WORK-BASED LEARNING

By Catherine Imperatore

WORK-BASED LEARNING (WBL) EXPOSES STUDENTS TO THE WORLD OF WORK, ENGAGES THEM WITH employer mentors, develops their knowledge and skills, and brings learning to life. For these reasons, Work-based Learning is one of ACTE's 12 elements of high-quality career and technical education (CTE) within the *Quality CTE Program of Study Framework*.

The Work-based Learning element of ACTE's quality framework includes nine criteria that address the full continuum of sustained, meaningful interactions with industry or community professionals that foster in-depth, firsthand engagement with the tasks required in a given career field. The criteria listed below are from the 2018 version of the ACTE *Quality CTE Program of Study Framework*.

Criteria for Quality Work-based Learning

a. A full continuum of work-based learning experiences, progressing in intensity, is accessible to every student at some point during the program of study.

b. Work-based learning experiences are aligned with relevant national, state and/or local standards.

High-quality programs of study do not merely provide students with isolated workplace exposure, but rather work to develop a continuum of experiences that progress in intensity from workplace tours and job shadowing to school-based enterprises, internships and apprenticeships. Many states have defined, or are in the process of defining, the experiences appropriate for each learner level and for reporting or accountability purposes. This task of defining the range of WBL experiences is supported by national organization resources, such as the Linked Learning WBL continuum.

Ensuring that each and every learner has access to the WBL continuum requires intense collaboration with business and industry, across secondary and postsecondary partners and with middle and junior high schools, as WBL and career development activities are increasingly provided in the middle grades (a trend facilitated by Perkins V legislation). In addition, high-quality programs collaborate with career counselors and other education professionals, such as special education instructors and transition specialists, to determine appropriate WBL placements. A criterion in the Access and Equity element of the ACTE framework addresses removing barriers to WBL and other experiential learning opportunities.

In addition, workplace experiences must align with standards to ensure that they are relevant and aligned with the curriculum and with student goals. Many states, districts and institutions have developed these standards, and WBL standards have also been created by national groups such as the National Academy Foundation.

c. Work-based learning experiences develop and reinforce relevant technical, academic and employability knowledge and skills.

d. Work-based learning experiences are intentionally aligned with each student's education and career goals.

Through high-quality WBL experiences, learners develop and practice technical skills, using industry-standard technology and processes. Students also hone applied academic skills like reading and writing industry- and occupational-specific texts and — perhaps most importantly — they develop essential professional skills for communicating, collaborating and behaving professionally in the workplace.

WBL should be closely aligned with classroom-based instruction to help students move along their chosen education and career pathways. While workplace experiences that don't match their goals can still help students gain skills relevant across multiple industries and occupations, to the greatest extent possible, WBL placements should be specific to a student's program of study. Criteria in the Student Career Development element address communicating WBL opportunities to learners and their families and aligning WBL with students' individual education and career plans.

e. Work-based learning experiences are provided through delivery methods that maximize meaningful interaction with business professionals.

Business and industry partnerships are fundamental to providing work-based learning. High-quality programs of study engage employers and industries in developing and evaluating WBL, as described in

the Business and Community Partnerships element of the framework, to ensure that students sustain meaningful interactions with business and industry professionals. This engagement most typically occurs in the workplace, where students can authentically participate as a member of the team.

However, in-person WBL may not always be possible or effective, particularly in rural communities. In these cases, districts and institutions can explore creative delivery models such as simulated or virtual WBL. For instance, West Virginia and Alabama have flipped WBL on its head through the Simulated Workplace model, which reorganizes CTE programs into school-based businesses. Business partners help develop and monitor these workplace environments for their realism and industry alignment. A criterion in the Facilities, Equipment, Technology and Materials element addresses maximizing student access to relevant tools and technology through flexible delivery methods, which may include in-person and virtual WBL.

f. Requirements and procedures for work-based learning experiences that address access, selection, liability, supervision, rights and responsibilities, safety, transportation, learning objectives and evaluations are formalized and shared in advance of work-based learning experiences with employers, students and parents/guardians (as appropriate).

g. Work-based learning experiences comply with relevant federal, state and local laws and regulations.

h. Work-based learning experiences are supervised by CTE staff with clearly defined roles.

Successful WBL requires standardized policies and procedures that communicate to students, families (if appropriate) and employers their respective rights and responsibilities and that address logistical and legal issues. These procedures must align with relevant labor and safety laws and regulations, particularly in K–12 education. To ensure access for all learners, programs should also consider supports such as transportation to the job site.

Form templates and other materials are included in several state and nationally developed toolkits (found in our High-quality Tools online library section on WBL), as are publications that address liability concerns through such means as hold-harmless waivers, insurance and third-party intermediaries.

To organize this complex process, WBL experiences must be coordinated and supervised by instructors, counselors, WBL coordinators or other CTE staff with time, knowledge and resources to develop and implement high-quality WBL. Criteria in the Prepared and Effective Program Staff element and the Student Career Development element further address staff responsibilities and needs in this area.

i. Students engage in reflection and document learning resulting from work-based learning experiences, such as through a portfolio or presentation.

As with any type of learning, it is important to assess student development of knowledge and skills. For WBL, this evaluation may include student portfolios or presentations, as well as employer evaluations. This assessment process benefits the student, the employer and the program, as each learns what went well and what can be improved in the future, and serves to further align WBL to classroom-based experiences within the CTE program.

Success Strategy: Virtual Enterprise

At Granville County Public Schools, a rural district in North Carolina, students can participate in a virtual school-based enterprise through the Virtual Enterprises International (VEI) platform. As described in *Simulated Work-Based Learning: Instructional Approaches and Noteworthy Practices* (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), VEI is a nonprofit organization that provides schools with a web-based curriculum and network focused on developing skills in business, finance, marketing and IT. Business and industry partners serve as advisers to students as they run their own virtual businesses. These employer partners provide students with real-world problems and projects and give small grants and sponsorships to cover VEI expenses. Students learn about day-to-day business operations, communicate with potential clients and customers, and market and sell virtual goods and services. In addition to the virtual component, the classroom itself is set up to look and operate like a business. VEI is credited with building students' leadership and employability skills, and Granville VEI students have been successful in state, national and international competitions.

Learn More and Assess Your Programs

Practitioners can turn to ACTE's High-quality CTE Tools online library for resources on workplace experiences. The WBL section features case studies, toolkits and publications outlining strategies to develop and implement various types of work-based learning, including apprenticeships, as well as tips on how to overcome access and equity challenges for various student groups and in the middle grades.

In addition, practitioners can use the *Quality CTE Program of Study Framework Self-evaluation Instrument* to assess a single program, or multiple programs across a district or institution, in relation to the WBL and all 12 elements of high-quality CTE. The rubric can be completed on paper or online, where users can receive automatically calculated scores, save and print their results, and be connected to the online library for areas identified as needing improvement. ■

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REFERENCE

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education. (2017). *Simulated Work-Based Learning: Instructional Approaches and Noteworthy Practices*. Retrieved from https://www.gfcmsu.edu/revup/documents/SWBL_Report.pdf.

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Quality CTE Program of Study Framework and *Self-evaluation Instrument*:
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