

June 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!](#)

WBLC Members Attend Aspen Institute Convening

Six WBLC members, a couple colleagues, and some young leaders attended the [Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions Opportunity Youth Forum](#) convening in Los Angeles in late May. The conference focused on supporting youth engaged in education, justice, foster, or other systems and preventing youth from being disconnected from school and work through both direct programming and systemic changes. Sessions focused on different types of programs for youth ages 16-24; Belonging, Meaning, Wellbeing, and Purpose strategies; collaborative work; workforce engagement; youth-led change; and much more.

Gabe Eklund Rowley co-presented a session exploring how workforce development systems can embed Belonging, Meaning, Wellbeing, and Purpose (BMWP) to ensure that young workers—especially those from historically marginalized communities—find purpose and thrive in their careers. By centering BMWP, employers improve recruitment, retention, employee mental health, and innovation.

While in Los Angeles, some of the conference attendees were able to watch the L.A. Dodgers win a baseball game!



DLI Launches Indigenous Workforce Warriors

The Department of Labor and Industry has launched an exciting new poster series aimed at uplifting and inspiring Native youth by showcasing successful young adults from tribal communities across the state. The poster series initiative “Indigenous Workforce Warriors” highlight individuals who have thrived in the trades, entrepreneurship, union work and apprenticeship programs- real people who look like our youth, speak like them and come from the same communities. By making success visible and relatable, this campaign seeks to empower the next generation of tribal leaders and workers with tangible role models they can see themselves in.

Our first individual is Chance Main, a proud member of the Fort Belknap Indian Community. Chance’s journey began in high school, where he entered the apprenticeship pathway under the guidance of the late Casey Martin of Martins

Construction in Hays, MT. With hard work and deep passion for building, Chance went on to establish his own business, Last Chance Construction, LLC. His company not only reflects his entrepreneurial spirit but also serves the Fort Belknap Reservation through vital housing projects and personal construction efforts that wider the Community. Watch his video [here](#).

Chance’s story is just the beginning. Through this poster series, we aim to continue highlighting the achievements of young Native professionals who are reshaping their communities through skilled labor and leadership. These posters will serve as everyday reminders in schools, tribal offices, and



workforce centers that success is possible- and already happening- in tribal communities across Montana.

Building Pathways: Connecting Classrooms to Careers

On May 15, Cognizant and Discovery Education hosted a panel to discuss the important conversation about how Montana can collectively support our students in becoming future-ready. The panelists shared a wealth of insights across education, industry, and workforce development. Here are a few key takeaways from the discussion:

- Employability skills and tech fluency are top priorities for employers in today's evolving job market.
- There is a growing need for hands-on learning experiences and career exposure.
- Education and industry partnerships are essential to align curriculum with real-world workforce needs.
- It's important to give students access to opportunities no matter the geographical location.
- We must instill a lifelong learning mindset to help students adapt to an ever-changing workforce.

Career, Technical, and Adult Education Updates

Career and Technical Education Specialists have been assigned regionally to schools. These assignments will be used to review the 2025 - 2026 Perkins Grant application and any remaining 2024-2025 amendments. Along with our partners at the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, we will plan regional meetings to prepare for the FY 27 Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment for the 2026-2027 Perkins Grant Cycle.

The tentative dates and locations are:

- **Eastern Region** - Glendive, MT September 9, 2025
- **Northcentral Region** - Great Falls, MT September 10, 2025
- **Northwest Region** - Pablo, MT September 15, 2025
- **Southwest Region** - Butte, MT September 18, 2025
- **Southcentral Region** - Billings, MT September 22, 2025

OPI will provide more information as dates, locations, and start times are secured.



Other Montana Updates - Construction Technology at Highlands College

Highlands College has a construction technology program that is built on stackable credentials, which enables students to exit out after one year with a certificate, to receive an AAS degree upon completion of two years, and if they so desire, students can block transfer their AAS degree into a bachelor of applied science degree in business with a construction management emphasis.

Our construction program is made up mostly of “hands-on” work with students seeing the building of modular homes from conception to completion within the two-year time period. Once completed, the modular homes are offered for sale to people in Southwest Montana.

Once a student graduates from our program, he/she will be able to become employed by small or large construction companies doing a wide variety of construction tasks.

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Podcasts

Stories for Action holds a mission to use the power of storytelling to spark positive action for people and place. They hold conversations with people taking bold steps, bridging divides, and creating calls to

action. Listen to these two episodes about youth, belonging, and economic impact.

- [The Mighty Few - Part 1](#)
- [The Mighty Few - Part 2](#)



News You Can Use

New America Seeks to Better Understand Degree Apprenticeship

What if we blended earning a paycheck with earning a college degree? That's the vision for degree apprenticeship, a growing model that blends academic coursework with work-based learning and culminates in a degree, which the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce tells us will be required for most good jobs by 2031.

The Growth of Earn-and-Learn Apprenticeship Degrees: Expanding America's Mobility and Opportunity Structure

College Uncovered: The Revenge of the Humanities

Some colleges are rebranding liberal arts as "applied humanities" or "leadership studies" to better connect with career paths and market demand. Humanities graduates bring some of the most in-demand skills to the workforce: communication, critical thinking, collaboration and the ability to navigate ambiguity.

What is the Evolving Role of Future Educators?

The role of the educator is unmistakably —but beautifully reimaged, especially now, as the Office of Educational Technology (OET) reminds us that keeping educators at the heart of teaching is essential. Smart tools can enhance teaching and learning – but only when they complement rather than replace the human element. These teachers aren't at the front; they are centered within the learning experience, designing conditions where curiosity thrives, mistakes are welcomed, and where growth is expected, supported by thoughtful use of and co-design with intelligent tools. Third Horizon Learning Models must, in part, define the instructional role of the teacher as Facilitator, Partner and Guide rather than director.

To fill 'education deserts,' more states want community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees

Iowa has joined a growing number of states that are considering letting community colleges like this one offer bachelor's degrees, or where community colleges have already started adding them, as a way of filling these so-called rural higher education deserts and training workers in rural places for jobs in fields where there are growing shortages.

More women are landing construction jobs. Trump's war on DEI could change that

Despite making up 47 percent of the workforce in the U.S., women constitute less than 5 percent of workers in skilled construction trades — a cluster of careers that typically offer high pay without requiring a college degree.

Could This Tool Make Teacher PD More Relevant?

More states are embracing microcredentials as a form of professional development for teachers

that's self-paced, ideally hands-on, and customizable to the skills they want to build or the subject areas they want to teach.

Career-connected learning is important at all ages

Competency-Based Learning: Emphasizing Life Skills, Reflection, and Proficiency

Education Reimagined identified five key elements that can be seen across many learner-centered environments: learner-agency; socially-embedded; personalized, relevant, and contextualized; open-walled; and competency-based.



Questions? Contact:
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Work That Matters

Work-based learning (WBL) opportunities span a continuum from workplace tours to apprenticeships (and many models in between).

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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