



SC Work-Based Learning Report

Pursuant to Proviso 1A.5 (SDE-EIA): Work-Based Learning

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Introduction

This report, prepared in accordance with Proviso 1A.5 (SDE-EIA: Work-Based Learning), provides a comprehensive overview of South Carolina's Work-Based Learning (WBL) Program, highlighting key accomplishments, ongoing challenges, and strategic goals for future expansion. It also examines policy considerations to enhance program effectiveness and ensure access to high-quality career development experiences statewide.

The South Carolina WBL Program serves as a vital bridge between education and the workforce, providing students with real-world career experiences that align with industry demands. Through internships, apprenticeships, mentoring, and job shadowing, students gain critical skills essential for postsecondary success and long-term employability. The program is guided by 12 Regional Career Specialists (RCSs), who facilitate career development initiatives, professional learning for educators, and direct student support across the state.

Key Accomplishments (2022–23)

- 70,000+ students engaged in structured WBL experiences, including internships, apprenticeships, mentoring, and worksite field studies.
- 5,000+ business and industry partners collaborated with schools to provide career exposure and skill development opportunities.
- 200+ workforce development workshops trained 16,000+ educators, school counselors, and career specialists on best practices in career readiness.
- 45% increase in WBL participation compared to the previous school year, reflecting strong post-pandemic recovery and industry engagement.
- Expansion of virtual WBL opportunities, improving access for students facing transportation or scheduling barriers.

These milestones underscore the growing demand for high-quality, hands-on career experiences and reinforce WBL's critical role in preparing South Carolina's future workforce.

Challenges Limiting Work-Based Learning (WBL) Expansion

While South Carolina's Work-Based Learning (WBL) Program continues to grow and positively impact students, several structural and operational challenges limit student access and program effectiveness. Addressing these issues is critical to ensuring equitable career development opportunities for all students statewide.

Key Barriers to WBL Access & Effectiveness

- 1) Decentralized Coordination of Regional Career Specialists (RCSs)

- Originally established under the School-To-Work Act of 1994, RCSs now report to multiple fiscal agents, leading to salary disparities, inconsistent program delivery, and unequal student access to career guidance.
- 2) Transportation Limitations
- Students in rural areas face significant barriers in accessing off-campus WBL experiences due to lack of reliable transportation, limiting participation in internships and apprenticeships.
- 3) Scheduling Conflicts
- Misalignment between school schedules and standard business hours makes it challenging for students to engage in long-term WBL experiences, reducing workforce readiness opportunities.
- 4) Limited Employer Incentives
- Many businesses struggle to host student placements due to financial and logistical constraints, impacting apprenticeship and internship availability.
- 5) Inconsistent Data Reporting
- Variability in district-level reporting within PowerSchool limits the ability to assess statewide WBL impact, identify trends, and track student progress.

Policy Considerations for Improvement

To ensure all students—regardless of location—can access meaningful career experiences, targeted policy adjustments and program enhancements are necessary. Future initiatives should focus on improving coordination, enhancing employer engagement, addressing logistical barriers, and ensuring robust data collection to maximize the program’s effectiveness.

Looking Ahead: Future Goals

SCDE could further enhance the WBL Program by:

- Expanding partnerships with businesses and industries to increase internship and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Improving district-level data collection and accountability to track WBL participation more accurately.
- Providing targeted career ready experiences aligned with state sector strategies and workforce needs.
- Enhancing career-cluster-specific training and guidance for educators, students, and parents.
- Continuing to expand virtual and in-person WBL opportunities to ensure accessibility for all students.

These efforts will ensure South Carolina remains a leader in workforce preparation, equipping students with the skills and experiences needed for high-demand, high-wage careers.

Authorizing Legislation

The Work-Based Learning (WBL) Program in South Carolina is governed by key legislative provisions that establish the framework for career development initiatives, funding allocations, and accountability measures. These statutes and provisos guide the implementation of WBL programs, ensuring alignment with state economic and workforce development priorities.

S.C. Code Ann. § 59-59-60(1), -140, -200 (Supp. 2011)

- Mandates career guidance, work-based learning experiences, and regional career coordination to support student career readiness and workforce alignment.
- Establishes Regional Career Specialists (RCSs) to assist schools in implementing career guidance programs and expanding work-based learning opportunities.

Proviso 1A.5

1A.5. (SDE-EIA: Work-Based Learning) Of the funds appropriated in Part IA, Section 1, VIII.A.1. for the Work-Based Learning Program,¹ \$75,000 shall be used by the State Department of Education to provide for regional professional development in contextual methodology techniques and integration of curriculum, and professional development in career guidance for teachers and school counselors and training mentors. Pilot-site delivery of contextual methodology training in mathematics will be supported by technology and hands-on lab activities. In addition, \$500,000 shall be allocated for Regional Career Specialists. Each Regional Career Specialist shall (1) be housed within the regional centers/WIOA geographic areas, (2) provide career development activities throughout all schools within the region, (3) be under the program supervision of the Office of Career and Technical Education, State Department of Education, and (4) adhere to an accountability and evaluation plan created by the Office of Career and Technical Education, State Department of Education. **The Office of Career and Technical Education, State Department of Education, shall provide a report, in February of the current fiscal year to the Senate Finance Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee on accomplishments of the Regional Career Specialists.** Of the funds appropriated in the prior fiscal year, unexpended funds may be carried forward to the current fiscal year and expended for the same purposes.

¹ There is no line item in the budget for the Work-Based Learning Program. A former line for “Tech-Prep,” and others, were rolled up into the line for “Career & Technology Education” in the 2017-18 Appropriations Act.

Work-Based Learning Experiences

Work-Based Learning (WBL) in South Carolina has undergone significant changes over the past decade, with continued efforts to improve data collection and program implementation. Since 2008–09, WBL data has been electronically recorded, providing valuable insights into participation trends. However, shifts in student information systems, evolving school-business partnerships, and external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic have influenced reporting accuracy and participation rates. The following table illustrates the number of WBL experiences by type and year, offering a comprehensive overview of participation trends.

Table 1. K-12. Work-Based Learning Experiences by Type, between 2017-18 and 2023-24

Type of Experience	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
CTE Internship Credit Bearing Course	N/A	97	227	172	164	30	54
Cooperative Education	2,878	3,033	1,570	896	1,864	1,167	1848
Internship	4,539	4,276	3,540	2,128	4,089	5,551	7081
Mentoring	2,318	2,246	1,667	1,240	1,353	1,589	992
Registered Apprenticeship	95	57	40	33	47	72	95
School-Based Enterprise	4,653	4,110	2,869	3,037	4,136	4,158	5000
Service Learning	15,630	11,835	7,972	5,440	6,288	9,011	10,903
Shadowing: On-Site	30,216	33,398	23,767	1,396	13,090	25,168	30,767
Shadowing: Virtual	25,158	22,766	15,800	27,045	30,166	23,203	24,210
Structured Field Study	36,620	36,023	25,432	18,506	23,198	52,517	62,175
Youth Apprenticeship	361	96	53	34	51	73	35
Total Experiences	122,468	117,840	82,937	59,927	84,446	122,984	143,160

Key Observations and Data Trends

1. Overall WBL participation dropped significantly between 2019–20 and 2020–21 due to pandemic-related disruptions but has since rebounded with a 16% increase from 2022–23 to 2023–24.
2. Internships, cooperative education, and structured field study programs saw steady growth in recent years, indicating increasing employer engagement.
3. Shadowing (on-site) and virtual WBL options remain critical components, particularly for students with limited transportation access.
4. Youth apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships continue to underrepresent total WBL opportunities, highlighting the need for expanded employer partnerships, and the age limitations of official apprenticeships.

Addressing Data Collection Challenges

The Office of Career and Technical Education (CTE) implemented targeted interventions to support districts and schools in improving data accuracy:

- Since 2014–15, Regional Career Specialists (RCSs) have provided technical assistance to districts struggling with PowerSchool reporting.
- SCDE-led professional development workshops have trained educators on accurate WBL data entry methodologies.
- Ongoing monitoring and technical support have improved data consistency and reporting diligence despite staffing transitions.

These measures have led to significant improvements in WBL data quality. However, the absence of a statewide WBL reporting function remains a challenge. Establishing a centralized, uniform reporting system would ensure statewide access to WBL opportunities and improve program accountability.

Challenges Affecting WBL Participation

Despite improvements, WBL participation has faced fluctuations, with notable declines beginning in 2018–19 due to several factors:

1. Scheduling Conflicts
 - a. Variations in district schedules and career center bell times create misalignment between student availability and employer expectations.
 - b. The time-intensive nature of WBL often conflicts with academic scheduling constraints, limiting student participation in long-term experiences like internships and apprenticeships.
2. Transportation Barriers
 - a. Rising transportation costs and district budget constraints make it difficult for schools to provide busing for WBL placements.
 - b. Students are increasingly required to arrange their own transportation,

disproportionately affecting rural and lower-income students.

- c. Ongoing bus driver shortages further limit districts' ability to transport students to off-campus sites.

3. Role Overload for School Personnel

- a. Many school administrators, counselors, and career specialists must manage WBL coordination duties in addition to their academic, career, and social-emotional support roles.
- b. The lack of dedicated WBL coordinators in school districts results in inconsistent implementation and employer engagement efforts.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on WBL

In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented disruptions to WBL participation:

- Virtual learning limited students' ability to engage in hands-on work experiences.
- Health and safety restrictions led to a sharp decline in employer-hosted internships and apprenticeships.
- Many industries reduced or eliminated student placements, significantly impacting WBL engagement rates.

To address these challenges, SCDE and OCTE implemented innovative virtual solutions:

- [SC Career Guidance/Work-Based Learning Virtual Toolkit](#): Expanded remote WBL options.
- [SC Work-Based Learning Implementation Guide](#): Provided districts with updated strategies for WBL continuity.
- [Business & Industry Toolkit](#) & [Online Engagement Hub](#): Strengthened connections between schools and employers, ensuring students could still access career-related experiences.

Looking Ahead: Strengthening WBL Data & Participation

South Carolina continues to prioritize the expansion and improvement of WBL experiences by:

- ☐ Refining PowerSchool tracking to ensure consistent and accurate WBL reporting statewide.
- ☐ Developing flexible scheduling solutions to accommodate long-term WBL programs.
- ☐ Expanding employer partnerships to increase the diversity of WBL opportunities.
- ☐ Enhancing virtual WBL models to reduce transportation barriers and increase statewide access.

By addressing these challenges and leveraging innovative strategies, South Carolina aims to expand WBL access, improve program quality, and prepare students for high-demand careers in the evolving workforce.

Regional Career Specialist (RCS) Program

The Regional Career Specialist (RCS) program was originally established under federal funding through the School-To-Work Act of 1994, supporting technical preparation consortia and workforce alliances. However, in June 2007, federal funding for Tech Prep-School-To-Work Alliance Partnerships ceased, leading to decentralization of RCSs across the state.

Each RCS is assigned to a geographic region to provide direct service in:

- Work-based learning (WBL) implementation
- Professional development for educators & counselors
- Business/industry engagement & career readiness activities
- Student career guidance & Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs)

While RCSs focus on K–12 career development, they work alongside Regional Workforce Advisors (RWAs), housed under the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce (SCDEW). The two roles are distinct but collaborate to ensure education and workforce alignment across the state.

Table 2. Comparison of Career Readiness Roles in South Carolina: RCS, RWA, and Career Specialist

Role	Job Responsibilities	Differences
Regional Career Specialist (RCS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides career development training and support for school districts, educators, and counselors. - Facilitates work-based learning (WBL) opportunities such as internships, apprenticeships, and structured field studies through partnerships with business/industry. - Conducts professional development for school staff on career pathways, workforce needs, and career readiness. - Assists with Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs) and SC Diploma Pathways endorsements. - Recognizes exemplary student achievement through CTE student skill competitions and career ready accomplishments through annual career guidance student award nomination process. - Works with districts for WBL career ready qualifier implementation, compliance, and accurate reporting in PowerSchool. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Works for various fiscal agents but in coordination with the SCDE Office of Career and Technical Education (CTE). - Focuses on K-12 education and career readiness initiatives. - Works closely with educators, school counselors, and students. - Ensures alignment between education and workforce preparation.
Regional Workforce Advisor (RWA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Builds partnerships between businesses and schools to support workforce development. - Identifies regional labor market needs and ensures alignment between education programs and employer demands. - Works directly with business and industry leaders to promote workforce readiness programs. - Supports adult workforce training and post-secondary transitions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Works for the SC Department of Employment and Workforce (SCDEW). - Primarily serves as a liaison between businesses and education institutions. - Focuses on employer-driven workforce initiatives rather than school-based career guidance.
School-level Career Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides direct career counseling and guidance to students within schools. - Helps students with career assessments, job exploration, and postsecondary planning. - Supports IGP development and assists students in meeting career-ready qualifications. - Organizes career fairs, job shadowing, and other school-based career development activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Works within a specific school or district, directly serving students. - Works under school administration and school counselors. - Primarily focused on student-level career guidance and planning rather than workforce-business partnerships.

This chart clarifies the distinct but complementary roles of RCSs, RWAs, and School-level Career Specialists in supporting career and workforce readiness in South Carolina.

Professional Development & Training Initiatives

2023–24 Professional Development Highlights

During the 2023–24 school year, RCSs provided:

- 275+ professional development workshops serving 9,000+ educators statewide.
- Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) certification training, certifying 75+ educators—placing South Carolina among the top states in career guidance certification.
- Contextual methodology training in all 12 workforce regions, integrating career readiness into math, science, and CTE curricula.
- Structured field studies, business/industry panels, and mentorship programs, engaging 5,000+ business representatives and supporting 90,000+ students.

Enhancing Career Readiness Through RCS Initiatives

RCSs have strengthened career education in South Carolina by:

- Expanding work-based learning (WBL) placements through structured field studies, internships, and apprenticeships.
- Providing career-cluster training to educators, school counselors, and administrators, equipping them with labor market-driven career pathways.
- Supporting military career pathways, working with all military branches to integrate ASVAB, SCOIS, and workforce readiness programs into Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs).

Key Accomplishments of RCSs in 2023–24

Career Readiness & Business Engagement

- 90,000+ students participated in career readiness workshops & business field studies.
- 5,000+ business & industry representatives engaged in school partnerships.
- 500+ structured field studies, mentorships, and WBL activities coordinated statewide.

Training & Support for Educators

- 275+ professional development workshops conducted for 9,000+ educators.
- 75+ GCDF-certified educators, making South Carolina a leader in career guidance training.
- 12 regional training sessions covering career assessments, labor market data, and workforce integration in academic instruction.

Supporting Career Development & WBL Expansion

- Strengthened student WBL placement tracking & reporting through PowerSchool

implementation.

- Expanded career fairs, industry field studies, and employer engagement strategies to align with high-demand career pathways.
- Facilitated career decision-making workshops for students, aligning CTE programs with workforce needs.

Future Considerations

While RCSs have significantly expanded career development opportunities statewide, ongoing challenges in funding, role standardization, and employer engagement remain. To enhance South Carolina's workforce development efforts, the following steps are recommended:

- Standardized RCS Salary & Funding Structure – Address regional disparities by ensuring consistent funding and accountability measures statewide.
- Increased Business Engagement & Employer Incentives – Expand workforce partnerships by introducing apprenticeship & WBL incentives for employers.
- Strengthened Data Tracking & Reporting – Improve PowerSchool data collection for accurate tracking of WBL placements & student outcome.

Through state-level coordination, direct service accountability, and strategic partnerships, the SC Department of Education continues to enhance RCS effectiveness. Strengthening funding consistency, business engagement, and data tracking will further solidify South Carolina's workforce pipeline for the future. The department remains committed to ensuring equitable access to career development opportunities for all students, fostering economic growth and workforce readiness statewide.

Work-Based Learning Program Contact Information

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