



Northern Indiana Work-Based Learning Toolkit

NAVIGATING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

Building Tomorrow's Workforce Today

Northern Indiana's employers are facing a familiar challenge: as experienced workers retire and the labor market tightens, the demand for skilled, work-ready talent continues to grow. To stay competitive, businesses must take an active role in shaping the next generation of their workforce—starting before students even graduate high school.

Traditional classroom-based education and training programs, while valuable, do not always align with the real-world skills employers need. Many job candidates enter the labor market without the hands-on experience, workplace readiness, or technical competencies that make them effective from day one.

To build the most relevant and sustainable talent pipeline, career preparation must reflect the realities of today's industries—and take place within the workplace itself. **Work-Based Learning (WBL)** bridges that gap by connecting education with experience. Through internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and mentorship opportunities, employers can help shape the next generation of workers while directly influencing the skills being developed.

By engaging now, businesses not only strengthen their future workforce but also gain a competitive edge—reducing turnover, improving productivity, and ensuring that the skills of tomorrow are built on the needs of today.

Businesses that participate in Work-Based Learning don't just "give back" — they gain measurable financial and strategic returns by building a reliable talent pipeline, lowering hiring costs, and strengthening their brand and workforce culture.

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The ROI of Work-Based Learning

Why employers invest in tomorrow’s talent – and win today.

Tangible ROI (Financial + Operational Benefits)

Benefit	How It Pays Off
Reduced Recruiting Costs	WBL students already know your systems and culture — many convert to full-time hires at 40–50% lower recruitment and onboarding cost.
Improved Retention	Alumni stay longer — often 20–30% higher retention after two years — reducing costly turnover.
Higher productivity	Work-ready hires mean shorter ramp-up time and fewer training hours.
Tax Credits + Incentives	Many states offer tax credits, grants, or wage reimbursements for hosting students. <i>Example:</i> Earn Indiana- Employer Incentive funds (eligibility req.)
Stronger Talent Pipelines	Builds a reliable talent pool for hard-to-fill or aging positions, reducing vacancy and overtime costs.

Intangible ROI (Brand + Culture + Community Benefits)

Benefit	Why It Matters
Enhanced Employer Brand	Companies known for investing in youth talent earn goodwill, positive PR, and attract top applicants.
Employee Engagement	Staff who mentor students report higher satisfaction and purpose.
Community Leadership	Partnership with schools positions you as a local workforce leader, shaping future-ready talent.
Innovation + Fresh Perspective	Students bring new ideas, tech-savviness, and creativity that spark innovation.

Investing in work-based learning isn’t charity — it’s smart workforce strategy. You get stronger talent, better retention, and measurable cost savings — while shaping the next generation of skilled workers.

Connecting WBL to the New Diploma Requirements

Employer support for Work-Based Learning helps students meet diploma requirements and prepare for success in college, career, or enlistment. The highlighted areas below show the WBL components essential to earning Indiana's various diploma types and seals. For each Honors Plus Seal Diploma earned, a District receives \$2500 per student. Learn more at in.gov/doi.



INDIANA
DEPARTMENT of
EDUCATION

BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS: READINESS-SEALS

Readiness seals are designed to be permeable, allowing students to update their graduation plan and pivot, if their original interests and goals change. Although seals are optional, students are encouraged to utilize the blueprints below to focus their flexible credits into a connected pathway that aligns with their future goals. Students may earn one or multiple seals. Graduation Pathways requirements will be satisfied through completion of any seal.



ENROLLMENT



EMPLOYMENT



ENLISTMENT & SERVICE



HONORS SEAL

- Complete at least 4 World Language and 6 Social Studies credits
- Complete at least 8 Math credits
 - Algebra I plus Geometry, Algebra II, and Pre-Calculus or any advanced math credits aligned to their course of study
- Complete at least 6 Science credits
 - Biology I plus Chemistry and Physics or any advanced lab science credits aligned to their course of study
- Earn a C or higher in all courses and earn a cumulative B average
- Complete one of the following:
 - Earn 4 credits in AP, IB, or Cambridge courses and take corresponding exams
 - Earn 6 college credits
 - Score a 1250 on the SAT or a 26 on the ACT
 - Earn two of the following:
 - At least 3 college credits
 - 2 credits in AP courses and take corresponding exams
 - 2 credits in IB courses and take corresponding exams
 - 2 credits in Cambridge courses and take corresponding exams

- Complete one of the following:
 - A market-driven credential of value aligned to a specific occupation
 - 3 courses in a Career and Technology Education (CTE) pathway
 - An approved career preparation experience aligned to Indiana's CSA program, or
 - An approved, locally-created pathway
- Complete 150 hours of work-based learning (may include multiple experiences that are paid, unpaid, on-site, or simulated)
- Demonstrate skill development in Communication, Collaboration, and Work Ethic
- Meet attendance goal:
 - At least 1 school year with no more than 3 days of unexcused absences: or
 - At least 150 hours of work-based learning experience with no more than 3 unexcused absences.

- Complete one of the following:
 - Introduction to Public Service course or approved locally-created equivalent
 - Emphasis on developing an awareness of the physical standards and character required for service
 - One year of JROTC or Civil Air Patrol in high school
- Achieve a score of 31 on the ASVAB and complete one of the following:
 - All three components of the Career Exploration Program
 - A career exploration tool approved by IDOE
- Meet attendance goal:
 - At least 1 school year with no more than 3 days of unexcused absences
- Demonstrate skill development in Communication, Collaboration, and Work Ethic
 - Externally verified through a mentorship experience with current military personnel, veterans, or other public safety professionals



HONORS PLUS SEAL

- Earn the Honors Enrollment Seal, **plus**:
- Earn a credential of value that may include, for example:
 - Associate degree;
 - Technical Certificate;
 - Indiana College Core;
 - AP Scholar with Distinction;
 - Cambridge AICE Diploma; or
 - IB Diploma
 - Complete at least 75 hours of work-based learning (may include multiple experiences that are paid, unpaid, on-site, or simulated)
 - Demonstrate skill development in the following areas: Communication, Collaboration, and Work Ethic

- Earn the Honors Employment Seal, **plus**:
- Earn a market-driven credential of value that may include, for example:
 - Associate degree;
 - Technical Certificate;
 - Indiana College Core; or
 - Advanced industry certificate
 - Complete additional work-based learning (total of 650 hours in one or more experiences) that may include, for example:
 - Pre-Apprenticeship
 - Modern Youth Apprenticeship
 - Demonstrate skill development in Communication, Collaboration, Work Ethic, and any additional skills determined locally

- Earn the Honors Enlistment Seal, **plus**:
- Complete one of the following:
 - Achieve a score of 50 or higher on the ASVAB
 - Enrollment in ROTC at the collegiate level
 - Acceptance to a service academy
 - Demonstrate excellence in leadership through one of the following:
 - Completion of at least 100 hours of public service;
 - Holding a leadership role in a co/extracurricular activity;
 - Completion of two seasons of a team-based physical sport or activity

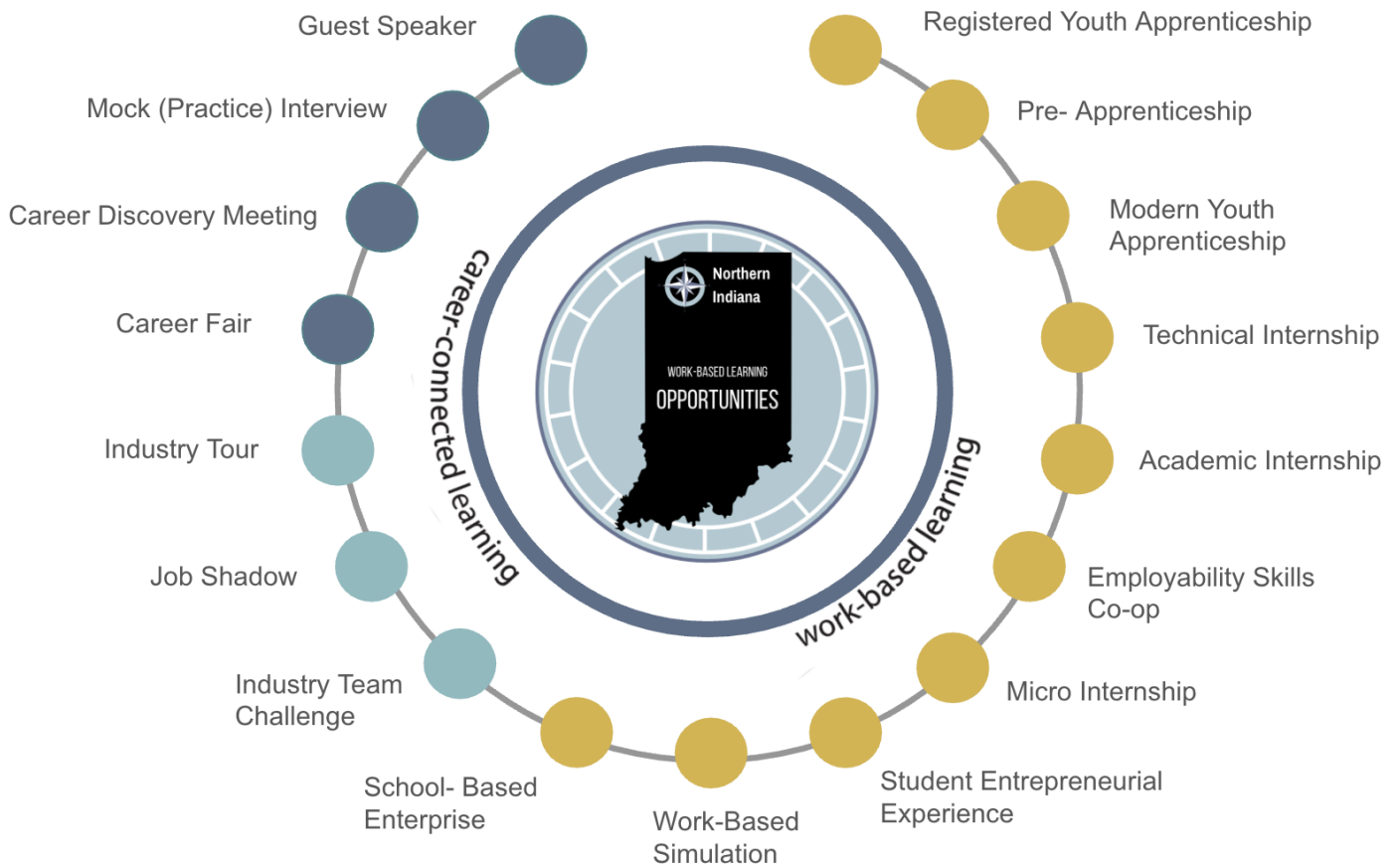


WBL Opportunities Overview

Career Exploration

Career Engagement





Career Experience







Work-Based Learning Descriptions

FOR EDUCATORS AND BUSINESSES











Career Exploration Opportunities

Activity	Description	Time <i>May vary, Examples offered</i>	Student Impact
Guest Speaker	Host guest speaking sessions to share your career journey and industry knowledge with students. This helps youth gain a real-world understanding of different careers and what it takes to succeed.	Example: 30 MINUTES TO 2 HOURS	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways
Mock (Practice) Interview	Offer students a safe space to practice job interview skills. They build confidence, learn to share their strengths, get helpful feedback, and prepare to make a great impression with real employers.	Example: Classroom prep (3 visits- Mock Interview event - 1day	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways
Career Discovery Meeting	Help prepare youth for the workforce by guiding them through practice interviews, resume building, and career assessments—giving them essential job-seeking skills and confidence.	30 MINUTES PER STUDENT OR GROUP	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways
Career Fair	A career fair is an event where employers come together to introduce students to many different job paths and educational opportunities. It's a chance for students to explore career options, meet and talk with professionals, ask about the skills and training needed for various jobs, and start imagining what their future careers could look like.	Example: 2 TO 4 HOURS	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways












Career Engagement Opportunities

Activity	Description	Time <i>May vary, Examples offered</i>	Student Impact
Industry Tour	An industry tour is when you open up your workplace to youth and young adults, giving them a chance to see your work environment and daily operations firsthand. This experience helps them understand what a typical day looks like in your industry, the kinds of tasks involved, and the skills needed. It's a great way for them to get a real sense of what working in your field is all about and start thinking about their own career possibilities.	Example: 2 TO 3 HOURS	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways
Job Shadow	A job shadow is an opportunity for youth and young adults to spend time observing a professional as they go about their typical workday. This experience gives participants a firsthand look at the daily tasks, responsibilities, and work environment within your company. By following and learning from experienced employees, they gain valuable insight into what a specific career involves, helping them better understand different roles and decide if a particular job or industry might be a good fit for their future.	Example: 4 TO 8 HOURS	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways
Industry Developed Team Challenge	This is a hands-on learning experience where a local company presents a real-world problem to a group of students as part of a class or project. The students work together to create a solution for the challenge, using what they've learned. At the end, industry professionals review and evaluate the students' ideas. Students involved in Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) might also get to take part in these challenges through regional, state, or national competitions.	HOURS BASED ON PROJECT SCOPE- Multiple visits to classroom should be expected	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways  Enrollment Honors PLUS Seal









Career Experience Opportunities

Activity	Description	Time <i>May vary, Examples offered</i>	Student Impact
School-Based Enterprise	A school-based enterprise is a student-run business that operates within a school. Students plan and manage the business, selling products or services to the school or community while gaining real-world experience in entrepreneurship, marketing, and management. Businesses from similar sectors will partner as mentors	25 hour minimum	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways  Employment Honors Seal  Enrollment Honors PLUS Seal
Workplace Simulation	A workplace simulation is a hands-on learning experience that recreates a real work environment inside a school or training center. Students use real tools and processes to explore different job roles, build practical skills, and connect with local industry partners—all while gaining a feel for how the workplace really operates.	25 hour minimum 75+ for CTE Alignment & Enrollment Honors Plus & Employment Honors Seal	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways  Employment Honors Seal  Enrollment Honors PLUS Seal
Student Entrepreneurial Experience	An entrepreneurial student business is created and run by a student with guidance from teachers and industry mentors. The student takes the lead in managing all aspects of the business—such as a lawn care service, coffee cart, or graphic design venture—gaining real-world experience in entrepreneurship, problem-solving, and leadership.	25 hour minimum 75+ for CTE Alignment & Enrollment Honors Plus	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways  Enrollment Honors PLUS Seal
Micro-Internship	A micro-internship is a short-term, hands-on work experience that falls between job shadowing and a traditional internship. Lasting at least 25 hours, it gives students a chance to explore a career field or gain real-world experience during shorter timeframes—like school breaks or summer sessions.	25 hour minimum 75+ for CTE Alignment & Enrollment Honors Plus	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways  Enrollment Honors PLUS Seal

Career Experience Opportunities (continued)

Activity	Description	Time <i>May vary, Examples offered</i>	Student Impact
Employability Skills Co-Op	An Employability Skills Co-op combines paid, mentored on-the-job training with classroom learning focused on workplace skills and career readiness. Students gain valuable experience even if the job isn't directly related to their career pathway.	15 hours on the job and 5 hours in the classroom per week	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways  Enrollment Honors PLUS Seal
Academic Internship	An academic internship combines classroom learning with hands-on work experience in a student's career interest area. It's ideal for students who aren't in a CTE pathway but have taken related courses and want to explore a professional setting, like a healthcare internship after science classes.	75+ for CTE Alignment & Enrollment Honors Plus	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways  Enrollment Honors PLUS Seal
Technical Internship	A technical internship is a work experience directly related to a student's CTE pathway. It can be a standalone opportunity or part of a course, often serving as a capstone where students apply what they've learned in the classroom to real-world work.	75+ for CTE Alignment & Enrollment Honors Plus & Employment Honors Seal	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways  Employment Honors Seal  Enrollment Honors PLUS Seal
Modern Youth Apprenticeship	A Modern Youth Apprenticeship is a paid, structured program that combines classroom learning with at least 650 hours of on-the-job training. Students follow a competency-based plan and have the chance to earn postsecondary credit and industry recognized certifications while gaining real-world work experience.	Minimum of 650 On the Job hours Typically a 2-3 year program often starting in Junior year	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways  Enrollment Honors PLUS Seal  Employment Honors Seal  Employment Honors PLUS Seal

Career Experience Opportunities (continued)

Activity	Description	Time <i>May vary, Examples offered</i>	Student Impact
Pre-Apprenticeship	A pre-apprenticeship is a hands-on training program linked to a registered apprenticeship. It combines real-world work and classroom learning to prepare students for a smooth transition into a full apprenticeship program.	Typically a 1-2 year program	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways  Enrollment Honors PLUS Seal  Employment Honors Seal  Employment Honors PLUS Seal
DOL Registered Apprenticeship Programs	A registered apprenticeship is a structured training program approved by the U.S. Department of Labor that combines paid on-the-job learning, classroom instruction, and mentorship. High school students, starting as young as 16, can participate and earn credentials while gaining expert skills in their field.	Competency Based Or Up to 2000 hrs Typically a 2-3 year program often starting in Junior year.	 Base Diploma/ Grad Pathways  Enrollment Honors PLUS Seal  Employment Honors Seal  Employment Honors PLUS Seal
Educator Externship	Educator Externships connect the classroom to the workplace. Educators spend time on-site at a business to gain perspective and identify ways to creatively integrate relevant, real-world experiences into student learning.	2-3 Days	



Investing in Work-Based Learning today ensures a steady pipeline of prepared, motivated talent for tomorrow.

Message to Educators

Helping students prepare for life after high school can be both exciting and challenging. Today's learners benefit most when they can see clear connections between what they study in the classroom and the opportunities waiting for them in the real world. When students understand how their interests align with potential careers and educational paths, they become more motivated, confident, and ready to make informed choices about their futures.

To support this goal, the Northern Indiana Work-Based Learning Toolkit was created as a resource for schools, educators and employers across the region. Developed in partnership with local organizations committed to career-connected learning, the toolkit provides a wide range of experiences that expose students to local industries and career pathways. By integrating these opportunities into instruction, educators can help students discover their strengths and passions while enhancing the relevance of academic learning. When education is paired with meaningful, hands-on experiences, students not only engage more deeply in their studies but also begin to envision a future full of possibility.



Get Connected

Your Local/Regional Contact:

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Toolkit References

- Special thanks to [Employ Indy](#) for use of the [Talent Bound Toolkit](#) Model
- Resources:
 - [IDOE Work-Based Learning Definitions](#)
 - [WBL Menu of Experiences](#)
 - [Indiana Diploma](#)
 - [Work and Learn Resource Hub](#)
 - [Earn Indiana](#)

Northern Indiana Work-Based Toolkit is brought to you by:

Northern Indiana Educational Service Center, Northwest Indiana Educational Service Center, Region 8 Education Service Center, Horizon Education Alliance, the South Bend Regional Chamber of Commerce and the LaGrange Chamber of Commerce