

# Findings and Recommendations from a Workplace-based e-Learning Project

*Special Stakeholder Meeting on Workplace-based e-learning*

Association of Washington Business Institute

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# How we got here

- WA State Legislature passed ESSB 6295, creating the Workplace-based Learning Initiative Steering Committee (2008)
- Steering Committee identifies policies and practices for successful workplace-based learning initiatives (2008-2011)
- Steering Committee, Workforce Education and Training Coordinating Board (WTB), and partners seek funding for pilots
- U.S. Department of Labor grant (2011)
- Workplace-Based Learning for Low-wage, Lower-skilled adults Project (2011-2013)
  - Pilot program spearheaded by WTB
  - 3 Learning Laboratories:
    - Clark College and PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center;
    - Whatcom Community College, Skagit Valley College, and the Early Childhood Development industry;
    - South Seattle Community College, WA State Aerospace Joint Apprenticeship Committee, and Pioneer Industries
- Focus groups and findings report (2013)

# Why Workplace-based Learning?

- Premise: Bring education to where working adults are everyday, the workplace.
- Hypotheses – This model can:
  - Bridge physical, financial and mental gaps between working adults and education;
  - Provide alternatives for working adults to participate in credit-bearing courses and gain foothold on a career pathway
  - Meet the real-time needs of companies for workers with the right skills and education
  - Inform policy and resource allocation decisions at the college, state and federal levels to better address the needs of working adults and growing industries

# Criteria for Learning Laboratories

1. Target low-wage working adults
2. Target a specific industry
3. Education and training leads to industry recognized credential(s) on well defined pathway
4. Education and training leads to employment in a high demand industry
5. Worker representation/Union involvement if applicable
6. Focuses on learning in the workplace
7. E-learning is a critical component
8. Mentors at the place of work
9. Incorporates other key modes of course delivery that best serve working adults (assessment, case management, coaching, advising to navigate post-secondary learning, credit for prior learning, etc.)
10. Clear evidence that the education and training will lead to better wages and/or benefits for workers.
11. Commitment to create a true learning community of faculty, staff, students, others.
12. Evidence of employer's active support
13. Provision of measurable benefits to participating employers
14. Creates new education and training, or significantly changes and enhances current programs available to working adults
15. Evidence of active recruitment of a diverse group of participants
16. Addresses post-grant sustainability of the program.

# From the Labs: What, How, Impact

- Kevin Kussman, Associate Vice President, Corporate & Continuing Education, Clark College
- Sally Holloway, Coordinator of Education Programs, Whatcom Community College

# From Focus Groups: What Works

- Strong employer partners that can commit:
  - workplace learning space, employee learning time, flexible scheduling, access to technology, and mentoring and ongoing support.
- College leadership and staff that can:
  - adapt or create new coursework that is a hybrid of online, at-work and classroom learning; ensure that courses are credit-bearing and clearly connect to a viable career pathway; provide hands-on, high touch tutoring, mentoring and academic counseling; and act as coordinator for other needed participant supports.
- Ready and willing participants that can:
  - Demonstrate interest and a willingness to engage (or learn to engage) via technology as well as in classroom at at-work.

# Additional Strong Findings

- Power of Mentoring: especially upfront to keep participants engaged and encouraged
  - “I got into my first class, got my first paper back, and was ready to quit right then and there. I was devastated. I said ‘why am I torturing myself?’ I was in tears. But I talked to my mentor and teacher, and they helped me. I figured out what they wanted vs. what I thought they wanted! I got through that first class, a huge hurdle for me, and it made me come out of my shell.”
  - “She sat down with me, helped me prioritize, helped me do the right pacing and timing of courses, explained which were available when or yearly or more often, which courses were really heavy, which ones I should take together because of complimentary content, which I should take because I did well in a similar course, and then she pressured me to always do just a little bit more.”
- Power of the Cohort Model: informal and formal peer support
  - Comraderie across participants at all sites was very strong: tutored each other, encouraged each other to do more, learned new approaches from each other, even made dinner for each other
- Power of Applied Learning: immediate application of new skills and learning
  - “After the communications class, I actually could relate better to patients who were frustrated or aggressive. I behave differently as a result.”
  - “I’ve applied something to my [Childcare] Center from every class I’ve taken.”
  - “I changed my classroom totally. Blocks don’t just go into a bucket anymore; it’s a math project now, and the kids love it. Discipline has totally changed too. It’s now true guidance. My colleagues, other teachers, come in and tear up when they see what I’ve done. They are learning from me.
  - “I didn’t even know that a computer had an on/off button before this class.”
  - *Discussing the math component of GED prep:* “Most guys just copy what the next guy is doing. Not anymore. I cut to exact specs and now I know why. Now they copy me.”

# Recommendations and Policy Insights

- Expand workplace based learning:
  - Low-skilled working adults have the most to gain in short timespans from further education.
  - Employers agree the model is worth their time and investment based on short term applied learning and long term reductions in recruitment and turnover costs.
- Formalize workplace based learning as an evidence based model for education:
  - Develop formal ROI mechanisms (for employers, for participants, for colleges, for state investments, for state economies)
  - Formalize marketing and awareness to all parties (aggressively market)
  - Develop common terminologies and criteria
  - Create tax incentives for employers to invest in the model
  - Make it easier for colleges to shift how they offer the model (best practice sharing, support in needed college policy changes)