



One in a series for Redesigning Education and Workforce Systems

## ► Integrating Learning and Work

### Why it Matters

Earning a degree is no longer enough to successfully launch a career and advance in the economy. Employers say that college graduates lack proficiency in skills necessary to succeed in the workplace. Meanwhile, two-thirds of college students say their schools are not doing a good job of connecting education to careers.

The COVID-induced disruptions to education and economic activity have made matters worse. One in five college students say COVID-19 has weakened opportunities for career exploration. Meanwhile, unemployment rates are highest among populations, like opportunity youth and adults in low-wage jobs, who would benefit the most from opportunities to improve their job readiness skills, expand their professional networks, and strengthen their ability to navigate the world of work.

Research shows that incorporating work-based learning into education and workforce development programs can address this job readiness and career advancement conundrum. Importantly, programs like apprenticeships and internships enable participants to earn income while they build skills and gain experience in their desired career fields. Work-based learning also benefits employers, because the trainees develop skills that make them good candidates for permanent jobs. The value of work-based learning

is increasingly well understood, and employers in fields like IT, manufacturing, and health care are embracing the model.

However, while work-based learning programs clearly benefit people who face barriers to career entry and advancement, women, people of color, and youth are underrepresented in apprenticeships, and people in rural areas and other communities with few employers and unreliable internet service have limited access to work-based learning opportunities, especially those that involve remote work and instruction.

### Current Challenges

- Educators and workforce development providers have a limited understanding of how to structure learning in the workplace and provide clear connections to the next steps in career or academic pathways.
- A lack of time and money makes it difficult to engage with employers.
- Secondary and postsecondary systems lack consistent metrics for quality of, accountability for, and attention to work-based learning and, more broadly, career readiness.
- Inconsistent alignment, coordination, and investment across education and workforce systems makes it difficult to deliver work-based learning to the learners, workers, and employers who would benefit.

## What's Needed

Integration of learning and work to provide people with real-world opportunities to apply the lessons learned in classroom settings, build professional networks, earn money while they learn, and get a head start on the road to a career.

## What State Policymakers Can Do

### Foundational Steps

- ▶ Establish a statewide initiative to promote the expansion of high-quality work-based learning experiences. This should include clearly defining work-based learning, setting goals, and developing strategies that expand access to work-based learning. The initiative should create consistent guidelines and braid funding to support cross-sector partners in co-designing work-based learning experiences. States also should create incentives for the implementation of advanced forms of work-based learning, including Registered Apprenticeship, and recognize pre-apprenticeships that lead to Registered Apprenticeship.

### Advanced Steps

- ▶ Invest in intermediary organizations that create the infrastructure needed for successful work-based learning. Intermediaries can help lead efforts to integrate learning and work by developing and monitoring state strategic plans; managing relationships; facilitating partnerships; serving as conveners, brokers, and technical assistance providers across systems; and identifying, monitoring, and reporting key metrics. By doing that, they make it easier for employers to get involved and enable education and training providers to use their time efficiently.
- ▶ Ensure equitable access to high-quality work-based learning opportunities. States should collect and report disaggregated data on participation and wage and career outcomes to verify that marginalized populations have equitable access to work-based learning and progress to in-demand careers. They should also offer career navigation services and scale initiatives that close equity gaps, such as expansions of transportation and broadband services. In addition, states should set an expectation that partnering employers participate in trainings on workplace culture and equity.

### Transformational Steps

- ▶ Set the expectation that high-quality work-based learning experiences be integrated throughout secondary and postsecondary curricula and into rigorous job training programs. As part of this effort, policymakers should set clear career readiness accountability measures that prioritize work-based learning. They should also provide guidance and an infrastructure for facilitating credit articulation for work-based learning experiences, incorporating work-based learning into degree programs, and providing sufficient funding and technical assistance to implement, scale, and sustain these efforts.

## State Spotlights

### Colorado

In July 2020, the state of Colorado passed legislation supporting CareerWise Colorado, a statewide intermediary that supports a youth apprenticeship program in which participants split time between high school and the workplace. Apprentices begin the program in grade 11 and finish in their 13th year. They earn money and gain hands-on experience through which they apply what they learn in school. When they finish, they earn nationally recognized certifications and college credit. Participating employers add well-trained workers to their talent pipelines, have opportunities to mentor young people, and help build a diverse workforce.

### Washington

In 2019, Washington passed legislation creating Career Connect Washington (CCW), a statewide collective action initiative whose mission is to combine classroom learning with career experiences to prepare youth and young adults for postsecondary education and the workforce. CCW uses a career-connected learning continuum that includes three steps: Career Explore, Career Prep, and Career Launch. Influential employers support CCW, and a tax on large employers helps fund the initiative. One key to CCW's success is its focus on building a network of intermediary organizations that create the infrastructure needed to support the implementation of work-based learning. More than 150 programs are serving young people at every step along the career-connected learning continuum.

### Hawai'i

Using federal CARES Act funding that it secured through the U.S. Department of Education's Reimagining Workforce Preparation Grant program, Hawai'i developed and expanded high-quality statewide apprenticeship programs. The tourism and hospitality industries typically drive the state's regional economies, but now that COVID has disrupted those sectors, officials are focusing on developing apprenticeship programs in new and emerging industries that need skilled workers and have paths to advancement for all state residents.

## Featured JFF Resources

### Expanding High-Quality Work-Based Learning.

In this brief published by the Education Commission of the States, JFF's policy team recommends state policies that support the development and expansion of high-quality work-based learning experiences during the pandemic-driven economic downturn.

[Read More Here](#) ▶

### JFF's Work-Based Learning Framework.

JFF's Center for Apprenticeship & Work-Based Learning provides a framework that offers state policymakers, intermediaries, and practitioners guidelines for creating and implementing high-quality WBL programs.

[Read More Here](#) ▶

### State Policy Road Map for an Equitable

### Economic Recovery

*This resource is a part of a series that provides state policy solutions focused on people, places, and systems – with the goal of closing equity gaps and driving economic advancement for all.*

[Read Full Series](#) ▶

