# Expanding High School Work-Based Learning in the U.S.

American Student Assistance®
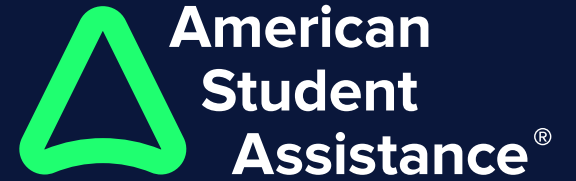
High-quality work-based learning (WBL) experiences can help high school students earn industry credentials while in high school, build the technical and interpersonal skills they need to succeed in the workplace, and provide a pathway into the labor market.

Research shows that many students are interested in an internship or other WBL experience, but most companies in the U.S. today do not offer these opportunities, often due to lack of resources, no jobs suitable for high schoolers, liability issues, or budgetary reasons. Recent federal legislation has sought to remove these common barriers to youth WBL, through more flexibility and increased funding. States have also made progress in the development and expansion of WBL programs in schools and communities, by passing laws and updating policy with respect to strategy, coordination, oversight and accountability, access and scale, funding, and continuity of programming. But while advances have been made in recent years, states' different approaches to WBL for high school youth have led to program availability and quality that is inconsistent and scattershot throughout the country. Consider:
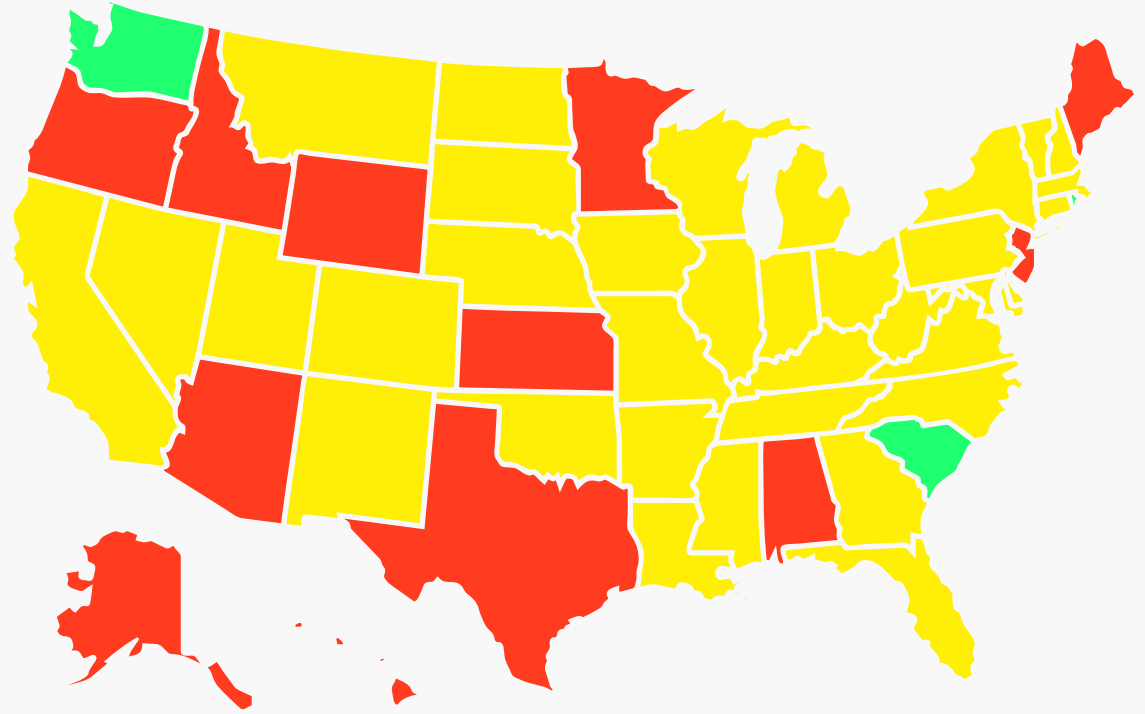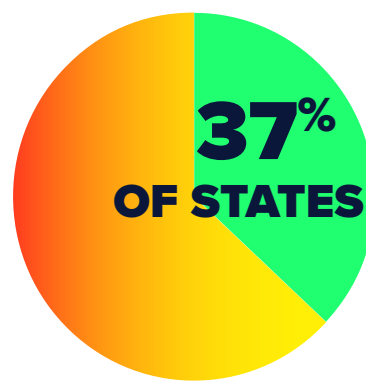


**American Student Assistance** joined with **Bellwether Education Partners** to conduct a state-by-state analysis of high school work-based learning policies, evaluating each state* against a rubric of 15 criteria across six categories: existence of policies, content of policies, funding, support infrastructure, quality and accountability.

- **Green** ratings indicate that a state achieved a desired state on most components of the rubric.
- **Yellow** ratings indicate that a state achieved a desired state on some components of the rubric but there is room for improvement.
- **Red** ratings indicate that a state did not achieve a desired state on most components of the rubric.
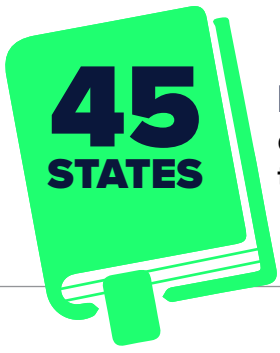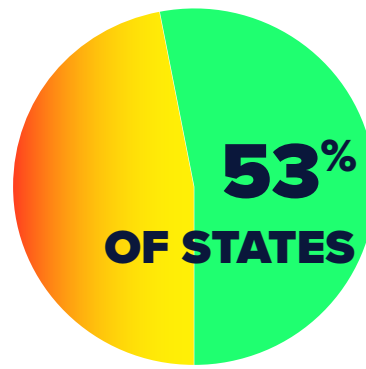
## 45 STATES
**HAVE DEFINED WBL** as a set of activities/experiences that qualify as WBL.

## 27 STATES
**PROVIDE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES** to some types of participating employers and/or for some types of WBL, while only five states have created a line item in the state's budget or other consistent source of state funding dedicated to WBL.

## 82% OF STATES
track some data on their WBL programs.

## 22% OF STATES
disaggregate the data to identify gaps in access and participation.

## 4% OF STATES
have developed comprehensive, statewide program improvement processes using WBL data.

## 37% OF STATES
**HAVE POLICIES OR SUPPORT STRUCTURES IN PLACE** to help underserved student groups access WBL opportunities beyond the minimum requirements laid out in federal law.

## 53% OF STATES
**HAVE SYSTEMS OR ORGANIZATIONS IN PLACE** to facilitate cross-sector partnerships related to WBL, while **20% OF STATES lack clear guidance, expectations, or systems to facilitate communication about WBL among stakeholders.**

## WA
**ONLY 1 STATE, WASHINGTON, HAS SET CLEAR QUALITY STANDARDS FOR EMPLOYERS** offering work-based learning in high school and has developed a process for holding them accountable; **6 STATES have set standards for WBL school coordinators** and have a process for holding them accountable.

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Download the full report: **Working to learn and learning to work: A state-by-state analysis of high school work-based learning policies**

## KEY PRIORITIES FOR STATES SEEKING TO STRENGTHEN WBL

- Clearly define what WBL means, decide what quality looks like, and develop clear expectations.
- Develop guidelines that promote widespread access to WBL opportunities for all students.
- Develop explicit supports to ensure high-need student groups have equitable access to WBL.
- Develop explicit supports to ensure a diverse pool of employers can provide WBL.
- Ensure adequate funding for all parties involved — students, schools, and employers.
- Develop or strengthen WBL coordinating infrastructure (e.g., intermediaries, public-private partnerships) and establish a strong communications infrastructure to share available opportunities.
- Create a system to assess and track the quality measures developed.
- Collect and disaggregate data on WBL programs to identify gaps in access and participation, recognize barriers, and make quality improvements.
- Explore and pilot opportunities to adapt work-based learning to virtual environments to expand access.

asa.org/advocacy