

# Scaling Work-Based Learning: Quality Criteria for Continuous Improvement and Equity

July 2024



**EdSystems**

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY



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## MISSION

EdSystems fosters collaborative partnerships to design, implement, and evaluate policies and practices that ensure successful transitions to and through postsecondary and career opportunities for students, with a particular emphasis on historically marginalized populations.

## VISION

EdSystems helps create a world where students have clear, unambiguous paths to college and career opportunities that equip them for meaningful participation in the global economy.

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# Introduction

## Illinois Frameworks for Work-Based Learning

The [Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act](#) was signed into law in 2016 to improve Illinois students' postsecondary and career readiness. Two of the four key strategies included in this act inform the framework for work-based learning in Illinois' public schools: [Postsecondary and Career Expectations](#) (PaCE) and [College and Career Pathway Endorsements](#).

- The PaCE framework serves as a guide for students, families, and educators, outlining the essential experiences and information needed to make informed decisions about college and career planning from 8th grade through high school.
- The goal of the College and Career Pathway Endorsements system is to enhance the readiness of Illinois high school graduates for postsecondary education and careers. Students must fulfill specific, rigorous requirements to receive an endorsement on a high school diploma or transcript. These requirements include participating in work-based learning activities designed to develop [essential and technical employability competencies](#).

Illinois' work-based learning continuum includes career awareness, career exploration, team-based challenges, and career development experiences. The definitions of experiences on the work-based learning continuum can be found in the [Illinois Career Pathways Dictionary](#). While these definitions set minimum expectations for quality, they are intentionally broad to accommodate various experiences. However, they do not cover details such as preparation, reflection activities, mentor diversity, or connections to postsecondary programs. The quality criteria set forth in this document aim to go beyond definitions and develop comprehensive resources for equitable advancement, to support communities in implementing robust systems that offer meaningful professional learning opportunities aligned with growing, well-paying career fields.

### *Work-Based Learning Continuum*



### WORK-BASED LEARNING DEFINITIONS

**Career awareness** is the process by which students explore possible career clusters and specific jobs that are available and gain a deeper understanding of the different paths they can take toward a fulfilling future. Career awareness is a valuable opportunity to connect an individual's own abilities and interests to related college and career opportunities.

**Career exploration** is an activity such as a job shadow, attendance at a career exposition, or employer site visit that provides an individual with the ability to engage directly with employers for the purpose of gaining knowledge of one or more industry sectors or occupations.

**Team-based challenges** are group problem-based learning projects relating to an individual's career area of interest that involves a problem relating to employers, mentoring from adults with expertise in that area, and a student presentation of the project's outcomes.

**Career development experiences** occur in a workplace or under other authentic working conditions, and include supervision, compensation or educational credit, professional skill development, and an assessment.

## Why Quality Criteria

Districts across Illinois are implementing the College and Career Pathway Endorsements framework, and legislation passed in 2022 ([Public Act 102-0917](#)) will foster significant scaling in the coming years. With increased legislative support and the natural expansion of schools offering the College and Career Pathway Endorsements, college and career programs are poised for substantial growth in the coming years, both in the creation of new programs but also in deepening and expanding existing programs. The growth calls for enhanced support for college and career programming, moving beyond initial implementation to emphasize continuous improvement and equity. The criteria in this document specifically address work-based learning components. A parallel working group developed a set of quality criteria for college and career pathways design and implementation, which should be taken into consideration alongside this guide. The college and career pathways criteria can be found at [edsystemsniu.org/resources](https://edsystemsniu.org/resources).

As programs expand beyond implementation, educators and their employer and community partners must be able to offer experiences that address the needs of their communities. The guidance included in this document provides a non-exhaustive list of accessible high-quality criteria and resources for communities as they expand offerings across the work-based learning continuum and ensure equitable access to these experiences. The quality criteria outlined in this document recognize that schools and organizations have different staffing capacities and may not have a designated work-based learning coordinator. Regardless of roles, the criteria can be implemented successfully by distributing expectations thoughtfully across a team, including external partners.

## Process for Development

EdSystems brought together a diverse, statewide advisory group of stakeholders in work-based learning from October 2023 to April 2024 to develop criteria and engage in discussions about how to support districts in their efforts to advance their professional learning offerings. The advisory committee, consisting of work-based learning specialists, school administrators, employers, and other school partners, engaged in a four-step process, bringing their unique perspectives to the conversation to develop the high-quality criteria and resources.

## Engaging with the Quality Criteria

The following section consists of high-quality criteria and resources organized by five components. The first four are based on the work-based learning continuum and include a definition of the experience followed by a table that notes the high-quality criteria together with the student “I can” statements, which provide a guideline on what students are expected to understand and be able to do for each work-based learning experience. The statements are based on student insights gathered through interviews and reviewed by the committee. Following the table are additional considerations for student equity and advising. Note:

- The included criteria are **best practices, not requirements**. Criteria are meant to equitably advance work-based learning programs, however they do not represent any requirements for work-based learning implementation.
- Practitioners should consider their unique school populations, external partners, and environments and tailor the criteria to their communities.
- This resource is intended for use comprehensively or by individual components.

The final component opens the aperture to look across the work-based learning continuum and focus on system-wide support and considerations, including equity and staff capacity.

## Work-Based Learning Roles

For the purposes of the criteria, the advisory determined the following definitions for the various roles within work-based learning:

- **Work-based learning coordinator:** A person, school, or organization who helps coordinate work-based learning.
- **Work-based learning community partner:** An employer or organization supporting the work-based learning experience.
- **Learner or student:** Person completing the work-based learning experience.

### CAREER AND TECHNICAL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

[Career and Technical Student Organizations](#) (CTSOs) are an additional resource for engaging students across the work-based learning continuum. CTSOs can provide students with the opportunity to find a community within Career and Technical Education, as well as ways to participate in competitive events and apply their career knowledge through field experiences. The opportunities provided by CTSOs can serve as team-based challenges and career development experiences when the CTSO activities match the requirements set forth for these work-based learning continuum components. It is important for schools and their CTSO representatives to have a conversation and norm around the expectations of a team-based challenge to ensure they are meeting ISBE requirements to qualify for an endorsement. Students also have the opportunity to strengthen their leadership skills through CTSOs. Each organization functions on an entirely student-led state executive board. By integrating CTSOs in the implementation of work-based learning, schools are not only providing hands-on learning experiences but elevating the importance of student representation.

The Illinois State Board of Education recognizes the following CTSOs:

- [Business Professionals of America \(BPA\)](#)
- [Future Business Leaders of America \(FBLA\)](#)
- [Family, Career and Community Leaders of America \(FCCLA\)](#)
- [Educators Rising](#)
- [Illinois DECA, Inc.](#)
- [Illinois FFA](#)
- [Illinois HOSA](#)
- [Science Olympiad](#)
- [SkillsUSA Illinois](#)
- [Technology Student Association \(TSA\)](#)

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# Framework Components



# Career Awareness Criteria

Career awareness is a valuable opportunity to connect an individual’s own abilities and interests to related college and career opportunities.

	High-Quality Criteria	Student “I Can” Statements
<b>Aligning Coursework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Classroom connects content and skills to pathways of interest.</li> <li>○ Students understand how aptitudes align to career areas and the academic application to career fields.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I can understand how aptitudes align with career areas. I can understand how my education applies to career fields.</li> </ul>
<b>Understanding Pathways</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students are made aware of work-based learning opportunities available to them in high school and postsecondary education aligned to their career area of interest.</li> <li>○ Career interest inventories inform high school career and technical education engagement as well as college and career planning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I can understand what work-based learning means, and what opportunities are available for me in high school and postsecondary for each career area of interest.</li> </ul>
<b>Student Reflection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Self-reflection activities are provided to make meaning and connect student knowledge, interests, values and skills with essential employability competencies.</li> <li>○ Students are provided opportunities to reflect on career interest inventory results and identify the activities and aspects of work that align to their career goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I can reflect on how to connect my knowledge, interests, values, and skills to authentic job experiences.</li> <li>○ I can identify the activities and aspects of my job that align with my career goals, to connect these preferences to future careers I envision myself in.</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Industry is engaged in the design of career awareness activities and local employers, organizations, and people are prioritized to be highlighted in videos, posters, materials, etc.</li> <li>○ Students are made aware of successful individuals in a career field of interest that they identify with in race, gender, and other characteristics to learn about their career journey.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I can identify successful individuals who share my identity in race, gender, and other similar characteristics to learn about their career journey.</li> </ul>

## DEFINITION

“Career awareness” is the process by which students explore possible career clusters and specific jobs that are available and gain a deeper understanding of the different paths they can take toward a fulfilling future.



*Policy Alignment*

**PaCE Framework**

Career awareness activities are highlighted throughout the PaCE framework, including engaging in guided self-reflection and completing career cluster surveys.

**College and Career Pathway Endorsements System**

While career awareness is not a required experience to earn a College and Career Pathway Endorsement, it is an important building block of a high-quality work-based learning continuum. Better informing students of different careers and related postsecondary opportunities early in the continuum will support their engagement in future work-based learning experiences that are a required part of earning an endorsement.

*Advisory Highlight*

Career awareness opportunities are similar to but different than career exploration activities. Both encourage students to learn about their own interests and skills as they interact with the existing job market. However, career exploration takes this one step further with direct contact and industry mentors.

	Career Awareness	Career Exploration
<b>Student engagement:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gain general knowledge about industry sectors and their occupations</li> <li>• Explore personal abilities and interests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct contact with employers or other partners</li> <li>• Deepening knowledge of one or more industry sectors in an area of interest and their occupations</li> </ul>
<b>Examples include:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career interest surveys</li> <li>• Interactive or video presentation tools</li> <li>• Self-reflection activities and projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worksite tours</li> <li>• Job shadows</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Guest speakers</li> <li>• Career days or fairs</li> </ul>

“Career awareness is essential, and this stage should focus on all the opportunities rather than deep diving into them. That deep dive should begin during the exploration. This stage should be an introduction, while career exploration should begin with higher-level exposure.”

– Career Coordinator, Des Plaines Valley Region



### *Student Equity Considerations*

As students engage in career exploration and awareness opportunities, teachers and administrators need to better clarify expectations for students. Most students can engage in exploration and increase career awareness by taking school-sponsored courses that teach one of the career pathways. However, language that's unfriendly to students or a lack of outreach from the administration can confuse students about what course decisions they're allowed to make to explore different career pathways.

Furthermore, scheduling issues are one of the most prominent barriers to student access to work-based learning. For many students, opportunities for career awareness and career exploration are considered an extracurricular or out-of-school activity, causing scheduling conflicts with other after-school commitments. When students are forced to balance between academic, athletic, and postsecondary preparation, it's necessary to understand the language, scheduling, and outreaching barriers that exist.

### *Resources*

- [Career Conversation Starters](#): These guides, developed by the American School Counselor Association, provide conversational prompts for communicating about career and postsecondary planning with students of all grades, parents, and communities.
- [Career Inventories](#): CareerOneStop offers a free assessment that shows students careers that fit their interests based on a short questionnaire.
- [Educators Share Their Stories of Teaching in Central Illinois](#): This video series from Education for Employment #330 features educators as they share their stories of why and how they started their careers.
- [ExploreHealthCareers.org](#): A website from Liaison in collaboration with leading healthcare associations, this tool provides easy access to updated, peer-reviewed career descriptions that inspire and motivate students to explore health sciences careers.
- [Resources and Guidance for Supporting Young Women in Manufacturing](#): This guide by EdSystems addresses how to engage and support young women who historically do not see themselves in manufacturing positions to participate in manufacturing-related experiences.
- [Teach Central Illinois](#): This website from Education for Employment #330 has resources for students and parents to learn about what it means to be an educator.
- **EXEMPLAR**: At Grayslake High School, the English class assigns students to write about two pathway options and their aligned classes and clubs or activities. This helps teachers gather a writing sample while helping students develop advocacy skills in college and career planning.
- **EXEMPLAR**: [Plainfield District 202 Education Pathway Promotional Video](#): Educators worked with students to create a promotional video about the education pathway before the course request season.
- **EXEMPLAR**: [Regional Apprenticeship/Internship Program Business Interest Levels](#): Northern Kane County Region 110 has outlined how community partners can engage in work-based learning at varying levels of commitment.

# Career Exploration Criteria

	High-Quality Criteria	Student “I Can” Statements
<b>Student Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students are provided an overview and context about what they will be observing and learning.</li> <li>○ Students are introduced to general expectations of behavior and essential employability competencies when communicating with industry partners, including how to stay engaged and ask meaningful questions.</li> <li>○ A classroom lesson or activity is provided beforehand on the related industry or sector.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I can communicate with employers and fellow employees respectfully and understand general expectations of behavior and etiquette, including how to stay engaged and ask meaningful questions, how to dress, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Community Partner Prep</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The work-based learning coordinator helps the work-based learning partner understand the most effective ways to communicate with learners, anticipate the types of questions learners are likely to ask, and learn about the developmental aspects of working with youth.</li> <li>○ Logistics of the experience and mentor expectations are made clear to the community partner.</li> </ul>	
<b>During the Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Through hands-on interaction, students gain insights into adults’ career choices and are given the opportunity to have real-world experiences.</li> <li>○ Students develop awareness of how core academic skills, such as math and communications, are used in the workplace and connect academic coursework to industry needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I can gain insights into adults’ career choices, real-world experiences, and gain hands-on experience with certain jobs and fields.</li> <li>○ I can understand the many careers and postsecondary choices available to me.</li> <li>○ I can understand how my core academic skills, such as math and reading, are used in the workplace and connect my education to jobs.</li> </ul>
<b>After the Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students are provided time to reflect on their experience and how it connects to their thinking about next steps and interests.</li> <li>○ The work-based learning coordinator uses a process for following up with students that confirms interests as a result of this experience, in order to connect students with future opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I can reflect on my experience and think about next steps and interests. I can choose to experience more exploration of careers, network with other students and professionals, or engage in activities with my peers in a chosen field.</li> </ul>

## DEFINITION

“Career exploration” is an activity such as a job shadow, attendance at a career exposition, or employer site visit that provides an individual with the ability to engage directly with employers for the purpose of gaining knowledge of one or more industry sectors or occupations. The dictionary further defines an “intensive career exploration experience” as a structured, multi-day student experience, such as a career exploration camp, that provides students with the opportunity to explore various occupations relating to an Illinois College and Career Pathway Endorsement area with hands-on training and orientation activities.

### *Policy Alignment*

#### **PaCE Framework**

As part of the PaCE Framework, students should be supported to visit at least one workplace aligned with career interests and connect and build relationships with two to three adults to support the postsecondary and career selection process.

#### **College and Career Pathway Endorsements System**

To earn a College and Career Pathway Endorsement, students are expected to complete two career exploration activities or one intensive career exploration experience in their endorsement area. Career exploration occurring in 9th and 10th grades prepares students to move on to more intensive work-based learning such as team-based challenges and career development experiences.

Note: Activities taking place in grades 6th through 12th may be included as a career exploration activity, with at least one activity taking place within grades 9th through 12th.

### *Advisory Highlight*

When connecting students with mentors in the exploration stage, remember that mentorship exists in many different forms. Whether through formal experiences such as job shadows, through informal relationships, or experiential learning, mentorship plays a crucial role in guiding and supporting individuals along their paths to success.

“Career exploration should provide the opportunity to observe different careers and the basic pathways leading to a variety of careers by connecting them with business partners (in person or virtual)...[and] allow students to begin identifying areas of career interest. Provide opportunities for students to connect with networks of industry professionals or potential mentors and provide students with work-related experience under guidance of industry experts and teacher.”

– Work-Based Learning Specialist, Northern Kane County

## Resources

- **Building a Career Pathway:** From Oregon GEAR UP, this worksheet helps students reflect on personal values, interests, and skills to build a personal college and career pathway.
- **Make the Future™, Connecting Girls to Manufacturing:** This toolkit from National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity provides free methods and tools to help educators, counselors, administrators, and recruiters break down barriers to engage more young women in STEM education and to pursue manufacturing careers.
- **Student Reflections:** From the Iowa Department of Education, this document provides examples of student reflection activities following work-based learning experiences.
- **EXEMPLAR: Girls in Future Careers:** This annual event from Chicago Public Schools exposes female students to career possibilities in the trades, healthcare, IT, and manufacturing, bringing together industry experts and diversity-focused employers in a safe and inclusive space. Students engage with partners and participate in hands-on activities, presentations led by industry partners, and panel discussions.
- **EXEMPLAR: Clairemont High School Mentorship Program:** This program's goal is to connect every 11th grader with a mentor who can guide students through the challenges of academics and career decision making. The webpage links to materials for both students and mentors to foster success.
- **EXEMPLAR: Health Care Career Fair:** East St. Louis School District 189 together with its postsecondary partners and Barnes-Jewish Hospital hosted a career fair designed for both students and their families, held on Saturday mornings to accommodate attendance. The event featured hospital department representatives paired with local college representatives, allowing attendees to learn about career pathways and aligned job openings, as well as small group tours.
- **EXEMPLAR: Illinois Math Badging Initiative Micro-Internship Final Project Description:** This document clearly outlines student objectives for the internship that tie together math classroom curriculum and research and communication skills needed in industry.
- **EXEMPLAR: Pathway Playbook: ROE 47 and Sauk Valley Community College** host an annual Pathways Playground event that allows 8th grade students to explore and experience local employers in all career pathway areas. Resources include a [pre-event teacher guide](#), [sample questions for students to ask](#), [career fair bingo game](#), and [career choices activity](#).
- **EXEMPLAR: Writers Week:** Grayslake Central High School hosts professional writers and content creators such as authors, journalists, poets, comedians, broadcasters, and musicians to speak and/or perform alongside students and faculty. The English department provides students with an overview and context prior to the event to help aid career exploration.

# Team-Based Challenge Criteria

	High-Quality Criteria	Student “I Can” Statements
<b>Designing and Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Descriptions of the challenge should emphasize the technical and essential employability competencies that students will engage in and the connection of the authentic problem to the real world.</li> <li>○ Team-based challenges should be designed in a fashion that communicates the cadence of activities and expectations for participation for students, mentors, and support staff to easily understand.</li> </ul>	
<b>Student Preparation and Expectations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students are provided training and resources on technical and essential employability competencies being assessed, highlighting interpersonal skills relevant to effective collaboration such as teamwork and conflict resolution, decision-making, and communication.</li> <li>○ Student expectations, detailed rubrics, and examples are shared at the start of the team-based challenge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I understand how to develop and apply work skills for teamwork, conflict-management, decision-making, and communication.</li> <li>○ I can understand and apply the technical skills for the presented career pathway.</li> <li>○ I can understand what is expected of me during team-based challenges through rubrics, clear expectations, and previous project examples.</li> </ul>
<b>Mentor Preparation and Expectations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Logistics and commitment expectations of the mentor’s role are made clear, including relevant information for contacting and supporting the students.</li> <li>○ When troubleshooting with students, the mentor asks probing questions to guide the student to think through different scenarios.</li> <li>○ The role of the educator shifts from lecturer (direct teaching) to a facilitator (cooperative or experiential forms of teaching).</li> </ul>	
<b>Engagement in Real-World Problems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students engage in authentic problem solving through student voice and choice in the way they determine to address the problem.</li> <li>○ Instructors take into consideration the difference between an authentic task and an authentic problem to support students to engage in critical thinking skills, career technical competencies, essential skills development, and problem solving without the educator providing the answers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I understand that my voice and choices are valued when I am engaging in problem-solving scenarios.</li> <li>○ I understand and can solve problems through working with my peers.</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment and Reflection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students are assessed on the problem-solving process rather than the final solution alone: how well they identified and analyzed the problem, the strategies they used, the rationale behind their decisions, and how well they were able to apply essential and technical skills to their solution.</li> <li>○ Regular feedback opportunities are provided throughout the experience to guide students in refining their approach and improving their work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I can demonstrate my understanding and learning through my reasoning and problem-solving process, rather than the final solution. I can demonstrate my understanding and analysis of real-world problems and how to approach solutions through team-based challenges.</li> <li>○ I can receive and implement feedback from my mentors and learn to improve through reflection.</li> </ul>

## DEFINITION

A “team-based challenge” is a group problem-based learning project relating to an individual’s career area of interest that involves a problem relating to employers within that area, including mentoring from adults with expertise in that area, and requires the individual to present the outcomes of the project. Team-based challenges may be incorporated into the instructional sequence or designated as separate activities, and must include the following components:

- An authentic problem or challenge that is identified from or in collaboration with a community or business partner.
- Meaningful interaction with an adult mentor who has related industry expertise and who is not an assigned classroom teacher
- Demonstration of at least one career pathway-specific technical competency as identified in the College and Career Pathway Endorsements framework.
- Demonstration of at least one cross-sector essential employability competency skill.
- Collaboration with groups to solve a problem.
- A final product or presentation.

## Policy Alignment

### PaCE Framework

Completing at least two team-based challenges with support from an adult mentor is included on the PaCE Framework to be completed by the end of 12th grade.

### College and Career Pathway Endorsements System

Completing at least two team-based challenges is also a required component of the College and Career Pathway Endorsements.

## Advisory Highlight

The team-based challenge is more about the process of students engaging in essential employability and technical skills through their engagement with an authentic problem than it is about the solution that students design. The process-focused approach emphasizes developing skills as well as engaging with mentors. However, mentors should not be expected to have the “right” answers; their role instead is to guide students in their problem-solving processes.

People in different roles may serve as mentors as long as they have related industry expertise and are not an assigned classroom teacher. Examples may include college faculty and nonprofit organizations. It is important not to place too much work on educators, work-based learning coordinators, or community partners. Be mindful of individual communities’ capacity when determining who will serve as point-people for different tasks within team-based challenge planning and implementation.



### Student Equity Considerations

Team-based challenges are an immersive opportunity for students to participate in the work-based learning continuum. However, one of the biggest insights from students is the lack of familiar language. Most students are unaware of the term and might even be participating in team-based challenges without knowing they are. This inherently poses a barrier to awareness and may prevent students from understanding the benefits of participating in a team-based challenge.

For students who do participate in team-based challenges, the most accessible and popular method has been through school-sponsored courses. These courses embed opportunities for team-based challenges, collaboration, and career education as an academic class. This eliminates scheduling and transportation barriers while providing students with intensive opportunities to collaborate with peers and professionals. However, it is important to remember that not all school districts have the capacity to incorporate and sustain school-sponsored programs. Because of this, many students participate in Career and Technical Student Organizations. These organizations foster a community of students, representative of each career pathway, and offer ways to get involved in hands-on problem-solving experiences..

### Resources

- [Remote Learning from the Student and Teacher Perspective](#): This team-based challenge template from ROE #47 and Sauk Valley Community College lays out a clear timeline of events with deliverables.
- [Success Stories](#): Future Ready Iowa collates project summaries and videos that highlight student and industry engagement in authentic, real-world problems.
- [Regional Team-Based Challenge](#): Waubensee Community College hosts a regional team-based challenge for their [medical assistant](#), [basic EMT](#), and [nursing](#) programs. Rubrics have a focus on the communication process.
- [College and Career Pathways Endorsement Resources](#): This webpage from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) includes tools and templates for designing team-based challenges.



# Career Development Experience Criteria

	High-Quality Criteria	Student “I Can” Statements
<b>Designing and Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ During planning discussions, work-based learning coordinators and partners define how students will be supported at work, including clarifying the role of work-based learning partners to provide an orientation as a part of the onboarding process, train, and mentor students at work.</li> <li>○ Opportunities are aligned to the postsecondary education and career goals of the students.</li> </ul>	
<b>Student Preparation and Expectations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students have engaged in the essential employability skills prior to the experience and have been made aware of the time commitment and what types of tasks and activities they will be completing.</li> <li>○ Students understand the value of the career development experience as it relates to their college and career planning and how it can help them gain technical and essential skills, build their professional networks, and secure future employment in their career of choice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I am familiar with what employability skills mean and what types of tasks and activities I will be completing.</li> <li>○ I can understand the value of career development experiences, how they help me in the future, and how they can help me build professional networks and secure future employment in my choice of career.</li> </ul>
<b>Partner Preparation and Expectations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work-based learning partners have a mentorship approach and set clear expectations built upon essential and technical skills for any team members mentoring a student to ensure a common experience across students and mentors.</li> <li>○ Staff whose primary role is to serve as student mentors promote personal and professional development through regular check-ins that celebrate successes and serve as problem-solving opportunities.</li> </ul>	
<b>Intentional Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work-based learning partners provide feedback and vital information to support students as they make decisions.</li> <li>○ Work-based learning partners develop tasks that provide value to their organization but prioritize a focus on extending classroom-based learning, aligning with relevant industry or occupational standards and targeting development of essential and technical skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I can use the feedback from mentors and partners to think through situations, but I can make and learn from my own decisions.</li> <li>○ I can complete tasks that hold clear value to shaping technical skills and apply my classroom-based learning.</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment and Reflection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work-based learning partners gather information and communicate strengths and areas for improvement.</li> <li>○ There is a formative evaluation process in place for both students and work-based learning partners, occurring, at minimum, at the midpoint and end of the experience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I can communicate with my mentors to identify areas of improvement and reflection.</li> <li>○ I can complete evaluations throughout my work-based learning experience as checkpoints.</li> </ul>

## DEFINITION

A “career development experience” is a supervised work experience relating to an individual’s career area of interest that includes the following:

- A course transcription and corresponding school credit for the experience, compensation of the student’s work hours for the career development experience, or both.
- A workplace with authentic working conditions and tasks that include, but are not limited to, timekeeping, evaluation of work, responsibility to adhere to safety protocols, or adherence to the organization’s standard operating procedures. The workplace experience must reinforce the relevant technical and essential employability competencies.
- Collaboration between the school district and the community or business partners in developing and monitoring the experiences.
- Feedback is given to the student.
- At least 60 hours of participation completed by the student through a single experience or across two experiences; however, no individual experience may be less than 20 hours.

In addition to workplace settings in business or community partner locations, a supervised career development experience may include a workplace setting that is:

- Based in the school district if the setting is authentic and the district employee serving as a supervisor is fulfilling the role of an industry mentor or supervisor rather than the role of a classroom teacher; or
- Virtual if it includes authentic virtual, remote, or hybrid working conditions and a mentor or supervisor who is an employee of the workplace’s organization.

## *Policy Alignment*

### **PaCE Framework**

Obtaining an internship opportunity related to a student's career pathway is included on the PaCE framework, to be completed by the end of 12th grade.

### **College and Career Pathway Endorsements System**

Completing at least 60-hours of a supervised career development experience is a required component of the College and Career Pathway Endorsements.

## *Advisory Highlight*

As involvement with community partners increases, ensure that parents/guardians are included in the conversation. When considering permission slips, universal release forms at the beginning of the school year may be convenient, but be sure to include clear information about potential school activities wherever possible. Whenever a learner engages in a new experience, consider sending an information sheet to their family even if an associated permission slip is not needed.

Balancing educator, work-based learning coordinator, and work-based learning community partner capacity is a challenge. Many of the quality criteria included in this document may seem like a barrier to involvement for coordinators or community partners. Therefore, the sharing of responsibility should be done with mindfulness for an individual community's capacity. For example: If a coordinator is able to create templates for a community partner to utilize to make a learner's experience high-quality, this may lower barriers of entry to community partners, who may not have the capacity to otherwise thoughtfully engage a learner.



### *Student Equity Considerations*

As students progress along the work-based learning continuum, career development experiences offer valuable opportunities to work directly in a career field. Self-motivated students may seek out internships, apprenticeships, and jobs to gain career experience. However, the most prominent student barriers to seeking out individual experiences are the cost, time, and effort. Many internships may require students to utilize their own transportation and take up most of a student's time during or out of school. In addition, seeking out and applying for these positions often becomes competitive and selective, posing opportunity barriers for those interested in a career development experience.

Thus, many students have favored school-based enterprises when available. This inherently reduces barriers in transportation and competition, allowing more students to participate without leaving campus. Furthermore, with the help of an advisor or specialized director for work-based learning experiences, students participating in a school-based enterprise can find a support system to address any concerns that arise.

## Resources

- [Connecting the Dots: Supporting Interns on Their Journey to College and Career Success](#): This employer-facing resource from EdSystems focuses on the post-internship phase. It provides a roadmap for companies to support interns in their college and career readiness, ensuring a clear next step for those who complete the experience.
- [Cultivating Success: Mentorship in the High School Internship](#): Recognizing the importance of mentorship, this employer-facing resource from EdSystems offers guidance on fostering meaningful mentor-mentee relationships, emphasizing the role of mentors in shaping the learning experience and ensuring the overall success of high school interns.
- [Host Evaluation of Participant & Organization](#): This template from EdSystems is for employer partners hosting a career development experience to complete as a culminating activity.
- [Onboarding and Supporting High School Interns](#): This employer-facing resource from EdSystems focuses on establishing a robust onboarding process for high school interns and provides insights on creating a structured and supportive environment, enabling interns to thrive in their roles.
- [Participant Exit Interview with Host](#): This template from EdSystems provides guidelines and suggested exit interview questions for employer partners hosting a career development experience.
- [Participant Task Examples by Pathway Endorsement Area](#): This resource from EdSystems offers suggested career development experience tasks, organized by the College and Career Pathway Endorsements industry sectors.
- [Sample Memorandum of Understanding Agreement](#): Northern Kane County Region 110 created a template for use between school district and a work-based learning partner.
- **EXEMPLAR:** [Business Internship Preparation Checklist](#): Northern Kane County Region 110 provides employers with an orientation for planning a fruitful internship experience as well as adequately preparing the student to engage.
- **EXEMPLAR:** [Educator Pathway Experience](#): In this year-long internship course at Morrison High School, students are placed each quarter with an educator in the district to learn and experience what a career in education is like in various positions and at different grade levels. The district created a [Placement Teacher Agreement](#), which details responsibilities for teachers hosting students in their classrooms, and a [Competency Rubric](#), which is based on the [State of Illinois' Recommended Technical and Essential Employability Competencies](#).
- **EXEMPLAR:** [Essential Skills and Professional Etiquette Training Program](#): Decatur Public Schools created a career exploration event that provides students with necessary essential employability skill training before engaging in a career development experience.
- **EXEMPLAR:** [Internship Micro-Credential for Employers](#): Valley Education for Employment System has a structured process with employers in their region to prepare them to host and support young people in work-based learning opportunities, including internships.
- **EXEMPLAR:** [Internship Nomination Letter](#): This template from North-Grand High School provides an example of how to clearly communicate logistics to students before they begin an internship.
- **EXEMPLAR:** [Marketing Coordinator Internship Description](#): This job description from Streamwood Park District communicates clear expectations for interns.
- **EXEMPLAR:** [Pharmacy Technician Internship Description](#): This job description from Advocate Sherman Hospital communicates clear expectations for interns.
- **EXEMPLAR:** [Student Internship Proposal](#): This collaborative program of Moline Coal Valley School District offers a three-tiered student internship program at McLaughlin Body Company to juniors and seniors. The experiences include exposure to five different engineering-based careers, completing identified work-readiness standards, and resume and job interview preparation and support. At the culmination of the program, students have the possibility of full-time paid employment at McLaughlin.

# Systems and Processes Criteria

The successful growth of a work-based learning program requires system-wide support. These criteria can support practitioners to advocate with leadership for systemic support. To that end, the criteria include considerations that span the continuum, including equity and staff capacity.

	High-Quality Criteria
<b>Coordinated Continuum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students participate in a personalized and coordinated continuum of work-based learning experiences designed to provide opportunities for students to learn through work to demonstrate academic, technical, and essential employability skills.</li> <li>○ There is collaboration between secondary and postsecondary educators and community partners in co-designing and adopting the work-based learning continuum, ensuring the creation, design, and delivery of high-quality experiences.</li> </ul>
<b>Regional Capacity and Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The vision for a comprehensive work-based learning system considers a range of challenges including equity, quality, scheduling, transportation, and staffing and establishes program goals, who it will serve, and key program elements such as positive relationships with adults and network-building.</li> <li>○ A dedicated staff member coordinates across stakeholders to set expectations and provide time for all stakeholders to identify, communicate and support student needs.</li> <li>○ Leadership (e.g., convening leadership, administrators, work-based learning intermediaries) develops and/or advocates for goals and policies within their district strategic plan that ensure program staff have the time, resources, and support to implement each element of a high quality work-based learning program.</li> <li>○ Formalized processes, protocols, and tools are used to recruit and engage community partners based on pathways needs and aligned to regional labor/workforce data analysis.</li> </ul>
<b>Continuous Improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Clearly defined and established metrics and benchmarks inform a system for regularly tracking, reporting, and utilizing data to inform work-based learning program improvement and student outcomes.</li> <li>○ Data are used to provide strategic and systematic support, inform outreach, and marshal additional resources to address gaps and barriers that will improve student access and success, particularly for historically marginalized students.</li> </ul>
<b>Communications and Messaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Educators are aware of work-based learning opportunities, expectations, and timelines so that they can align and engage in pre- and post-activities as a part of their course.</li> <li>○ Leadership has a clearly articulated and public statement about the value and benefit of work-based learning and an outreach/marketing plan is in place to communicate with relevant constituents and stakeholders (e.g., community members, students and families, educators, community partners, etc.).</li> </ul>
<b>Equity and Access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work-based learning programs offer a comprehensive range of critical services to students to help address barriers to participation and support their need to balance work, school, extracurriculars, and family care responsibilities.</li> <li>○ In matching students to community partners for a work-based learning experience, practitioners balance meeting both students' and partner's needs by taking into account the varying needs of students and a partner's capacity to support them in the workplace, including assessing fit in terms of culture and diversity in the workplace.</li> </ul>
<b>Developmental Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work-based learning programs cultivate positive and healthy relationships with adults that promote the social, emotional, and cognitive growth that young adults need to succeed at work and navigate their next steps.</li> <li>○ The developmental relationships students engage in provide challenges that lead to growth, offer support to build confidence while navigating difficult situations, share power by involving youth in decision-making, and expand possibilities by connecting youth to new people, places, and ideas.</li> </ul>



### *Student Equity Considerations*

Through work-based learning experiences, students learn the fundamentals of essential employability skills, preparing themselves for careers beyond high school. When speaking with work-based learning coordinators and students, one of the biggest points of feedback for a successful program is centering focus on a student's needs. Coordinators need to understand the reason why students are participating in a work-based learning opportunity. For example, some students may be interested in learning more about a desired career pathway, while others may be interested in learning how to manage financial responsibilities. Understanding these objectives will allow coordinators to create a more open relationship in understanding difficulties that arise, as well as monitoring a student's progress in a work-based learning program.

Furthermore, students themselves should also understand what they can expect to learn from participating in a work-based learning experience. Most importantly, students should understand how to grow in their skill-building capabilities aligned with the state's recommended essential employability and technical skills. As students gain more experience in a career path and learn employability skills, learning about the process of earning endorsements can reduce the lack of awareness associated with work-based learning opportunities and increase the number of certifications for students.

### *Advisory Highlights*

Establishing high-quality work-based learning systems and processes distributes the workload evenly across various components of the system, including counselors, coordinators, educators, and community partners. While it is crucial to consider the capacity of individuals and schools, implementing such systems can help mitigate the need for dedicated staff in specific roles or overwhelmed areas. For example, creating a database of potential work-based learning community partners that monitors the demand of opportunities and facilitates high quality student placements, may alleviate the work of work-based learning coordinators.

It is important to designate a point person for each aspect of work-based learning to ensure smooth operation and clear communication. For instance, for consistent interaction with community partners, having at least one designated point person for external partner communication is essential.

These guidelines represent best practices and preferences, but they are not mandatory. While it is ideal to provide students with the support they need for successful participation in work-based learning, such as flexible scheduling, transportation, child care, or additional mentoring, this may not always be feasible. To begin, prioritize student needs and identify roles for individuals in the system to facilitate effective communication, then set forth on a path towards always striving for improvement together.

## Resources

- [5 Steps for Building & Strengthening Students' Networks](#): This playbook was developed by the Clayton Christensen Institute to support the implementation and adaptation of strategies, tools, and metrics that build and strengthen students' networks in support of their well-being and with the aim of expanding their postsecondary and career options.
- [Gap Analysis](#): This template from Career ConneCTEd Illinois is designed to help determine if work-based learning experience requirements or objectives are being met.
- [Staffing Considerations](#): This section of the Career Development Experience Toolkit was created to encourage organizations to examine the division of roles and responsibilities among their current staff before engaging with work-based learning experiences.
- [The Missing Metrics: Emerging Practices for Measuring Students' Relationships and Networks](#): This paper from the Clayton Christensen Institute provides a four-dimensional framework for building and measuring students social capital grounded in both research and practice.
- [Welcoming Young Talent: How to Prepare for High School Interns](#): This employer-facing resource from EdSystems outlines strategies for companies to create an environment that welcomes young talent, including preparing for high school interns, setting expectations, and fostering a positive work environment.
- **EXEMPLAR:** [Industry Executive Council and Pathways Advisory Boards](#): North Kansas City School District engages work-force leaders to keep its pathways focused on making the student experience real and relevant, monitoring progress, celebrating success, advocacy, providing accountability, and ultimately supporting the work-based learning needs of the pathways. The district publishes a one-page [Impact Report](#) to publicly engage stakeholders.
- **EXEMPLAR:** [Mentor Profile](#): This required form from Clairemont High School is used to match mentors to students carefully. It takes mentors approximately 15 minutes to complete and provides a detailed profile of each volunteer.

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# Appendices



# Sources Used in Quality Criteria Development

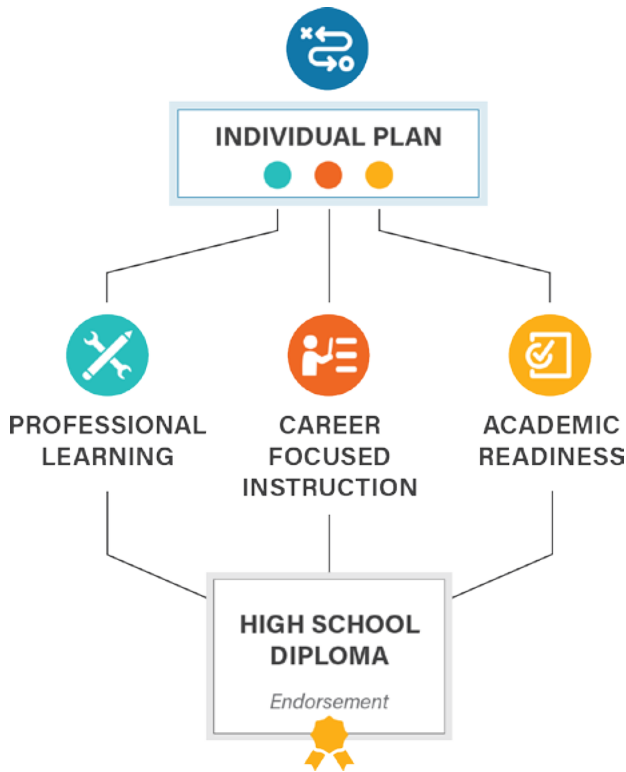
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# College and Career Pathway Endorsements System

The following framework is outlined in the [Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act](#), signed into law in 2016 to improve Illinois students' postsecondary and career readiness.



## INDIVIDUAL PLAN

Each student completing an endorsement must have an individualized plan, which includes college planning linked to early understanding of career goals, financial aid, resume, and personal statement.

## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Awareness, exploration, and preparation activities that provide opportunities for students to interact with adults in their workplace and gain essential employability and technical competencies.

9th	10th	11th	12th
At least 2 career exploration activities or 1 intensive experience		60 cumulative hours of paid or for credit, supervised career development experience(s) with a professional skills assessment r	
At least 2 team-based challenges with adult mentoring			

## CAREER-FOCUSED INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE

2 years of secondary coursework or equivalent that include essential employability and technical competencies, at least 6 hours of early college credit, and articulation to a postsecondary credential with labor market value.

9th	10th	11th	12th
Orientation / Introduction Courses			
Skill Development Courses			
			Capstone / Advanced Courses

## ACADEMIC READINESS

Ready for non-remedial coursework in reading and math by high school graduation through criteria defined by the school district and local community college.

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