

Promising Pathways to Careers

Work-based Learning for Pennsylvania Young People

Preparing for a New Economy

Throughout Pennsylvania, new technologies are creating new career fields and changing traditional ones. Every young person can find a career to be passionate about, whether it requires an industry credential, associate's degree, bachelor's degree or a doctorate. The Pennsylvania Department of Education's forward-looking career education and work standards assure that students develop real-world skills demanded by 21st Century employers.

Unfortunately, young people and their families rarely know about the jobs emerging from the new economy, or the education and skills needed to attain them. What does it take to become a computer software engineer, chemical pathologist, health information technologist, computer-aided design drafter or nanotechnologist?

One solution is work-based learning – diverse methods and strategies for exposing young people to career possibilities, immersing them in the work world, and developing action plans leading to specific career goals. The issue takes on economic urgency because 75 percent of Pennsylvania jobs require education beyond high school, yet nearly half of Pennsylvania's workers hold no more than a high school degree.¹

Whether they live in cities, suburbs, or rural areas, Pennsylvania's youth need opportunities to explore career possibilities and start down the paths that lead to lifetime productivity and fulfillment.

Pennsylvania businesses devote time and money to building tomorrow's workforce because they can't find the right workers today — people with strong technical skills who can pass drug tests, communicate well, and work in teams, says Pam Streich of the North Central Workforce Investment Board in Ridgway, PA.

What is Work-based Learning?

Work-based learning spans from middle school into postsecondary education, providing structured experiences and exposing young people to a range of occupations and careers. In this paper, we examine the middle and high school years:

- Career awareness, early middle school.** Students hear about careers and occupations in industry clusters (groups of industries that are closely linked by product markets, labor pools or similar technologies) through career presentations, career fairs, workplace tours and field trips, interviews with adults in careers of interest and career camps.
- Career exploration, late middle school to early high school.** Students explore specific interests through job shadowing, mentoring by professionals, service learning and career clubs.
- Career preparation, late high school.** Students discover fields in depth, understand the importance of classroom learning to career goals, and develop specific career and occupational skills through internships, apprenticeships and other work experiences.

Benefits for young people can include understanding the education and skills needed for jobs in the new economy, motivation to stay engaged in school and graduate, planning and preparing academically for postsecondary education, and acquiring soft skills to meet employer expectations. Employers see benefits, too: a pipeline of skilled future workers; extra help for less urgent projects; supervisory experience for employees overseeing young people; and new perspectives and technological savvy in the workplace.



Though work-based learning in Pennsylvania varies by region, every community in the state has been served by a Regional Career Education Partnership (RCEP). Each of Pennsylvania's 22 RCEPs has proven its value, despite ongoing funding uncertainties. Under the RCEP model, regional Workforce Investment Boards use \$1.3 million in federal Workforce Investment Act funds, distributed by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, to convene local partners – employers, educators and community members. The RCEPs form the foundation of a statewide but locally driven strategy to connect the right people with the right opportunities.

Proven and Promising Models in Pennsylvania

Programs differ around the state, but two common threads emerge.

First, businesses that want to support work-based learning need help with the administrative and supervisory challenges of bringing young people on board.

Second, effective work-based learning emphasizes education and skill building. Students learn appropriate workplace conduct, norms, and ethics. They have job descriptions and responsibilities. They might even realize that a certain job isn't for them and try something else.

WorkReady, Philadelphia Youth Network and Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, Pittsburgh

THE PROGRAM: The City of Philadelphia's WorkReady initiative coordinates programs and information year-round for youth ages 14 to 21, introducing them to careers, exposing them to workplaces, and stressing 21st Century skills such as teamwork, communications, receiving feedback, and professionalism. In Pittsburgh, the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board piloted WorkReady's summer internship model in 2011 and is considering year-round programs.

How it works:

- School-connected, year-round programs provide work-related experiences over multiple years, connect students with businesses, and offer industry-specific training, specialized academic support and internships.
- Programs for out-of-school youth provide employment pathways through job readiness training and service projects, job placements and occupational skills training.
- Summer initiatives include work experience, service learning, and paid internships for high school juniors and seniors. Participants work four days a week and devote Fridays to professional development.



What they're saying:

A "real disconnect" between available jobs and workers' skills is keeping unemployment rates high. Not enough people have the credentials and skills needed to fill positions. "We have jobs available for the right people. That's where work readiness is so critical." – Daniel K. Fitzpatrick, President, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, Citizens Bank.

"Businesses are likeliest to engage when encouraged by other businesses. CEO to CEO – that's how we get these large businesses to participate." – Stephanie Gambone, vice president for business partnerships, Philadelphia Youth Network.

"I definitely think I'm approaching college and career differently, because I've had this experience to help me move forward." – Mariya Moseley, WorkReady summer intern at Highmark in Pittsburgh.

Professional development sessions "take some of the onus off the employer. We have a full orientation and explain expectations and dress code prior to the program starting." – Allison Davies, director, WorkReady Pittsburgh.

Lehigh Valley CareerLinking Academy, Lehigh Valley Workforce Investment Board

THE PROGRAM: A career awareness program aligned with state career education and work standards and developed in conjunction with the Society for Human Resource Management's Lehigh Valley chapter. Services include career assessments, interview techniques, resumé preparation, job shadowing and college tours.

How it works:

- Local school districts submit customized proposals for high school juniors and seniors to explore careers, build skills, and get exposed to workplaces through week-long programs, after-school sessions and worksite tours.
- Career-specific academies have focused on health care, opportunities for women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and local targeted industry clusters.
- School districts can credit students' participation toward their senior projects.
- Parental involvement is encouraged through information nights and financial management seminars.

What they're saying:

"Those kids know what major to declare when they go to college, and they're not spending six years in college anymore because they don't have to change their major. And they don't have to go to a four-year school when what they really need is an associate's degree." – *Cindy Evans, workforce coordinator, Lehigh Valley Workforce Investment Board.*

Work-based learning fact: Eight in 10 high school dropouts say opportunities for real-world learning would have improved their chances of graduating.²

Youth Apprenticeship Program, Northern Tier Industry & Education Consortium

THE PROGRAM: Integrating school and work-based learning toward rewarding employment and career opportunities and creating a highly skilled workforce in Bradford, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga and Wyoming counties in northeastern Pennsylvania.

How it works:

- Juniors and seniors at least 16 years old apply for apprenticeships at about 100 northeastern Pennsylvania businesses. Each works from eight to 30 hours a week.
- The employer assigns a jobsite mentor to help apprentices learn their skills.
- Apprentices must earn good grades to remain in the program.

What they're saying:

"The real magic is just having kids in the workplace with caring adults who want them to be successful. And guess what? They are successful." – *Pete Butler, engineering manager, Procter & Gamble, Mehoopany.*

Work-based learning fact: Work-based learning can lead to jobs. Of Procter & Gamble's 172 apprentices dating back to 1993, 71 were hired — and 80 percent of them still work there. That saves P&G the expense of retraining older new hires.

BerksWorks, Berks Business Education Coalition

THE PROGRAM: The online BerksWorks database links employers, school districts, and high school and postsecondary education students seeking work-based learning opportunities.

How it works:

- Employers post work-based learning opportunities, including internships, job shadowing, and workplace tours.
- Students and career educators, including guidance counselors, can search the site by career cluster and occupational fields.
- Students can also post resumés for review by employers seeking interns.

What they're saying:

"In the past, any time schools wanted to interface with business, they frequently would be calling the same people, whereas now there's a search vehicle, so there's not nearly as much time spent

supporting internships. Plus, businesses are quite happy with the opportunity to have access to so many different students. A number of employers are posting full-time positions on BerksWorks." – *Dr. Robert Runkle, executive director, Berks Business Education Coalition.*

Making Use of Afterschool Time

Work-based learning is more than an afterschool job. It's a stepping stone to adult roles. As one researcher noted, most teenage jobs, especially in fast food and retail, "no longer provide skills and workplace knowledge as preparation for adult work, in part because most teenagers work in jobs with no opportunities for meaningful interaction with adult mentors and supervisors."³

Afterschool programs for high school and middle school students can foster essential youth-adult interaction. They don't take time out of the school day, and they offer more flexibility and opportunities for students to experience firsthand the world of work.

In fact, work-based learning and career exploration activities promote higher recruitment and retention rates among afterschool programs, according to "The Pennsylvania Older Youth Out-of-School Time Study," conducted in 2010 by Penn State University researchers for the Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool Youth Development Network.

Penn State's study has found that work-readiness programs in many communities are fragmented and duplicative, says researcher Kathryn Hynes, Ph.D. Coordination can promote positive outcomes – communications skills, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, avoiding trouble, staying in school – and afterschool programs can be key elements in an integrated approach. "People are really starting to think about how these systems can come together," Hynes says. "Only so much can be packed into school."



Promising afterschool model: SHINE Career Camps, Carbon County Action Committee and Lehigh Carbon Community College (LCCC)

THE PROGRAM: SHINE – for Schools and Homes in Education – supports the educational advancement of Carbon and Schuylkill County children, youth, and families. Afterschool programs for children from six months before kindergarten through the summer before sixth grade include Career Camp and other activities exposing young students to career opportunities.



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How it works:

- Career Camp offers an intensive, 32-week curriculum around STEM careers for children in fourth and fifth grades. Students visit local businesses and learn problem solving, global awareness and effective communication. The program also strengthens students' academic weaknesses by working with teachers and school principals on assessment-driven, individualized instruction and activities.
- Students in grades nine through 11 who have aged out of SHINE afterschool programs can complete their service projects by tutoring and mentoring younger students in the fields of education, criminal justice, psychology and sociology.
- High school seniors enrolling in LCCC as education majors can become educational interns the summer before entering, and internships can continue in the freshman and sophomore years.

Work-based learning fact: Students from SHINE's Career Camp pilot increased their knowledge of jobs of the future by 30 percent and their understanding of the importance of reading and math to future careers by 10 percent. Students from three of the four participating districts showed gains on academic performance, science grades, and classroom conduct.⁴



Action Steps in Work-Based Learning

Pennsylvania business people, educators, parents, and community leaders are working hard to open the eyes of students to their full potential. Policymakers can take meaningful steps to coordinate these fragmented efforts and create a dynamic, comprehensive approach to work-based learning.

- Continue funding Pennsylvania's Regional Career Education Partnerships. The RCEPs develop and implement local strategies to coordinate work-based learning activities for young people and help school districts and career and technical schools ensure that students meet the state's career education and work standards. With stable funding, RCEPs can continue to link the efforts of local partners, engage more employers and help them provide meaningful experiences, integrate middle and high school afterschool programs into the systems, and provide one-stop shopping for young people, schools and employers.
- Provide incentives, such as tax credits, to employers who provide work-based learning for students in high school and career and technical schools, and for out-of-school youth.
- Offer small grants that give afterschool programs the resources to integrate career education and work-based learning into their programs by building partnerships with schools and businesses.

A comprehensive, statewide platform of work-based learning will help today's young Pennsylvanians emerge as tomorrow's innovators. A commitment to work-based learning, supported with clear policy directives and appropriate funding, will build the workforce of tomorrow and give Pennsylvania a competitive edge in a rapidly evolving global economy.

1 U.S. Bureau of the Census and PA Department of Labor & Industry, Center for Workforce Information & Analysis, 2008

2 Bridgeland, J; Dilulio Jr., K; Burke, Morison; A report by Civic Enterprises in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts, 2006

3 Staff, Jeremy; Schulenberg, John E; Millennials and the World of Work: Experiences in Paid Work During Adolescence; Journal of Business Psychology, 2010

4 SHINE After-school Program; www.shineafterschool.com