1.08.03	Why WBL is Important / Why WBL Fails / The Universe of WBL Opportunities

Why Workplace-Based Learning (WBL) is Important

Different resources created for different states indicate dozens of reasons why WBL is important for high school students. These different reasons can be categorized in four ways:

1) **Relevance** – for far too many students, high school can be uninspiring . . . even boring. These students can't find the linkage between "regular" school work and what captures their interest and enthusiasm. CTE classes are, for many of these students, the best way to fire their imagination and bring passion to their schoolwork. But this lack of connection between school and what fires their interests returns once they walk back into their academic-subject classrooms.

   For students who find school boring – or even top academic students who need some motivation from time to time – WBL provides a motivating linkage between classwork and the opportunities of adult life. Imaginative, proactive CTE leaders can find ways to form teams of CTE and academic-subject teachers who create WBL-linked assignments that demonstrate how academic concepts tie to the world of work (while helping students master key literacy, numeracy, communications, team-building and problem-solving skills). WBL becomes the fulcrum of the student's high school career, the activity that elevates otherwise-uninteresting school work to a level at which students *want* to engage;

2) **Confidence** – students don't gain confidence by engaging with parents or teachers. The experience is too common. In many cases, teenage high school students find themselves in constant conflict with parents and at least some teachers.

But students are more often motivated to excel with they are in contact with unfamiliar workplace adults.

The students' first reaction isn't necessarily confidence. In fact, the prospect of engagement with unfamiliar workplace adults almost always causes terrific anticipatory anxiety among students.

Properly-structured WBL enables students to succeed in their interactions with unfamiliar workplace adults. These "real world" experiences help students learn the importance of – and master – critical workplace behaviors and communication skills.

Invariably – once they've succeeded with their curated WBL exercise – students are *thrilled.* They regard their WBL as among their most memorable and treasured high school experiences. And their confidence soars.

> **Why WBL is Important**
> - **Relevance** – properly-implemented WBL provides students with hands-on examples of how their CTE and academic course work is relevant to life after high school
> - **Confidence** – every type of WBL gives students the opportunity to gain confidence by mastering key workplace behaviors and soft skills
> - **Awareness** – WBL offers students a window to the universe of professional and personal opportunities available to them
> - **Maturation / Transformation** – WBL enables students to learn about themselves and how they might fit into the adult world, potentially serving as the catalyst that transforms students into young adults on the pathway to personal and career success

3) **Awareness** – properly created, WBL provides *all* students (no matter where they live or their personal circumstances) a window to the universe of professional and personal opportunities available to them.

   Many of us work with students who have limited opportunities to explore the options of the world around them – limited opportunities, and maybe even no expressed interest in finding out what lies beyond their school or their neighborhood. These self-imposed limitations deny students access to the amazing opportunities available to every American.

   The first step students can take to envisioning their best future is seeing first-hand the full universe of career opportunities. Except for the handful born rich, *all* students will work for a living – ***all students are career students!*** WBL helps them learn about diverse 21st Century careers, and how features of each career might appeal to them.

4) **Maturation / Transformation** – properly curated, WBL offers students the dual opportunity of: a) enhancing proficiency on basic academic skills (verbal and written communications particularly); and b) practicing skills essential to adult success (teamwork, problem-solving and attention-to-detail, in addition to enhanced communications skills. Practicing these adult skills helps students understand what work requires, and how they need to grow to succeed in the workplace.

   Engaging students with unfamiliar adults is perhaps the best way for them to recognize that workplace expectations are more demanding than those of high school, averting what could be repeated job turnover after they graduation from high school. WBL is perhaps the single best way to help high school students advance their social-emotional maturity.

WBL isn't only important to CTE students. ***Properly-designed and faithfully-implemented WBL is essential for all students – regardless of interests, abilities or personal circumstances – to realize their full adult potential.***

Why WBL Fails

All of us have the best intentions when developing and deploying WBL . . . but too often our WBL programs may not meet our enthusiastic expectations. Why does WBL fail?

Why WBL Fails

- **Insufficient imagination** – WBL offerings can become stale and limited unless CTE leaders leverage imagination, technology and enthusiasm to create a broad portfolio of innovative WBL options

- **Insufficient quality control** – properly-implemented WBL includes proactive organization and regular follow-up with students, families, employers and regional stakeholders

- **Insufficient relevance** – WBL integrated with academic coursework and student counseling has the best opportunity to be truly transformative for every engaged student, educator and industry stakeholder

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Insufficient imagination – too often we recycle the same job fairs, the same classroom speakers, the same methods we've used for years on end. Even great methods get stale at some point.

The really great news is: new virtual technologies (available to any classroom with a laptop with a camera and an internet connection) bring with them a limitless universe of WBL opportunities.

Your students want to talk with an orthopedic surgeon, a rocket scientist, a refinery process tech, a professional athlete or a video game developer? No problem. All of these individuals are available with a few clicks of the mouse.

Want to find industry judges for a class contest? No problem.

Want to create a "job fair treasure hunt" requiring students to gather nuggets of information that actually require them to engage in meaningful ways with the industry adults present? No problem.

Want to require students to complete meaningful reflection exercises on their internships / co-ops / apprenticeships that help them master key verbal and written communication skills, while engaging their workplace adults in the evaluation of these exercises? Totally doable.

New technologies and available best practices resources mean that you can create a broad portfolio of WBL options that are doable for your teachers (i.e., don't take up too much time, provide predictably effective results, tied to each teacher's curriculum) while providing outstanding value to both your students and the industry stakeholders involved.

Insufficient quality control – properly-implemented WBL requires lots of follow-up. As with any entrepreneurial venture, proactivity is rewarded in delivered quality and stakeholder results.

The first step in quality control is establishing great organization. Most CTE leaders already know this and implement regular systems to make sure students show up where they're supposed to show up, engaged and effective during their WBL.

The more-overlooked second step is the follow-up required to develop "lessons learned" that improve future WBL. Feedback from students, families, employers and engaged regional stakeholders give CTE leaders and teachers insights they can use as part of their continuous improvement efforts.

Insufficient relevance – the best WBL is integrated with the academic coursework students are completing. This is especially important for traditional CTE students who may not be as enthusiastic about completing academic assignments as they are engaging with their hands-on CTE coursework. But it is equally true that academically-inclined students will find tremendous value and motivation with WBL, since it can give them a preview of their future.

The biggest hurdle in improving the relevance of WBL for university-oriented students is getting academic-subject teachers to engage. Candidly, academic-subject teachers are all extremely busy with required lesson plans tied to the standardized tests their students will be taking at the end of the school year.

That's why, in some cases, WBL with academic-subject teachers may need to take place after high-stakes tests, or during "quiet times" in the school year.

But the best case is when CTE leaders can work with their academic-subject colleagues to find ways to embed core academic materials in the CTE instructional resources that students must complete. That way, the WBL reinforces the basic need for this information / these skills, while providing greater relevance for what the students are learning.

For CTE students, the linkage to relevance is thankfully easier. Giving students the opportunity to indicate which types of workplace experts they want to engage is a proven-effective way to increase their interest and cement their participation. Assigning one-on-one communications (Thank You Notes are especially effective) also increases engagement and relevance.

The Universe of WBL Opportunities

The text box on the right provides a snapshot of the universe of WBL opportunities, starting with the easiest-to-arrange and least complex to those WBL modalities that require the greatest amount of effort to organize . . . and consequently provide the most in-depth student engagement / experience.

> **The Universe of WBL Opportunities**
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> 1) Industry classroom speakers (in-person or virtual) – *can include structured activities (like expert interviews)*
> 2) Workplace field trips (including virtual visits)
> 3) Day-on-the-job / job shadowing
> 4) Job fairs
> 5) Internships
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> Check for uploaded implementation artifacts on www.lacteleaders.com
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> 6) Simulated workplaces / School-based enterprises
> 7) Co-ops
> 8) Apprenticeships

The first three modalities – classroom speakers, field trips and days-on-the-job – are well understood. Each can be energized and enhanced by specific activities assigned to students, like some type of interview and/or follow-up written assignment.

Included with this module's materials is an Employer's Guide to Work-based Learning (from the nonprofit Change the Equation - http://www.changetheequation.org/) that can help industry partners understand how they can most efficiently maximize the value of their WBL commitments.

This guide also covers job fairs – they're a well-known but much more demanding form of WBL. *Our goal for later in 2018 is to upload "best practices" resources on holding job fairs contributed by Academy participants, so that other CTE leaders don't have to reinvent the wheel in terms of the preparation and implementation of highly-effective job fairs.*

The last four types of WBL are all time-intensive, for CTE leaders, teachers and students.

5) Internships can include the types of jobs that students already seek, offering students the opportunity to receive both academic credit and pay. (Louisiana students *may* receive pay during an internship where they earn academic credit; this is a widely misunderstood policy.) Students earn the academic credit by engaging in a series of reflection exercises that help them master key workplace communication skills. The resources teachers and students must use for internships in Louisiana can be downloaded from the *All Things Jump Start* web portal: https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/jump-start-student-internship-guidelines Louisiana is also working with Big Picture Learning on a pilot test of the ImBlaze cellphone-based system that helps students and employers find each other for productive internships while automating all required recordkeeping.

6) Simulated workplaces and the more-recently-developed concept of school-based enterprises are both efforts to create "jobs at school," although they take very different approaches. School-based enterprises are actual company sites on a school campus (often a food service outlet). Simulated workplaces are the best replication of a workplace that a teacher and students can create on campus. A great resources for understanding and implementing simulated workplaces is the *Alabama Simulated Workplace Manual*, included with the resources in this module.

7) Co-ops are more extensive than internships, requiring far greater teacher engagement and student academic deliverables. *Our goal for later in 2018 is to upload "best practices" resources on co-ops.*

8) Apprenticeships is a WBL modality attracting a great deal of attention at a national level. There is no question that a properly-designed apprenticeship provides students with the most comprehensive WBL, as well as the best pathway to entry-level employment in high-demand sectors. The challenge with apprenticeships is that they are most "doable" for students in communities near large employers. This means that students in more remote areas have no reasonable access to apprenticeships. *Because we are focused on maximizing opportunities for all students, this module will not provide extensive details on apprenticeship opportunities . . . but we're open to including these resources in 2019 if there is that request from Academy participants.*

Given new technologies and a bit of imagination, *all* students should have access to a robust portfolio of WBL options, no matter where they live or what their personal circumstances may be.

These WBL options should be driven by your students evolving interests, and effective in enhancing basic academic and workplace skills. Students should be free to participate in as many WBL modalities as their schedules allow.

The www.lacteleaders.com website will be uploading a growing body of implementation resources for every WBL modality, which all Academy participants are welcome to adapt and adopt.