



January 2025

Collaborative Partner News

The Work-based Learning Collaborative includes 30 partner organizations that cover the gamut of work-based learning from the student, employer, and educator perspectives, as well as direct-service, capacity, and policy levels. We are proud to share highlights of our WBLC partners - state agencies, industry associations, colleges, high schools, and nonprofit organizations. Find the list of the WBLC members [here!](#)



Work-based Learning Collaborative MONTANA

We need your help

Employer Workforce Satisfaction Survey

Dates: Jan 1 - March 31, 2026

Who should take it: Someone familiar with your employee recruitment and retention practices and needs (i.e. HR or management).

How long: It should take about 20 minutes.

What we will do with your data: Your responses will inform the work of WBLC, partners, and policymakers. We publish aggregate data (never individual data) on the WBLC Data Dashboard (wblmt.org).

What you get out of it: The data will be used to improve workforce supports, work-based learning, and education opportunities so you gain skilled workers.

Montana Employers

We want to learn about your recent experience recruiting, retaining talent, and your interest in work-based learning.

Scan the QR code to fill out the Employer Workplace Satisfaction Survey.



<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JG5SDDL>

Work-based Learning Collaborative MONTANA
POWERED BY Reach Higher Montana.

Learn more about us at wblmt.org

Complete the survey [here](#). Curious about the results from 2024? [Check them out here!](#)

The Work-based Learning Collaborative is hiring a **VISTA volunteer!**

Learn more

Please help spread the word.



Gov. Gianforte Advances 406 JOBS Initiative to Boost Workforce

Governor Gianforte announced his approval of the 406 JOBS Year One Work Plan, a comprehensive roadmap developed by the State Workforce Innovation Board (SWIB) to modernize Montana's workforce development system. "Government usually struggles to move at the speed of business, but 406 JOBS is proving that wrong," Gov. Gianforte said. "We launched this initiative with a clear mission: we can do better to empower Montana's workers and employers..."

Delivered just 90 days after the governor launched the 406 JOBS initiative with Executive Order 5-2025, the plan outlines immediate actions to align government resources to support workers and employers. The plan identifies 12 priorities across the workforce system to drive innovation, remove red tape, and foster collaboration between state agencies. Key initiatives focus on increasing Registered Apprenticeship Pathways, preparing the workforce for artificial intelligence and automation opportunities, and establishing local sector partnerships in high-demand sectors.

To support labor force growth, the plan also addresses childcare shortages and removing barriers to employment for veterans, individuals with behavioral health and developmental disabilities, and those reentering society through the newly established Office of Reentry. Additional action items include launching a statewide credential registry, modernizing career exploration tools, expanding jobs for Montana's graduates and empowered sites, and improving overall coordination between state agencies.

406 JOBS Year One Work Plan - view a [summary](#) or the [full plan](#).

Work-based Learning Highlight: Three Forks High School

Together Three Forks educators, students, community partners, and Dick Anderson Construction have created a program that models career readiness, innovation, and school-community collaboration that will benefit students for years to come. After an extensive remodeling project of Three Forks Schools, the campus was left with 5 enclosed courtyards. Teacher Cathe Felz saw each of these courtyards as a safe and accessible extended learning space that could offer hands-on experience in design, construction, sustainability, outdoor learning, and career exploration. So, she went to work.

After gathering ideas and input, securing funding and community donations, and overcoming several barriers, Cathe and her colleagues partnered with Dick Anderson to bring their pre-apprenticeship program to Three Forks High. Students worked alongside Dick Anderson's professional carpenters and began giving life to the first courtyard - an outdoor kitchen space useful in grilling and smoking culinary units, as well as a space for student relationship building. Due to Dick Anderson's commitment to the project and to the pre-apprentices, the kitchen is now finished. The end result will benefit the student body at large, and has provided a real-life opportunity for the pre-apprentices to gain industry knowledge, skills, and experience. They can continue their pre-apprenticeship experience with Dick Anderson upon project completion allowing Dick Anderson to tap into and train a talent pool at an early age supporting their workforce development. The 2nd courtyard project, a greenhouse and garden, is now underway incorporating multiple curriculum areas—culinary arts, construction, business, and environmental science - and

all grade levels PreK-12 with a focus on student wellness.

Read full article [here](#).

Cultivating Native Student Success at Aaniiih Nakoda College

This piece was originally published on <https://www.aacrao.org> and was written by Scott Friskics. It caught my eye as an excellent illustration of how our tribal colleges are intentionally building belonging and fostering wellbeing for students. WBLC builds understanding of and shares strategies for incorporating belonging, meaning, wellbeing, and purpose across Montana.

As one of 35 tribal colleges and universities in the United States, the core of Aaniiih Nakoda College's mission is to "maintain and revitalize the Indigenous lifeways" of the people we serve: the Aaniinen (White Clay People or Gros Ventre) and Nakoda (Assiniboine) nations of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in northcentral Montana.

Nowhere is this mission-guided approach more evident than in our efforts to foster and promote student success. ANC students who have a strong sense of cultural identity and community belonging, are much more likely to succeed in college and beyond. In other words, our students are more likely to succeed if they know who they are and where they come from.

Through a combination of co-curricular events, advising strategies, and curriculum enhancements, ANC is making a concerted effort to provide all students with the cultural foundation and sense of belonging that will help them stay in school, succeed in their classes, earn their degrees, and live happy, productive lives. Assessment data from multiple sources tell us that, to date, this strategy is working.

However, given the importance of storytelling and oral tradition among the Aaniinen and Nakoda people, perhaps the truly transformative impacts of these efforts are best described through the words of our students, "You could go into any environment in the college and see how Aaniiih and Nakoda values are championed and what impact that has on the culture and mental health over at the college."

Read the full article [here](#).

From High School to Junior Developer: Rae's Work-based Learning Journey with VR and Pre-ETS

Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services

Rae began working with her Pre-ETS Specialist during her senior year of high school, receiving job exploration counseling and support through a Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE) with Cedar Mountain Software. Funded by Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS), Rae earned \$12.50/hr while learning web design. Her performance led to a part-time job offer and continued growth. Though she initially enrolled in college, Rae found the structure challenging and chose to focus on her career. She transitioned to PantrySoft, where she received mentorship and online coding training. Today, Rae is a full-time Junior Developer earning \$65,000/year.

She shared: “My biggest takeaway from VR is that it changed the trajectory of my life. If I didn’t connect with VR in high school and receive the support VR provided, I don’t think I would be in a meaningful career today, doing what I am doing now. The support from my Pre-ETS Specialist and VR staff was amazing for me, and I am so appreciative of it.”

Highlands College receives \$310,000 grant to expand CNA School to Work program

The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation has awarded Highlands College of Montana Tech a \$310,000 grant to support and expand its CNA School to Work program, helping high school students explore healthcare careers and earn a Certified Nursing Assistant license. The one-year grant will serve students in nine Montana counties and is expected to support 75 young people, with 40 earning their CNA credentials through the program.

Knowledge Nugget

Did you know that our Work-based Learning Toolkit has all you need to know to host work-based learning experiences?

Look no further! Do you need:

- A readiness assessment to ensure you’re ready to host interns? Look at page 26.
- Planning checklist? Pg 27
- Sample intern projects and week-by-week plans? Start on page 29
- Onboarding checklist? Pg 36
- A mentorship plan? Pg 40
- Intern manager best practices? Look at page 46

Find the toolkit [here](#).



Events

Office of Public Instruction Work-Based Learning Licensure Cohort Sessions begin January 21. [Click here](#) for more information and to register.

A Discussion about Competency-Based Apprenticeship
Jan 20, 2026 @ 9:00-10:00 AM

Ron Jacobs, Ph.D. and leader of SiTUATE will look at how a time-based model focuses on set hours for training, while a competency-based model centers on mastering specific tasks before advancing, no matter how long it takes. **Register [here](#).**

Harnessing Neuroscience to Help Gen Z Navigate the Path to Adulthood
Jan. 20, 2026 @ 1:30–3:30 PM

Join a discussion on how systems of education and workforce development, including apprenticeship

programs, can better support young people in gaining the skills, credentials, and connections they need to thrive in the years ahead. [Register here](#).

News You Can Use

[Future of Jobs Report by World Economic Forum](#)

[Nursing Apprenticeships Are Starting to Fix a Broken Career Ladder, Amid National Shortage](#)

[Employer Practices that Attract and Retain Young Workers](#)

[No College Degree, No Problem? Not So Fast](#)

[One City's Big Bet on Finding Badly Needed Early Educators](#)

[Pasadena City College Unveils Groundbreaking Pact Linking Apprenticeships to Degree Pathways](#)

[New Mexico to offer 3,000 paid internships to high school students](#)

[Wistar Institute in Pennsylvania Receives \\$600,000 Grant to Support Biomedical Technician Training Pre-Apprenticeship](#)



Questions? Contact:
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Work That Matters

Work-based learning Work-based learning (WBL) is learning about work, at work and is a key component of career-connected learning.

In addition to building employability skills, WBL experiences help students develop **meaning** from their classroom learning and explore **purposeful** career opportunities. Employers who intentionally cultivate **belonging** in the workplace for young workers can gain access to future workforce talent. The Montana Work-Based Learning Collaborative works to promote belonging, meaning, well-being, and purpose for all young Montanans by building capacity for high-quality WBL experiences.

There are components of work-based learning in the K-12 education system, the postsecondary education system, and the public workforce system – but no single entry point for students or employers to access them. Our work to improve coordination among agencies and WBL partners benefits Montana's emerging workforce and Montana's businesses.



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