

Employer resource



**Roundhouse**  
Partnership Solutions



# The Employer's Guide to Working with Schools

Partnering with schools in career and technical education (CTE) can transform your workforce strategy. This guide outlines why and how employers can engage with local schools to build a talent pipeline, retain community talent, boost employee satisfaction, and enhance your company's reputation. Learn to navigate school cultures, align partnerships with your goals, and leverage work-based learning, advisory roles, and advocacy to meet industry needs. With practical steps and measurable outcomes, this guide equips employers to create impactful, mutually beneficial school partnerships for long-term success.

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# The employer's guide to working with schools

Employers play a critical role in helping young people explore and pursue their career options. But given the many ways in which they can use their scarce resources, they must carefully consider whether—and how—to engage with their local schools. This guide will help employers understand why and how they can work with their local schools and earn the kind of return on investment (ROI) that will make an early commitment to workforce development worthwhile.

## A. Why work with schools?

When employers invest in relationships with local schools, the focus is often on the benefit to students—exposure to career possibilities, skill development, and real-world experience. However, the advantages extend far beyond student outcomes. Partnering with schools can deliver measurable returns that directly impact your bottom line and long-term business sustainability.

### **Building tomorrow's workforce**

Labor shortages across industries have reached critical levels, forcing many businesses to operate below capacity or turn away customers. As Baby Boomers continue retiring in record numbers, the talent gap will only widen. The solution isn't just recruiting from the existing workforce—it's cultivating the next generation of skilled professionals. By engaging students early in their career journey, you're essentially growing your own talent pipeline, ensuring a steady stream of candidates who understand your industry and potentially your company culture.

### **Retaining talent in the community**

If young people aren't aware of local career opportunities, they will often relocate to pursue their ambitions, draining communities of their most promising talent. When you actively showcase the possibilities available in your area, you're more likely to retain graduates who might otherwise seek opportunities elsewhere. This community retention benefits not just your hiring pool but the entire regional economy.

**Roundhouse Partnership Solutions** operates at the intersection of industry and education, helping stakeholders on both sides of the equation to build strong and sustainable solutions to talent development challenges. To learn more about the many ways in which we can help you to understand the field, build strategy and develop internal capacity, please visit us online at [www.RoundhousePartnerships.com](http://www.RoundhousePartnerships.com).



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## Boosting employee satisfaction and retention

While student engagement programs require a long-term view—today's sophomore may not be job-ready for several years—your current employees will realize benefits almost immediately. Research shows that employees who participate in community outreach and mentoring activities report higher job satisfaction and remain with their employers longer. Prospective employees also look at community involvement when evaluating companies, giving you an edge in competitive hiring markets.

## Enhancing community standing

Organizations that invest in their communities build stronger relationships with all stakeholders, from local government officials and regulatory bodies to customers and suppliers. This enhanced reputation creates goodwill that pays dividends across many aspects of your business operations.

## B. Defining your interests and outcomes

Many employers make the mistake of taking a deferential approach when approaching school partners: "I don't know much about education, so just tell me what you want me to do." You may not know a lot about the education process, but if you ignore your own interests and just do whatever you're asked then you probably won't be happy with the results.

Before reaching out, decide what it is that you want to get out of this relationship and approach these relationships as a partnership of equals, where you work together in ways that your interests and theirs align. You'll find plenty of common ground, but you'll be doing so with a clear eye on the returns you get from your investment.

That said, you should remember that education is a long-term process and invest your efforts accordingly. You may define your interests as connecting with students with the potential to enter an in-demand field, but that doesn't mean you should limit your engagement to hosting internships for seniors. If you want to create a true pipeline, you should also work with your education partners to recruit students into their programs, ensuring a larger pool of future candidates and supporting the steps that nurture students towards a field, such as serving as a guest speaker, participating in mock interviews and hosting site visits and job shadows. Each of these activities moves students along the career continuum and gives you an early opportunity to start building a relationship.

## C. Finding the right school partners

One of the biggest challenges in developing school partnerships is simply knowing where to start. Both employers and educators frequently express frustration about finding the right contact person. Fortunately, educational institutions are starting to make this process easier by clearly organizing their online presence.

## Connecting with postsecondary institutions

Colleges, universities, and technical schools typically organize their websites around academic departments and programs. Start by reviewing their program listings to identify departments that align with your industry or specific skill needs. Most program pages include contact information for department chairs, faculty members, and sometimes dedicated industry liaison staff.

Don't overlook community colleges, which often have the most robust industry partnership programs and may be more flexible in developing customized solutions. Many also maintain active advisory boards and have staff specifically designated to work with employers.

## Engaging with high schools

High school partnerships require a slightly different approach since career and technical education (CTE) programs vary significantly between schools and districts. Begin by exploring the websites of your local high schools to understand what CTE pathways they offer. Programs might include manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, business, or other clusters relevant to your industry.

If individual school websites don't provide clear information about their CTE offerings, check with the district office. Most districts have CTE coordinators or supervisors who can provide an overview of programs across all schools and help you identify the best matches for your interests.

## Making the initial contact

When reaching out to potential education partners, think in terms of relationships rather than transactions. Take the time to get to know their programs and give them time to get to know your organization. Ask what they're already doing: You may find ways to fit into their existing partnership strategy rather than having to create something new. But on the flip side, don't compromise your goals for the partnership: Make sure they understand what you're trying to accomplish for your business and make sure you're both getting your needs met as a result of your work together.

# D. Understanding the school culture

Business and education are very different worlds. For employers, working successfully with your school partners requires that you understand these differences and account for them in your work.

## Taking a cautious approach to change

People refer to schools as being resistant to change, but that's not entirely fair. Schools have been undergoing tremendous internally-driven changes over the past few decades, from the adoption of curriculum standards to incorporating technology to adopting new models of schooling (charters, magnets, career academies) to entirely new models of assessment and accountability. It's a lot to manage, and when partners ask for additional changes, educators have to balance the potential benefits against the risks while minimizing disruption to the learning environment.

That's not to say that educators are automatically against change: CTE educators in particular know that the industries they serve are evolving and that they need to change curriculum and teaching practices to keep their programs relevant. But employers need to understand the larger context and realize that the change they may want needs to be considered carefully and introduced in smart ways.

## Making decisions

While businesses often pride themselves on rapid decision-making, schools prioritize consensus-building and stakeholder input. Before implementing significant changes, school leaders typically consult with teachers, administrators, and sometimes students or parents who will be affected.

This consultative approach can improve program quality and increase buy-in from participants, but it can also extend implementation timelines. Understanding this helps you set realistic expectations and plan accordingly.

## Education as the primary mission

While this may seem obvious, it's important to remember that when you work with students through schools, they are students first and potential employees second. Work-based learning activities are first and foremost educational activities: Every activity you design should have clear learning objectives and educational outcomes. The goal isn't just to give students work experience, but to help them develop knowledge, skills, and understanding about your industry and the broader world of work.

This educational focus actually benefits employers in the long run, as it ensures students gain meaningful insights rather than just completing tasks. Students who understand the "why" behind their work are more likely to develop genuine interest in your field.

# E. Navigating the school calendar

The academic calendar operates differently from the business world, and understanding these rhythms is important for fostering successful partnerships. Schools follow predictable patterns that, once understood, can help you time your engagement for maximum impact.

## The academic year structure

Most schools operate on a traditional nine-month calendar from late August through early June, though some districts have moved to year-round schedules with shorter breaks throughout the year. For the majority of schools, the key planning periods are:

- ◇ **Summer (June-August):** During the summer months, most teachers are out of the office but administrators are generally still working. Some educators use this down time to connect with employers even if they aren't officially on the clock: It's easier than trying to meet with them during the school year given the scheduling challenges. Depending on the start date for the school year, which could be anywhere from early August to early September, teachers start planning their curriculum, participating in professional development, and working with partners to plan WBL activities in late July to early August.

- ◇ **Fall semester (August-January):** The energy is high at the beginning of the school year, making September and October ideal for launching new work-based learning activities, particularly those not involving a lot of preparation work. Guest speaking, site visits, and mock and informational interviews are all optimal in the fall. However, avoid the first few weeks of school when everyone is settling into routines.

## The language of education

Every industry has its share of jargon and acronyms; education is no different. The following are common acronyms and words that you may come across during your work with students and schools.

### General Education Terms

- ◇ **ESSA** (Every Student Succeeds Act) - Federal law (2015–present) replacing No Child Left Behind (NCLB), emphasizing state-led accountability, student achievement, and flexibility in school improvement. Impacts career and technical education (CTE) by supporting career readiness and equitable education.
- ◇ **WIOA** (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) - Federal law supporting workforce development, including youth programs and job training. Aligns with CTE by funding partnerships that connect students to employment opportunities.
- ◇ **FERPA** (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) - Federal law protecting student education records' privacy. Employers must comply with FERPA when accessing student information during partnerships, ensuring confidentiality and proper data handling.
- ◇ **IEP** (Individualized Education Program) - A legally binding plan for students with disabilities, outlining tailored educational goals, accommodations, and services. Employers should understand IEPs when providing work-based learning to ensure accessibility.
- ◇ **PLC** (Professional Learning Community) - A group of educators collaborating to improve teaching and student outcomes. Employers may engage with PLCs to provide industry insights for CTE curriculum development.

### Career and Technical Education Terms

- ◇ **CTE** (Career and Technical Education) - Educational programs preparing students for specific careers through hands-on training and technical skills. Includes fields like healthcare, IT, and manufacturing, often involving employer partnerships for relevance.
- ◇ **Perkins** (Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act) - Federal legislation funding CTE programs to prepare students for high-demand careers. Supports work-based learning, curriculum development, and employer partnerships to ensure programs meet industry needs.
- ◇ **POS** (Program of Study) - A structured sequence of CTE courses and experiences aligning with career pathways. Guides students from high school to postsecondary education or employment, often involving employer input.
- ◇ **WBL** (Work-Based Learning) - A CTE component where students gain real-world experience through internships, apprenticeships, or job shadowing. Employers play a key role in providing these opportunities to bridge classroom and workplace.
- ◇ **CLNA** (Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment) - A Perkins-required process for CTE programs to evaluate local workforce needs, program effectiveness, and gaps in student access. Employers may be consulted to align CTE offerings with industry demands.

- ◇ **Spring semester (January-June):** This is typically when the most intensive work-based learning happens, including internships and capstone projects. Plan your heaviest engagement during this period.

## Working around key dates

Several predictable events will impact your ability to engage with schools:

- ◇ **Testing periods:** State assessments usually occur in spring (March-May), during which academic activities take priority and CTE programs may have limited flexibility for work-based learning.
- ◇ **Holiday breaks:** Schools typically have extended breaks around Thanksgiving, winter holidays, and spring break. Plan accordingly, as these can disrupt longer-term projects.
- ◇ **End-of-semester priorities:** The final weeks of each semester are consumed with final projects, exams, and grading. Talk with your education counterparts about scheduling new activities during these periods: There may be windows to avoid, but you may also find greater student availability after some commitments have been completed before the end of the semester.

## F. Stages of career development

Understanding where students are in their career development journey helps you tailor your engagement to be most effective. Students progress through predictable stages, and your role should evolve accordingly. Note that some states define three stages of career development – generally career awareness, exploration, and preparation – while others work through four stages, separating the last stage into a planning and preparation stage and one focused on placement and management.

### Career awareness

This stage focuses on introducing students to the concept of careers, helping them become aware of various occupations and industries, their own interests, and basic workplace concepts. The goal is to build a foundational understanding of the world of work without requiring deep decision-making. This work can begin in early elementary school and may continue through early high school, overlapping with the next stage. Some common activities at the career awareness stage:

- ◇ Introduction to basic workplace skills like teamwork, communication, and problem-solving through discussions and participation in class projects.
- ◇ Hosting a variety of guest speakers who discuss their occupations and the industries they work in.
- ◇ Conducting research, like reading about and researching different occupations and watching career videos online.
- ◇ Tours of different organizations in your community to learn about particular occupations and industries and to generally get a sense of the different functions of an organization.

## Career exploration

This stage involves deeper investigation into career options, allowing students to explore their interests, skills, and values in relation to potential careers. It emphasizes hands-on experiences, with students beginning to make tentative career-related decisions. This work typically starts in middle school and continues through early high school, grades 6–10. Some common activities at the career exploration stage:

- ◇ Identifying personal interests, strengths, and values through interest and aptitude assessments as well as reflective activities.
- ◇ Development of career-related skills, such as goal-setting, decision-making, and understanding educational requirements.
- ◇ Exposure to career clusters (e.g., STEM, arts, healthcare) and CTE options within their schools to narrow and advance interests.
- ◇ Connecting academic subjects to career paths (e.g., how math applies to engineering).
- ◇ Participate in job shadow activities, spending a day with a professional in a field of interest.
- ◇ Conduct informational interviews with professionals in a field of interest.
- ◇ Visit postsecondary institutions to explore advanced education options related to a career path.
- ◇ Participate in an externship, spending a week or two learning about an industry and a handful of targeted careers.
- ◇ Join a Career Technical Student Organization (CTSO) to learn more about a career area and participate in learning activities and competitions.

## Career preparation

This stage focuses on equipping students with the specific skills, education, and experiences needed to pursue a chosen career path. It involves concrete planning and action to transition into post-secondary education, training, or the workforce. This work typically happens in mid-to-late high school and beyond, grades 11–12 and into early adulthood. Some common activities at the career preparation stage:

- ◇ Setting specific career goals and creating a plan to achieve them. Some states, like Pennsylvania, have made this a requirement, with students creating their plan and updating it annually.
- ◇ Developing job-specific skills and workplace readiness (e.g., resume writing, interviewing).
- ◇ Finalizing educational or training pathways, such as applying to colleges or trade schools.
- ◇ Completing a program of study in a CTE pathway.
- ◇ Completing one or more advanced work-based learning activities like an internship, co-op, capstone project or pre-apprenticeship.

Note that these stages represent broad guidelines: Students may revisit earlier stages as interests evolve, and age/grade ranges are approximate and vary by state or program. States often align these

stages with standards like the National Career Development Guidelines or ASCA (American School Counselor Association) frameworks, which would be worth researching for those interested in more information.

## G. Partnership models

While many employers think about school partnerships in terms of volunteering and donations, you can actually work with schools in several ways, all of which can support students and your organization.

### Work-based learning

Students need opportunities to spend time with employers and learn firsthand about the world of work, making work-based learning activities a critical part of their education. Employers can support career exploration and preparation by serving as guest speakers, hosting site visits and job shadows, hiring interns, and engaging in many other kinds of work-related activities. See the appendix for a list of work-based learning models.

### Advisory boards

CTE programs need to be relevant, aligned with the current practices and expectations of the professions and industries they serve. To do that, CTE educators and program leads need to hear directly from employers on the current state of the field and what they look for in candidates; that discussion takes place via the advisory boards each program is required to have.

### Teacher externships

CTE educators (and others) need to keep in touch with the world of work in order to make education relevant and engaging to their students. Teacher externships are a great investment, impacting hundreds of students over several years.

### CTE program recruiting

If you want to see more students participating in career and technical education, you can help your partner programs by reaching out to students and educating them on the opportunities presented by the program and your industry. You can offer to give presentations to students in middle school and early high school and encourage your employees with children to consider these programs as they think about their futures.

### Lobbying/advocacy

Employers can advocate for schools in ways that educators simply cannot. Educators may be barred from lobbying activities, and the conflict of interest they face may undercut their message. If you have a strong relationship with your local schools and want to support them, you can advocate for their needs with other business leaders, politicians, district officials, and the public at large.

## Curriculum/instruction

The teaching materials used in a classroom are typically selected by the school and/or the instructor, but employers have played a role in this area. Many advisory boards will do a regular program review to ensure that what is being taught and how it is being taught line up with industry needs; this includes a review of facilities and of teaching materials, with suggestions to make modifications as needed.

Instruction is also typically handled by the schools, but there have been many cases where industry partners participate in teaching. In some cases, such as where there are chronic shortages of teachers in select areas, industry will manage that function completely.

## H. Student safety

Student safety is the top priority for schools, even more important than learning. As an employer partner, you share in the responsibility to keep the students you work with safe. Your school partner will likely have certain rules and requirements tied to student safety; understand that this is not intended to question your motives or practices, but rather to create systems that will keep students out of harm's way to the greatest extent possible.

First, if you do any direct work with young people, you and any other participating staff members will need to undergo a background check. Typically paid for by the school or district, these checks typically require you to share some information like your Social Security number and signing a consent form allowing their agent to look into your background; you may also need to provide your fingerprints and/or references. These background checks will typically be used to confirm your identity, flag any criminal history (particularly anything that would be relevant to working with minors), and may or may not include driving history. Background checks can take several weeks to process, so plan ahead. Many districts maintain approved volunteer lists that can expedite the process for repeat partnerships.

Your school counterpart should familiarize you with The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which protects students' identify and their education records. You must agree to protect and hold confidential any information from a student's educational record, including grades, disciplinary records, and even the fact that a student participates in your program. Further, you cannot share student information with unauthorized parties, including other employees within your company who aren't directly involved in the educational partnership. The student's parents or guardians may need to sign a waiver allowing the student's personal information to be shared with you in the first place.

Finally, you will likely be expected to undergo some kind of training, and/or sign an agreement, that explains the kinds of safety practices you and the student will need to follow. Examples include:

- ◇ Ensuring you and the student are not working alone, perhaps agreeing to a Two Adult Rule and that you work in public and observable places at all times.
- ◇ Direct communications such as phone calls and emails take place only on monitored systems like approved messaging apps and that another adult is CC'd on electronic communications.
- ◇ You agree to and support a background check as detailed above.

- ◇ You review and sign a Code of Conduct statement outlining appropriate behavior, boundaries, and responsibilities when working with students. This may include guidelines on physical contact (e.g., no hugging or touching), language, and maintaining professional boundaries.
- ◇ Parents are regularly informed of schedules, locations, and the adults involved in their child's activities to ensure transparency.
- ◇ Understand and follow all workplace safety regulations, including those that address safety requirements and child labor laws.

## I. Addressing employer concerns and barriers

Despite the benefits of engaging the next generation of workers, many employers hesitate to engage with schools and students due to perceived barriers. Understanding and addressing these concerns upfront can help you make an informed decision and structure partnerships for success.

### Time commitment concerns

- ◇ **The concern:** "We don't have time to supervise students or manage educational partnerships."
- ◇ **The reality:** Successful partnerships can be scaled to fit your capacity. Start small with low-commitment activities like guest speaking or facility tours, which require only a few hours per year. As you see results and build systems, you can expand to more intensive partnerships.
- ◇ **Solutions:** Designate a partnership coordinator, integrate student supervision into existing employee development activities, and work with schools to batch activities (like hosting multiple students for job shadowing on the same day).

### Return on investment questions

- ◇ **The concern:** "The payoff is too far in the future to justify the investment."
- ◇ **The reality:** While talent development benefits may take years to realize, it is really the only way to fundamentally reshape the workforce pipeline. Other benefits are immediate: Current employees gain leadership experience through mentoring, your company's community reputation improves, and you gain early insight into emerging talent.
- ◇ **Solutions:** Develop a logic model (as described in the section on measuring impact) to track shorter-term outcomes, and consider the immediate benefits to employee engagement and community relations as part of your ROI calculation.

### Liability and insurance worries

- ◇ **The concern:** "What if a student gets hurt at our workplace?"
- ◇ **The reality:** Most school districts carry liability insurance that covers students during educational activities, and your existing workers' compensation and liability insurance typically covers educational partnerships.

- ◇ **Solutions:** Verify insurance coverage with your school partner and your insurance provider, ensure students receive proper safety training, and maintain the same safety standards you use for regular employees.

## Managing student performance

- ◇ **The concern:** “What if students don’t meet our standards or are disruptive?”
- ◇ **The reality:** Students are learners first, and some will need more support than others. However, schools can help you screen students for readiness and provide ongoing support.
- ◇ **Solutions:** Work with school partners to establish clear expectations, create structured learning experiences with defined outcomes, and maintain open communication with teachers who can provide additional support when needed.

## Regulatory compliance uncertainty

- ◇ **The concern:** “We don’t understand all the rules about working with minors.”
- ◇ **The reality:** While there are additional requirements, they’re straightforward once you understand them, and school partners can help guide you through compliance.
- ◇ **Solutions:** Partner with experienced CTE programs that can help you navigate requirements, start with lower-risk activities like job shadowing before moving to internships, and consult with legal counsel if you have specific concerns about your industry.

## Small business resource constraints

- ◇ **The concern:** “We’re too small to manage formal partnerships with schools.”
- ◇ **The reality:** Many successful partnerships involve small businesses, and schools often prefer working with smaller employers who can provide more personalized attention to students. And students can provide real value when projects are set up correctly.
- ◇ **Solutions:** Consider consortium approaches where multiple small businesses collaborate on student programming, focus on activities that leverage your existing expertise (like serving as a guest speaker in your area of specialization), and partner with larger employers who can handle administrative aspects while you provide industry expertise.

## J. Measuring impact

Businesses live and die based on the idea of return on investment, or ROI. This is true not only for conventional business activities like marketing and sales but also for non-revenue functions such as recruiting and workforce development. So how can you define ROI on a long-term effort like early talent development, which may involve a recruiting payoff over five years away?

You can start by creating a logic model. Basically, a logic model involves defining where you are now and where you want to be, and then defining the steps you’ll take to create that change. For example,

suppose you're hiring two welders a year out of a postsecondary program (your starting point), and you want to increase that to 10 welders a year (your ending point). You might build a logic model that looks something like this:

- ◇ Build relationships with the CTE programs in your local schools that include welding within their programs of study (programs such as construction and advanced manufacturing to start). Sit on their advisory boards (to help ensure instruction aligns with industry standards) and offer your support for work-based learning.
- ◇ Work with your partner schools to identify talent early. Encourage them to adopt interest and aptitude assessments and use that information and other data sources to help them recruit middle and high school students to their relevant programs.
- ◇ Engage with students at all points along the work-based learning spectrum, from guest speaking to hosting internships. Make sure each interaction gives students a window into the profession and helps you develop a relationship with them that grows over time.
- ◇ Connect with relevant postsecondary programs, helping them recruit promising students from local schools and also connecting with students recruited from other sources. Continue engaging in work-based learning (internships and apprenticeships) and recruiting from this pool.

This type of model provides you with measurable outcomes at each stage of the model. How many CTE programs have you engaged in? How many students have been identified and recruited into programs? How many have you connected with via different types of work-based learning? How many postsecondary programs have you engaged in? How many of your high school students have moved into these programs? How many have you recruited?

Remember that these models will need to be regularly reviewed and updated. At the beginning, you'll list your best guesses on ratios—recruiting 100 middle school students with talent results in 40 CTE program participants, results in 25 participating in work-based learning, results in 15 pursuing a credential or postsecondary degree and becoming a viable candidate. As you start to gather data, you can revise your model to give you a more accurate projection of future candidates. The important thing is that you figure out what your pipeline looks like, providing you with the proof that early talent engagement is an excellent strategy for meeting your future needs.

# Appendix:

## Types of work-based learning

Work-based learning is one of the most effective strategies for engaging students, helping them learn firsthand what it takes to succeed in various careers while giving them direct experience that can prepare them for the future. Following are a range of work-based learning models you can consider when working with your area schools.

### **Guest speaker**

Educators can bring in speakers from a particular career field or industry to talk with students and answer their questions. The time commitment is low on the part of the speaker and the educator, and interested students can be provided an opportunity to follow up with additional questions or requests in the future.

### **Career fair**

Some schools or districts organize annual career fairs, in which students walk through halls populated with representatives from area businesses who are prepared to talk about their industries and careers. This provides students with a one-stop opportunity to learn about opportunities in multiple areas and develop contacts for future exploration.

### **Informational interview**

Students can set up informal conversations with professionals working in a career area that interests them and who will give them helpful information and advice. It is an effective research tool in addition to reading books and guides, exploring online resources like career and industry videos, and examining job descriptions. It is not a job interview, and the goal is not to find job openings; this is simply an information-gathering effort.

### **Site visit**

Local businesses can host site visits, allowing groups of students to participate in a prepared tour of a workplace and possibly participate in presentations and question- and-answer sessions with employees. This may involve hands-on demonstrations and other experiences.

### **Job shadow**

Students can follow and observe a professional working in their field of choice for a few hours or more. This allows them to observe firsthand how that person spends his or her time, including tasks performed, professional interactions, and the reality of the work environment.

## Mock interviews

To prepare for entry into a career, students may participate in mock interviews conducted by area employers. These experiences force students to be able to convey their interests and industry knowledge and understand how to best position their past experiences and abilities in ways that are attractive to employers.

## Career mentor

Mentoring can focus on social, academic, and/or professional outcomes. In career mentoring, students are paired on a long-term basis with a professional working in their field of choice; that mentor can help them better understand their career and industry and work to guide their academic and professional choices as they prepare to move into the field.

## Volunteer experience

Students may choose to volunteer in some capacity in order to get experience in an industry or career field. Examples would include prospective veterinarians working in an animal shelter or future nurses volunteering in a hospital. These are unpaid positions by definition and rarely include formal academic or professional training components.

## Internship

In an internship, a student joins a workplace for a period of time ranging from a few months to a year (semester-length internships are common). While there, he or she will perform job functions and learn about the career and industry. Internships may be paid or unpaid, depending on whether the student is performing productive work. Students participate under the direct supervision of a business mentor and focus on meeting both educational and workplace learning goals set jointly by the educator and employer.

## Externship

Like internships, externships provide valuable on-the-job training opportunities for students. They are essentially mini-internships, lasting between one day and two weeks, providing some meaningful work experience and exposure to multiple parts of an organization. They rarely include compensation.

## Co-operative education (Co-op)

Co-ops are multi-year commitments in which employers and educators work together on a formal strategy to integrate training and instruction. Students may alternate semesters between full-time school and full-time work or may combine the two. Students are typically paid, with wages increasing as their skills and experiences warrant. School credit is received for both the on-the-job training and the classroom components.

## Apprenticeship

Apprenticeships are offered in multiple industries to prepare an individual for various careers. They are most common at the postsecondary and adult levels; however, some programs accept high school students between the ages of 16 and 18 so the student can get a head start on completing the program. They consist of paid on-the-job training supplemented by related classroom instruction and take between one and five years to complete, depending on which occupation is chosen. Unlike most work-based learning models, the employer – not the educator – manages the experience.

## Service learning

Service learning is a work-based learning strategy that combines community service with career and technical learning goals. Students provide volunteer service to public and non-profit agencies or civic, charitable, and governmental organizations in the local community. Service learning differs from volunteering in terms of the higher-skilled work involved, higher levels of managerial oversight and support, and integration with instruction.

## School-based enterprise

A school-based enterprise is a simulated or actual business conducted by a school. It replicates a specific business and is a learning experience that provides direct links between classroom learning and the world of work. These commonly include school-based businesses such as snack or sundry shops, technology-based businesses such as web design, or offsite initiatives such as catering and event support operations. Students typically manage all aspects of these businesses, from sales to accounting, with faculty support and sometimes with employer mentors. This strategy is especially useful in areas without a large support base of local businesses.

## Teacher externships

Teacher externships provide hands-on opportunities for educators to engage with local industries, enhancing their understanding of current workplace practices, technologies, and skills. By hosting externships, employers allow teachers to observe and participate in real-world operations, fostering stronger connections between education and industry. This collaboration ensures CTE curricula align with workforce needs, equipping students with relevant skills. Externships typically last a few days to weeks, typically during the summer months to avoid scheduling issues.