

Relationship Building

Maintaining and Enhancing Post-Secondary Relationships

Postsecondary organizations are important to your Advisory Board and should have representatives from departments related to your industry and/or involved in the dual credit process for your students. These partners can offer advice about curriculum development, particularly in technical classes. They can assist in clarity about requirements and enrollment, and they may provide college courses for students to take through dual enrollment. They can also introduce staff to other sources of information related to the industry and possible sources of funding. Students should have opportunities to have a planned college visit to one or more of the postsecondary partner sites to learn about the programming they provide and the necessary academic experiences and achievement required to enroll.

Research has been conducted to identify the key components that play a role in your advisory work. They mention three separate high view opportunities for K-12 institutions to partner with postsecondary institutions to co-design, co-deliver and co-validate each other. Under these three ideas, they made recommendations for how to develop stronger relationships with your postsecondary institutions, some of the following items could be prioritized.

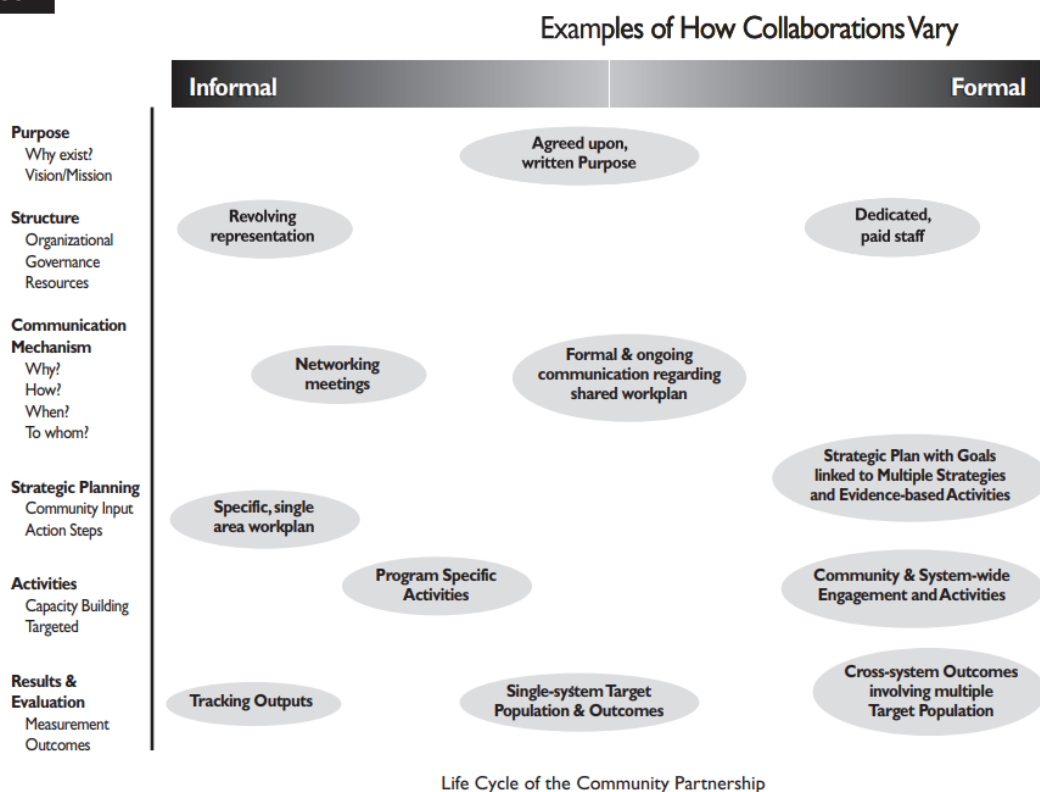
- Creating asset mapping tools understand both the postsecondary and high school strengths and weaknesses
- Increasing your communities commitment to increase postsecondary credentials
- Collaborating on shared student information initiatives– building data infrastructure
- Engaging leadership commitment at both institutions
- Strengthening adult capacity around data use and college readiness
- Connecting indicators with supports to promote college readiness,
- Developing partnerships with community institutions and institutions of higher education

([Source](#))

As a WBL Coordinator, teacher, or program manager, you play a critical role in this relationship building by serving on community teams and boards that can address these long term barriers. Institutions and career programs can assist each other in the education

to work pipeline creation that hopefully is a major priority as your WBL program develops. The key component to this work is understanding that students benefit from “soft hand-offs” to postsecondary institutions when they take a dual credit course, fulfill a college requirement in a high school program, or connect with a college professional in a 11th or 12th grade workplace setting, classroom or college visit.

Tool No. 1



[School-Community Partnership Guideline Tools PDF](#)

Postsecondary College Visits

As legislation in Illinois has brought forth advances in WBL, the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act (PWR), through the PaCE Framework mandates that students participate in Postsecondary Education Exploration to meet the expectations set out in the legislation. Often school districts meet this requirement by setting up multiple college and university trips throughout different grade levels to expose youth to the various programs our collegiate institutions have to offer. It is recommended that these visits be carefully thought out and should be filled with activities, not “sit and get” information. Remember, this is an opportunity for the college or university to make a real connection with the

students. Just talking to students in a large college setting is not enough. We should strive to provide opportunities that show them “behind the scenes”...the places they would be spending their time in a college program. Some examples from college visits could include:

- Medical Students visiting the labs and interacting with students in them
- Engineering students meeting college students working on projects
- Mechanical students visiting the car center and seeing how students work on specific cars and trucks
- Arts students visiting and interacting with students, their projects, and the lab materials and settings they use on an everyday basis

Curriculum Alignment and Postsecondary Credit

While using your advisory partners, it could be a great use of time to discuss with them the connections your WBL program has made with local postsecondary institutions. Feel free to invite local professors, credential experts, and postsecondary stakeholders to come to meetings to discuss how your curriculum can better align to theirs, and vice versa. Having these conversations align curriculum (after much needed work) and begins the conversation of where dual credit opportunities exist.

Why Postsecondary Credit?

Dual credit opportunities strengthen a high school student's relationship to a postsecondary institution and can be an equalizer for students in low income communities and students seeking first generation college graduation. Dual credit agreements are often decided by top level district personnel who are able to meet on a regular basis with postsecondary institutions to align their programs, however, teachers and WBL coordinators play a role in aligning curriculum with these partners and providing key feedback on the skills being taught.

It is important to note, Illinois is requiring Career Pathway Endorsement programs to offer 6 hours of early college credit in approved pathways. The credits can be generated by AP courses, dual credit courses, early college placement coursework, dual certification college credit, and articulated credit courses. Below we will provide definitions of these types of credit.

Types of Postsecondary Credit

Advanced Placement (AP) – college-level courses offered by the CollegeBoard that align to the students’ pathways. Students may earn college credit based on taking the advanced placement exam at the completion of the course. Postsecondary institutions will award

proficiency credit depending on the final score that the student earns. The credit earned does not affect a student's postsecondary grade-point average.

Dual Enrollment – these courses allow students to attend classes after high school hours, or under an agreement where 10-12th graders leave school for a short period of time to travel to a college campus. Students may also complete these courses online.. These courses often only give students college credit; however, certain partnership agreements may award students high school credit as well.

Dual Credit – these college courses are taught at the high school by an approved high school instructor. The course is the exact same course as is taught at the college campus to college-age students. These courses are made available to students by way of an established agreement between the college and high school. Upon completing the course, students receive a letter grade on both their high school and college transcript.

Articulated credit – this is an agreement between the college and high school where the student receives proficiency credit at the partnering college for a high school course that meets similar learning objectives of the college course and is non-transferable to other institutions. Articulation agreements encourage students to attend the partnering local community college or university.

Running and maintaining a high functioning WBL program means that school districts will have to come to conclusions on what type of early college credit are for their institutions and programs. There are no silver bullets to what works and what does not work, and many school districts have a menu of numerous course offerings that offer various types of college credit to meet the diverse needs of their students. AP courses, while a great option for some students, do have a caveat that the students need to attain a certain score on the AP exam. Students who do not earn a high enough score on the exam do not qualify for college credit. This is why, for equity purposes, an examination of this practice may need to be investigated further.

Enhancing Partnerships with Students, Parents, and Guardians

Partnership agreements can and should exist with a host of different stakeholder groups. Districts and schools can develop partnership agreements with businesses and non-for-profits, governmental entities and agencies(city, county, park districts, Police departments), postsecondary institutions (local community colleges and universities), students, and with parent organizations or individual parents.

While all of these groups are extremely important to high functioning Work-Based Learning programs, this section will focus on student and parental partnership agreements. Other

partnership agreements will be outlined later in this module or in administrative roles and procedures in module 7.

Research has validated the need for parents to be involved in their students' learning. Furthermore, research indicated parental involvement is key to predicting success in classroom settings. The research is clear; students do better when parents are involved in their lives, and that includes their school and postsecondary achievements. This is why it is so important for parents to be included in Work-Based Learning initiatives and programming. Developing an effective strategy for parent partnerships includes the following components:

1. Engages families to guide students postsecondary decisions through a comprehensive communications plan – letters, emails, agreements, etc
2. Actively listens to families and their needs
3. Establish goals for Students - Student Partnership Agreement
4. Identifies ever evolving strengths, challenges, and priorities for families
5. Encourage supports for students that are agreed upon and understood with parents - Develop a Parent Partnership Agreement
6. Builds trust to establish and maintain positive, goal-oriented relationships through celebrating students' successes (with all stakeholders)
7. Assists the school/district on offering programs that align with parental and family goals through surveys and other collected data

[\(Source\)](#) [\(Source\)](#) [Source: Weis (1990) and Okagaki, L., & Frensch, P. A. (2016)]

Developing communications tools with parents and guardians is just one of the many ways that your program can assist parents in ensuring that students are reaching their full potential in WBL. Each school has some resources already available to them when reaching out to families, whether it is an email system, a family interaction monitoring program, or some other kind of program, these types of communications exist. Working with your advisory, your PTO, or a combination of parent organizations in finding “just the right amount” of parent involvement in WBL might be a way to show that a district is listening to the concerns of parents.

Step 1 - Engages families to guide students postsecondary decisions through a comprehensive communications plan – letters, emails, agreements

Coming up with a communications plan is not easy, even when you have a communications degree or background in that field. For educators it becomes even more difficult as it may seem like, at times, we are becoming a communications expert, not honing our skills as educators. But communication in any field is important, which is why it is an Essential Skill we should be teaching directly in our CTE and WBL courses. We need to model excellent communication skills for our students and families. We can do this by creating form communications that address various needs:

- Form email for recruitment to the WBL program or courses
- Form acceptance letter home to the WBL program
- Form email letter home on grade updates
- Form Teacher appraisal document
- Calendar of communications plan – checklist of communications with parents
- Form letter – Successful Completion of the Semester or Program

Step 2 - Active Listening with Families

Successful conversations with parents involve listening and showing genuine interest in what each person has to say. We show our interest and respect when we listen to a family without interrupting, ask if we can take notes during a conversation, or follow up to check if we understand correctly. Family stories can be personal, sensitive, and emotional. It is our privilege and responsibility to listen with the compassion and respect that conveys a spirit of partnership. We also want to remember that families are unique, and each family may have a different perspective based on their past experiences, culture, place of origin, child-rearing practices, and family priorities. Gender roles may exist within different families and cultures as well.

Examples of Active Listening Strategies

Be affirming and validating: Affirm a family's willingness and courage to be open and share personal information. For example, you might say, "Thank you for trusting me with that information," or "I heard you say this... is there more you'd like to tell me?"

Show sensitivity and compassion: Be empathetic when a parent is vulnerable or emotional. Sometimes the most powerful thing we can do is express our empathy rather than try to fix a problem. For example, you might say, "That sounds so difficult. I'm sorry you experienced that."

Ask clarifying questions: Asking questions at the right time can show that you are interested and engaged. For example you might say, "You seem to be saying this... is that correct?" or "Now that you have shared this, are there ways that I can help?"

Alternate Text Version

Step 3 - Establish goals for Students - Student Partnership Agreement

As a student, they agree to participate in your WBL experience and fulfill all of the requirements:

- Follow bus or transportation guidelines
- Return my homework completed on time
- Believe in myself that I can learn → even when it's difficult
- Always try to do my best in my work and my behavior
- Set my own goals for WBL and postsecondary
- Show respect for myself, my peers, my school and community organizations
- Respect the feedback of industry partners and the adults teaching me the Technical Skills
- Participate in WBL team and Essential Skills exercises
- Attend the WBL experiences prepared with my homework, supplies and professional dress
- Attend school regularly

Note: This is not an exhaustive list. Your list should be relevant to your school, program, and community.

Step 4 - Identify ever evolving strengths, challenges, and priorities for families at the beginning of the year

- Reach out to parents through a beginning of the year meeting, at early parent/teacher conferences, or at beginning of the school year sign-ups
- Create a video and send it to parents through screencast or other video conferencing

Step 5 - Encourage supports on students through a Parent Partnership Agreement

- What are the goals of the WBL experience – high level?
- What individual goals does each student have as a part of the programming?
- What attendance mandates must they meet?
- What are the minimum requirements/ what does a high functioning experience look like?

Step 6 - Continue to Build and Maintain Trust

Celebrate your students with parents and community! Creating opportunities to engage parents in a positive fashion creates an environment where parents want to engage. Often the call home from school is the emergency call or the one where the parent tries to avoid the interaction due to their perceived “parenting failure” has now become a problem. Positive interactions through the course of the PaCE Framework, but more importantly in WBL coursework, engages parents in a way they can advocate for further institutional change in our education system. Some examples of positive communications home that help to build and maintain trust include, but are not limited to:

- Emails or letters home throughout the course of the experience sharing wins and other news
- Communication requesting sharing of concerns or partnership in problem solving to enhance program and remove barriers for students
- Calls home with positive feedback
- Comments made in monthly or quarterly report cards
- End of the semester/year WBL dinner or celebration event

Step 7 - Survey Parents

Create a parent survey to build on continuous improvement models. Ask questions that you believe will build better relationships with parents.