

CENTRAL MINNESOTA JOBS AND TRAINING SERVICES, INC.

EMPLOYER STRATEGY GUIDE WORK-BASED LEARNING

Be a part of the solution: Address critical workforce demands while fostering local talent.





Welcome to the Work-Based Learning (WBL) Employer Strategy Guide

This guide helps employers create and oversee Work-Based Learning (WBL) opportunities for high school students, including youth apprenticeships (YA).

WBL uses the workplace as a structured learning environment to support students' academic, social, and career development. It is enhanced by school-based activities that apply and extend learning from the job site. Students gain real-world knowledge and skills in an active setting.

Your mentorship can help students gain confidence, develop essential skills, and build a bridge from school to meaningful careers—while helping you grow your future workforce.

This guide includes:

- *Key resources and contacts*
- *Employer roles and supervision best practices*
- *Strategies to support participant success on the job*
- *Legal, safety, and liability requirements*

So why go through all the trouble? Work-Based Learning is a flexible workforce strategy that helps employers meet current and future talent needs while reducing hiring risk.

Resources:

- [MDE's Work-Based Learning Website](#)
- [FutureForward™](#)
- [MN Work-Based Learning Handbook](#)
- [Disability Hub MN - Work-Based Learning](#)
- [MN WBL Framework](#)
- [Access to Career Technical Education for Students with a Disability](#)
- [DOL Child Labor Fact Sheet](#)

Develop a loyal talent pipeline with customized, on-the-job training.



WBL allows employers to shape talent, strengthen teams, and invest in workforce solutions that support long-term business success.



Return on Investment

WBL helps your teams build skills that match your business needs, so training stays useful and effective. By training students on real tasks with your own systems, you boost productivity. This practical approach improves performance and lowers recruitment and onboarding costs by developing talent from within your company.



Reduced Hiring Risk

This approach lets you see how the student performs, how reliable they are, and whether they fit your company culture before you commit to hiring them long-term. Rather than just looking at résumés, you can base your decisions on real skills you've seen in action. When you hire a student who already knows your workplace, you're more likely to keep them and build a team that fits your company well.



Customized Training & Talent Pipeline

You help students get ready for specific roles, equipment, and workflows so they can meet your organization's needs. The WBL approach creates a steady flow of skilled workers for both entry-level and advanced jobs. Training programs are designed for jobseekers of all ages, backgrounds, and experience levels, helping you build a diverse and capable team.

Work-Based-Learning (WBL) connects classroom knowledge with real-world work experience. For employers like you, WBL is an efficient way to train future talent, increase employee retention, and build a skilled workforce—all while contributing to your company's success and reputation. These programs let you shape new professionals to fit your unique workplace culture and needs.

As an employer, you play a vital role as a mentor, supervisor, and partner—helping students succeed while investing directly in the future of your workforce and your business.



Employer & Worksite Supervisor Responsibilities

Employers providing Work-Based Learning (WBL) experiences must follow all federal and state child labor and equal opportunity laws, maintain a safe and harassment-free workplace, and pay students for all hours worked in paid experiences. They are also responsible for completing and adhering to the Individual Training Agreement/Plan when required, conducting and sharing progress reviews with schools when applicable, and treating WBL participants as regular employees. Additionally, employers must provide safety training, ensure proper equipment and lawful working conditions, and train students on equipment before use.

Supervisor–Student Relationship

Supervisors guide WBL participants through structured, real-world learning experiences that build skills, confidence, and productivity. Effective supervision helps students develop both technical and employability skills.

Best practices for supervisors include learning about each student’s goals, interests, and needs; prioritizing and reinforcing safety practices; and encouraging appropriate decision-making and independence. Supervisors should teach workplace culture, expectations, and norms while modeling professionalism and respectful behavior. Providing clear orientation, instructions, and feedback is essential, as is sharing career pathways and industry insights to help students understand their options and grow within the field.

While apprentices can infuse a department with new energy, fast-paced learning, and productivity, know that supervisors of youth apprentices are key to apprentice success and also gain valuable mentoring and leadership skills in the process.

Supporting WBL Participants

Work-Based Learning (WBL) participants bring a range of backgrounds, strengths, and learning styles to the workplace, and some may have experienced trauma, which can influence their behavior and learning. Employers can best support these students by integrating Universal Design for Learning, which provides multiple ways for participants to learn and demonstrate skills, with Trauma-Informed Practices that create safe, supportive, and predictable environments. Together, these strategies help foster inclusion, adaptability, and success for all learners.



Practical Employer Practices

1. Welcome & Orientation

Welcome new students, introduce them to the team and routines, provide clear orientation materials, and repeat key instructions to check understanding.

2. Designate a Supportive Mentor

Choose a trusted person to check in often, listen without judgment, and give clear guidance.

3. Use Multiple Ways of Learning

Show and explain tasks out loud, provide simple written steps or checklists, let students practice with your help, ask how they learn best and adjust.

4. Build Safety, Trust, and Belonging

Create predictable routines, communicate in plain, accessible language, and address inappropriate remarks immediately to reinforce zero tolerance for discrimination.

5. Check In Consistently

Start shifts with a quick check-in and a simple stress scale. Encourage students to share what helps them.

6. Celebrate Effort and Progress

Celebrate effort and progress by recognizing small wins, giving specific praise, and encouraging reflection.

7. Encourage Healthy Boundaries & Rest

Enforce work-hour limits, ensure breaks, and remind students to disconnect outside scheduled hours.

8. Gather Feedback & Adapt

Schedule regular reflection check-ins to gather feedback and adjust training and supports as part of ongoing improvement.

Requirements and Regulations

Work-Based Learning (WBL) experiences operate under shared responsibility among employers, schools, and students, with **liability and insurance** coverage varying by role and circumstance. Employers are responsible for the products and services produced by their business, and in most cases, existing general liability and workers' compensation policies are sufficient to cover WBL participants. Employers are advised to verify any equipment-use restrictions for minors with their insurance providers.

Transportation liability depends on who provides the transportation. When students provide their own transportation, coverage falls under their personal auto insurance. Transportation provided by schools is covered by school insurance, while employer-provided transportation places liability on the employer.

Workers' compensation coverage applies to paid WBL participants through the employer's policy. Unpaid participants typically rely on personal medical insurance for injuries, though employer general liability coverage may apply in certain situations. Additionally, some WBL participants—such as full-time public school students earning academic credit—may not qualify for unemployment compensation benefits.

Child Labor Laws (Minnesota)

All WBL participants and employers must follow applicable state and federal child labor laws when participants are minors.

<https://www.dli.mn.gov/child-labor>



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All Workforce Development services are free! Our services include assessment, career planning, skills training, job search guidance and resources, and preparation for further training and education. We also offer scholarships and connections to many other great programs and resources in Central Minnesota. Contact us today!



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