

# A WORK IN PROGRESS

## Putting the Learning in WBL



As we consider the daunting task ahead of us in response to the pressure on the availability of a workforce, many are seeking both short-term and long-term solutions. With over a quarter of a million Ohio job openings (per [ohiomeansjobs.com](http://ohiomeansjobs.com)) and the anticipation of the many thousands more coming to our state, HR and talent professionals are seeking connections to educational providers as early as the lower grades to build a pathway from school to work.

When we talk about Work-Based Learning (WBL) in 2022, the view shared by the business community has changed drastically. In 2006, a study by Cassner Lotto & Barrington revealed that only 20% of the businesses surveyed felt it was their responsibility to help create pathways from high school to workforce. Let's compare that statistic to our work at the Chamber Foundation. We have met with over 100 businesses this year that are seeking counsel on workforce. To date, over 43% are asking for help connecting to emerging talent or finding interns to join their company.

As a result of these consultations, we recently convened a panel of subject matter experts for our March 16th Experience Series: Power of Emerging Talent Pipelines. We sat down with Christine Boucher with Eastland Fairfield Career & Technical Schools; Angie Dye with Mid-Ohio Food Collective; John Hambrick with The Educational Service Center of Central Ohio; and Tiffany Marr with Wemblr.

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## Redefine the Work Experience

We have discussed the importance of work-based learning in career tech high school education and pre-apprenticeship to registered apprenticeship pipelines, and the value to both students and businesses. Another WBL opportunity to consider is Project Based Learning (PBL). In this model, students spend a few weeks up to a full semester, working on a real-world problem, presented by a business. Using creativity, collaboration, and communication with the partnering company, the students create or enhance a product for presentation. This process helps the student build necessary demonstrable skills and often assists the business with research and development, testing, and go-to-market strategy.

How does PBL differ from “doing a project” for class? It really comes down to rigor. The higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and presenting real-world and real-time solutions to a pressing business problem is significantly different than traditional short and light assignments.

Tiffany Marr is the owner and CEO of Wemblr, an employer-provided FinTech empowering employee net worth through financial mindfulness, peer strategy networks, wealth assessment tools, and financial professional matchmaking. Growing the platform to reach high school students has long been one of Tiffany’s goals. Through a partnership with Southwestern City Schools and their Mobile App Class, she is currently working on a project that will build out the minimum viable product (MVP).

The process includes weekly or bi-weekly meetings with the students and the instructor to check on progress and gauge feedback. Students are presenting the results of their research and mapping out code during these updates.

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*“Not only are we getting students building the product, but we are also getting a focus group of potential end-users. It is a cost-effective way to go about this, particularly for a tech start-up.”*

**- Tiffany Marr, Owner/CEO,  
Wemblr**

### How to Prepare for High School Interns:

- Create an intern/student worker guide that includes a company profile, job description, company policies, workplace etiquette and behavior expectations, timesheets, and necessary reporting
- Send a welcome letter to intern/student that includes start date, hours to be worked, mentors and key “go-to” staffers, and how and when to communicate with management
- Notify incumbent workers that they should welcome the intern/student, short bio, and what they plan to accomplish while in your workplace
- Review parking, workstation, breaks, cell phone and internet usage, pay period, and paychecks

Remember, this is most likely their first time in a workplace and what we take for granted may be new information to them. Your local school district or Educational Service Center can be a great resource for learning more about the stages of development and what is to be expected at certain ages.