



Ascend Indiana Student-Led Business Toolkit



Created to support Indiana schools & intermediaries leveraging student-led businesses as work-based learning opportunities



THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

This Student-Led Business Toolkit was built in partnership with schools and intermediaries from across the state who are leading the way in student-led businesses!

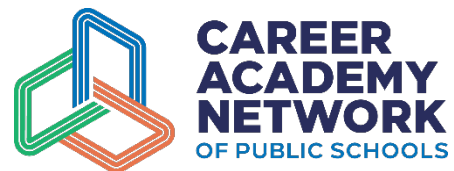


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The Toolkit is organized into 5 phases of creating and launching a Student-Led Business. In most cases, schools should begin in Phase 1 and work their way through the resources in each phase. Every phase features a checklist or worksheet covering the main elements with links to additional supportive tools as needed.

Schools that have an existing student-led business may begin in Phase 5 to refine and enhance their current business.

1 – EXPLORE

Student-Led Business Overview

Explore the features of a Student-Led Business and why it is a valuable work-based learning experience.

2 – ASSESS READINESS

Readiness Assessment Checklist

Work through this checklist to determine your school's readiness for launching a student-led business.

3 – DESIGN

Business Plan Design

Create a detailed business plan defining your product/service, customers, operations, and partnerships.

4 – BUILD & LAUNCH

Operational Launch Worksheet

Use this checklist to review readiness, identify gaps, and ensure a smooth and successful launch of your SLB.

5 – REFINE & ENHANCE

Continuous Improvement Checklist

Review this checklist on a consistent basis to evaluate and refine all aspects of the business.

APPENDIX

Additional Supportive Tools

Reference additional supporting tools as needed for each phase of the SLB Toolkit.

Phase 1: EXPLORE

Student-Led Business Overview

Explore the features of a Student-Led Business and why it is a valuable work-based learning experience.

The Indiana Department of Education defines [Work-Based Learning \(WBL\) experiences](#) as sustained interactions between students and employers in real or high-quality simulated work environments. To count toward graduation requirements, the experience must:

- Align to course or training competencies,
- Involve real tasks tied to workplace expectations, and
- Include a written work and training plan signed by the student, school, parent/guardian, and employer.

However, schools across the state face barriers in expanding employer-hosted WBL placements. Transportation limitations, limited employer capacity, and student schedules that allow only one class period instead of half-day blocks can all restrict participation. To ensure more students can access high-quality WBL, schools are increasingly turning to Student-Led Business (SLB) models that bring real work into the school itself.

Indiana Department of Education Recognizes 3 types of student-led businesses:

School-Based Enterprise (SBE)

A student-run business that sells goods or services to real customers on school grounds. Students manage daily operations, finance, production, marketing, and customer service. Employers or industry partners advise students, evaluate work, and ensure the business reflects real workplace expectations. ([Creek Cattle](#))

Workplace Simulation

A school-based environment that replicates the tools, roles, and expectations of a workplace. Students conduct work tasks and may interact with real or simulated clients but are not required to operate as a fully functioning business. Simulations may be virtual only if the represented industry can also operate virtually. ([Bend Manufacturing](#)) & ([Commodore Manufacturing](#))

Student Entrepreneurial Experience

A student-created and student-led venture, such as a landscaping service, coffee cart, apparel brand, or repair business. Students design, launch, and manage the enterprise, supported by teachers and industry mentors who reinforce professional expectations. ([STARTedUP Foundation](#))

Indiana High School Diploma Seal

In December 2024, Indiana approved a [redesigned high school diploma](#) intended to better align students' high school experiences with their post-graduation goals, whether they pursue college, employment, or military service. As part of this structure, students may earn up to six optional diploma seals, each tied to a future pathway. Three of these seals require students to complete a defined number of WBL hours.

HONORS PLUS ENROLLMENT SEAL	HONORS EMPLOYMENT SEAL	HONORS PLUS EMPLOYMENT SEAL
75 WBL Hours	150 WBL Hours	650 WBL Hours

Visit [in.gov/doi](https://www.in.gov/doi) for additional details on graduation seal requirements.



Indiana Intermediary Support

Intermediaries help bridge gaps between industry and the education and workforce system by providing specialized capacity to support employers in launching, scaling, and implementing work-based learning programs. Schools can connect with their own regional intermediary through Ascend's [WBL Intermediary Directory](#).

For more information on intermediaries, visit the [Strada Education Foundation](#).

Leveraging the SLB Toolkit

Schools should continue working their way through the resources in each subsequent phase, filling out the checklist or worksheet that covers the main elements and referencing the linked additional supportive tools as needed.

Schools that have an existing student-led business may begin in Phase 5 to refine and enhance their current business.

Phase 2: ASSESS READINESS

Readiness Assessment Checklist

Work through the checklist below to determine your school's readiness for launching a student-led business.

	Review all Questions	Record Answers Here
Identify Business Idea	• What is a problem or need in our community? • Could students realistically run and manage this business? • Will it generate enough income to be sustainable and educational?	
Assess Space Needs	• Is there usable space for the SLB? (classroom, storefront, kitchen, etc.) • Is the space available for the time required?	
Estimate Startup Costs	• How much funding is needed for equipment, materials, and space for SLB to launch? • What potential funding gaps currently exist?	

	Review all Questions	Record Answers Here
Form Planning Committee	• What faculty member should lead the planning committee (i.e. business or CTE teacher)? • What school counselor can gauge the student participation in the SLB and the impact on scheduling? • What principal or administrator can authorize the assessment process?	
Survey Student Interest	• What students or student groups may be interested in leading and managing an SLB? • Is there enough interest in the SLB to launch and staff it with students?	
Survey Industry Partner Interest	• What educational outcomes do we want this partnership to support (e.g., employability skills, entrepreneurship, curriculum links)? • What real-world standards or expectations should students be exposed to? • What role do we want the partner to play (advisor, mentor, co-designer, customer, investor, operator)?	

Phase 3: DESIGN

Business Plan Design

Create a detailed business plan defining your product/service, customers, operations, and partnerships.

	Review all Questions	Record Answers Here
Business Plan	- Is there a written business plan that outlines the enterprise's goals, operations, budget, and student roles? - What components still need developed?	
Employer Partnership	- Does this student-led business plan to involve employer partners who support student learning through mentorship, guidance, feedback, or real-world insight? - If you answer no, identify potential employers or community partners who could support this enterprise, and outline next steps for outreach or engagement.	
WBL Requirements and Curriculum Alignment	- Does the SLB align with IDOE Diploma Seals? - Have you aligned the experience to IDOE curriculum standards to ensure students receive credit?	
Legal Compliance	- Has the SLB plan been reviewed with the school's legal guidance to ensure compliance with district policies, state regulations, liability requirements, and financial procedures? <i>Ascend Indiana <u>does not</u> provide legal advice.</i>	

Phase 4: BUILD & LAUNCH

Operational Launch Worksheet

Use this checklist to review readiness, identify gaps, and ensure a smooth and successful launch of your SLB.

	Review & Confirm Status
Program Structure & WBL Compliance	☐ The experience aligns to an approved Indiana WBL experience type (e.g., School-Based Enterprise, workplace simulation) ☐ A written Work and Training Plan is developed, outlining student duties, skill supervision, and learning outcomes in alignment with Indiana WBL requirements. ☐ The experience includes a minimum of 25 hours of meaningful work-based learning. ☐ Student work is connected to real-world business operations.
Student Participation & Supervision	☐ Student roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. ☐ A qualified school-based supervisor has been assigned. ☐ Supervision plans meet IDOE WBL expectations. ☐ Student schedules allow for consistent participation. ☐ Procedures exist for attendance and hour tracking.
Training & Skill Development	☐ Students receive pre-launch training related to job roles. ☐ Workplace expectations and professionalism have been reviewed. ☐ Safety procedures and emergency protocols are taught. ☐ Skill development aligns to career pathway standards. ☐ Reflection or assessment methods are identified.

	Review & Confirm Status
Final Approvals	☐ The SLB plan has been reviewed & approved by school/district administration and legal guidance. ☐ Safety guidelines and risk mitigation plans are documented. ☐ Student tasks are age-appropriate and school-approved. ☐ Parent/guardian permissions are collected, if required.
Evaluation & Continuous Improvement	☐ Student performance evaluation methods are identified. ☐ Feedback processes are built into operations. ☐ Records will be maintained for WBL audits or reporting. ☐ Plans exist for reviewing and improving operations throughout the year.

Completion of this checklist confirms that all required operational, training, supervision, and compliance components are in place. Once reviewed and approved by school leadership and appropriate district personnel, the student-led business is considered ready to launch and begin student operations in alignment with Indiana Work-Based Learning requirements.

Phase 5: REFINE & ENHANCE

Continuous Improvement Checklist

Review this checklist on a consistent basis to evaluate and refine all aspects of the business.

	Evaluate Business Success	Consider Additional Tools
Student Engagement	☐ Students attend scheduled shifts consistently ☐ Students understand and perform assigned roles ☐ Student leaders help manage daily operations ☐ Professional behavior is demonstrated	• Attendance logs or sign-in sheets • Task completion checklists • Meeting minutes showing student-led decisions • Advisor observations of professionalism
Daily Operations	☐ Enterprise operates according to schedule ☐ Products/services are delivered correctly ☐ Inventory levels are monitored and adjusted ☐ Procedures are followed with minimal errors	• Daily operations checklist (opening/closing, tasks done) • Order sheets or service logs • Inventory counts and stock reports • Notes on procedure adherence from advisors
Financial Health	☐ Weekly or monthly sales totals ☐ Budget vs. actual spending ☐ Accurate cash counts at close ☐ Financial records kept up to date	• Sales receipts or cash logs • Budget vs. actual expense reports • Bank deposit records (if applicable) • Financial statements or reconciliation sheets

	Evaluate Business Success	Consider Additional Tools
Customer Experience	☐ Customers are greeted and assisted appropriately ☐ Feedback is mostly positive ☐ Issues are resolved in a timely manner	• Customer feedback forms or surveys • Complaints/resolution logs • Repeat customer counts or loyalty records • Social media or school event engagement metrics
Marketing and Sales	☐ Promotions are being done ☐ Promotions increase sales ☐ Business is visible in the school	• Number of promotions completed • Sales increase during promotions • Visibility of enterprise in school (posters, announcements)
Learning & Skill Development	☐ Students can explain their role and tasks ☐ Students understand pricing and costs ☐ Improvement in communication and teamwork ☐ Reflection or review completed regularly	• Student reflections or short journals • Short presentations or explanations of what they did • Simple skills checklist or mini-assessment • Teacher/advisor observation notes
Program Sustainability	☐ Roles and procedures are documented ☐ New students can be trained efficiently ☐ Enterprise is prepared to continue next term	• Standard operating procedures / playbooks • Student onboarding & training guides • Student role descriptions • Leadership succession plans

	Evaluate Business Success	Consider Additional Tools
Employer Engagement	☐ Employers have clearly defined roles (advisor, evaluator, mentor, client) ☐ Employer expectations are documented and shared ☐ Employers participate beyond one-time events ☐ Partnership goals align with workforce and industry needs	• Employer role descriptions & expectations • Partnership agreements • Employer engagement calendar or tracker • Employer feedback or evaluation forms
Curriculum Alignment	☐ Enterprise activities are mapped to specific academic standards (e.g., CTE, state standards, Common Core) ☐ Cross-curricular connections identified (Math, ELA, Social Studies, STEM, Business, etc.) ☐ Career readiness and employability skills are explicitly embedded ☐ Alignment documents are updated at least annually	• Business Activity-to-Standards Table • Business Skills & Curriculum Category Chart • Student performance evidence (portfolio, assessments) • Annual Alignment Review worksheet

APPENDIX

The Appendix includes additional supportive tools beyond the primary sections of the toolkit. These tools are linked throughout the toolkit and collectively below to provide extra support as needed.

1 – EXPLORE

- WBL Intermediary Directory

2 – ASSESS READINESS

- Identify Business Idea
- Estimate Startup Costs
- Form Planning Committee
- Survey Student Interest

3 – DESIGN

- Business Plan Worksheet
- Curriculum Alignment Worksheet

4 – BUILD & LAUNCH

- WBL Work & Training Plan
- Daily Operations Checklist

5 – REFINE & ENHANCE

- Feedback Reflection Form