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Advocating for the Adoption of a Comprehensive Work-Based Learning System

Shelley Gates

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ADVOCATING FOR THE ADOPTION OF
A COMPREHENSIVE WORK-BASED LEARNING SYSTEM

Shelley Gates
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
In the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education National Louis University
June, 2019
A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

A COMPARISON OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND COLLABORATION IN HIGH SCHOOL GEOMETRY CLASSES INCLUDING GEOMETRY IN CONSTRUCTION

PERCEPTIONS OF A TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL BELL SCHEDULE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

ADVOCATING FOR THE ADOPTION OF A COMPREHENSIVE WORK BASED LEARNING SYSTEM

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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This document was created as one part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006). For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning. My Program Evaluation is entitled, “A Comparison of Cooperative Learning and Collaboration in High School Geometry Classes Including Geometry in Construction.” I chose to evaluate an aspect of the Geometry in Construction program because it exemplifies what I believe to be “best practices” for student learning: hands-on, contextual, interdisciplinary, and team-oriented.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006). My Change Leadership Plan is entitled, “Perceptions of a Traditional Bell Schedule in the 21st Century.” I selected this topic because what I believe works best for student engagement and learning (hands-on, contextual, interdisciplinary, and team-oriented) requires blocks of time that are not currently available to most teachers at my school which operates under a traditional 42-minute bell schedule.

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995). My Policy Advocacy Document is entitled, “Advocating for the Adoption of a Comprehensive Work-Based Learning System.” I chose this topic based on my belief that a primary goal of education is to prepare all young people for viable and fulfilling lives beyond high school. I chose to research and write about Work-Based Learning as it exemplifies what I believe to be “best practices” in education. Namely, Work-Based Learning nearly always includes hands-on, contextual, interdisciplinary, and team-oriented learning.

**Works Cited**


6.20.16
ABSTRACT

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is an instructional strategy that has the potential to help students make powerful connections to the world of work leading to the development of viable post-secondary plans and successful careers. This study advocates for the implementation of a structured continuum of WBL experiences for all students at a large suburban high school. The benefits of WBL for students, the school, the community, and employers are examined. The impact of WBL is analyzed through the lenses of educational, economic, social, political, and ethical perspectives. The negative aspects of the prevailing culture of college for all is discussed. The importance of building and sustaining strong relationships between educators and the business community is highlighted, as well as the importance of addressing the effects of historic racism or bias in both education and employment. The author argues that with input from a range of stakeholders, high schools can develop, implement, and measure the success of comprehensive WBL systems leading to higher levels of post-secondary success for ALL graduates.
PREFACE: LESSONS LEARNED

There can be no doubt that the quality of a person’s work life will have a major impact on identity, wealth, self-esteem, and overall connection to society. Therefore, the question of how best to prepare young people for a successful work life is one that I believe educators should not be allowed to ignore. Serving as a Career and Technical Education Department Chair in a large suburban high school for 15+ years has solidified my belief in the potential of Work-Based Learning (WBL) as an important tool for preparing all young people for their future careers. WBL exemplifies what I have to come to believe are critical elements of student learning; it is hands on, contextual, interdisciplinary, and team-oriented. Whether students are participating in a class field trip to a construction site, working in teams to develop a detailed marketing plan for a local entrepreneur, engaging in an employer sponsored design challenge in an engineering class, or developing and teaching lessons to preschoolers, they are experiencing learning in important ways that are just not available in a traditional classroom setting.

A key takeaway from the experience of researching and writing about the need for the adoption of a WBL system at WTHS is the importance of taking advantage of opportunities for change as they arise. In 2019, the timing is right for an increased emphasis on WBL as it is a major component of the current national discussions regarding College and Career Readiness. Illinois’ new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) State Plan, which includes a College and Career Readiness Indicator (CCRI), will require high schools to measure multiple factors of student readiness for post-secondary success (Education Systems Center, 2017). This provides an excellent opportunity for adoption of a comprehensive WBL system to ensure that ALL students are on track for career success.
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SECTION 1: VISION STATEMENT

Work Based Learning (WBL) is an instructional model that encompasses both career planning and career preparation. WBL emphasizes real-life work experiences that enable students to learn and apply academic, technical, and employability skills. It is a sequenced and coordinated set of experiences that enables students to gain increasing exposure to the world of work (Cahill & Jackson, 2015). WBL is an underutilized instructional strategy that has the potential to help students make powerful connections to the world of work leading to the development of viable post-secondary plans and successful careers. It can help students develop 21st century skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity while also building a network of professional connections. Students who participate in WBL think in new ways that are not generally available to them in traditional classroom settings (Bailey, Hughes, & Moore, 2004). For example, students can transfer skills and knowledge between contexts by solving workplace problems using the technical and academic skills they learned in school, and by applying workplace skills to solve problems in their classes at school (Alfeld, Charner, Johnson, & Watts, 2013). WBL can be an antidote to the chronic problem of disengagement in school as students who participate in WBL report that these programs make them more interested in school which in turn leads to higher attendance and lower dropout rates than comparison students (Bailey et al., 2004). This is particularly significant for what is known as opportunity youth (defined as people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor working) who do not see themselves on the typical 4-year college track (Verrenti Consulting, 2017).

For these reasons, I am proposing the adoption of a district policy requiring the implementation of a comprehensive WBL system at Willard Township High School (WTHS). Specifically, this system would provide a sequenced continuum of WBL activities and
experiences for all students that address career awareness, career exploration, career preparation, and career training. In my role as Career and Technical Education Department Chair at WTHS, I have seen firsthand how WBL experiences can positively impact the post-secondary trajectories of students. I know students whose lives have been changed by something as seemingly simple as a one-day job shadow experience. I have seen students participate in a sequence of career awareness and career exploration activities that led to a summer job that turned into a career path. Unfortunately, many students at WTHS are exposed to a minimal amount of WBL, perhaps only an online career interest assessment during their freshman year. This means they are missing the opportunity to learn about how their skills, talents, and interests can lead them to a successful and meaningful post-secondary path. Only 75% of WTHS graduates (class of 2015) were enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college 12 months after graduation. With a graduating class of 699, that means that 175 WTHS graduates were not enrolled in college one year after graduation (omitted for confidentiality, 2017). For these students, I believe that a continuum of WBL experiences during high school could have increased their awareness of and access to a wide range of post-secondary pathways to success.

Willard Township High School is not alone in struggling to find ways to prepare all students for post-secondary success. High schools across the nation recognize that too many students leave high school without the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in a world that demands young people who can think critically, solve problems, collaborate with others, take initiative, and innovate (Wagner, 2008). As we entered the second decade of the 21st century, researchers and policymakers voiced growing concern about young people who leave high school without the skills, knowledge, experience and aptitudes necessary for success in an increasingly complex world (Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011; Wagner, 2008; CCSSO,
2014; Brand, 2013). The US economy requires a better educated workforce than in the past, and jobs in this new economy require more complex knowledge and skills. The Center for Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University projected that by the year 2018, nearly two-thirds of jobs created in the US required some form of post-secondary education (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Many young adults in the US lack the skills they need to attain and keep jobs that pay a middle class wage (Symonds et al., 2011).

In his book, “The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don’t Teach The New Survival Skills Our Children Need and What We Can Do About It,” Tony Wagner provides detailed descriptions of seven survival skills that he believes all young people need to be successful in the 21st century: critical thinking and problem solving; collaboration across networks and leading by influence; agility and adaptability; initiative and entrepreneurialism; effective oral and written communication; accessing and analyzing information; and curiosity and imagination (Wagner, 2014). The Partnership for 21st Century Learning, a coalition founded to bring attention to the importance of 21st century readiness in the US K-12 education system, developed a framework that echoes many of Wagner’s survival skills and adds others such as mastery of key academic subjects (English, world languages, arts, mathematics, economics, science, geography, history, government/civics); global awareness; financial and business literacy; media literacy; social and cross-cultural skills; productivity and accountability; and leadership and responsibility (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2015). Recent efforts by organizations like Achieve and the Career Readiness Partner Council have focused on developing career-focused readiness indicators to partner with college readiness indicators. Career readiness indicators include proficiency in core academic subjects as well as a level of technical-skill proficiency aligned to a particular career pathway. They also encompass a
number of employability skills and dispositions including goal setting and planning, ethical
decision making, and communication skills (Kreamer, O’Hara & Curl, 2014).

**Benefits to Students**

Across the country, there is growing recognition that work-related experiences can
increase students’ understanding of the connections between educational attainment and career
trajectories. This is because WBL experiences -- including career awareness, career exploration,
career preparation, and career training -- provide clear pathways to educational and career
advancement for young people. According to *Pathways to Prosperity* (Symonds et al., 2011),
“Work-linked learning should play an especially important role in the new American system of
pathways to prosperity. There is mounting evidence that this would be an effective strategy for
encouraging young people to complete both high school and post-secondary degrees” (p. 31).

In a study of more than 30,000 college graduates across the US, Gallup, Inc. and Purdue
University found that participating in an internship or job that enabled them to apply what they
were learning in the classroom resulted in an increase in workplace engagement. For the
purposes of the study, workplace engagement was defined as being intellectually and
emotionally connected to work based on a belief that the worker is doing what he/she is best at,
liking what he/she does at work, and having someone who cares about his/her development at
work. Having this type of internship or job, combined with active engagement in
extracurriculars, and taking courses that enabled them to work on projects that took a semester or
more to complete, actually doubled the odds of work engagement later in life (Gallup-Purdue,
2014).

Students who interact cooperatively with employers benefit in a variety of ways. They
are able to apply classroom learning (both academic and technical) in a real-world setting and
establish a clear connection between school and work. By observing and participating in authentic job-related tasks, students are able to develop and practice positive work-related habits and attitudes including the ability to think critically and work in teams (Hoffman, 2015). They are able to establish professional contacts for future employment and improve their post-graduation employment opportunities (Theodos et al., 2017). Having opportunities to engage in meaningful WBL has been found to reinforce high expectations for student success and contribute to students’ personal and professional development (Thessin, Scully-Russ, & Lieberman, 2017).

**Benefits to Employers**

Employer motivation for partnering with schools to provide WBL opportunities is two-fold: self-interest and philanthropic (Bailey et al., 2004, p. 75). In terms of self-interest, the most obvious benefit is access to a more robust talent pipeline and to a diverse and innovative workforce (Cahill & Jackson, 2015, p. 5). A thoughtfully developed WBL program can result in reduced training/recruitment costs and provide developmental opportunities for current employees. Many employers choose to participate in WBL for philanthropic reasons such as a general interest in contributing to the community. They may also see participation in WBL as a way to contribute to improvement of the public education system. (Bailey et al., 2004, p. 78).

**Benefits to Schools**

Increasing WBL for students promotes and fosters interactions between teachers and other school staff members and the business community. As school personnel engage with employers, they can access valuable real-world input on curriculum, instruction, and facilities. Students benefit from exposure to state-of-the-art equipment and technology that is normally not
available in classroom settings. Business partners may also bring financial resources to the school. WBL can increase attendance and graduation rates (Colley & Jamison, 1998), lower dropout rates (National Academy Foundation, 2011), and increase college entrance rates for students of color (Center for Advanced Research and Technology, 2011).

**Benefits to the Community**

Communities benefit when strong partnerships based on collaboration and cooperation are formed between schools and employers. A robust WBL program can contribute to a more productive local economy and foster confidence in the school system as one that is providing opportunities for all students to make connections to the real world and build skills for post-secondary success. Another advantage is the potential for increasing employment prospects for local high school graduates, allowing more young people to remain in the community as adults (Iowa Department of Education).

To reap all of these WBL benefits, WTHS will need to shift from a culture of *college for all* to one that values career readiness and career connected learning for all students. It will necessitate the building and sustaining of strong relationships between school personnel and local employers. It will also require a specific focus on addressing the effects of historic racism or bias in both education and employment in our school and community. With input from a range of stakeholders, WTHS can develop, implement, and measure the success of a comprehensive WBL system leading to high levels of post-secondary success for ALL graduates.
SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

I believe that the adoption of a comprehensive WBL system at WTHS will lead to an increase in the number of graduates with viable post-secondary plans based on individual skills, interests, and career aspirations. This section will analyze the need for expansion of WBL as an integral part of the educational system in US public schools. Five specific disciplinary areas (educational, economic, social, political, and moral/ethical) are examined in relation to both the need for and the complexity of implementing elements of WBL.

**Educational Analysis**

Learning via the workplace has engaged interest around the world as a way to create smoother pathways from school to work, ensure closer alignment between what students are learning and the knowledge and skills they will need in the workplace, foster students’ acquisition of “soft skills,” and help answer the question, “Why do I have to learn this?” (Falconer & Pettigrew, 2003; OECD, 2014; Hoffman, 2015). Although WBL programs and activities are currently more common at the post-secondary level in the US, they have also shown promise at the high school level as a way to connect academics to the “real world;” to motivate students to engage in academic learning; to help students learn about and set goals for post-secondary success; and to provide opportunities for students to learn academic, life and work-readiness skills (Kenny, Walsh-Blair, Blustein, Bempchat, & Seltzer, 2010; Bempechat, Kenny, Bluestein, & Seltzer, 2014). A major advantage of WBL is that students can observe direct applications for what they are learning in the classroom. They are able to engage in contextualized learning which has been specifically linked to positive outcomes for students who have not been particularly successful in traditional academic settings (Holzer, Linn & Monthey, 2013). WBL can provide a wide range of educational experiences and opportunities, along with support from adults, that serve as a foundation for positive youth outcomes (Bailey et al., 2004).
Students participating in WBL can expand their repertoire of problem-solving skills; engage in higher-order thinking; and learn about social relations, organizational dynamics, and workplace cultures (Bailey et al., 2004).

Countries with high percentages of high school students participating in both intensive Career and Technical Education (CTE) and WBL have higher achievement outcomes (graduation rates, reading and math literacy, post-secondary enrollment) than do countries where participation is low, such as the United States (Stone & Lewis, 2012). In the US, the prevalent thinking is that young people are supposed to vigorously pursue their education and then, and only then, pursue a career or find employment. This dichotomy between education and work prevents us from understanding that the workplace actually provides an ideal environment for students to apply academic skills and knowledge and practice critical 21st century skills like teamwork and problem-solving (Hoffman, 2015).

Despite the evidence supporting its benefits, WBL has been implemented by only a small number of individual schools and school networks in the US since the 1990s. Examples include the Catholic school network Cristo Rey and the Big Picture Learning charter schools (Berdik, 2017). At Cristo Rey high schools, students participate in a structured corporate work study program. Each student works one full day each week at local companies in various industries including accounting, banking, healthcare, insurance, law, real estate and technology (Cristo Rey Network). At the Big Picture Learning schools, students participate in Learning Through Interests and Internships (LTIs), often twice per week for the entire school day. The focus is on spending time with experts in the student’s field of interest and requires the completion of authentic projects and understanding how interests connect to the real world (Big Picture Learning Ten Distinguishers).
According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), recent educational reform movements have primarily focused on academic standards via standardized testing and raising teacher quality rather than focusing on the many barriers that inhibit student success. To counteract this trend, the ASCA is committed to helping students understand how their school experiences can affect their educational and career options in the future. Fully one-third of the ASCA National Standards for Students focus on career development, providing a “foundation for the acquisition of skills, attitudes and knowledge that enable students to make a successful transition from school to the world of work, and from job to job across the lifespan” (American School Counseling Association, 2004). In support of WBL opportunities, there is a specific standard for applying academic and employment readiness skills in work-based learning situations such as internships, job shadowing, and/or workplace mentoring experiences.

In short, WBL has the potential to enhance and enrich the academic learning environment in US high schools, and at the same time, enable students to attain personal, social and workplace readiness competencies (Kenny et al., 2016).

Economic Analysis

There is a growing skills gap in the US which is impacting employers’ ability to fill open positions and remain competitive in the global market (American Society for Training and Development, 2012; Symonds et al., 2011; OECD, 2014). This skills gap is characterized by, on the one hand, too many young people who do not have the necessary job skills and, on the other hand, employers who have not been able to develop effective talent pipelines to fill open positions. Contributing to the problem are large numbers of individuals who lack even fundamental employability skills, as well as a lack of workers who have the specialized skills needed for many skilled trade positions. The problem is particularly acute in the areas of
science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). This includes jobs in the healthcare, information technology, and manufacturing sectors. For example, there are currently approximately three and a half million open positions in manufacturing and 6 in 10 jobs are going unfilled (Cahill & Jackson, 2015). Because the working-age population in the US is currently growing at only half the rate of the past century and baby boomers are retiring in record numbers, the skills gap is a growing problem (Business Roundtable, 2017). Many employers in the US do not believe that the majority of today’s young adults have the necessary skills to succeed in the 21st century workforce. They are particularly critical of high school graduates’ skill levels in the areas of oral and written communication, critical thinking and professionalism (Symonds et al., 2011).

Other factors that contribute to the skills gap include lack of labor market information regarding the job needs of a particular geographic region, a lack of understanding of the level and types of training required for those jobs, the unavailability of the kind of education or training needed for specific occupations, and the lack of clear pathways to post-training employment (Business Roundtable, 2017). Despite the fact that the private sector spends approximately $160 billion each year on education and training, this expenditure is not translating into a sufficient number of skilled workers to meet our nation’s needs (Symonds et al., 2011).

Expansion of WBL can lead the US in the direction of full employment by stimulating job growth for young adults, which is the demographic group with the highest unemployment rates. Increasing young adults’ job skills leads to higher productivity in the US economy as a whole (Holzer & Lerman, 2014). While offering numerous benefits to young adults, WBL can be developed for fairly low costs to public institutions (schools, community colleges, workforce
development agencies). This is because employers generally pay for the training provided for participants. In the case of apprenticeships and some internships, WBL participants receive some form of financial compensation in addition to the skills they are learning. Many employers are willing to bear the costs of this kind of training based on the benefits of raising employee productivity and loyalty (Cahill & Jackson, 2015; Hoffman, 2015; Alfeld et al., 2013).

Social Analysis

The number of high school aged students in the US who hold part-time jobs has steadily decreased over the past 20 years. In 1995, 33.2 percent of all young people enrolled in high school were also employed compared to just 19.4 percent in 2015 (Child Trends, 2017). This has had a negative impact on young people as a whole as it has deprived many of them of the opportunity to earn income, develop job-related skills, learn about the world of work, and/or list job experiences on applications and/or resumes. This decline was primarily caused by the economic downturn which led to fewer total jobs available which in turn led to older Americans taking many jobs that used to be filled by young people (Cahill & Jackson, 2015). Young adults in the United States face many additional barriers as they attempt to successfully transition from school to adulthood. The vast majority of jobs that pay enough for economic self-sufficiency require some post-secondary education or credentials, yet many young people are either working in low-wage, dead-end jobs, or are pursuing educational credentials that are not only expensive but may lead to un- or underemployment (Dahl, DeLeire, & Schwabish, 2010). A term used by researchers to describe the difficulties faced by many young adults as they attempt to transition from school to work is “floundering.” This term accurately describes the ineffective series of activities that many young people undertake as they leave high school and attempt to attain economic self-sufficiency. Floundering is characterized by frequent job changes, entries and
exits from the job market, and attempts at further education that do not lead to better career options (Vuolo, Mortimer & Staff, 2013).

One approach to providing job-related experiences and increasing the match between young adults’ skills and the requirements of today’s job market is to expand WBL opportunities. For young adults who have completed high school, WBL has a number of advantages over other educational or training programs. Perhaps most significant is the fact that students engaged in WBL do not have to choose between pursuing educational credentials and working. In addition, in a WBL experience such as an apprenticeship, a young person is an employee who is actually paid because she/he is contributing to the financial success of the employer (Holzer & Lerman, 2014). In addition, WBL programs are often offered through partnerships between educational institutions (high schools and community colleges) and employers or employer associations. This helps to ensure that the skills students are learning are valued in the workplace. These WBL programs often lead to credentials, such as an Associate’s Degree, in high-demand fields (Holzer & Lerman, 2014). Because of this, WBL models can be viewed as an important piece of the post-secondary puzzle rather than as poor substitutes.

The skills and knowledge gained via WBL experiences can have a far reaching and long lasting impact on an individual’s future. In terms of salary attainment and earning potential, young people who pursued a career field of interest (and were academically prepared) consistently earned higher wages than did those who ended up working in careers for which they had little or no interest. For college students, factors such as higher grade point averages, retention rates, and graduations rates are all positively correlated with majoring in a stated career field of interest (Meeder, 2016).
Political Analysis

Although some countries, such as Switzerland, Germany, Singapore, and the Netherlands, have highly developed or comprehensive WBL programs at the secondary school level, WBL programs are not typical or systemic in the US (Hoffman, 2015). Policies designed to improve labor market outcomes for young adults in the US are limited by a scarcity of information regarding “best practices” in school-to-work policies and by tight budgets at the local, state, and national levels. Additionally, employers may be reluctant to provide certain kinds of WBL experiences for students based on concerns about labor laws and liability issues. In fact, federal and state laws do not prevent high school students from participating in most school-sanctioned WBL experiences. In most cases, the laws and regulations in place for adult employees apply to young people under the age of 18. While some state and local governments may have specific regulations focused on the number of hours students can work or the type of work they are allowed to do, most employers can easily comply with these requirements and still provide meaningful WBL experiences that will be mutually beneficial to students and themselves (Cahill & Jackson, 2015).

In order to maximize access and increase participation in WBL, the US needs additional policies that promote the development and implementation of comprehensive programs. According to Jobs for the Future, a national policy organization that focuses on ensuring that all lower-income young people and workers have the skills and credentials needed to succeed in our economy, there are three types of policies that would have a positive impact on increasing WBL opportunities. The first type of policy is incentivizing to increase employer buy-in through mechanisms such as tax credits, training levies, or subsidies. A second recommended policy would target the embedding of WBL in schools by providing teacher
externships and credits for high school students who engage in WBL. Lastly, to provide more staffing of WBL efforts, Jobs for the Future recommends financial support for intermediaries to help develop stronger partnerships between schools and employers and provide technical assistance for WBL program development and implementation (Hoffman, 2015).

Designing effective state workforce and education systems is a priority of US governors. The National Governors Association is attempting to help states in the adoption of innovative approaches to closing the skills gap, including expansion of WBL strategies. Examples include the launching of a “Invest in Skills NY” campaign in New York, a recent financial commitment to developing innovative career pathways in Maryland, and a new Office of Apprenticeship & Work-Based Learning in Indiana (Hauge & Parton, 2016). In Illinois, the House of Representatives adopted House Resolution 477 in 2015 which called for the State Board of Education, Community College Board, Board of Higher Education, Student Assistance Commission, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and the Department of Employment Security to research and develop recommendations regarding ways to better prepare high school graduates for success in college and/or career. Advisory committees were formed and recommendations were developed. This effort culminated in the passage of a bill which created the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act, which codified the Illinois PaCE: Postsecondary and Career Expectations Framework. This framework was designed as a way for schools to organize and focus efforts in three areas: Career Exploration and Development; Postsecondary Education Exploration, Preparation, and Selection; and Financial Aid and Literacy (Illinois PaCE, 2016) (see Appendix A).
Moral and Ethical Analysis

There is a growing movement in US high schools to proclaim that their institution is ensuring that every student will graduate *college and career ready*. After many years of a *college for all* message throughout the US, there is an increasing recognition that career readiness is important and not just for the *non-college bound*. However, the concept of *career readiness* continues to be seen by many educators, parents, and community members as an afterthought. Many Americans continue to believe that if students will just pursue a college preparatory course of study in high school, they will, by default, be on track for a rewarding career. The one-size-fits-all model of *college for all* with *career preparation* as a secondary and less important goal actually serves to solidify the class divide in the US (Hoffman, 2015). While students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds follow in their parents’ footsteps to anticipate and prepare for professional careers, students from lower income families often lack the financial and social capital needed to navigate the expensive and complex world of higher education. The vast majority of middle and high school students in the US plan to go to college, and college enrollment continues its long-term rise. Yet 1.3 million drop out of high school each year, and less than half of all college students earn a credential within six years. This leads to the question of whether the traditional pathway to a well-paying and satisfying career—a high school diploma and a four-year college degree—is in fact the best pathway for all young people. Because we have failed to make the concept of multiple pathways to post-secondary success a reality in the US, many young people spend years after high school floundering. Our economy and society are missing out on their potential contributions (Symonds et al., 2011).

Low-income youth of color face a variety of barriers to attaining jobs that provide meaning and economic self-sufficiency (Mathew & Ferber, 2016; Bird & Okoh, 2016). As the
workforce changes based on technological innovation and the globalization of the economy, young people from low-income families, who have less education, and/or who belong to a racial or ethnic minority group are at a disadvantage. They are more likely to experience an opportunity gap meaning that they have less access to the academic, economic, and social resources compared to more affluent students (Kenny et al., 2016). The opportunity gap can result in negative outcomes such as lower rates of high school or post-secondary education completion, lower lifetime incomes, and longer periods of unemployment.

In 2016, the unemployment rate for young people aged 16 to 24 who are out of school was 28.9% for whites, 31.3% for Latinos, and 53.1% for blacks (Mathew & Ferber, 2016). The high unemployment rate for youth of color is particularly troubling because early work experiences have been positively connected to long-term employment outcomes such as higher wages (Bird & Okoh, 2016). Barriers faced by youth of color include limited access to transportation; the need to balance multiple obligations including family, school, and work; and a lack of access to social capital and/or networks of adults who can help them gain employment (Mathew & Faber, 2016). Work-based learning can help urban youth, particularly youth of color, explore the meaning of work in relation to their own values and develop a positive future orientation (Kenney et al., 2016).
SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

In this section, I will provide an overview of the goals and objectives of the comprehensive WBL system that I am proposing for implementation at WTHS. This overview will include an explanation of the sequenced set of activities through which students will gain increasing exposure to the world of work.

Goals and Objectives

I am proposing the adoption of a WBL system that is modeled after the Work-Based Learning Continuum developed by the California Center for College and Career for the Linked Learning System in California (Figure 1) (Linked Learning, 2012). The elements of the model that make it a good choice for WTHS are the emphasis on providing continual opportunities for career awareness throughout a young person’s years of schooling, combined with the opportunity for more intense WBL experiences for students as they approach high school completion. Linked Learning WBL is a core component of the California Linked Learning model and was developed as an essential instructional strategy for preparing students for post-secondary education and careers (Linked Learning, 2012). The primary purpose of this kind of WBL system is to expose students to a wide range of future options and to provide opportunities for the development of career-related skills over time. In a WBL continuum, students participate in learning experiences that are thoughtfully and intentionally designed to help students make connections between what they are learning in school and potential post-secondary outcomes. While partnerships with business and community professionals are a key component of the model, the term work-based does not mean that all of the experiences must occur away from the school building.

In this model of WBL, there are three stages of experiences: learning about work, learning through work, and learning for work. In the first stage (learning about work), students
participate in career awareness and career exploration activities. In the second stage (learning through work), students participate in practical experiences such as internships. In the third stage (learning for work), students train for employment in a specific occupational area. Experiences along the continuum help young people progressively build their career awareness skills and typically increase in intensity as the student progresses (Verenti Consulting, 2017). As designed and implemented in California Linked Learning schools, the WBL continuum begins in kindergarten and reaches into adulthood (Linked Learning, 2012).

**Figure 1 - Linked Learning Work-Based Learning Continuum.**

(Linked Learning, 2012).
Because WTHS is a high school district, the WBL program I am proposing will be implemented for grades 9 through 12 only. I am recommending collapsing the four stages of WBL as described in the Linked Learning model to 2 stages to simplify implementation and communication. The first stage, career planning, will encompass both career awareness and career exploration and will take place primarily during grades 9 and 10. The second stage, career preparation, will encompass career training and will take place during grades 11 and 12.

Upon adoption of the comprehensive WBL system, WBL will become a documented part of every student’s educational experience and will result in increased career planning and career preparation with the primary goal of increasing the number of students who graduate with viable post-secondary plans. Student participation in and reflection about their WBL experiences will be housed in her/his Naviance (college and career readiness software system) account. In the proposed system, WBL will include a wide range of activities that promote both career planning and career preparation. It will also include opportunities for more intensive career preparation via paid or unpaid work experiences, internships, and/or career mentoring. Detailed descriptions of these two components of WBL are included below.

**Career Planning**

Career planning is an essential component of any WBL system and it is comprised of career awareness and career exploration. Career awareness and exploration activities such as career interest inventories, career research, job shadowing and worksite field trips help young people identify their own skills and interests and make meaningful connections to post-secondary aspirations and goals. In addition, these activities are designed to help students to develop a comprehensive understanding of the world of work (Jobs for the Future, 2017; Verrenti Consulting, 2017). Career planning requires that students have access to up-to-date information
regarding career options and that students have time built into the school day to complete career awareness and exploration activities (Jobs for the Future, 2017). Within the new WBL system, a high-quality career awareness or career exploration activity will be defined as a planned interaction between an individual or a group of students and a business partner/employer. Upon completion of a career planning activity or experience, a student will have a broad understanding of the options available within a particular career strand and understand and be able to articulate the post-secondary training and/or education that is required to attain a position in a particular career field. The student will be able to reflect upon and communicate both verbally and in writing (in the Journal section of his/her Naviance account) examples of how her/his own skills, interests, and abilities relate to a specific career field or occupation (Jobs for the Future, 2017).

**Career Preparation**

While career planning experiences are designed to increase student awareness of the world of work, career preparation moves students along the WBL continuum to support their ability to be successful in a specific career area (Jobs for the Future, 2017; Linked Learning, 2012). Within the new WBL system, high-quality career preparation activities will take place primarily as part of a course of study within the Career and Technical Education or Fine Arts Departments. However, a key element of the new WBL system will be the engagement of teachers across all departments to provide experiences for students that help them develop workplace skills that they can apply to multiple post-secondary options.

Career preparation activities will be defined as direct and sustained interaction with business partners (or college faculty members), engagement in activities that have consequences beyond a specific high school class and that are evaluated by professionals from beyond school walls, and application of skills and knowledge transferable to a variety of careers (Linked
Learning, 2012). The experiences may include a project that is integrated within a specific course that involves multiple interactions with business and/or community partners (such as an industry challenge), a student-run enterprise with business partner input, service learning via community partnerships, or an internship that is connected to a course of study.

Upon completion of a career preparation experience, a student will be able to reflect upon and communicate both verbally and in writing about how she/he has been able to build and use 21st century skills such as team building, collaboration, communication, and problem solving. The student will be able to record reflections in the Journal section of her/his Naviance account. Career training experiences will be designed to prepare students for employment in a specific range of occupations. While career training is primarily a strategy in post-high school education, the WTHS WBL system will include a small number of career training options, primarily via industry-recognized certifications. Opportunities to earn industry-recognized certifications are currently available in a variety of WTHS Career and Technical Education courses including Culinary Arts (ServSafe Food Handler and Food Protection Manager), Health Sciences (Pharmacy Technician), Early Childhood Education (Gateways to Opportunity Level 1 Early Career and Education), Construction (OSHA 10-Hour Safety), Automotive Technology (Automotive Service Excellence Student Certification), and Manufacturing (National Institute of Metalworking Skills Material, Measurement, and Safety). Once the WBL system is in place, WTHS can begin to expand options for industry recognized certifications including digital badges (an online record of student competencies in a variety of technological and other 21st century skills) which could be earned via classroom or workplace experiences.
SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

In this section, I will present what I consider to be the two major arguments in favor of the adoption and implementation of more robust WBL programs within all US school systems, with a particular focus on the positive aspects of implementation at WTHS. Following an explanation of these two arguments, I will present the two most prevalent counter-arguments.

I believe that prevention of *post-high school floundering* is the primary argument for the adoption of a continuum of WBL experiences for high school students. Researchers coined the term *floundering* to describe the challenges many young people face as they attempt to navigate the increasingly complex, lengthy, and for some, expensive transition from school to career (Vuolo et al., 2013). The cost of this floundering is borne by individual young people, their families, employers, and society at large. An example of a challenge that leads to floundering is the phenomenon of recent college graduates taking jobs for which they are overqualified. This is termed *underemployment*, (Lederman, 2018, p. 1), and it is estimated to affect up to 45 percent of recent college graduates (Federal Reserve of New York, 2018). Another contributing factor to the floundering phenomenon is student loan debt. In 2016, approximately 37 percent of adults under the age of 30 had student loan debt and Americans owned more than $1.3 trillion in student loans, 2.5 times more than what was owed in 2006 (Cilluffo, 2017). Student loan debt has serious consequences for young adults including struggling financially, needing to hold a second job, and a negative opinion about the value of their college degree when weighed against the costs (Cilluffo, 2017). While underemployment and crushing student loan debt contribute to floundering for recent college graduates, young people who do not go to a four-year college or who attend a four-year college but do not actually complete a bachelor’s degree face even more daunting challenges as they navigate their post-high-school life.
Over 20 years ago, traditional American high schools were criticized for failing to ensure that graduates had the “mature and informed judgement needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself” (United States Department of Education, 1983, p. 1). Today, students face even more difficulties such as the rapidly changing global economy, increased automation causing job displacement, and a shrinking middle class. Given these economic challenges, the public school system is obligated to expose young people to information about the rapidly changing labor market, continuous technological innovations, and employers’ increasing demands for higher and different kinds of skills (Bennett, 2007).

To avoid post-high school floundering and successfully navigate the complexity of the current labor market, young people require access to current information regarding the ever changing job market and connections to successful career mentors. I believe that high schools are obligated to help all students make the best decisions about their post-high school plans and an important way to do this is to provide WBL experiences. No matter what a student wants to do after leaving high school, having the opportunity to learn about and gain real experience in a career field will help them make better decisions and increase the odds that they are choosing the best post-secondary path for their future.

At WTHS, the issue of “career readiness” is addressed as part of the Board of Education’s strategic plan in Goal #1 -- Equitable and Excellent Education. The details of this goal are as follows: “WTHS will strive to eliminate the predictability of academic achievement based upon race. WTHS will increase each student's academic and functional trajectory to realize college/career readiness and independence. Recognizing that racism is the most devastating factor contributing to the diminished achievement of students, we will also strive to eliminate the
predictability of academic achievement based upon family income, disabilities and status as English language learners” (omitted for confidentiality, 2016 [a]). Although the prevention of post-high school floundering is not specifically mentioned in the board goal, the focus on the importance of ensuring that each student achieve college/career readiness is clear.

In a 2016 memo, the WTHS Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction referenced the work of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) regarding the establishment of benchmarks for college, career and life readiness (omitted for confidentiality, 2016 [b]). The association’s support of the use of multiple measures to assess and demonstrate college, career, and life readiness rather than standardized test scores has been titled “Redefining Ready” (AASA). Closer to home, the development of these new college, career and life ready benchmarks is taking place in Illinois District 214. Students are considered Career Ready if they have identified a career interest and meet two or more of the following behavioral and experiential benchmarks:

- 90% attendance
- 25 hours of Community Service
- Workplace Learning Experience
- Industry Credential
- Dual Credit Career Pathway Course
- Two or more organized Co-Curricular Activities (AASA).

According to the WTHS Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, the WTHS administration sees great promise in using this multiple measure approach to gauge college and career readiness because it moves away from the use of a single, standardized test score to a more inclusive measure (omitted for confidentiality, 2016 [b]). Because Workplace
Learning Experience is prominently featured in the career readiness benchmarks, the time is right for the development and implementation of a WBL system at WTHS that focuses on equity, quality, and measurability.

A second compelling argument for the implementation of WBL programs in schools is their potential for transformational learning. The value of learning outside the classroom -- and in the workplace -- has been extolled for many years but is currently vastly underutilized as a learning strategy. All students benefit from opportunities to learn beyond the classroom as they can transform minds and build capacity to understand and pursue future possibilities (Dewey, 1916). However, the common perspective in the US is that young people become educated and then, and only then, they go to work. This perception of the dichotomy between education and work prevents us from seeing the workplace as an environment where powerful learning can take place. In fact, the workplace provides opportunities to apply academic skills and content as well as build important 21st century skills such as interpersonal and intrapersonal capacities (Hoffman, 2015).

Students participating in WBL actually learn to think in new ways that are not generally available in the traditional US classroom. They are exposed to contextualized learning that includes different ways of forming and solving problems, as well as distributed thinking and teamwork (Bailey, Hughes, & Moore, 2004). Learning in the workplace can range from acquiring very specific technical skills to developing a broader understanding of what work is and what it means. It has been proven to increase young adults’ social networks, including connections to post-secondary options and further career opportunities. Learning in the workplace can change the way a young person approaches subsequent tasks, relates to others, and considers options (Cahill & Jackson, 2015). While there is a general awareness that
employment can be a positive aspect of youth development, research supports the importance of early work experiences (such as WBL), particularly for low-income youth and students of color (Bird & Okoh, 2016).

Thomas Bailey, Katherine Hughes and David Thornton completed an in-depth ethnographic inquiry research study which involved observing and interviewing 25 high school students who were participating in internships. Although they found what they considered to be only weak evidence for a direct positive impact of WBL on academic achievement as it is traditionally measured (standardized tests and grades), they found that WBL helps to address student disengagement from school. In their analysis of research regarding school-to-work programs implemented in the 1990s, they found that students who participated in WBL programs reported a positive connection between their WBL experiences and being more interested in school overall; WBL participants also had higher attendance and lower dropout rates than comparison students (Bailey et al., 2004).

The most prevalent argument against the establishment of a comprehensive WBL system at WTHS is that our primary focus should be on college readiness for all students. While the overall concept of “Redefining Ready” is being embraced by more school districts, college readiness remains the primary concern and receives the majority of time and attention at schools like WTHS. For example, in the same memo in which the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction refers to the promising nature of multiple measures of high school graduate success, he recommended that the board focus on five measures “that matter” including keeping freshmen on track, the graduation rate, access to and success in AP courses, ACT College Readiness Benchmarks in English and math, and reduction of discipline and suspension rates (omitted for confidentiality, 2016 [b]). Career readiness is not mentioned.
In the minds of many, completing a college degree remains the “gold standard” for success in the US and this belief permeates virtually every aspect of life in American high schools. The evidence in favor of college is compelling. For example, the lifetime earnings gap between those with a college degree and those with only a high school education is estimated to be close to $1 million (Symonds et al., 2011). In the US, a variety of college-for-all policies have been in place since the end of the WWII and have led to large scale college enrollment. At the beginning of the 21st century, over 80 percent of on-time high school graduates were enrolling in college within 8 years after graduation and this percentage has continued to increase (Rosenbaum, Ahearn, & Rosenbaum, 2017). Indeed, one reason for the college for all emphasis in the US is that the college degree has, over time, become a proxy for career readiness. As the value of the high school diploma came into question as documentation of meaningful achievement, many employers have come to rely on the college degree as a marker of career and life readiness (Stone & Lewis, 2012). Many school leaders continue to believe in the college for all rhetoric that has been a major force behind current education reform movements. In a time of scarcity (time and money), emphasizing college readiness remains a politically safe course to follow.

Another compelling argument against the implementation of a robust WBL system is the complexity of implementation. Even for those who agree that the workplace is an ideal place for learning, the development and implementation of a WBL program is fraught with challenges. The vision for a comprehensive WBL system must consider a range of issues including equity, quality, scheduling, transportation, and staffing. The issue of staffing is particularly critical. Research has shown that an important feature of any successful WBL program is coordination by a dedicated staff member who can form and sustain relationships
with the business community, prepare both students and employers for WBL experiences, and visit work sites to insure proper student supervision, as well as solve any workplace issues (Alfeld et al, 2013). Other specific concerns that must be addressed include high school students’ lack of maturity, state labor laws and regulations, and liability insurance (Alfeld et al., 2013). In fact, many employers remain hesitant to engage in WBL, especially in activities that are longer in duration and for which they incur a cost for wages (Cahill & Jackson, 2015).

Despite the continuing college for all rhetoric and the difficulties we will face as we attempt to engage employers in WBL efforts, educators must develop and implement new strategies to reduce post-high school floundering and help students and their families understand and access multiple pathways to success. WBL provides students with unique opportunities to increase their understanding of the world of work, their potential place in that world, and the skills and credentials they will need to be on track for career and life success. In addition, WBL makes it possible for students to experience learning in ways that are not available to them in the traditional classroom setting.
Adoption of a WBL system for students at WTHS will require the incorporation of the initiative into the Board of Education’s goals, a detailed implementation plan, and a performance measurement plan. Setting educational goals in accordance with State of Illinois law and adopting school board policies are among the Board of Education's main responsibilities. Having a WBL system adopted as part of the Board of Education’s goals, along with incorporation into the district's strategic plan, will help insure resource allocation and provide impetus for the administration to identify WBL as an important area of focus in the district's planning efforts and provide the resources for successful implementation. Without a detailed plan for implementation that includes multiple stakeholders, it is likely that the WBL program will fall victim to the disconnect between vision and actual implementation, an all too common pitfall of proposed policy changes in the educational arena (Odden, 2012).

While the task of developing a WBL system can be considered a technical solution to a technical problem, it is more useful to consider it as an adaptive challenge as described in “The Practice of Adaptive Leadership” (Heifetz, Linsky & Groshow, 2009). The establishment of the system itself involves technical moves such as setting goals, determining staffing, and developing timelines. However, growing a WBL system is a challenge that requires substantial new thinking, learning, and change by numerous stakeholders including teachers, students, parents, employers, and community members. It requires a shift in how schools teach students and requires the long-term commitment of a wide range of stakeholders both within and beyond the walls of the school (Jobs for the Future, 2016).
Incorporation into District Board of Education Goals

In April of 2016, the State of Illinois submitted its Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) State Plan to the US Department of Education. The plan includes a College and Career Readiness Indicator (CCRI), which includes multiple factors for measuring student readiness for post-secondary success (Education Systems Center, 2017). Although the Illinois State Plan for implementation of the ESSA has not yet been finalized and approved by the US Department of Education, the Illinois State Board of Education is working with the Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University to support implementation of the CCRI by conducting an analysis of existing definitions and data collection structures and providing recommendations for statewide implementation.

Statewide implementation of the CCRI provides a platform for local school districts, communities, and business leaders to determine how best to implement WBL experiences for students. For example, an important component of the CCRI is student completion of a Career Development Experience which is defined as a supervised work experience relating to an individual’s career area of interest that:

1. Occurs in a workplace or under other authentic working conditions;
2. Is co-developed by an education provider and at least one employer in the relevant field;
3. Provides compensation or educational credit to the participant;
4. Reinforces foundational professional skills including, at a minimum, those outlined in the Essential Employability Skills framework; and
5. Includes a Professional Skills Assessment that assesses skill development and is utilized as a participant feedback tool (Education Systems Center, 2017).
Career Development Experiences may include any of the following, provided the experience meets the definitional criteria: internship, school-based enterprise, supervised agricultural experience, cooperative education, research apprenticeship, remote work for a client or employer, student-led enterprise, or youth apprenticeship (Education Systems Center, 2017).

Because WBL will become a required part of ISBE’s ESSA state plan, the WTHS school board will need to adopt a CCRI which must include WBL experiences. This provides a unique opportunity to implement a WBL system that is in compliance with the ESSA state plan and provides the experiences necessary for WTHS students to be college and career ready upon graduation.

**Detailed Implementation Plan and Timeline**

While the ISBE continues to fine tune the CCRI, WTHS already has elements of WBL in place that can be more fully developed and expanded into a comprehensive system. As stated on the district’s College and Career Services webpage (Individual Career Plan, 2017):

WTHS is committed to empowering all students with the tools to make informed decisions about their post-high school options. The goal is for every student to develop a broader awareness of self and the breadth of opportunities available to them after high school (p. 1).

To attain this goal, all students are directed to develop an Individualized Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) beginning in their Freshman year. The ICAP is meant to be a process for regularly engaging in and informing student decisions about courses and activities throughout high school and leading to the successful attainment of post-secondary goals. The ICAP is also a document that is stored within the school’s Naviance system and can be accessed and viewed by students and their parents/guardians. The ICAP document was designed to house information
and student reflections regarding four-year course plans, long-term and short-term goals; results
from career and interest inventories; résumés; a schedule of assigned, upcoming and completed
tasks; education and career plans; standardized test scores and GPA; reflective writing; journal
notes or documents regarding meetings and learning experiences both in and out of school;
scholarships; and community service hours. Although ICAPs were originally meant to provide
all students with access to meaningful career development experiences that incorporate self-
exploration and career exploration, career planning, skill-building, and reflection activities, this
goal has not yet been fully realized. For example, in terms of Career Awareness (learning about
work), on-line activities are assigned to 9th grade students via the Freshman Advisory Study Hall
(FASH); additional on-line activities are assigned to 10th grade students via their grade level
counselor. The results of these activities are recorded in each student’s ICAP. Career
Exploration (learning about work) experiences are handled by a Post-Secondary Counselor who
is housed in the College and Career Center. Although one half of her time is devoted to assisting
students with job shadowing, workplace visits, and inviting speakers for the annual Career Week,
she is also responsible for providing college counseling assistance to students who will be the
first in their family to attend college and to assisting undocumented students with post-secondary
planning. An additional on-line tool, “Inspire the Future,” enhances WBL efforts but to date has
been minimally utilized by students. Due in part to a recent increase in employer interest in
developing internships, the Department Chair for Career and Technical Education (with
assistance from CTE teachers) is currently involved in developing more intensive aspects of the
WBL continuum (Career Preparation and Career Training). While all of these efforts result in
positive results for some students, the vast majority of WTHS students do not currently benefit
from a full continuum of WBL experiences. In fact, only 227 students (out of the total of 3,459)
participated in either job shadowing or career exploration field trips during the 2017/2018 school year (omitted for confidentiality, 2018).

With the impetus provided by the need to implement the state-mandated CCRI, ICAP stakeholders (administrators and counselors) can provide the leadership for implementation of a comprehensive WBL system at WTHS. An important aspect of the plan will be a formative evaluation which will require the collection of data beginning during the first year of implementation to uncover problems as they arise and ensure programmatic success (Patton, 2008, p. 118). With a mandate from the Board of Education and the Superintendent, and under direction from the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, a committee made up of ICAP stakeholders can:

1. Develop a vision for a comprehensive WBL system at WTHS (Year 1);
2. Provide a comprehensive review of current WBL experiences already provided at WTHS (Year 1);
3. Review WBL learning models such as California’s Linked Learning WBL system (Linked Learning, 2012), the American Association of School Administrators “Redefining Ready” Initiative (AASA), Illinois District 207 Career Experiences Program (Redefining Ready!), and the Illinois PaCE Framework (Illinois PaCE: Postsecondary and Career Expectations, 2016) (Year 1);
4. Develop a comprehensive WBL system that meets the requirements of the ISBE CCRI and is connected to the existing WTHS ICAP system (Individual Career and Academic Plan) (Year 1); begin implementation of the model (Year 2).
5. Develop a job description for the new position of Work Based Learning Coordinator (Year 1); conduct a search and hire for the position (completed by the beginning of Year 2).

6. Begin the development of an improvement-oriented evaluation process to insure that the WBL system is meeting the needs of students and employers (Year 1); implement the evaluation process (Year 2).

**Staffing and Staff Development**

Adequate staffing for the development and implementation of WBL activities is a key dimension of WBL program success (Jobs for the Future, 2016). WBL is a labor intensive endeavor that requires dedicated staff time to build relationships with the business community and broker WBL experiences, connect students with WBL experiences that match their career interests and aspirations, work with teachers to make connections between curriculum and WBL activities, monitor programs, and collect data. To reach that goal, it will be necessary to hire a full-time WBL Coordinator to develop and implement a WBL system and assist with documentation of students’ Career Ready Indicators as part of the ISBE-required CCRI. As stated above, the job description for the position will be developed by the ICAP Committee at the end of year 1 of the planning process with the goal of having the new WBL Coordinator in place for year 2 of the process. The WBL coordinator will report to the Associate Principal for Student Services, will serve as a member of the already existing ICAP Committee, and will coordinate efforts with the current Post-Secondary Counselor and the Department Chair for Career and Technical Education.
Program Budget

The major expense for the program will be salary and benefit costs for the new position of WBL Coordinator. Tools that will be used by the WBL Coordinator to provide services and collect data such as Naviance and Inspire Your Future are already a part of the WTHS budget.

Communication Plan

Depending on the timing of the roll out of the ISBE ESSA and required Career Readiness Indicators and the WTHS Board of Education’s adoption and the administration’s implementation of a district CCRI, the district will need to develop a communications plan with the goal of educating various stakeholders about the value and importance of career readiness, work-based learning experiences, and multiple pathways to post-secondary success. To assist with communicating the messaging around the topic of college AND career readiness, WTHS can call upon community partners such as the local Cradle to Career Initiative and a newly formed Mayor’s Employer Advisory Committee. Elements of the communications plan will include celebrating WTHS graduates who have successfully pursued alternative pathways to post-secondary success (such as those who are participating in apprenticeships or job training programs) and information about a variety of career pathways that can be pursued in the local area. In addition, students, parents, and community members will need to be informed about the specific elements of the state required Career Ready Indicators, particularly the definitions of career development experiences, industry credentials, and Programs of Study.

Performance Measurement Plan

The need for a system of collecting and managing data regarding WBL is critical to program success (Jobs for the Future, 2016). To measure compliance with ISBE’s CCRI, I recommend that WTHS adopt the Redefining Ready! Report Card as developed by the School
Superintendent’s Association (AASA). *Redefining Ready* is composed of research-based metrics and indicators including school attendance, completion of community service hours, completion of WBL experiences such as job shadowing or internships, earning industry-recognized credentials, completing career-related dual credit community college courses, and participation in extra-curricular activities. WTHS will need to review each of these metrics and determine what data is already collected (for example, completion of community service hours is already collected via an on-line system maintained by the Community Service Department) and, if necessary, develop efficient and accurate ways to begin collecting new data (for example, documenting student participation in employer-sponsored challenges in a variety of Career and Technical Education classes). This will enable the collection of data on an annual basis, allow for comparisons over time, and provide a snapshot of our graduating seniors’ college and career readiness. While meeting the ISBE’s CCRI requirements will provide a baseline for data collection and reporting, the WTHS ICAP Committee will need to determine if they believe additional benchmarks for student participation in a range of career awareness, career exploration, career preparation, and career training programs and activities are necessary to provide a complete picture of career readiness for WTHS graduates.
SECTION 6: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

Preparing young people for life beyond high school is a complex and ever-changing endeavor. While we as a society grapple with how to measure college, career, and life readiness it is imperative that we do so with the belief that each student is more than just the number they earn on a standardized test, the number of AP courses they complete, or whether or not they complete a career awareness activity. Because the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive WBL system at WTHS will coincide with the ISBE’s development of an accountability system to meet the requirements of the federal ESSA, there will be a tendency to primarily focus on the compliance aspects of student participation in career readiness activities. The school board and administration at WTHS tend to take a negative view of federal and state accountability measures (such as the PARCC assessment which has now been discarded). Therefore, it will be important to go beyond a narrow focus on accountability to emphasize WBL’s potential to create smoother pathways from school to work, ensure closer alignment between what students are learning and the knowledge and skills they will need post-high school, and help students develop 21st century skills such as teamwork, communication, and critical thinking.

To determine if there is a correlation between WBL experiences and post-secondary planning, I recommend that the ICAP Committee, with assistance from WTHS Research and Evaluation staff, analyze student data collected within the Naviance system. Naviance has an outcomes dashboard that allows for tracking a variety of factors related to college and career readiness. The committee could analyze variables such as GPA, standardized test scores, courses taken, Naviance tasks completed (such as career interest inventories, suggested career pathways, journal entries, and resume completion), completed college applications and acceptance (2-year
and 4-year), and post-secondary enrollment. All data will need to be disaggregated demographically (by race, gender, and socioeconomic status) to determine if WBL experiences and post-secondary outcomes are meeting WTHS standards for equity. I recommend that the Naviance outcomes dashboard be customized to include WBL tasks such as job shadowing, internships, and completion of industry-recognized certification programs.

Equally important, I recommend that WTHS develop an improvement-oriented, formative evaluation process to gather information about the strengths and weaknesses of the WBL system implementation (Patton, 2008). This will not only provide a lens for program improvement but will also encourage the collection of data to inform larger decisions about the development and implementation of career pathways, student acquisition of 21st century skills, and the quality of partnerships with work-based learning partners. A variety of data, both quantitative and qualitative, can be collected to inform this program evaluation process. Questions that can guide the evaluation process include: How are students reacting to WBL experiences? What barriers have we encountered as we implemented various WBL activities? What are student and staff perceptions of the WBL programming? What has been the response from employers? What new ideas have emerged about ways to improve WBL experiences? Additionally, it will be important to implement post-graduation surveys to collect data regarding the long-term impact of WBL experiences on post-high school trajectories, with a particular focus on outcomes for students of color and others who face additional barriers to post-secondary success such as low-income students and students with disabilities.

The new WBL Coordinator will be primarily responsible for implementation of the WBL system with support from the ICAP Committee and oversight from the Associate Principal for
Student Services. The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum in Instruction will be responsible for required reporting regarding the CCRI to the ISBE.
SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

It is my belief that one of the primary purposes of education is to prepare young people for a satisfying and financially rewarding career. This is not to say that other purposes like intellectual and emotional growth are less important but rather to emphasize the connection between what one learns during 13+ years of schooling and one’s future as a worker. Between the ages of 20 and 65, the typical adult in the US will work approximately 45 hours per week for a total of 90,000 hours of work over 4.5 decades. Regardless of the quality and trajectory of one’s work life, work itself has a major impact “on identity and character, on self-esteem, on one’s belief in the future, and ultimately on one’s feeling of entitlement to participate as a citizen, family member, and social being in the world beyond family” (Hoffman, 2015, p. 1). Despite this, our educational system does little to help young people understand the world of work and the importance it will play in their adult lives. Additionally, as the world of work has become increasingly complex, the education system has been asked to move away from traditional compliance and conformity and find new ways to help young people become innovative problem solvers who can work well with others and think critically. A well planned and executed WBL system can begin to address these shortcomings by providing students with windows into their futures as workers, innovators, and problem solvers.

An equally compelling reason for schools to implement new educational strategies such as WBL is the fact that in general, today’s high school students do not find school interesting or relevant. Proof of this persistent problem can be found in the 2014 Gallup Student Poll. When asked if they had learned something interesting in the last 7 days, just 33% of high school students answered in the affirmative. Only 20% answered in the affirmative when asked if they had fun at school in the last 7 days (Gallup, 2014). WBL can be a part of the solution to the
problem of disengaged, bored students. “Here, in fact, may be the greatest appeal of work-based learning to its participants, the reason it so often gets rave reviews from students, even when they cannot express clearly what they have learned: Namely, it is narrative, dramatic, and personal. By contrast, school-based learning is decontextualized, propositional -- no fun!” (Bailey et al., 2004, p. 163).

In the 21st century, educators need to provide students with challenging academic programs, as well as personalized and career-specific learning experiences that will prepare them to be global citizens in an ever-changing world. In “Opportunities and Options: Making Career Preparation Work for Students,” (CCSSO, 2014) the Council of Chief State School Officers criticized schools for their unsatisfactory response to the US economy’s demand for a more highly-educated workforce and for letting students down in the process. One of their top recommendations for solving this problem is for school districts to “work with the employer community to dramatically expand work-based learning opportunities to expose students to career options and connect what they’re learning in the classroom with the world of work” (CCSSO, 2014, p. 5).

I believe that the time is right for the adoption of a district policy requiring the implementation of a comprehensive WBL system at WTHS based on its enormous potential for increasing students’ workforce readiness and, at the same time, increasing student engagement. The ultimate purpose of WBL is to enhance all aspects of the traditional goals of schooling including building academic skills, preparing students for work and citizenship, and helping them become contributing members of the community (Bailey, et al., 2004). Specifically, by participating in a sequenced continuum of WBL activities including career planning and career preparation, all WTHS students will increase their awareness of the
variety of careers available, make connections between what they are learning in school and the world of work, and discover how their own individual skills and interests relate to career fields and occupations. They will meet and interact with adults who can serve as mentors and provide invaluable information and guidance that they would not otherwise receive.

Of particular importance in the adoption and implementation of a WBL system at WTHS is a focus on equity. The reason that the “career readiness” part of “college and career readiness” is considered to be of secondary importance at a school like WTHS is because of an underlying belief that pursuing a rigorous college prep academic course of study in high school will automatically result in better job prospects for all of our students. According to Nancy Hoffman from Jobs for the Future, “This lack of attention to career preparation only serves to intensify the class divide, leaving the most privileged students to anticipate and prepare for professional careers like those of their parents, while students from low-income families continue to think of work mainly as a way to survive” (Hoffman, 2015, p. 1). Our students who come from more privileged backgrounds have built-in advantages in accessing and benefiting from WBL experiences like job shadowing and internships. They have family members with connections to professionals in a wide range of career fields. Privileged students are more often in a position to take advantage of “...formal and informal opportunities to learn both hard and soft skills, access to traditional forms of social capital/networking, and support in navigating application processes” (Varrenti Consulting, 2017, p. 24). As we design and execute a comprehensive WBL system at WTHS, we must intentionally examine and address opportunity gaps and disrupt the existing system of privilege. Only then can we be confident that our WBL system is truly serving all students on their journey to be both college and career ready.
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## Appendix A

### Illinois PaCE Postsecondary and Career Expectations

Each student should have an individualized learning plan to help make decisions about career and post-secondary (PS) education or training, to plan a course of study, and to make financial aid assessments with family members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By the end of 8th grade</th>
<th>By the end of 9th grade</th>
<th>By the end of 10th grade</th>
<th>By the end of 11th grade</th>
<th>By the end of 12th grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A student should be supported to:</strong></td>
<td><strong>A student should be supported to:</strong></td>
<td><strong>A student should be supported to:</strong></td>
<td><strong>A student should be supported to:</strong></td>
<td><strong>A student should be supported to:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Complete a career cluster survey</td>
<td>- Revise career cluster interest survey and take a career interest survey</td>
<td>- Complete an orientation to career clusters</td>
<td>- Visit at least one workplace aligned with career interests</td>
<td>- Completes 3 or more admissions applications to PS institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Attend a career exploration day</td>
<td>- Complete an orientation course to a particular career cluster or cluster grouping</td>
<td>- Meet with a counselor to discuss coursework and PS/career plans using the ISBE College and Career Readiness Indicators</td>
<td>- Complete an orientation to career clusters</td>
<td>- Meet with a school counselor to ensure all steps in the PS admissions process are completed on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Complete an education planning</td>
<td>- Select a career pathway (CP) within a career cluster of interest</td>
<td>- Complete an education planning</td>
<td>- Complete an orientation to career clusters</td>
<td>- Attend a school counseling workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Be exposed to a financial literacy until 12th grade or workshop</td>
<td>- Begin determining eligibility for AP courses</td>
<td>- Complete an education planning</td>
<td>- Complete an orientation to career clusters</td>
<td>- Complete the FAFSA</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A student should know:</strong></td>
<td><strong>A student should know:</strong></td>
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<td>- The concept of career clusters of interest</td>
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<td>- Relationship between community service/extra-curricular activities and post-secondary (PS) career goals</td>
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