

Career Practicum:

A Work-Based Learning Strategy

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Developed in partnership with the following organizations as well as the individuals listed on the inside of this cover.



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Why Career Practicum?

Defining Career Practicum as a distinct set of work-based learning experiences supports a shift in mindsets and practices around work-based learning within high school college and career pathway programs.

If work-based learning experiences are to become a primary vehicle by which all students make progress toward pathway student outcomes, then more work-based learning experiences will need to be:

- Student-outcome driven rather than activity driven.
- For *all* students rather than some students.
- Focused on college *and* career readiness rather than only career or job readiness.
- Integrated and essential to the program of study rather than a separate and extra program.
- Supported by a team of academic and career-technical teachers rather than only by career-technical teachers.
- Centered in the workplace, at school, and supported by technology or a combination of all of these rather than only located in the workplace.

Career Practicum experiences are defined by the specific student outcomes they support and the specific criteria for implementation, not by the type of activity in which students participate. All Career Practicum experiences support higher-level college and career readiness student outcomes, include extended interaction with professionals from industry and the community, and are designed to give students supervised practical application of previously studied theory. Career Practicum can be implemented through a variety of different activities including, for example, integrated projects, internships, student-run enterprises and virtual enterprises.

An additional reason for defining Career Practicum is to expand the range of higher-intensity work-based learning experiences available to students. Commonly, internships are viewed as the only or most important in-depth work-based learning activity. Career Practicum includes internships as one important activity option and also supports a broader range of higher-intensity work-based learning experiences that can be effectively scaled to reach more students.

The purpose of this document is to define and support the implementation of Career Practicum as a set of work-based learning experiences that play an important role on the continuum of work-based learning.

How Does Career Practicum Relate to Other Types of Work-Based Learning Experiences?

Work-based learning is a continuum of educational strategies stretching from kindergarten into adulthood that are intentionally designed to help students extend and deepen classroom work and make progress toward learning outcomes that are difficult to achieve through classroom or standard project-based learning alone.

The term “work-based” does not mean the experience must occur at a workplace. Work-based learning may take place in a workplace, in the community, at school; be supported virtually via technology; or take place across a combination of all these settings.

Work-based learning has three primary purposes.

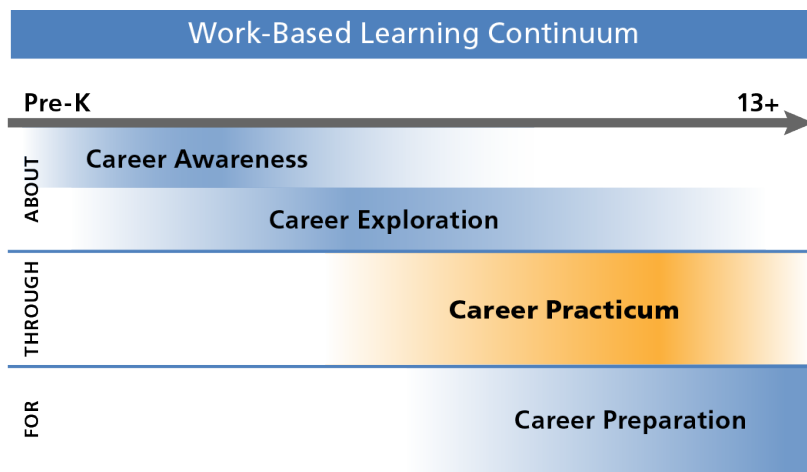
- Learning **ABOUT** work.
- Learning **THROUGH** work.
- Learning **FOR** work.

Traditionally, the work-based learning continuum has encompassed Career Awareness, Exploration, and Preparation. Career Awareness and Exploration experiences support learning **ABOUT** work.

Career Preparation experiences support learning **FOR** work, namely preparation for a specific range of occupations.

Introducing Career Practicum as an additional component of the continuum gives the field a clear way to discuss and implement experiences that support learning **THROUGH** work.

Career Practicum bridges Career Exploration and Career Preparation, as they have commonly been defined, by providing clarity about the possibilities for experiences in between the two. A specific activity, such as an internship or a job shadow, may be used in several places along the continuum depending on the student outcomes it supports and how it is designed.



Work-Based Learning Continuum Definitions

Career Awareness	Students build awareness of the variety of careers available and begin identifying areas of interest.
Career Exploration	Students explore career options for motivation and to inform decision making.
Career Practicum	Students apply learning through practical experience and interaction with professionals from industry and the community outside of school in order to extend and deepen classroom work and support the development of college and career readiness knowledge and skills (higher-order thinking, academic skills, technical skills, and applied workplace skills).
Career Preparation	Students prepare for employment in a specific range of occupations.

Definition of Career Practicum

Career Practicum is applied learning that provides students with practical experience and interaction with professionals from industry and the community outside of school in order to extend and deepen classroom work and support the development of college and career readiness knowledge and skills (higher-order thinking, academic skills, technical skills, and applied workplace skills).

Career Practicum experiences have the following characteristics:

- Students have direct, systematic interaction with professionals from industry and the community over a period of time.
- The experience is an integrated part of a sequential preparation for college and career and is also explicitly integrated into students' current academic and technical curriculum.
- The depth and length of the experience is sufficient to enable students to develop and demonstrate specific knowledge and skills.
- The experience prioritizes the development of transferable, applied workplace skills while also seeking to reinforce and provide opportunities to apply the basic and higher-order academic skills and technical skills being learned in the classroom.
- Students engage in activities that have consequences beyond the class or value beyond success in school and are judged by outside professionals from industry and the community using industry standards.
- Students develop skills and knowledge applicable to multiple career and postsecondary education options.

Career Practicum experiences do not have to occur at a workplace. They may take place in a workplace, in the community, or at school; be supported virtually via technology; or take place across a combination of all these settings.

Career Practicum experiences are most suitable for high school students. Ideally, students have more than one Career Practicum experience in high school, each of which may support subsets of appropriate student learning outcomes such that over the course of their experience they have the opportunity to make progress toward all of the outcomes associated with Career Practicum. In addition, a Career Practicum experience, whether in the form of an internship or an alternative form, can serve as the culminating work-based learning experience for a high school student in a college and career pathway program.

Student Learning Outcomes Supported by Career Practicum

Student learning outcomes drive all work-based learning, just as they drive all other learning experiences. Career Practicum experiences are driven by high-level college and career readiness outcomes that integrate and reinforce academic, technical, and applied workplace skills. This set of outcomes for Career Practicum is supported by extensive research around college and career readiness cited at the end of this document.

These outcomes are a minimum set of learning outcomes a Career Practicum experience aims to support. Many Career Practicum experiences will also support additional outcomes specific to the student’s individual learning plan, the school program (i.e., pathway outcomes, graduation requirements, ROP, CPA, WIA, etc.), or additional industry-specific technical skills.

Category	Student Learning Outcome
	<i>Student...</i>
Collaboration and Teamwork	Builds effective collaborative working relationships with colleagues and customers; is able to work with diverse teams, contributing appropriately to the team effort; negotiates and manages conflict; learns from and works collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, ethnicities, ages, gender, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints; and uses technology to support collaboration.
Communication	Comprehends verbal, written, and visual information and instructions; listens effectively; observes non-verbal communication; articulates and presents ideas and information clearly and effectively both verbally and in written form; and uses technology appropriately for communication.
Creativity and Innovation	Demonstrates originality and inventiveness in work; communicates new ideas to others; and integrates knowledge across different disciplines.
Critical Thinking and Problem Solving	Demonstrates the following critical-thinking and problem-solving skills: exercises sound reasoning and analytical thinking; makes judgments and explains perspectives based on evidence and previous findings; and uses knowledge, facts, and data to solve problems.
Information Management	Is open to learning and demonstrates the following information gathering skills: seeks out and locates information; understands and organizes information; evaluates information for quality of content, validity, credibility, and relevance; and references sources of information appropriately.
Initiative and Self-Direction	Takes initiative and is able to work independently as needed; looks for the means to solve problems; actively seeks out new knowledge and skills; monitors his/her own learning needs; learns from his/her mistakes; and seeks information about related career options and postsecondary training.
Professionalism and Ethics	Manages time effectively; is punctual; takes responsibility; prioritizes tasks; brings tasks and projects to completion; demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior; and acts responsibly with others in mind.
Quantitative Reasoning	Uses math and quantitative reasoning to describe, analyze, and solve problems; performs basic mathematical computations quickly and accurately; and understands how to use math and/or data to develop possible solutions.
Technology	Selects and uses appropriate technology to accomplish tasks; applies technology skills to problem solving; uses standard technologies easily; and is able to quickly access information from reliable sources online.
Workplace Context and Culture	Understands the workplace’s culture, etiquette, and practices; knows how to navigate the organization; understands how to build, utilize, and maintain a professional network of relationships; and understands the role such a network plays in personal and professional success.

Criteria for Designing and Assessing a Career Practicum Experience

High-quality Career Practicum experiences have specific characteristics. The criteria listed here support rigor, consistency, and equity when designing, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of the experience in supporting the desired student outcomes.

Criteria	Characteristics
	<i>The Career Practicum experience...</i>
Purpose	Has learning as its primary purpose and is an integrated part of a sequential preparation for college and career.
Outcomes	Is designed using student learning outcomes, relevant college and career readiness standards, and context-specific professional and industry standards.
Relevance	Is relevant to the student's career interests, individual learning needs, and the pathway theme; has consequences beyond the class or value beyond success in school.
Integration	Is integrated into the student's academic and technical curriculum.
Variety	Involves a variety of tasks, opportunities to work with multiple adults, and opportunities to work in individual and group settings—without compromising the depth of the experience.
Preparation	Is prefaced by preparation for the student in class and in previous less-intensive experiences with the academic, technical, and applied workplace skills needed for a Career Practicum experience; orientation for the student to the learning expectations for the experience and to the individuals and/or organizations with which he/she will be engaged; preparation for the partners prior to the experience with information about the student, the individual student learning outcomes, and other information relevant to the experience.
Interaction	Provides opportunities for the student to interact directly with professionals from industry and the community over a period of time.
Coordination	Is coordinated by the student, teacher, pathway team, partner, and parent/guardian; each understands their respective roles and responsibilities in supporting the experience, ensuring progress toward student learning outcomes, and communicating with each other before, during, and after the experience.
Reflection	Engages the student in reflection and analysis throughout the experience and after it concludes in order to link the experience back to the student learning outcomes and forward to career and postsecondary options.
Assessment	Involves the student, pathway team, and partner in assessing progress toward student learning outcomes and the work produced against college and career readiness standards and context-specific professional standards; asks the student to demonstrate what was learned from the experience by documenting learning during the experience and presenting at the end to teachers and those with whom he/she has worked.

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