



Work-based learning (WBL) experiences involve students engaging with professionals in workplace environments. WBL can take many forms, from job shadowing to apprenticeships, but these authentic experiences educate our students in a vastly defining way. This can often be the opportunity to give students a clear direction for their postsecondary learning and career goals. What follows are several profiles of the types of WBL programs found across the country.



# LEARNING

# HELP

# SKILLS

## Western Maricopa Education Center, Arizona

In Arizona, Western Maricopa Education Center (West-MEC) believes in the value of work-based learning so much that they have embedded these experiences in their one- and two-year programs. Examples of programs with exemplar work-based learning opportunities include auto collision, cosmetology, general construction technologies, HVAC and medical assisting.

The General Construction program at West-MEC's Southwest Campus has established an innovative work-based learning partnership with Sutter Masonry. This industry partner supplied pro-

fessionals from within their staff to visit the Center to instruct the students on masonry techniques. These employees dedicated eight weeks of their time, as well as all needed supplies, so that students could have an outstanding experience through learning by doing. After the initial instruction, Sutter sponsors students each year to compete in the Fastest Trowel in the West Competition. The competition is held in Arizona, with West-MEC students typically taking several of the top awards. Sutter Masonry sponsors those award winners to compete in Las Vegas in the National Masonry Competition. Along with this integrated curriculum model and sponsorship, Sutter allows students to job shadow at various job sites. Several students have been offered apprenticeships in the masonry industry, either with Sutter or other entities, following these activities.

Like the General Construction program, some of the programs at West-MEC have established powerful industry partnerships to create real-life experiences, while others incorporate student-based enterprises (SBE) into their curriculum. A school-based enterprise is an entrepreneurial learning experience that provides a realistic setting to reinforce instruction. SBEs are managed and operated by students who can sell goods and services to authentic customers. SBEs provide some students their first work experience, while allowing other students to build their management, supervision, and leadership skills.

## Provo High School, Utah

Provo High School is one of three high schools in the Provo City School district. Provo High School has an enrollment of nearly 2,000 and has between 150 to 200 students complete a CTE Career Pathway each year.

Provo High School work-based learning uses valuable connections with members of the Parent-Teach Association, advisory boards and Department of Workforce Services. They are open to opportunities for students to connect with professionals in their career area interest. The importance of making these connections has built a solid foundation for their career and technical education programs.

Each semester, 80-120 students intern in career areas such as medical, education, business/marketing, programming/computer science, veterinary, law, and automotive service/repair. In addition, there are several students in the programs working to complete hours for industry certifications, such as Medical Assisting, ASE and ECE Certification.

The first annual Career Signing Day was held in May 2019 to celebrate the successes of the students who had been hired by local companies because of their CTE certifications and/or internships. Signing days are important for work-based learning because they direct focus to the value that the authentic experience offers students in making lifelong career decisions.

## Washington County School District, Utah

The population of Washington County has risen over 30% since 2010 and was recently listed as the third fastest-growing metropolitan area in the United States. This type of growth has forced the Washington County School District to adjust to meet current demands for instruction and to develop a sustainable learning model for the future. Their new model has increased employer engagement by 3,900% in just under four years.



### Their Story

The Washington County School District has always been in the business of education but has struggled engaging with the business community. As they continued to grow and build high schools in response to the increasing populace, they were forced into a unique position. Where do they put all the additional students while new schools are being built? For some schools, they chose to approach their seniors with an offer to learn through "internships." This allowed the students to leave school and learn while they worked for an employer, simultaneously earning graduation credit. By doing this, they

■ were able to free up classroom seats for sophomores and juniors. This response provided an immediate fix but also came with a couple of heavy consequences.

1. Employer burnout from feeling like they were babysitting.
2. Work release instead of internships. Work release is not career focused. When the experience is about a job and not long-term learning for a career, committed work-based learning employers decrease.

In 2016, Washington County School District began looking into this model and quickly realized it needed to be repaired so that they could address these mounting challenges to their internship programs. The school district recognized the need to have continuity in their efforts and made the commitment to hire a dedicated staff person to oversee the internship program to begin the process of improving student outcomes and to address their employer problems. Among the new approaches

implemented, the staff member scheduled regular meetings with employers to open stronger communications and research into what other school districts across Utah were doing to build a sustainable internship model.

In 11 months, the Washk12 Internship program was recognized as the “Best in Utah” for its model, student success and community partnerships.

### **Building Quality**

The Washk12 Internship program has continually evolved since 2016 to stay current and meet the demands of both students and employers. Focus groups were held to learn from the business community. A selection process was developed to emphasize the learning components of the program and remove students who were taking the internship for the purpose of getting out of attending school. In addition, minimum standards of professional readiness were identified as a critical employability skill that needed to be integrated into the program before and while the student was placed in a work environment. This led to the creation of professional development workshops as a prerequisite to the program. These workshops are held in a neutral location for all the high school students to attend after school and during summer break. When students saw the value, they began to fill the workshops.

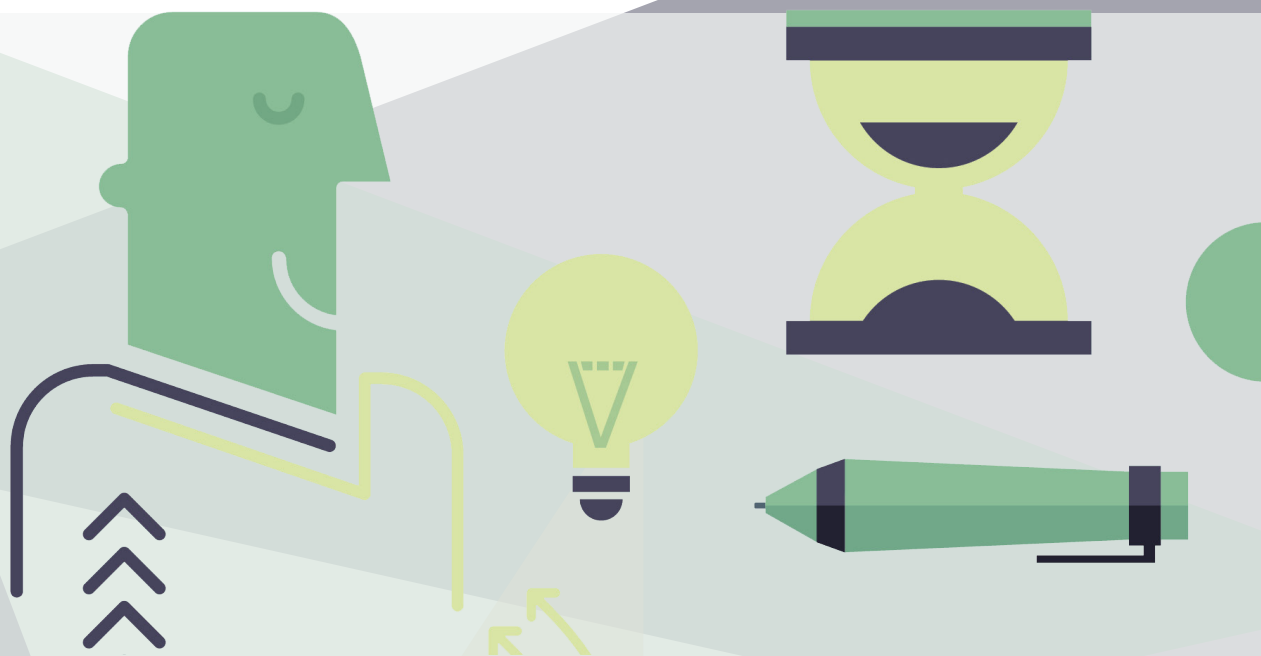
In these workshops, students build their LinkedIn profiles, resumes, cover letters, references, recommendations, interviewing skills, and personal brand. These workshops are offered to all students who would like support to their professional futures. At the completion of these workshops, industry partners were brought in to provide a mock interview and serve as a gatekeeper to the business community. Students must pass the mock interview with an 80% or higher. If they do not hit that mark, they do not move on. They take all the feedback and begin working with a Career Coach one-on-one until they have increased their skill set and pass the next mock interview. This accomplished meeting the “minimum standard of professional readiness” requested by the business community.

Students then compete against all the other qualified students for an internship. All of this can be done in the Washk12 Program in as little as four weeks. Utilizing LinkedIn has been the difference-maker for introverted students as they now have an exceptional profile that serves as a voice to advocate for their pathway success.

**Building a “No Pressure” Partnership.** Regardless of where a student lives, the business community has one goal: To ensure their company is profitable. A close second to this goal: Give back to the community. This is a big reason most







companies are willing to partner with local programs. As learned in 2016, that is not enough. Employers do not want a revolving door, and they do not want to babysit students who may not have an interest in truly developing important skills for employment.

Washk12 has found that building an employer pool and asking them to give a “preferred interview” with no obligation to employ students has led to positive outcomes. The pressure has shifted from the employer feeling obligated to take on interns to the students learning how to build their cases, so an employer wants to say yes. When an employer is asked, “Did you get a chance to view the student LinkedIn portfolio?” along with, “Would you like to interview our qualified candidate?” — it just makes sense to say yes. ■

These examples demonstrate the positive strides education is making toward connecting our students with business professionals. ACTE has identified the importance of supporting continued professional development by showcasing best practices for work-based learning at the annual ACTE Work-Based Learning Conference. The inclusion of work-based learning as an essential component of high-quality career and technical education is an acknowledgment of the value given to supporting quality CTE programs with business engagement. ACTE is committed to supporting future work in developing quality work-based learning programs.

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