

Work-Based Learning for Students with Disabilities

What is Work-Based Learning?

Work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities are supervised, school-coordinated activities which provide opportunities for students to achieve employment related competencies in a workplace environment. These activities extend the classroom into the workplace and are related to students' career interests and program of study. Work-based learning experiences involve assessment of students' interests, aptitudes, and abilities while learning about career possibilities. These experiences can also increase the likelihood of employment and community integration for students with disabilities when they become adults, help to teach 21st century workplace readiness skills, and support national and state initiatives such as Employment First and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs.

Building Career and College Readiness

Work-based learning builds career and college readiness through a continuum of experiences designed to foster improved educational outcomes for students with disabilities. This continuum may include experiences in the following four areas:

Awareness: Students learn about work through various careers

Exploration: Students learn about work by connecting interests with specific careers

Preparation: Students learn through work

Training: Students learn to work in a specific career of choice

Examples of Work-Based Learning Experiences

- Workplace tours
- Work-related field trips
- Guest speakers
- Employer presentations
- Career fairs
- Business mentorships
- Job shadowing
- Volunteering
- Job training
- Service learning
- Student run enterprises
- Work-study programs
- Paid and unpaid internships
- Apprenticeships
- Paid employment
- Career & Technical Education course projects and competitions such as Skills USA

Key Components of Work-Based Learning

Requirements

- Follows applicable school, state, and federal mandates
- Follows compliance guidelines for confidentiality as defined through IDEA regulations
- Takes place in the workplace or a simulated workplace environment
- Is monitored and evaluated
- Is supported by school personnel
- Is clearly defined in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students receiving special education services for work-based learning experiences

Best Practices

- Is driven by individual preferences and needs rather than availability
- Is evaluated by individual outcomes rather than the number of students participating
- Is integrated into students' programs of study and pathway program
- Includes partnerships with adult or outside agencies
- Is documented in the student's IEP if the experiences are through general curriculum & NO special services or supports are needed

Determining when a Student is Entitled to Wages

The United States Department of Labor (DOL) has provided guidelines in the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) that help determine if an "employee relationship" has been established in work-based learning experiences. It is important to remember if an "employee relationship" has been established, then the student is entitled to wages. If the "employee relationship" has not been established, the student is not entitled to wages. The DOL provides additional guidelines regarding the time students are allowed to spend in specific experiences in community work-based experiences to ensure an "employee relationship" does not exist & FLSA is not being violated:

Career Exploration (limited to 5 hours/job) - a brief exposure to a variety of work settings and may include work site field trips or job shadowing to view the type of work being performed.

Career Assessment (limited to 90 hours/job) - an extended observation where the student undertakes work assignments for the purpose of assessing his/her interests, aptitudes, and support needs.

Work-Related Training (limited to 120 hours/job) - a period of work experience for the purpose of training job skills and job-related skills.

Additional Information

Virginia Department of Education's Career and Technical Education Work-Based Learning
doe.virginia.gov/instruction/career_technical/work-based_learning

National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center: Youth to Work Coalition
nsttac.org/ytw/wble-examples/youth-with-disabilities

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disabilities for Youth
ncwd-youth.info/work-based-learning