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Indiana

Work-Based Learning in Action

State incentives for employers, a committed network of employer intermediaries, and prioritization of work-based learning in state policy contribute to Indiana's strengths.

Indiana is forging a path to provide all learners access to high-quality work-based learning opportunities. Forty-nine percent of students pursuing a bachelor's degree at public institutions in Indiana report participating in at least one quality work-based experience (a paid internship, co-op, paid practicum, paid undergraduate research, or apprenticeship) before graduation – six percentage points higher than the U.S. average of 43 percent. A history of state incentives for employers, committed network of employer intermediaries, and prioritization of work-based learning in state policy contribute to Indiana's strengths in work-based learning. More recently, the state's dedicated efforts to focus on both secondary and postsecondary institutions draw from successful apprenticeship models, creating even more apprenticeship pathways for learners.

- ➔ To ensure work-based learning programs in Indiana meet industry needs, several intermediary organizations play a prominent role in increasing employer awareness and simplifying the process of reaching interns.



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Indiana's approach

Indiana's approach to scaling work-based learning incorporates a range of activities:

- **Incentivizing employer and student participation.** Introduced in 2013, the Employment Aid Readiness Network, or EARN Indiana, reimburses participating employers up to 50 percent of the wages they pay to eligible high school and postsecondary interns.¹
- **Defining quality work-based learning experiences.** As part of administering EARN funds, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education defined what constitutes a quality work-based learning opportunity. At a high level, the experience must include elements of workplace exposure, skills building, and team collaboration, and assigned projects must contribute to the organization's long-term results.²
- **Having a committed employer intermediary ecosystem.** To ensure work-based learning programs meet industry needs, intermediary organizations Ascend Indiana (an initiative of the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership), the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, EmployIndy, and many other regional intermediaries play a prominent role in increasing employer awareness and simplifying the process of reaching interns.

➤ **Prioritizing work-based learning in higher education.** In 2024, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education published recommended enhancements to the state's higher education strategic plan, known as the Hoosier Opportunities & Possibilities through Education – or HOPE – Agenda. The HOPE Agenda's key pillars of enrollment, completion, and graduate retention work to ensure access to education and a better-prepared workforce. Work-based learning is one of the strategies put forth as a means to achieve these goals. Recommendations included embedding work-based learning in every Indiana degree program, formalizing employer engagement in postsecondary education and training, increasing performance-based funding for work-based learning, and expanding access to youth apprenticeships.³

Alignment with goals of state leadership

- Indiana established a goal for the 2023–2024 academic year to increase the number of high school students participating in career and technical education experiences, including work-based learning. This goal prompted a series of legislative actions that, over the years, strengthened the state's commitment to work-based learning at both the secondary and postsecondary levels.⁴
- In 2023, Indiana law enhanced the state's workforce data by requiring employers to report the employment of students enrolled in work-based learning courses to the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. The law additionally mandated that both secondary and postsecondary transcripts credit the completion of a work-based learning course.⁵
- In the same legislative session, state leaders passed legislation instituting Career Scholarship Accounts as an additional tool to help provide high school students opportunities to participate in high-quality work-based learning. The accounts cover costs related to training, equipment, transportation, and other expenses to remove barriers for students.⁶ Students can receive the \$5,000 Career Scholarship Account up to three times. There were 2,000 scholarships available in the 2024–2025 school year for all those in grades 10, 11, and 12.⁷
- In 2024, the state Department of Education released its high school diploma redesign to better prepare graduates for either higher education enrollment, military enlistment, or employment. In addition to the base diploma, all students will have an opportunity to earn a readiness seal. Seals were developed in collaboration with key stakeholders to create a transparent recipe for success whether a student plans to go to college, go straight into the workforce, or enlist in the military. Multiple seals have a work-based learning component, ranging from 75 to 650 hours with an employer. In 2025, the state's school funding formula was updated to incentivize the completion of a seal.⁸
- Most recently, 2025 saw the adoption of a new state law that expanded work-based learning requirements in higher education. This law calls for consideration of work-based learning as part of the program review process for postsecondary education, activating the Indiana Commission for Higher Education's recommendation to incorporate work-based learning into all degree programs. The legislation also fortified state workforce data collection by requiring the Indiana Department of Education and the Indiana Commission for Higher Education to collect post-graduation income data linked directly to student identification numbers, providing deeper insights into career outcomes.⁹

Strategy

State leaders have pursued a combination of policy efforts, learning from best practices, investment in intermediaries, and technology systems to strengthen work-based learning participation in the state.

- **Inspiration and field visits to learn about the Swiss system.** The Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation sponsored cohorts of state, education, and industry leaders traveling to Switzerland to study its training and education system at the Center on the Economics and Management of Education and Training Systems, or CEMETS. This has resulted in the launch of CEMETS iLab Indiana, a coalition dedicated to developing and implementing the Indiana Career Apprenticeship Pathway, offering an alternative pathway to sustaining careers for high school graduates.¹⁰ As part of the Indiana Career Apprenticeship Pathway, new industry talent associations have been developed to convene and align specific industries to create standardized career pathways that include apprenticeship.
- **Laws requiring and incentivizing work-based learning at both the secondary and postsecondary levels.** From the EARN incentive to the more recent high school diploma redesign and new postsecondary program review protocol, Indiana has a history of state policies oriented toward cultivating the growth of work-based learning opportunities for students in high school and college.
- **Investment into intermediaries and technology that can simplify employer engagement in work-based learning.** The Central Indiana Corporate Partnership convenes chief executive officers on issues relevant to business. Its affiliate, Ascend Indiana, plays a leading role in issues related to talent development and acquisition. Ascend Indiana developed and maintains a matching platform that allows employers to post internships and find students. Similarly, the Institute for Workforce Excellence at the Indiana Chamber of Commerce runs the Work and Learn Indiana platform, enabling employers to engage in a work-based learning marketplace and tap into the EARN incentive. To date, more than 11,000 employers have used the platform.

- Indiana continues to invest in strengthening the state's workforce data infrastructure to better measure and improve the journey from education to employment.

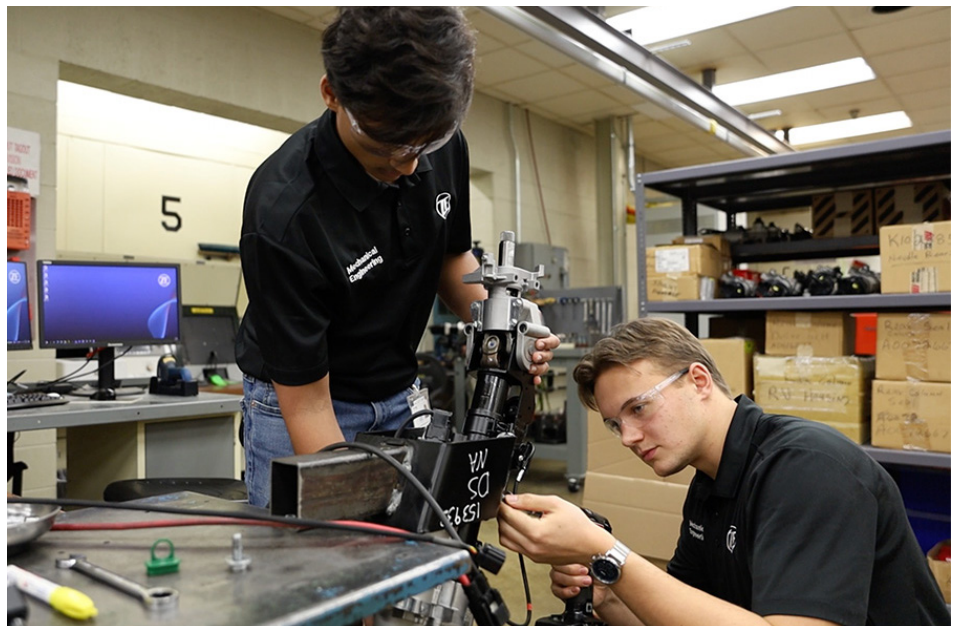


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Implementation and oversight

Key partners for expanding high-quality work-based learning experiences in Indiana include government, education, and industry entities:

- Ascend Indiana.
- The Indiana Department of Workforce Development.
- The Indiana Department of Education.
- Indiana Chamber of Commerce.
- The Indiana Commission for Higher Education.
- Indiana's two- and four-year higher education institutions.
- The Lilly Endowment and the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation.

Measuring success

Because legislation to redesign high school diplomas was signed into law relatively recently, longitudinal data on experience completion and employment outcomes by region are still emerging. In the meantime, the state continues to invest in strengthening the state's workforce data infrastructure to better measure and improve the journey from education to employment.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Indiana has developed several tools and resources to support its efforts:

- [Work and Learn's Resource Hub](#) is designed to support employers, educators, and community partners with navigating work-based learning. Resources include FAQs on understanding the U.S. Department of Labor's laws and regulations, how to access the state's EARN incentive, and promotions for upcoming statewide workshops and communities of practice related to work-based learning.
- [The Employer's Guide to Internships](#) is a guide for establishing an internship program.
- An [Internship Program Assessment](#) is designed to help employers make the decision of whether the organization is prepared to manage an internship program and explore what value an internship program can bring.
- [The Internship Agreement](#) is a project-scoping template for interns and their supervisors.

Endnotes

- 1 Work and Learn Indiana. (Indianapolis: Indiana Chamber of Commerce, 2021). https://www.workandlearnindiana.com/earn_info.
- 2 EARN Indiana. (Indianapolis: Indiana Commission for Higher Education, 2025). <https://www.in.gov/cche/state-financial-aid/state-financial-aid-by-program/earn-indiana/>.
- 3 "Partnership Pentagon: Strategic Recommendations to Bolster Indiana's Higher Education HOPE Agenda." (Indianapolis: Indiana Commission for Higher Education, 2024). https://www.in.gov/cche/files/2024_Partnership_Pentagon_05_21_25a.pdf.
- 4 Joni Wackwitz. "Gaining real-world experience: Strengthening career pathways through work-based learning." (Washington, DC: The Institute of Education Sciences, February 16, 2023). <https://ies.ed.gov/learn/blog/gaining-real-world-experience-strengthening-career-pathways-through-work-based-learning>.
- 5 House Bill 1638. (Indianapolis: Indiana General Assembly, 2023). <https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2023/bills/house/1638/details>.
- 6 House Bill 1002. (Indianapolis: Indiana General Assembly, 2023). <https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2023/bills/house/1002/details>.
- 7 Career Scholarship Accounts (CSA)s. (Indianapolis: Indiana Department of Education, 2025). <https://www.in.gov/doe/students/career-scholarship-accounts-csas/>.
- 8 Redesigning the Indiana Diploma. (Indianapolis: Indiana Department of Education, 2024). https://www.in.gov/doe/diplomas/#Final_Diploma_Rule.
- 9 Senate Bill 448. (Indianapolis: Indiana General Assembly, 2025). <https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2025/bills/senate/448/details>.
- 10 CEMETS iLab Indiana. (Indianapolis: Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, 2023). <https://www.rmff.org/our-work/ilabindiana/>.

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