NEW MEXICO
Public Education Department
College and Career Readiness

CREATED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
ADVANCE CTE
State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

NEW MEXICO WORK-BASED LEARNING Continuum and Progression Guide

NEW MEXICO WORK-BASED LEARNING TOOLKIT

PART 2

This guide expands on the ***New Mexico Work-Based Learning Framework*** by illustrating how work-based learning (WBL) develops across grade levels through a continuum of experiences. It is designed to support the implementation of the statewide vision for WBL by helping school leaders and educators sequence industry-aligned, standards-based WBL opportunities.

BENEFITS OF A WBL CONTINUUM

A WBL continuum helps ensure that students build career awareness and skills over time, rather than through one-off experiences. These experiences can start as early as elementary school through career exposure, helping students learn about the many types of careers and build awareness of different industries. With this foundation in place, students can deepen their understanding of these careers in middle school by participating in experiences that focus on the routines and daily practices of an occupation, such as career mentorships or job shadowing. This progression then leads to more advanced opportunities to build career-related skills in low-stakes settings, such as student-led enterprises. Further along it leads to career-entry placements, such as internships or apprenticeships.

When implemented intentionally, the WBL continuum equips students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make informed career decisions and successfully transition into the workforce. It also helps students make clearer connections between what they are learning in the classroom and how those skills apply in real-world settings. Importantly, the WBL continuum should be flexible and support students in accessing experiences at any stage, regardless of grade level. This approach provides students with the option to explore multiple career interests as their goals and aspirations evolve.

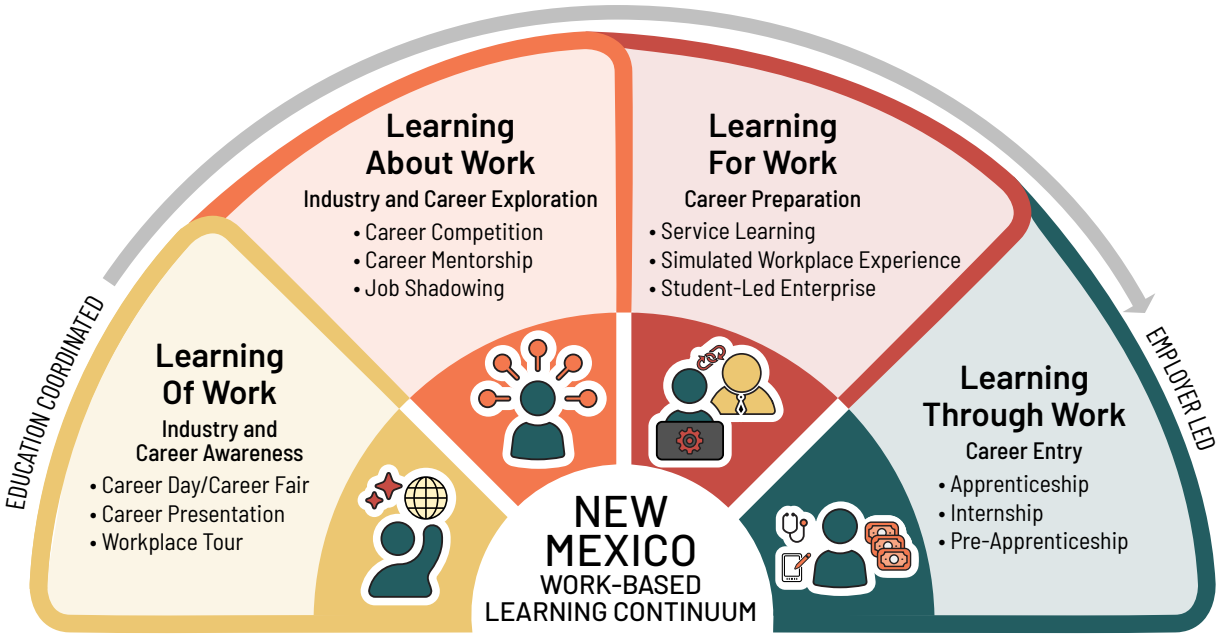
IMPACT OF A WBL CONTINUUM

- **Students** both within and outside of established programs of study gain exposure to careers, build technical and career-ready skills, and make connections between their education and future goals through real-world experiences.
- **Employers** develop a stronger, better prepared talent pipeline aligned with regional workforce needs while building relationships with local schools and the community.
- **Educators** strengthen instruction by connecting academic content to real-world applications, further reinforcing learning and positive student outcomes.
- **Leaders (state, district, and school)** advance a shared approach to career-connected learning that promotes quality and equity. A continuum supports the planning, scaling, and continuous improvement of WBL systems aligned with state expectations and workforce priorities.

OVERVIEW OF THE WBL CONTINUUM

The New Mexico WBL continuum is organized into four stages—Learning Of, About, For, and Through Work—to illustrate how WBL experiences deepen over time. Each stage aligns with the progression from career awareness to exploration, preparation, and entry, allowing students to build on previous experiences or move fluidly through stages as their interests evolve.

- **Learning OF Work (Industry and Career Awareness):** Students learn more about the world of work through all stages of their education and career journey. Experiences in this stage, such as career days/career fairs and workplace tours, help students gain an understanding of work through industry and career awareness activities.
- **Learning ABOUT Work (Industry and Career Exploration):** Students explore work through industry and career exposure experiences, such as job shadowing, career mentorship, and career competitions aligned with their program of study. These experiences typically begin in middle school and continue beyond high school.
- **Learning FOR Work (Career Preparation):** Students participate in career preparation and development experiences, such as student-led enterprises, simulated workplace experiences, and service learning aligned with their program of study. These experiences typically occur in high school.
- **Learning THROUGH Work (Career Entry):** Students prepare for the workforce through highly structured career entry experiences, such as internships, pre-apprenticeships, and apprenticeships, that often lead to educational credit or payment for work. These experiences can begin in high school and continue throughout a student's career, extending beyond the educational setting into the workplace.



WBL CONTINUUM STAGES AND ARRANGEMENTS

Each stage of the WBL continuum contains several arrangements, or experiences, delivered by education and industry that learners participate in. These arrangements within the WBL continuum represent a range of experiences that help students connect with careers at different levels of engagement, reflecting increasing intensity and responsibility aligned to programs of study and workforce expectations.

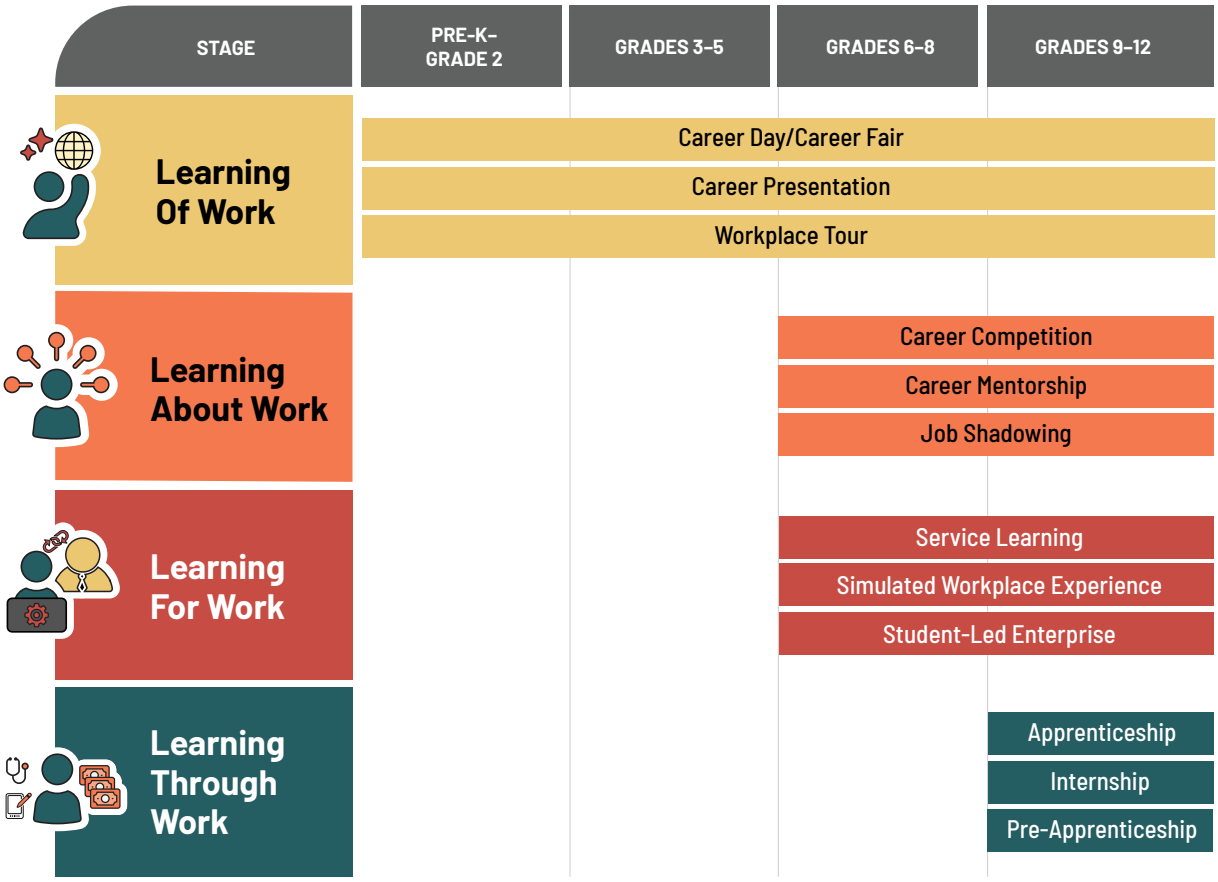
	STAGE DEFINITION	EXPERIENCE	EXPERIENCE DEFINITION
Learning Of Work	Experiences that support **industry and career awareness** expose students to a range of industries and occupations, helping them build foundational knowledge of the world of work and potential career pathways.	**Career Day/ Career Fair**	An event during which employers from a variety of industries come together, either in person or virtually, at a school or community location to share information about their companies, roles, and the education and skills needed for success. These events may also include hands-on engagement, such as mock interviews and connections to real-world experiences, including internships or summer employment.
		Career Presentation	An experience that features one or several employers or industry professionals who provide a deeper, more focused exploration of their career, including day-to-day responsibilities and pathways to employment. This format allows students to deepen their understanding of a specific industry.
		Workplace Tour	A highly structured experience in which students visit a workplace, learn about the business, meet employers, ask questions, conduct interviews with workers, and observe work in progress. These tours can take place in person or virtually.
Learning About Work	Experiences that support **industry and career exploration** provide students with more direct, interactive opportunities that deepen their understanding of specific careers, workplace expectations, and the skills needed for success.	**Career Competition**	An experience that provides students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of career-related skills through presentations or competitions judged by industry professionals and/or community members.
		Career Mentorship	An experience in which students are matched one on one or in small groups with an industry professional for a sustained engagement to explore potential careers and related topics. Mentorship experiences can be conducted in person or virtually.
		Job Shadowing	A structured experience in which students are paired with an employer and observe their work day, interact with clients or customers, and attend meetings and other appointments with the person they are shadowing.
Learning For Work	Experiences that support **career preparation** engage students in hands-on, applied learning that builds and demonstrates career-ready skills in settings that closely mirror real-world work environments.	**Service Learning**	An experience in which students participate in organized community service activities, receive related technical instruction, and engage in reflection to deepen their understanding of the work.
		Simulated Workplace Experience	An experience in which students engage in activities that are intentionally structured to replicate work environments. Examples include automotive or construction programs of study in which sustained industry involvement enables students to develop and apply their skills in line with industry standards and expectations.
		Student-Led Enterprise	An experience in which students operate school-based enterprises that produce goods or services for use or purchase by others, beyond the participating student(s).
Learning Through Work	Experiences that support **career entry** immerse students in sustained, real-world work opportunities that build advanced skills and prepare them to enter specific careers or advanced training programs.	**Apprenticeship**	An intensive experience that generally lasts from one to six years and combines on-the-job training and formal classroom instruction. Examples include programs reviewed by the New Mexico State Apprenticeship Council and approved by the State Apprenticeship Office.
		Internship	A highly structured, time-bound experience in which students are placed at a worksite to observe and participate in real work, providing meaningful, hands-on learning aligned to their program of study or career interests.
		Pre-Apprenticeship	A structured experience, most often administered by the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, that helps students prepare for apprenticeships.

For full arrangement descriptions and benefits, refer to the two-page arrangement explainers. The ***New Mexico Work-Based Learning Quality, Evidence, and Readiness Guide*** provides quality indicators for evaluating WBL experiences.

WBL GRADE-BAND STANDARDS

To support equitable and high-quality implementation of WBL, experiences are aligned to clear standards and are organized by grade band (Pre-K–2, 3–5, 6–8, 9–12).

These standards are intentionally designed to accommodate a wide range of WBL experiences. This flexibility allows districts and schools to design experiences that are relevant and responsive.



Learning Of Work (Industry and Career Awareness)

Purpose: Students build foundational awareness of careers, industries, and how work connects to their lives and learning.

Standard: Students can describe different careers, identify how businesses operate in their communities, and recognize connections between school subjects and jobs.

What This Looks Like in Practice: At this stage, students are not expected to make career decisions. Instead, they should be exposed to many options through engaging, age-appropriate activities that repeat over time. Experiences should prioritize relevance and curiosity-building.

What This Does Not Look Like in Practice: A one-time speaker without student interaction or follow-up; a passive assembly during which students listen without engagement; a standalone event with no connection to classroom learning

EXAMPLE EXPERIENCES

Career Day/Career Fair

- Students rotate through five to six stations with different employers using a question guide.
- Students complete a reflection at the end of the experience.
- Employers bring tools and uniforms and facilitate demonstrations that are relevant to their careers.

Career Presentation

- Students ask prewritten questions about the daily schedule of the speaker(s).
- Students participate in a follow-up activity in which they reflect on "a day in this career."

Workplace Tour

- Educators preview the company and key vocabulary in the classroom before the experience.
- During the experience, students complete a scavenger hunt or another engagement activity to understand the workplace environment better.
- After the experience, students connect what they saw to a class subject or particular skills.

This standard can be applied to WBL outside of the suggested arrangements. For instance, foundational career awareness can be incorporated into academic curricular content or a schoolwide event. School districts and charter schools can leverage existing curriculum and learning experiences to embed the Learning Of Work stage.

Suggested Grade Bands: Pre-K–2, 3–5, 6–8, 9–12

Learning About Work (Industry and Career Exploration)

Purpose: Students deepen their understanding of specific careers and begin connecting their interests and strengths to potential programs of study.

Standard: Students can identify careers aligned to their interests, describe workplace expectations, and demonstrate an understanding of the skills and education required for different jobs.

What This Looks Like in Practice: Experiences become more interactive and personalized. Students engage more directly with professionals and begin reflecting on their own goals, preferences, and skills.

What This Does Not Look Like in Practice: A short, unstructured opportunity with no preparation or reflection time; a mentor meeting that happens only once; activities in which students are passive participants without interaction; experiences without discussion of skills and educational expectations

EXAMPLE EXPERIENCES

Career Competition

- Students complete a real-world challenge (e.g., design a marketing pitch, build a prototype).
- Industry professionals judge student work using a rubric and give feedback.
- Students revise their work based on industry professionals' feedback.

Career Mentorship

- Students meet with a mentor monthly over a semester.
- Sessions include goal-setting, resume review, or program of study discussions.
- Students track what they are learning about themselves over time.

Job Shadowing

- Students follow an employee for half a day or a full day with a structured guide (e.g., tasks observed, skills used, what surprised them).
- Students participate in at least one age-appropriate task.
- Students reflect on the experience afterward, through either a written report or a presentation.

This standard can be applied to WBL outside of the suggested arrangements through classroom projects tied to careers or schoolwide/community events and competitions. School districts and charter schools can leverage existing community events, schoolwide structures, and curriculum to embed the Learning About Work stage.

Suggested Grade Bands: 6–8, 9–12

Learning For Work (Career Preparation)

Purpose: Students build and apply technical skills and career-ready practices in settings that simulate or reflect real work environments.

Standard: Students can apply technical skills and career-ready practices in simulated or workplace settings and demonstrate readiness for real-world experiences.

What This Looks Like in Practice: Experiences prioritize skill-building and application. Students take on increasing responsibility and produce work that reflects industry expectations.

What This Does Not Look Like in Practice: Busywork disconnected from real skills and expectations; simulated activities without structure or clear outcomes; projects during which students do not receive feedback to improve

EXAMPLE EXPERIENCES

Service Learning

- Students design and carry out a project connected to classroom instruction in collaboration with an external organization aligned to their career interests and/or program of study (e.g., health students run a community wellness event or engineering students design and build a prototype to solve a school or community problem).
- Students complete work aligned with identified learning objectives, demonstrating workplace skills and developing mastery of academic standards.
- Students reflect on both the impact of the service and the skills they developed and applied.
- Educators and external partners assess student communication, teamwork, technical skills, and/or other skills demonstrated throughout the experience.

Simulated Workplace Experience

- The classroom operates like a mock workplace where students have roles, team meetings, and deadlines.
- Students complete a project aligned to industry standards within this simulated workplace.
- Students reflect on or revise project work based on industry professionals' feedback.

Student-Led Enterprise

- Students run a real business (e.g., school store, coffee cart, design service).
- Students manage inventory, customer service, and finances.
- Students analyze and reflect on what worked and what did not work.

This standard can be applied to WBL outside the suggested arrangements through robust group projects that simulate a workplace team, students revising work in response to teacher or peer feedback to simulate feedback loops, or schoolwide events (e.g., student exhibitions). School districts and charter schools can leverage existing community and industry connections to embed the Learning For Work stage.

Suggested Grade Bands: 6–8, 9–12

Learning Through Work (Career Entry)

Purpose: Students apply their skills in real-world settings through sustained, immersive experiences that prepare them for entry into careers or further training.

Standard: Students can demonstrate advanced technical skills and career-ready practices in real-world settings and apply their learning toward postsecondary education, training, or employment.

What This Looks Like in Practice: Experiences are highly structured and supervised, and they often lead to educational credit, payment, and/or an industry-recognized credential.

What This Does Not Look Like in Practice: Shadowing-only experiences during which students do not actively participate or contribute; work experiences without clear learning goals or supervision; placements that are unrelated to a student's interests; jobs that do not create skill development for entry into a career

EXAMPLE EXPERIENCES

Apprenticeship

- Students split time between paid on-the-job training and classroom learning.
- Students earn industry-recognized credentials and progress toward permanent employment.

Internship

- Experiences include defined learning objectives and an agreement on the design.
- Students participate in real tasks that contribute to the organization's work and align with their career interests and goals.
- Students are provided with a supervisor and receive feedback to develop technical skills.
- Students complete a final reflection or presentation on skills gained through the experience.

Pre-Apprenticeship

- Students complete hands-on training aligned to a specific occupation or industry.
- The experience includes both technical instruction and workplace readiness skills.
- Students earn a credential or are directly connected to a Registered Apprenticeship Program.

This standard can also be met through structured school-based or community-connected experiences that mirror the rigorous expectations of a workplace environment. These experiences should include defined learning objectives, supervision, opportunities for students to apply technical skills and career-ready practices through authentic projects and tasks, and a method for documenting and reflecting on skill development. Experiences in this stage must meet the program quality indicators in the ***New Mexico Work-Based Learning Quality, Evidence, and Readiness Guide***. Districts and schools can leverage existing schoolwide structures, employer partnerships, and community relationships to embed the Learning Through Work stage.

Suggested Grade Bands: 9–12

For guidance on awarding credit for these various experiences, visit the ***New Mexico Work-Based Learning Academic Credit and Graduation Alignment Guide***.

This resource is Part 2 of the *New Mexico Work-Based Learning Toolkit*, a suite of resources that support the development of sustainable, equitable, and high-quality WBL systems across New Mexico. All resources are housed on the New Mexico Work-Based Learning website.

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