

MFL MarMac Community Schools

K-12 Work-Based Learning Plan: an array of sequenced experiences

“Know yourself, seize your opportunities, follow your path.”

Mission and Vision

The mission of the MFL MarMac School District is “to provide career-ready and college-bound programming for all students.” Our vision statement further expands on the mission to enlist the greater community in this effort. It states, “We challenge all members of the community to share in the responsibility of accomplishing these goals. It is our belief that every learner shall have the opportunity and the resources available to reach his/her mental and physical potential. We also believe that every learner shall be provided the experiences to appropriately apply the tools and application necessary to be successful lifelong learners. During this process, he/she will develop respect, responsibility, resourcefulness, and teamwork as an integral part of his/her learning. This will be obtained when teachers, parents, and the community share the responsibility in accomplishing these goals.”

Executive Summary

MFL MarMac comprises five communities -- Monona, Farmersburg, Luana, Marquette, and McGregor. We are located in the beautiful driftless area of northeast Iowa, as part of our district is located on the high prairie while another part of our district is nestled in the bluffs along the Mississippi River. Our area is a destination for travelers, but unfortunately we often struggle with the mindset that “you can’t be successful here.” We have many economic opportunities in the manufacturing, agricultural, telecommunications, financial, healthcare and tourism industries but many of our employers report skills are lacking in our current workforce.

Work-based learning builds necessary relationships between employers and students and teachers. This is important to change the mindset of the area. Many of our students have incredible skills and passions that go unrecognized and unappreciated by our community people. Positioning students in workplace environments will serve several purposes:

1. Allow students to see first-hand the skills necessary to succeed in the workplace
2. Allow employers to develop their understanding of a new generation of workers -- their goals, aspirations, passions, personalities, and unique perspectives on the world
3. Allow for new relationships to be formed that will ultimately lead to mentoring and networking opportunities where students’ skills are developed and honed and where employers’ perceptions of our students are positively changed

MFL MarMac’s most recent strategic plan for 2022-2025, as approved by the school board, identified work-based learning programs and partnerships as some of the key strengths of the district and ensured continued efforts in these areas as a priority for all students. To ensure a robust array of sequenced experiences for all K-12 students, the work-based learning program as presented here seeks to clarify and strengthen the activities already occurring in the classroom and beyond the school walls, while adding structure and manpower to further develop meaningful learning experiences. This directly aligns with the mission, vision, and strategic plan for our district.

In our K-3 center, our proposed activities will center around career awareness. In grades 4-8, we will add an important layer of career exploration activities. In grades 9-12, awareness and exploration continue with an

added emphasis on experiences and career preparation. The overall effect is to intentionally add to what students know as they progress through their elementary and secondary education – both about themselves and about the opportunities available to them.

As this plan was developed, a key distinction was made in the upper (9-12) grades vs. the lower (PK-8) grades. While all grades will have required components of career education in the curriculum, the focus in the upper grades will center around opportunities. These opportunities will be marketed heavily to students and parents. Often the word “requirement” equates with policing, enforcing, recordkeeping, and rules. The word “opportunity,” on the other hand, signifies leading, offering, discussing, and helping. MFL MarMac is fortunate to have invested heavily in marketing. We will use this strong presence to educate and motivate students and parents to take advantage of the vast resources we will have available. We will also directly market to industry, business, and community professionals to create buy-in and possible financial investment in our endeavors. These activities will be outlined in this report.

Three Core Essentials

An in-house survey, entitled *Career Exploration and Exposure through Classroom Activities*, was sent to 64 teachers in all grades and content areas. Teachers were asked to choose from the following list of activities in response to the question: “In the classes I teach, students have the opportunity to...”:

- Listen to guest speakers (in-person, zoom, etc.) centered on future career or professional learning
- Research various career paths
- Participate in hands-on activities through simulators or activities associated with a career path
- Complete authentic projects with business and community partners of any kind
- Engage in career-based service learning
- Attend a career event
- Tour a business, community organization, or worksite
- Participate in a job shadow
- Attend a professional skills workshop (resumé/cover letter writing, professional image, workplace ethics) outside of a classroom lesson
- Complete a mock interview
- Participate and/or run a school-based enterprise (store, café, etc.)
- Participate in an internship
- I currently do not offer any of the opportunities listed above in the classes I teach.
- Take a survey/quiz to determine attitude, aptitude, and interests
- Complete units of study on various career clusters or paths
- Challenge students to generate solutions to authentic / real-world problems
- Complete informational interviews about aspects of various careers
- Engage in conversation with people doing the work in a student's career path

Forty-five teachers responded. This survey displayed a variety of interesting experiences being offered, but also revealed the haphazard approach to career exploration in our district; that is, interesting things were being accomplished by individual teachers within their classrooms, but little articulation or collaboration was

happening. Having an established K-12 Work-Based Learning Plan will encourage our efforts to have conversations around building a sequenced program that leads to graduates with the knowledge and skills to take the NEXT step in their lives.

These findings will be shared with administration, school board, and the district's school improvement advisory committee. As stated in the strategic plan, it is a goal to maintain and strengthen work-based learning opportunities in the district and this information will help keep the initiative 'top of mind' for all stakeholders.

The three core essentials across the grade spans will include career awareness for grades K-5, career exploration for grades 6-8, and career exposure and preparation for grades 9-12.

The crucial first step, which will be the main goal in the first few months of implementation, will be the creation of a local/regional work-based learning database of business and community professionals and other resources to help teachers at all levels add career awareness, exploration, and exposure to their curriculum. This is in direct response to the many surveys that indicated that teachers:

1. do not feel that career awareness fits their grade level
2. do not feel that career awareness fits their content area
3. do not know how to plan for these types of activities
4. do not have the time to incorporate these activities into their lessons

The WBL Coordinator will reach out to all business and community contacts prior to being included in the database to go over career awareness goals and to assess the level at which they would like to be involved: guest speaker (virtual, in person), tours, job shadows, authentic learning projects, internships, work experience placements, etc.

Necessary professional development will be addressed later in the program planning document.

Kindergarten - Third Grade

While a number of respondents indicated field trips and guest speakers in the K-3 classrooms, it is generally agreed that lesser emphasis is put on academic preparation *before* the activity or reflection and follow-up *after* the activity. With guidance from the district WBL Coordinator, these activities will be transformed into legitimate work-based learning experiences with some minor adjustments or additions to what is already happening. Furthermore, having a database of resources to draw from will be beneficial to add to their offerings. For example, if the classroom is doing a unit on money, it will be helpful to have a database of interested businesses such as banks, insurance, and other financial professionals to contact. Knowing that these professionals have been contacted before and their readiness is established will help teachers overcome any barriers to utilizing them.

Our K-3 center recently began offering more structured and articulated STEAM lessons. A current instructional coach leads classroom sessions on computer science and STEAM topics. The goal is for classroom teachers to integrate these lessons into their own curriculum (with continued support.) Again, with a little adjustment to adding a career component to these lessons, this approach will connect the idea of problem-solving and future careers into each lesson. An example of this is our annual kindergarten STEM festival in which parents are invited to school to have their students demonstrate their knowledge and experience with various technology and STEM

resources including robots, coding, and more. Adding a career awareness component to this event would allow students to see themselves doing this type of activity in a future workplace setting. It would also educate parents about the possibilities available to their children. MFL MarMac Elementary was also a recent recipient of a STEM Scale-Up grant for a STEAM cart.

A Stanford University study finding indicates that career development at the elementary level solidifies the connection between academic achievement and future endeavors for students. It states, "An elementary career development curriculum helps younger students determine more of who they are so that by the time they are of employability age, they can concentrate more on what they want to do."

The current WBL coordinator is also the K-12 teacher librarian for the district. One proposed WBL activity in the elementary library would be to also hold a career awareness promotion. Biographies and books on careers would be highlighted and other activities could be held. One idea is to create age-appropriate descriptions of careers. Utilizing our school's marketing team, we will ask the business community to work with students in various grades to help write these job descriptions. We will then display these in the library and other spaces. The library is already established as a place for exploration and curiosity. This space is uniquely poised to offer opportunities for elementary students to see themselves in the world of work and to expand their choices to options other than the typical teacher, firefighter, or ballerina pathways!

Fourth - Fifth Grade

Around the age of 10-12, students begin to do abstract thinking and thinking about *possibilities* as well as considering many points of view. They also begin to see how they fit into society and how their interests/skills/values are similar to and different from others around them.

Our current offerings include computer coding at the 4th-5th grade levels. Students are also introduced to Google Apps for Education in 4th grade and begin to use email. Adding a component of career awareness at this level is crucial. This can be as simple as email etiquette to interacting with people outside of the classroom in order to solve real world problems.

Also, like the elementary, a number of field trips and guest speakers are utilized but some adjustments will be made to add academic preparation prior to and review/reflection following the activity. The WBL Coordinator can lead these "adjustment" conversations and/or offer resources to teachers.

A proposed venture at this grade span is the addition of problem-solution activities in which students engage with area business professionals. The vision for this activity would be to have a guest come to the classroom or zoom with students to present a "problem" tied to their work and then ask for students to problem-solve and generate multiple solutions to the problem presented. This could be as simple as the business professional saying something fairly general such as, "Sometime we have to deal with an unhappy customer..." or "Sometimes our work environment is not very organized" to something more specific like, "Our work includes how to save energy using..." or "what Ideas do you have for creating this new product..." Then students, in groups or individually, propose multiple solutions to the problem and offer them to the business. This allows students to see how they can contribute to the world of work and also gives a glimpse into a day in the life of a career professional.

Middle School 6th Grade - 8th Grade

Currently, our middle school offers a Careers exploratory class in 8th grade. Students begin using Kuder Navigator for surveys to discover their attitudes, aptitudes, interests, and skills. They also build their career development and educational plans using Kuder. Students also attend a career fair at our community college.

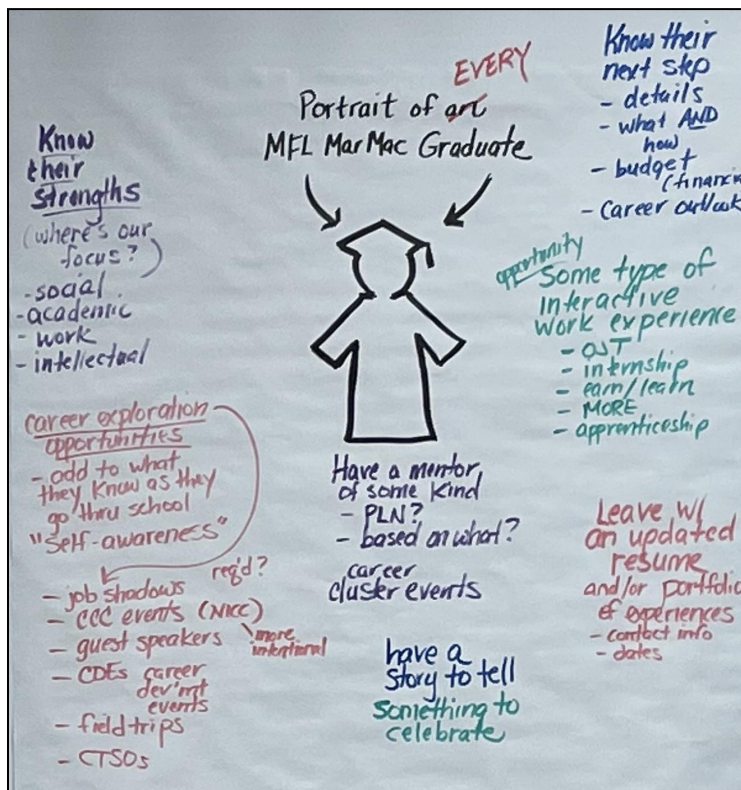
Seventh grade students have an exploratory STEAM class in which they operate a number of student-run enterprises where they choose a product, market and sell, and keep financial records. MFL MarMac is a recent recipient of a STEM Scale-Up grant to be used in the middle school.

Students also take field trips and have guest speakers that could be transformed into better work-based learning experiences with minor adjustments.

At this level, it is proposed to introduce students and teachers to the Future Ready Iowa Clearinghouse for Work-Based Learning. We currently have a district board with projects listed in our area. Further expansion of this resource by adding more community partners and projects would be helpful. Encouraging teachers to use this resource to add authentic projects into their curriculum would further engage the business community and build capacity for future work at the high school level.

High School 9th Grade - 12th Grade

A great deal of emphasis in our WBL plan was spent on identifying the components of a quality high school experience. The creation of our own "Portrait of a Graduate" revealed many components that we want to ensure happens for every student before leaving our school.



These components include:

- Self-awareness - Students should understand their strengths – social, academic, work, and intellectual. This awareness should grow throughout their academic career as they add to what they know as they go through school.
- Support - Students should have a system of support including like-minded people, a personal learning network, mentors, advisors, or other trusted adults.
- Story to tell / Something to celebrate - Students should have a variety of opportunities including projects they've worked on, experiences they've encountered, accomplishments they've completed in which to create a story of their successful journey toward a future career goal.
- Resumé / Portfolio - Students should leave with an updated resumé or portfolio with dates and contact information to use and access for a variety of purposes.
- Plan for next step - Students should know their next step and have a fairly detailed plan for how to get there (budget, help with applications, FAFSA). They should also know the career outlook for their chosen field. This is facilitated by various interactive work experiences to help them explore and prepare for their next step.

All students in grades 9-12 update their Kuder educational plans each year, but more conversation needs to occur around this activity. A schoolwide advisory time each day could allow this to happen at various times throughout the year.

All juniors take the ASVAB test and engage in a followup session to go over the results. Juniors are also enrolled in a concurrent WBL-110 course entitled Employability Skills. In this class, students explore various career clusters, construct resumé and cover letters, have a required job shadow experience, and take part in mock interviews with business professionals.

We have a strong partnership with Northeast Iowa Community College and utilize the services of their college and career coach. NICC offers numerous career events each semester including industry tours, simulations, and lab experiences. The high school learning commons includes the high school library but is also home to the College and Career Readiness hub. All students enrolled in PICC classes through NICC have an assigned period to work on their class in the learning commons. Having this captive audience allows the WBL Coordinator, who is also the teacher librarian, access to students to encourage their participation in events. All work-based learning opportunities, job openings, scholarship notices, and other future-ready information is displayed on a whiteboard kiosk in this space. College and career representatives are invited to set up during the school day to encourage students to explore their options.

The WBL Coordinator is also responsible for finding and monitoring students' work experience placements. Students may enroll as a TA (teacher assistant) or an outside work experience placement. MFL MarMac High School has a unique setup in that it is connected to our PK-3 elementary school and a community daycare center. Expanding our current TA/WEP program would allow for more robust experiences. If students are interested in the teaching profession, working in a classroom setting is ideal. We would like to make this a more structured experience, however, allowing students to take on increased responsibilities as they progress through their placement. We recently added two college courses in the teacher prep program – Children's Lit and Foundations of Education, which joins our current college class, Child Psychology. We are looking to create a local pathway for future educators which include teacher assistant experiences as well as possible certification as a paraeducator.

With childcare being an issue in our community as well as job vacancies, utilizing our students in work experience placements at our daycare is a win-win. This would allow for paid work experiences for some students. Students may also explore the business management side of the facility as well.

A primary goal of our plan is to expand work experience placements into paid/unpaid internships. The WBL Coordinator would serve as “matchmaker” helping students to find placements that will expose them to career opportunities but also fill needed gaps in our community workforce. Stacking experiences is also an opportunity. For example, we have a telecommunications firm who is interested in offering students more opportunities around fiber optics. This experience could be stacked with an experience with a local electrician as well.

As stated earlier in the plan, having a comprehensive database of stakeholders will be very important and useful. By engaging with business and community professionals, the WBL Coordinator will be able to educate them about the challenges and rewards of working with students and the potential talent pipeline it could create. The WBL Coordinator will also be able to assess the level of involvement that each business is looking for: from guest speaking and tours to full-blown internship experiences.

Capitalizing on our CTE programs in agriculture, industrial technology, business, and family/consumer sciences is an obvious avenue for expansion of our work-based learning program. Adding more authentic projects in all of these areas leads to work-based learning experiences as students discover their strengths and interests and we, as school personnel, search for further opportunities for the students to explore the career field more deeply. CTE programs also afford us entry into the various CTSOs associated with them. Currently, we have membership in FFA and FBLA. FFA is a very active and successful chapter. We look forward to taking advantage of the work-based learning opportunities in FBLA as well as adding other CTSOs in our lineup.

Yet another advantage we have is being a part of the Healthcare field consortium with other schools in our area. Students are able to take advantage of several online classes that fulfill healthcare program prerequisites. We also hold onsite CNA courses and are hoping to be able to offer an EMT certification course within the next two years. We are a rural area but have three hospitals within 20-30 minutes of our campus. We hope to explore more work-based learning opportunities in the healthcare field.

MFL MarMac has been successful in other authentic work-based learning endeavors. We are fortunate to have been awarded two STEM BEST grants. With our first award, we established an authentic learning program at the high school. The program is called MORE and stands for **M**ore **O**pportunities, **R**eal **E**xperiences. Students spend time exploring their strengths and workplace skills before choosing a semester-long (or more) project to work on. These projects may be pitched by businesspeople or they may be passion projects pitched by the students. All projects are designed to create an authentic deliverable for an authentic audience. Students work on the Universal Constructs of critical thinking, creativity, communication, adaptability, collaboration, initiative, and productivity throughout their projects.

Our second STEM BEST grant helped us create a new drone technology program at our school. MORE students were tasked with exploring all drones and necessary equipment and software to be used in the program. They also developed the class curriculum as well as test preparation for the commercial drone pilot license. When the program was launched, two MORE students continued to work as teacher assistants in the program. Today, the

program is one of more popular offerings and students use the drone applications in plant and soil science as well as graphic design and videography.

Other endeavors we would like to explore directly relate to our 'Portrait of a Graduate' and our listed below:

Self-awareness

- Marketing our opportunities to more students for self-exploration
- More followup with Kuder and ASVAB results
- More interest and skills surveys
- Tiered level of job shadows - sophomore level visit business as part of a group; junior level required 4-hour job shadow as part of Employability Skills class; senior level encouraged to do a 40-hour job shadow or stacked experience

Support

- Utilize advisory time and advisor connects for meaningful discussions around career exploration and survey results
- Offer a career cluster group where students can gather with other like-minded individuals to discuss opportunities and goals
- Help students find a mentor through job shadow and internship experiences

Story to tell / something to celebrate

- Creation of career pathways – both via the community college and locally created. We would like to create an ala carte menu of experiences including college classes, CTE classes, authentic learning, additional job shadows, and work experience placements to add up to a “pathway” in a particular career cluster
- Industry certifications – in addition to Part 107 drone license, we will look at construction and welding certifications and computer science certifications
- Authentic project story of how the student researched and took the lead on creating value for someone else while enhancing their own workplace skills
- All of the above will serve as marketable achievements for students

Resumé / portfolio

- Senior nights where we bring in business professionals, retired teachers, volunteers to help with FAFSA advisement, resumé writing, scholarship essay writing
- Continue and expand offerings that allow for marketable skills that can be added to students' resúms and portfolios

Plan for next step

- Guidance on realistic career outlook for chosen fields
- Assistance in establishing a budget for the next step after high school regardless if that is college, trade, or military
- FAFSA advisement

Identifying / Onboarding Businesses, Nonprofits, and Other Employers

MFL MarMac, through its CTE programs, NICC collaborations, and the authentic learning program, has a strong network of outside partners. We have a district board on the Future-Ready Work-Based Learning Clearinghouse that is being built with more opportunities. We also established a visioning committee for work-based authentic learning that included community, parents, and students. Our Friends of the FFA chapter is strong. Our work with NICC for our junior class mock interviews has been a model for our schools in our area and our CTE teacher and NICC Intermediary presented at the 2022 WBL Coordinators Conference.

The work of the WBL Coordinator to build our database of interested business and community members will open the door to conversations about future internships, problem-solution activities, guest speaking, job shadows, and more. It is imperative that our stakeholders view our school as creating a talent pipeline for the industries that are currently in our area. Future work may include requesting an investment from industry in our work-based learning efforts.

We will also continually highlight all of our efforts through our district marketing committee on social media and other media outlets. We have had a lot of success in gaining interest in our programming and feel our marketing effort is one of the strengths of our district.

Professional Development Supports

There are a variety of professional development elements needed in order for this plan to work. One simple, but not necessarily easy, step is to change the language and expectations around career awareness, exploration, and preparation. Many of our survey respondents indicated they did not have the time or expertise, or did not feel such work fit their content or grade level. This indicates much work needs to be done in this area. We want to encourage all stakeholders (teachers at all levels and content areas, students, administration, parents, and community people) to adopt a language of “what’s your next step?” rather than “what do you want to be when you grow up?” This is important because it sets a tone for continuous exploration and lifelong learning. When thinking of a “next step,” participants have a growth mindset about finding that intersection of skills, interests, and needs – which combines self-awareness with opportunity.

Utilizing the vast resources available through the STEM Advisory Council, the Future-Ready Work-Based Learning model, and the Department of Education, we hope to share a number of resources with our community people – either in face-to-face conversations or community stakeholder meetings. These include the Internship Toolkit, the Business Partner toolkit, the Work-Based Learning Guide, the Earn & Learn website, the Clearinghouse, and more. We will use our Sector Board to continue to understand the labor needs of our area and how our school can help meet those needs.

Another portion of our professional development will be bringing awareness to teachers on how to change current career learning activities into true WBL experiences without a lot of effort. It is important that all educators understand how these changes can make a big impact in the students’ continuum of exploration toward their postsecondary options – and that this work starts in the elementary and continues through graduation across all content areas. Best practice is not one or two teachers and a guidance counselor talking to students about careers in a specified Careers or Employability Skills class or at a scheduling session. It involves a team approach with a specific goal of awareness, exploration, and preparation in mind.

Staffing

The school recently recognized the title of Work-Based Learning Coordinator and has begun promoting this position as a valued use of district resources. They have committed to matching funds in both of our recent STEM BEST grants and have funded improvements to the learning commons area and the agriculture classrooms where much of our recent work-based learning activities have occurred.

Since the current WBL coordinator is also an instructional coach, this pairing of positions allows for increased time to collaborate with all teachers and coordinate conversations and actions. The WBL Coordinator will serve as a resource for helping teachers improve their career learning activities.

The WBL Coordinator is also MOC-endorsed which allows for on-site evaluations of our work experience and internship placements. The coordinator hopes to serve as a “matchmaker” between student interests and employer needs.

A close relationship with the school’s guidance department is also a must as scheduling concerns need to be addressed. Also, counselors gather data about postsecondary plans that may be shared with the WBL Coordinator.

Costs and Funding Sources

At this time, the district is paying for all costs associated with work-based learning activities. We plan to explore options for allowing for industry and community to invest monetarily in our efforts. We will also take advantage of any grant opportunities that are available. Business and community partners will continue to provide in-kind contributions to the program.

Community Assets

The MFL MarMac K-12 Work-Based Learning Plan depends on the resources available from the following entities (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Northeast Iowa Community College
- Iowa Intermediary Network
- Keystone Area Education Agency
- Iowa Governor’s STEM Advisory Council
- McGregor-Marquette Chamber of Commerce
- Monona Chamber and Economic Development
- Clayton County Development Group
- Authentic Learning Network
- Iowa Workforce Development

Our most important assets are the stakeholders in this work. We need students who see the value in taking part in the opportunities we are providing. We need families who are partners in our efforts in engaging students in worthwhile endeavors. We need educators at all levels who are willing to take on some level of responsibility in providing activities that help students develop their postsecondary plans. We need supportive and visionary leaders in our administration and school board. We need business and community people who are willing to take risks in working with students whether by collaborating in person at school, online or on zoom, or in their own

workplaces. We need organizations and agencies who provide support and resources that help us create a sustainable and successful program.

Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) utilization

The 2023 DCAP and ICAP documents were created in collaboration with this K-12 Work-Based Learning Plan to ensure continuity and consistency in our efforts. This WBL plan is included on our DCAP form submitted to the Iowa Department of Education. We will revisit our Career Exploration survey each year to gain an understanding of buy-in among our educators in this area. We will also use the DCAP rubric to gauge our progress from a self-rating of “not evident” to “strength” across all areas.

As mentioned many times in our plan, our program intends to use strengths-based approach to helping students identify their next steps. It is our belief that students who see their strengths are more likely to voluntarily offer them or seek opportunities to create value for others. The more value they add to others, the more personally successful they will become.

Perkins Alignment

Many components of our program will include resources and activities through involvement in various Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs). At this time, our plan is to use Perkins funding for costs related to memberships with FFA, FBLA, and more CTSOs in the future.

Challenges and Barriers

Consideration was given to the sustainability of our K-12 plan. We were conservative in what could be accomplished in the short term, while envisioning a program that grows and develops over time. Much of the work will rely on the efforts of the Work Based Learning Coordinator and the time that is allowed in the workday toward these efforts. It is a challenge in all school districts with staff being used in a variety of positions. This situation is no different. As the program succeeds, more time will be needed to visit workplace sites, develop authentic projects, provide professional development to new and veteran teachers, and continue to market our efforts to stakeholders.

Financial costs for increased work time for the coordinator by hiring additional support staff in this area may be a concern too.

Our plan was developed with a mindset of opportunities rather than requirements. Sometimes, when activities are not required, participation suffers. It is our belief that we want students and families to see the value on their own and utilize what we are offering. This will require a great deal of outreach and marketing.

As with any partnership that includes students in the workplace, child labor laws, insurance, narrow minds, and other barriers exist. Educating our workforce will be a constant effort. We will share resources such as “Classroom + Workplaces” videos and invite business professionals to join us at conferences and in local visioning meetings.

Sustained commitment from our school board and administration is a must. Our current strategic plan indicates that this work is valued, but leadership changes may impact this. It is not enough to only give verbal commitment to these efforts; district resources must also be directed to this work.

Last, it is important to not try to do everything at once. Our plan is conservative and doable at this time, but also includes some future goals. It is exciting to imagine five years from now and ask, “What will our 3rd graders be doing?” or “How will a high school student reflect on their school career and see the value of the opportunities provided?” or “What will the business and industry landscape look like here? Will our mindset change to allow our students to see themselves being successful in our beautiful area of the state? Will this result in opportunities being created because more people have decided they can live, work, and raise a family here?”