

WORK-BASED LEARNING BEST PRACTICES

DO IT WELL // DO IT TOGETHER

Quality benchmarks and a self-assessment rubric for rigorous, consistent, and accessible work-based learning in rural communities.



WORK-BASED LEARNING BEST PRACTICES FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

DO IT WELL // DO IT TOGETHER

Quality benchmarks distilled from the Tehama County pilot and national WBL research — plus a self-assessment rubric your partnership can score itself against twice a year.

1. THE FOUR QUALITY PILLARS

PILLAR	WHAT "GOOD" LOOKS LIKE
Quality	Real work tied to a written training plan; students produce value, not busywork; mentors are chosen and trained, not assigned.
Consistency	Every placement follows the same agreements, evaluation cycle, and documentation — regardless of which employer or school is involved.
Rigor	Competency-based progression with sign-offs; related instruction aligned to OJT; wage increases earned by demonstrated skill.
Accessibility	Recruitment reaches all students (not just the ones who find you); transportation, gear, and scheduling barriers are named and budgeted for.

2. BEST PRACTICES BY PROGRAM PHASE

DESIGN

- Start from employer demand, not program supply — validate the occupation with local labor data and employer testimony before building.
- Adopt existing registered standards where possible; customize the last 20%, don't write the first 80%.
- Design for replication from day one: template every document you create (that's this toolkit).

PARTNERSHIP

- Name one accountable coordinator with standing across schools and employers.
- Put every commitment in writing (Document 05) — goodwill fades, documents don't.
- Keep an employer advisory group meeting quarterly; employers recruit other employers better than agencies do.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- Treat transportation, work gear, and food as program costs, not student problems.
- Run a real onboarding: worksite culture, payroll literacy, and "how to ask questions" are teachable skills.
- Check in quarterly with student, mentor, school, and family together — small issues surface before they're exits.

MENTORSHIP

- Select mentors who volunteer and like teaching; provide a 2-hour orientation minimum.
- Give mentors the competency checklist and the authority to sign it.
- Recognize mentors publicly — it's the cheapest retention tool you have.

SUSTAINABILITY

- Track and publish outcomes from the first cohort: hours, wages, completions, employer retention.
- Braid funding early (grants, employer wages, school funds, workforce dollars) so no single source can kill the program.
- Feed lessons learned into the toolkit and the final report — your documentation is your case for the next grant.

3. PARTNERSHIP SELF-ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Score each row 1–4 (1 = not in place · 2 = emerging · 3 = in place · 4 = exemplary). Reassess every six months.

INDICATOR	SCORE	EVIDENCE / NEXT STEP
Written training plan with competencies for every placement		
Signed responsibilities agreement for every party		
Trained, named mentor for each student		
Wage progression published and honored		
Quarterly check-ins held and documented		
Work permits, hour limits, and minor task restrictions verified		
Recruitment reaches all student populations, with data to show it		
Transportation/gear barriers identified and funded		
Employer advisory group active		
Outcomes tracked and reported (hours, completions, retention)		
Single accountable coordinator in place		
Materials templated for replication		

4. COMMON FAILURE MODES (AND THE FIX)

FAILURE MODE	PREVENTION
Employer enthusiasm dies in paperwork	Pre-filled templates and a coordinator who completes forms with the employer (Documents 03–04)

FAILURE MODE	PREVENTION
Placement becomes unpaid observation	Competency plan + wage progression makes "real work" contractual (Document 02)
Student drops out over logistics	Transportation/gear budget; quarterly family check-ins
Program lives and dies with one champion	Documented procedures, advisory group, braided funding
Quality varies by site	Same agreements, same rubric, same evaluation cycle everywhere

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