

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. Strengthen State Infrastructure for Work-Based Learning

**Purpose:** Build the structural and resource foundation needed to scale high-quality WBL across Illinois.

### Long-Term Strategy

- Refocus and redeploy workforce and education resources to intentionally increase both the quantity and quality of work-based learning opportunities statewide.
- Strengthen state procurement strategies to include WBL/apprenticeship utilization in contracting.
- Invest in intermediary organizations to coordinate school–business partnerships and scale WBL regionally.

### Short-Term Activities

- Strengthen collaboration between education and workforce development so WBL strategies are co-designed, better aligned, and more impactful statewide.
- Develop and promote a statewide WBL definition and continuum that includes adult learners, Incumbent Worker Training (IWT), and On-the-Job Training (OJT).
- Set statewide goals for WBL expansion by model (e.g., internships, apprenticeships) aligned with industry needs and workforce priorities.
- Strengthen the alignment and outcomes of pre-apprenticeship programs by establishing clearer expectations, supports, and accountability mechanisms to ensure they serve as true on-ramps to registered apprenticeships, other WBL opportunities, and/or employment.

## 2. Expand and Support Business Engagement and Participation

**Purpose:** Grow and sustain business participation, the backbone of WBL success.

### Long-Term Strategy

- Offer financial incentives to businesses, especially small to medium-sized businesses, non-profits, and public sector employers, to offset WBL costs. Consider replacing the exclusive and underutilized Apprenticeship Education Tax Credit with a more accessible reimbursement or pay-for-performance model.

### Short-Term Activities

- Develop a centralized “WBL Resource Hub” (e.g., funding matrix, FAQs, technical assistance access).
- Use Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) funding as a bridge for businesses to start apprenticeship programs by upskilling trusted current employees and backfilling entry-level roles.
- Launch a statewide awareness campaign promoting WBL as a strategic talent pipeline tool.



### 3. Address Participant Barriers to Participation

**Purpose:** Ensure equitable access to WBL opportunities for all Illinoisans.

**Actions**

- Increase investment in wraparound supports to reduce participation barriers in the following areas:
  - » Transportation
  - » Childcare
  - » Support stipends
- Expand access to career counseling and case management in schools and community organizations for both youth and adult career seekers.

### 4. Support Youth Apprenticeship Development

**Purpose:** Create a strong on-ramp for young learners into career pathways.

**Actions**

- Implement a statewide standardized youth apprenticeship framework.
- Utilize state-funded Apprenticeship Specialists to coordinate and expand regionally developed and approved Youth Apprenticeships for in-school youth in partnership with Regional Offices of Education and school districts.
- Require transitional alignment of in-school youth and pre-apprenticeship programs with post-secondary apprenticeship programs. Define alternative success metrics when students diverge but achieve positive outcomes.
- Focus guidance counseling on post-secondary planning.
- Develop a directory of approved competency-based apprenticeships feasible for in-school youth through a review of other state programs, which may require modification of credentialing rules in certain occupations.

### 5. Strengthen Data Systems for Work-Based Learning

**Purpose:** Use data to drive continuous improvement, accountability, and impact.

**Long-Term Strategy**

- Finish building a statewide longitudinal data system that captures participation, progress, and outcomes across all types of work-based learning (e.g., internships, pre-apprenticeships, youth and registered apprenticeships, OJT). The system must include learners from K–12 through postsecondary and into the workforce, tracking post-graduation employment and education outcomes.
- Encourage state leadership to promote inter-agency data sharing to expedite the system launch.

**Short-Term Activities**

- The Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning in Illinois report, mandated by Public Act 101-364, offered valuable insights when published in 2020. Replicating this report annually would provide consistent statewide data to track progress, highlight trends, and support data-driven decisions that advance apprenticeship and work-based learning in Illinois.
- Align on common definitions and WBL frameworks across state agencies.
- Improve data accuracy and usability through consistent training and support for data entry personnel across education, workforce, and partner systems.
- Enable secure data sharing with educators, businesses, policymakers, and learners to support informed decision-making and program scaling.