual settings

Students begin to see a future for themselves. That shift is powerful.

Schools benefit as well. WBL supports graduation pathways, strengthens CTE programming, builds community partnerships, and aligns with Ohio's career readiness expectations — while offering flexible delivery options to meet diverse student needs.

Implementation Tip

Start small by introducing career exposure activities such as guest speakers, virtual workplace tours, or short career exploration projects. As partnerships and confidence grow, schools can gradually expand into job shadowing, internships, and more structured work-based learning opportunities.



Four Stage Framework

Stage 1: Career Awareness

Students begin learning about different careers and industries, helping them understand the possibilities available to them in the future.

- Guest speakers (in person or via Zoom/Teams)
- Virtual workplace tours
- Career fairs (in person or hybrid)
- Career interest surveys
- Digital career exploration platforms

Stage 2: Career Exploration

Students begin exploring careers more deeply by identifying their interests and learning what education, skills, and experiences are needed for different career paths.

- Job shadowing (in person or virtual shadow sessions)
- Informational interviews
- Mock interviews (live or virtual)
- Industry webinars
- Career-based research projects

Stage 3: Career Preparation

Students begin applying their knowledge in real-world settings while developing professionalism, responsibility, and workplace skills.

- Internships (in person or remote)
- Service learning projects
- Student-run enterprises
- Virtual micro-internships
- Entry-level industry credential programs

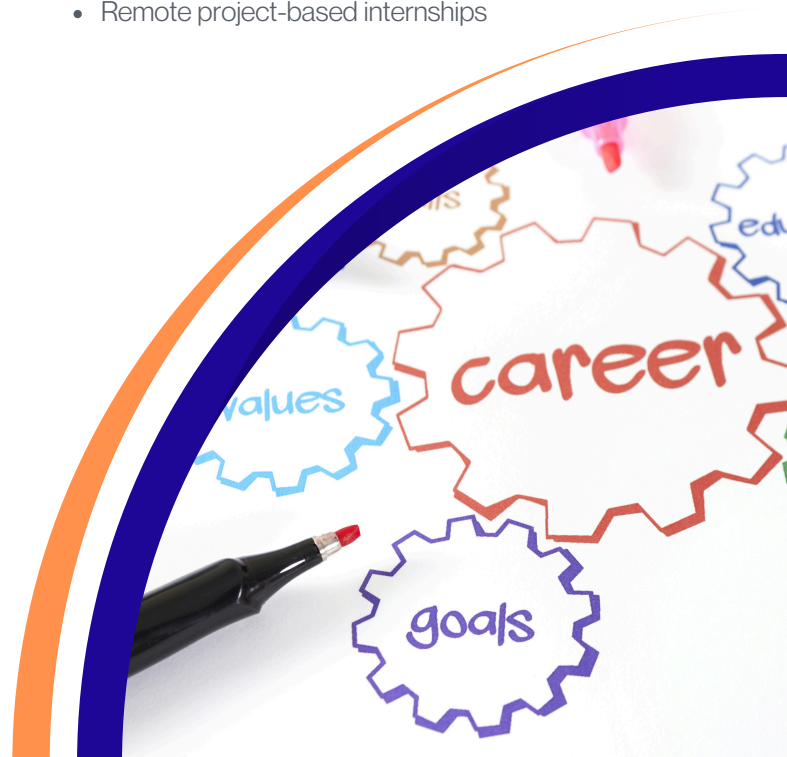
Stage 4: Career Training

Students gain occupation-specific training and hands-on experience that prepares them directly for a career or industry pathway.

- Registered apprenticeships
- Pre-apprenticeships
- Cooperative education (Co-Op)
- Advanced credential programs
- Remote project-based internships

Implementation Tip

Introduce the stages gradually by aligning activities with grade levels, starting with awareness in middle school and expanding toward training experiences in high school. Schools can use a mix of in-person and virtual opportunities to ensure all students have access as the program grows.



Types of Work-Based Learning

Flexible. Scalable. Accessible.

Work-Based Learning does not require one specific model. Schools can design programs that fit their community, staffing, and student needs. Many schools combine in-person, school-based, and virtual experiences.

Traditional Work-Based Learning

Traditional WBL places students in real workplace environments under professional supervision.

- ✓ **Internships:** Students work in a career-related role, gaining hands-on experience and exposure to professional expectations.
- ✓ **Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeships:** Structured training programs that combine classroom instruction with on-the-job learning.
- ✓ **Job Shadowing:** Short-term observational experiences that allow students to follow a professional through their workday.
- ✓ **Cooperative Education (Co-Op):** Students alternate between school and paid employment aligned to their career pathway.



Implementation Tip

Start by building relationships with a few trusted local businesses that are willing to host job shadowing or short-term internships. Beginning with small placements helps schools develop supervision systems and employer partnerships before expanding into larger programs like co-op or apprenticeships.



School-Based Work-Based Learning

School-based WBL allows students to develop professional skills within a structured environment. Ideal for middle school, students without transportation, and students needing additional support

- ✓ **Student-Run Enterprises:** School stores, cafés, media production teams, event planning teams, or entrepreneurship programs where students manage operations, customer service, budgeting, and marketing.
- ✓ **Career Labs & Simulations:** Mock hospitals, courtroom simulations, tech labs, broadcast studios, culinary kitchens, or engineering design labs that mirror workplace expectations.
- ✓ **Service-Learning Projects:** Students apply academic skills to address real community challenges while building teamwork, problem-solving, and civic responsibility.
- ✓ **Micro-Internships:** Short, guided experiences that can be in person or virtual that allow students to support everyday school operations in structured, professional ways.

Virtual Work-Based Learning

Virtual WBL allows students to engage in career experiences remotely, expanding opportunity far beyond the local community.

- ✓ **Remote Internships:** Students complete career-related projects and tasks while working remotely under the supervision of an employer or mentor.
- ✓ **Virtual Job Shadowing:** Students observe professionals via live video sessions or recorded workplace walkthroughs.
- ✓ **Digital Simulations:** Interactive platforms that replicate workplace tasks and problem-solving scenarios.
- ✓ **Online Mentorship:** Industry professionals provide career guidance and project feedback through virtual meetings.

Who Can Participate?

Work-Based Learning opportunities are designed to support students at multiple grade levels. While middle school students typically participate in career awareness and exploration activities, high school students can engage in more structured and hands-on career experiences.

Middle School

Grades 7th & 8th

At the middle school level, WBL is focused on career awareness and exploration, rather than employment. The goal is to introduce students to a variety of careers and help them begin thinking about their interests and future pathways.

Examples of middle school WBL experiences may include:

- Career awareness activities such as guest speakers or career days
- Exploration experiences such as job shadowing or industry tours
- Micro-internships within the school building
- Student participation in school-based enterprises or service projects
- Virtual career exploration activities or online mentorship

High School

Grades 9th-12th

High school students can participate in more advanced and structured work-based learning experiences. These opportunities allow students to apply academic and technical skills in real-world settings while developing professional habits, workplace communication skills, and career-specific knowledge.

Examples of high school WBL experiences include:

- Internships with local businesses or organizations (in person or remote)
- Registered Work-Based Learning programs that generate graduation credit
- Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathway placements
- Career-Based Intervention (CBI) experiential learning opportunities
- Virtual internships or project-based industry experiences



Work Permits

For students under the age of 18

If a student under the age of 18 is participating in a paid work placement, they may be required to obtain an Age and Schooling Certificate (commonly called a work permit) in accordance with Ohio Minor Labor Laws. Work permits are generally not required for unpaid career exploration activities.

Step 1: Forms Completed by Family & Employer

Two forms are required before the school can issue a work permit:

- [Work Permit Application](#)
 - Top half completed and signed by the parent/guardian
 - Bottom half completed by the employer
- [Work Permit Physical](#)
 - Must be completed and signed by a doctor
 - If the student has had a physical within the last year, a copy of that physical may be submitted instead

Step 2: Forms Submitted to the School

Once completed, the parent or student sends both forms to school contact

The school cannot begin processing the permit until both forms are received.

Step 3: School Verification

After receiving the forms, the school verifies:

- All required fields and signatures are complete
- The student meets attendance and engagement requirements

Step 4: State Processing (Ohio Department of Commerce)

Once verified, the school submits the information through the [Ohio Department of Commerce Minor Work Permit](#) system:

- The school uses a secure, school-specific login
- Multiple staff have access to ensure continuity if someone is out

Step 5 : Signatures

After submission, the system generates the official work permit document.

The school then:

- Sends the permit to the student
- Both the student and parent must sign the document and return to the school
- After the parent signs, the school completes the final signature

The student receives a fully signed copy of the official work permit.



Registered vs. Unregistered

Work-Based Learning experiences generally fall into two categories: Registered and Unregistered. The main difference is how formal the program is and whether it generates graduation credit. Some experiences are part of a state-approved program with specific requirements, while others are flexible, school-level opportunities designed to introduce students to careers.

Registered

- ✓ State-approved program
- ✓ Generates graduation credit
- ✓ Requires a licensed CTE coordinator
- ✓ Must be reported in EMIS
- ✓ Requires a formal training plan

Unregistered

- ✓ School-level experience
- ✓ Does not generate official WBL credit
- ✓ Requires less formal documentation
- ✓ Often used for career awareness, exploration, or pilot programs

How to Register a WBL Program

To offer Registered Work-Based Learning, schools must submit and receive approval for a WBL program through the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. This typically includes assigning a licensed CTE WBL coordinator, developing a formal training plan for student placements, and ensuring the program is properly reported through EMIS. Schools interested in registering a program should work with their district leadership and CTE coordinator to complete the state application and approval process.

[You can find more information here.](#)

Safety, Supervision & Responsibility

Student safety remains the top priority in every Work-Based Learning experience — whether the placement is in person, school-based, or virtual. Clear supervision, appropriate training, and proper documentation protect both students and schools.

For Paid Placements

When a student is placed in a paid position, they are generally considered an employee of the business. In these cases, the employer is responsible for providing Workers' Compensation coverage. The employer must also comply with all applicable labor laws, including wage and hour requirements and Ohio Minor Labor Laws for students under 18.

For Unpaid Placements

For unpaid internships, job shadowing, or short-term experiences, students are typically covered under the school district's general liability policy. Even in unpaid placements, the employer is still responsible for maintaining a safe work environment and following minor labor regulations.

Before Placements Begin

Regardless of type, schools should complete the following steps before a student begins:

- Conduct a workplace review (for in-person sites) to ensure the environment is safe and age-appropriate
- Confirm tasks assigned are appropriate under Ohio Minor Labor Laws
- Provide industry-specific safety training (such as OSHA-10 when applicable)
- Review emergency procedures and contact information
- Ensure supervision is clearly identified at the worksite
- Check on local and state requirements for insurance coverage

When safety systems are clearly defined at the beginning, Work-Based Learning becomes both powerful and responsible. Proper planning reduces risk and allows students to focus on growth and professional development.

Implementation Tip

Create a simple pre-placement checklist that includes safety training, supervision contacts, required documentation, and verification of labor law compliance. Reviewing this checklist with both the employer and the student before the experience begins helps ensure expectations are clear and the placement starts safely and smoothly.



Alternate Graduation Pathways

Work-Based Learning can play a powerful role in supporting students who are pursuing alternate or flexible graduation options. In Ohio, students may graduate through multiple pathways, including demonstrating competency, earning industry credentials, or meeting alternative requirements when traditional testing benchmarks are not met. WBL helps support these options by giving students meaningful, documented career experiences that demonstrate readiness beyond standardized testing.

How WBL Supports Alternate Graduation Options

- **Industry-Recognized Credentials**
 - Students participating in career training or CTE-aligned WBL may earn credentials that contribute toward graduation requirements and career readiness seals.
- **Graduation Seals (Industry & Career Readiness)**
 - WBL experiences — including internships, apprenticeships, and documented career exploration hours — support the Industry-Recognized Credential Seal and other career-focused seals.
- **Demonstration of Employability Skills**
 - Employer evaluations, professional skills rubrics, and documented workplace competencies provide evidence of workforce readiness, which can support alternate graduation pathways focused on career preparation.
- **Credit Flexibility**
 - WBL can be used under a district's Credit Flexibility policy to award credit based on demonstrated mastery through real-world experience rather than seat time.

Why This Matters

For some students, traditional testing pathways do not fully capture their strengths or potential. Work-Based Learning provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate:

- Responsibility
- Professional behavior
- Technical skill development
- Career readiness
- Real-world competency

WBL helps schools offer multiple pathways to graduation while maintaining rigor and accountability.



A Practical First-Year Plan

Schools do not need to launch a full Registered WBL program in year one. In fact, the strongest programs often begin with manageable, high-impact experiences that build momentum, systems, and confidence before expanding.

The goal of year one is exposure, structure, and relationship-building — not scale.

Month 1–3: Build Awareness & Buy-In

Start by creating consistent exposure to careers across grade levels.

- Host monthly guest speakers (in person or virtual)
- Invite community partners to speak during advisory or CTE classes
- Incorporate career spotlights into core classes
- Use virtual workplace tours to expand industry exposure

Month 3–6: Introduce Structured Exploration

Once awareness is established, add small, structured exploration opportunities.

- Organize one job shadow day
- Host a career fair (in person or hybrid)
- Implement a virtual industry project where students solve a real-world problem
- Have students conduct informational interviews (in person or virtual)

Month 6–9: Launch School-Based Experiences

Next, implement experiences that require minimal transportation and lower compliance barriers.

- Start a micro-internship program within the building
- Create a student-run enterprise
- Assign students to support office operations, events, media, or technology teams
- Introduce structured service learning tied to coursework

Month 9–12: Pilot a Small Internship Program

By the end of year one, consider piloting a limited internship experience.

- 2–5 students in a short-term internship
- A hybrid or virtual internship
- A summer internship opportunity
- A CTE-aligned placement

What Success Looks Like in Year One

Success is not measured by how many placements you have.

Instead, look for:

- Increased student interest in career pathways
- Stronger community connections
- Positive employer feedback
- Clear documentation processes
- Staff understanding of WBL expectations
- A sustainable supervision plan

If students are engaged and systems are forming, year one is successful.

Preparing for Year Two

At the end of year one, reflect on:

- What worked well?
- Where were barriers (transportation, supervision, scheduling)?
- Which industries showed the strongest engagement?
- Are you ready to register a formal WBL program?

Year two may include:

- Expanding internship placements
- Formalizing Registered WBL
- Aligning experiences to CTE pathways
- Increasing virtual and hybrid options
- Pursuing weighted funding



Contact Us

 Website

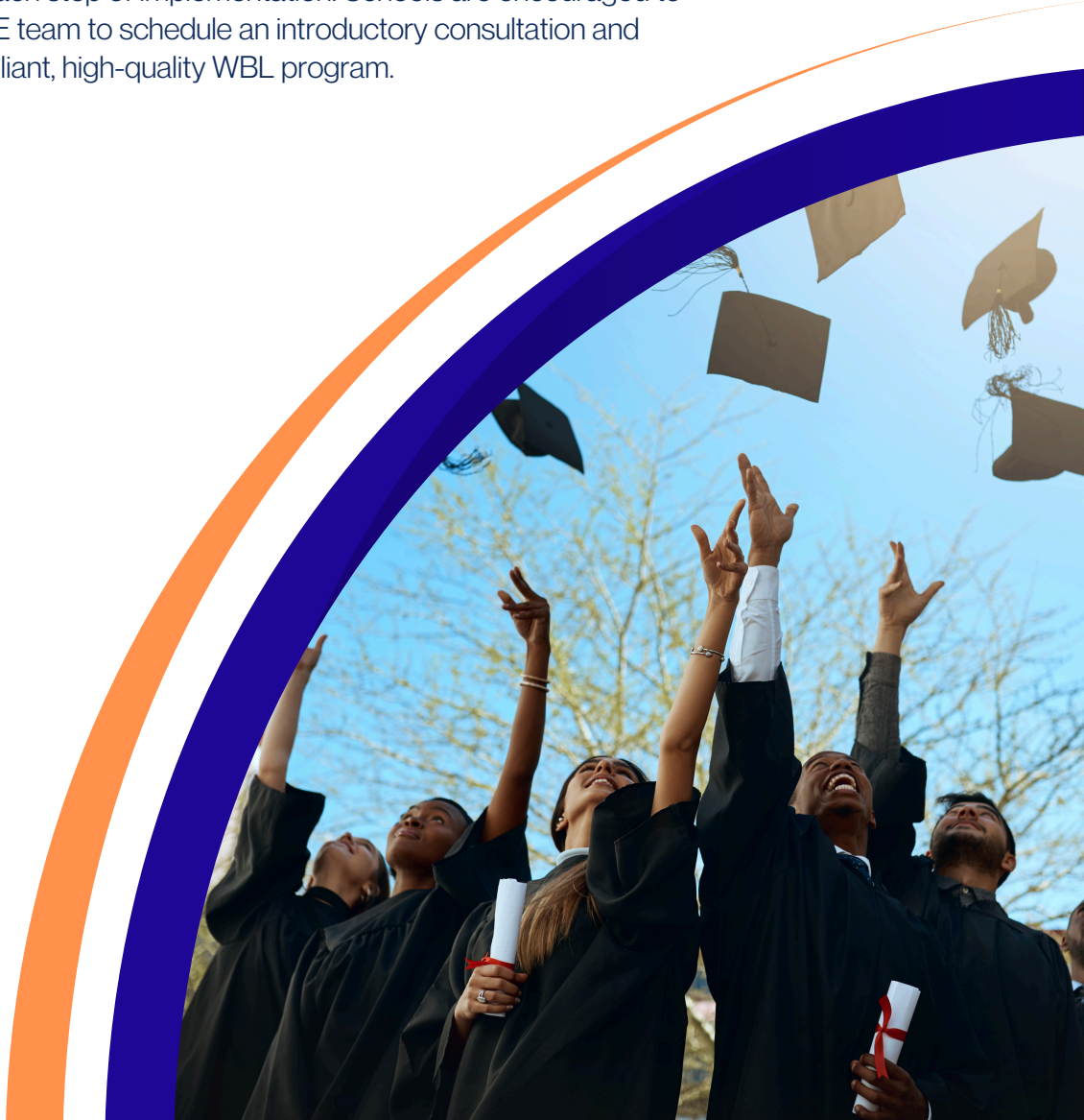
[accelcteresourcehub.com](https://www.accelcteresourcehub.com)

 E-mail

New Program: hhalfhill@accelschools.com

Compliance: mwilliams@accelschools.com

We're excited to help new schools get started with Work-Based Learning and guide them through each step of implementation. Schools are encouraged to contact the Accel CTE team to schedule an introductory consultation and begin building a compliant, high-quality WBL program.



Appendix

Ohio Department of Education & Workforce –

Work-Based Learning Information about Ohio WBL requirements, guidance, and resources.

<https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Career-Tech/Work-Based-Learning>

OhioMeansJobs K-12

Career exploration tools, career interest surveys, and workforce information for students.

<https://k12.ohiomeansjobs.ohio.gov>

Ohio Minor Labor Laws & Work Permits

Information on youth employment regulations and work permit requirements.

<https://minorworkpermit.com.ohio.gov>

Ohio Career Technical Education (CTE)

Information on CTE pathways, program requirements, and career readiness programs.

<https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Career-Tech>

Advance CTE

National organization supporting high-quality Career Technical Education and WBL programs.

<https://www.advancecte.org>

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)

Resources on career readiness competencies and workplace skills development.

<https://www.naceweb.org>

