

# Engaging Employers with the Essential Skills and Technical Competencies

As a Work-Based Learning Coordinator, it is important to understand that you are responsible for ensuring that community partners understand the Essential Skills and Technical Competencies. However, ensuring they know and understand the skills is not enough. You must also ensure that your community partners are prepared and engaged with assessing the skills and providing feedback to students. How do you do this? Below is a list of essential strategies to ensure partners not only understand but engage in helping students to develop skills.

1. Inform partners of the skills
2. Discuss what the skills look like in their work setting
3. Discuss teaching strategies...what takes place in the classroom? What takes place in the workplace?
4. Explain the importance of assessing student progress with skill development
5. Provide support and agree what assessment of skills may look like
6. Have discussions about how they can bring focus on the skills into their training and classroom contributions
7. Establish feedback expectations for students related to skills
8. Provide examples of what feedback may look like related to skills

Common themes for these strategies are talked about in greater detail as you progress through the remainder of this module.

## Helping Partners Understand the Essential Skills and Technical Competencies

Schools and WBL programs have a host of resources provided by ISBE and in their local curriculum that can provide employers with the needed information. Employers want to know how you are assessing Essential Skills and Technical Competencies. Share examples with them on how you assess Essential skills in your classroom and Pathway. If your program is struggling to communicate how you are assessing these skills, you may need to focus efforts on:

- A. Assessing current communication strategies and how they may be made more effective (related to skills focused learning and assessment)
- B. Develop clearer examples for employers and students to understand

Below are some examples of ways to communicate these skills to your employers:

- Share activities that assess Essential Skills (i.e. Trailheads video series)
- Provide curriculum that intentional incorporates and monitors Technical Competency and Essential Skill assessment
- Provide examples of worksheets, assessments, tests and activities that show student growth in the skills
- Invite employers to participate and actively engage in classroom learning and Team-Based Challenges, thus assessing the skills directly in a classroom setting
- Share expectations on how employers can help assess these skills

## Supporting Partners as they Engage with Students on Skill Development

Once the types of skills you are assessing have been effectively communicated with your students and employers, it is time for community stakeholders to play a role in classroom activities where they can enhance the student learning experience. Employer partners can take part in a wide variety of activities, but again, be clear and concise (with the use of a rubric) on how the students should be assessed on these skills. Here are some examples of opportunities in classroom settings that employers can participate in:

- Technical Skills assessment examples
  - Changing brakes on a car
  - Building a structurally sound table
  - Bandaging an open wound
- Essential Skills Assessment examples
  - Mock Interviews with community members effectively assessing Communication skills
  - Students developing a lesson plan in a multicultural classroom and developing an exercise where they must differentiate the lesson with feedback from other professionals (Cultural Competence)
  - Students plan a business meeting with another business they will be collaborating on a project with – feedback from businesses on the planning components(Planning and Organizing)
- Team-Based Challenges examples
  - Students participate in a Crime Scene Scenario where police assess the teamwork skills of the team in solving a crime
  - Students create a model home in a team and the house is tested by engineers to ensure it is structurally sound
- Clinical Experiences examples
  - Nursing students are assessed on various Essential skills they display while interacting with patients
  - Engineering interns are assessed on various Essential Skills on how they respond to their clients needs
  - Both could be interchanged with various Technical skills that are tested

## Utilize Skill Mapping Strategies

Based on the different examples provided in this section, every WBL program has exercises, experiences, opportunities where employer partners can play a role in assessing students. In creating an environment where these expectations and skills can be clearly assessed, it is integral for classroom teachers and WBL coordinators to share these experiences with employers and invite them to participate.

To get employers to participate, it makes sense to first share with them what types of activities you need assistance with. This work can be completed in various ways, but this module provide support for this work through the use of skill mapping. High functioning programs map these activities and align them to specific skills they could focus on.

Using the [Module 5 - Year Long Essential Skills Activities- Business-Spreadsheet](#), a business WBL coordinator mapped out various events that he/she assesses over the course of the year. Those events allow students to be evaluated on Essential Skills competencies. By creating one for your own WBL classroom or work experience, you can share the events that you need employer support with, but also share what Essential Skills you would have them assess with students. This role provides them key information on whether the

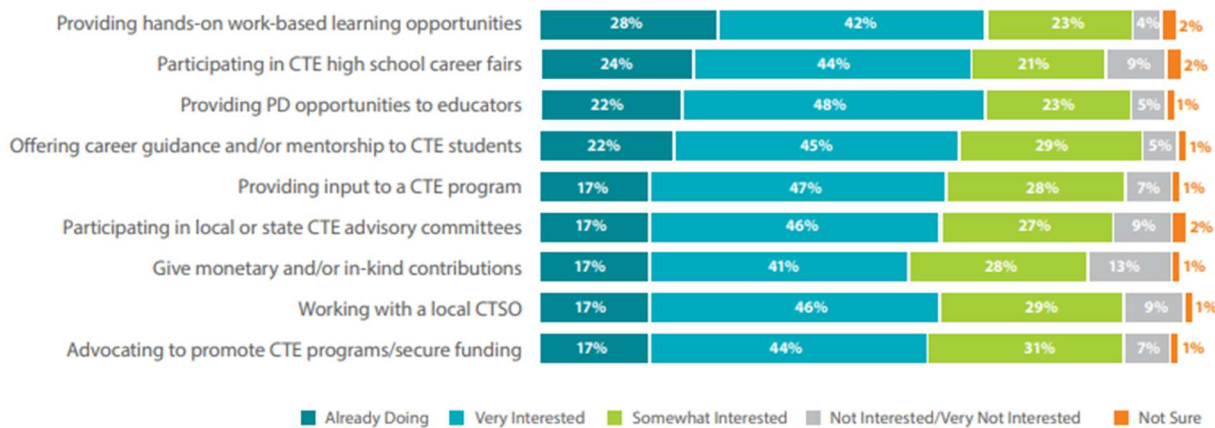
skills being assessed are necessary or in alignment with their own goals as a business or industry, and also creates synergy in getting students exposed to the pathway career pipeline we have referred to in this model. By meeting the students, participating in the experience, observing and giving direct feedback on specific skills, the employer becomes more aware of the abilities of individual students and can actively recruit students to clinical experiences, internships, work-study programs, college certification and a host of other career opportunities that are mutually beneficial to the student and employer.

**“The Ask”- Using your Skill Maps with Partners**

As mentioned previously, active participation by employers in CTE programs is crucial to both learners and employers because it ensures skills-based education is fully responsive to changing industry needs. Meaningful employer involvement cannot be limited to occasional advisory committee meetings or other transactional experiences; it requires trust and consistent engagement across program design, delivery and evaluation.

Employers recognize that increased participation in CTE will deliver greater returns for their bottom line and talent pipeline. Almost every employer surveyed – those already involved with CTE and those that are not – are either already participating or interested in participating in at least one of the strategies listed in Figure 5. The bottom line... employers see the value and want to help! ([Source](#))

**FIGURE 5.**  
Interest in working with CTE



[Alternate Text \(Source\)](#)

There are multiple opportunities for coordinators to work with their advisory, community members and employers to partner in WBL activities. These could include in-class assessments, or be more diverse in out of classroom experiences. Advisory members often get excited to bring the industry, postsecondary education, and the “real world” into the classroom. They provide general information about their industry, support for the academic disciplines, and/or offer specialized training. Ideas for classroom presentations frequently come from the Advisory Boards, other partners, colleagues and friends. Ideas often emerge during informal discussions at industry functions, site visits, teacher externships or more formal advisory meetings. By sharing your skill mapping exercise, you allow industry professionals to peer into what they think is critical, but also a means to support your classroom that best fits your students. The skill mapping exercise provides

an easy opportunity to guide “the Ask” (discussed earlier in the course) with community partners. During “the ask” be sure to highlight how their involvement is beneficial to their success as a business and critical to your students' success and the overall success of your WBL program. It can also promote further discussions on new strategies, resources they can provide in support of your course, and resources for them to reassure the school system is providing a sound foundational support for community growth.

As previously outlined in the course and emphasized in figure 5, the support employer partners can provide goes beyond providing financial resources. Review figure 5 in great detail focusing on the ways in which partners can be incorporated and the percentage who are already doing these things or interested in supporting CTE programs in these areas.

Some further considerations when planning “the ask” or having discussion with employer partners:

- Ask for ways they can assist with other classroom initiatives using their TIME
  - Mentoring
  - Tutoring literacy initiatives
  - Numeracy activities including their Pathway
  - Career counseling in specific fields
  - Providing site visits
  - Resume assists
  - Team-Based Challenges
- Ask for SUPPLIES that are of direct benefit to your course work
  - Industry specific supplies
  - Supplies that are in high demand
  - Supplies that might be left over, not in use, or that are left over
- Ask for PEOPLE support
  - People to assist with large events
  - People to join the schools alumni or PTO
  - People to assist with various classroom initiatives
  - People to support fundraising activities
  - People for volunteer opportunities
- While highly recommend that “money” not be proposed as part of “the ask” for WBL in initial conversations
  - It can cause a “quid pro quo” experience that leads to a toxic relationship
  - Often leads to expectations or control from an employer looking to influence others – leading to poor relationships from other employers
  - Can lead to expectations that cannot be met from your institution, or the WBL coordinators
  - This may be brought up by employer partners once relationships are established
    - Money asks can be utilized if there are mechanisms in place where the employer receives a mutually beneficial experience such as advertising in the yearbook, naming rights to a program, or some formal kind of predetermined agreement. These should be initiated at the district level.