Project-Based Learning

Studies show that Oklahoma currently faces a large work skills gap. In 2016, approximately half (46 percent) of the Oklahoma workforce had either attained only a high school diploma or dropped out of high school altogether. However, by 2025, 77 percent of Oklahoma jobs will require some form of education beyond high school. This is why it is important more than ever to provide students with high-quality work-based experiences. (Oklahoma works)

WBL takes many forms and often includes experiences such as: internships, job shadowing, and service-learning. "High-quality work-based learning experiences pair young people with mentors who show them how to solve real-world problems, cultivate professional skills, shoulder adult responsibilities, build workplace relationships, identify interests and aptitudes, and make good decisions about careers and college." (The Southern Regional Education Board)

WHAT IS PROJECT-BASED LEARNING?

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects. Benefits from PBL include:

- Students become more engaged, self-directed learners
- Students learn more deeply and transfer their learning to new situations
- Students have Improved problem-solving and collaboration skills
- Students perform as well or better on high-stakes tests

Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Brush & Saye, 2008; Strobel & Van Barneveld, 2009; Walker & Leary, 2009. www.edutopia.org

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- When creating PBL opportunities remember there are key characteristics that differentiate "doing a project" from engaging in rigorous Project Based Learning.

- Consider using a planning document to ensure that you create an equitable program that is able to yield successful outcomes, remain on schedule, and create equitable opportunities. Make sure your program is student-centric, allows students to ask driving questions related to their career interests. I.e. How does my career of interest affect my community? What are the barriers to creating a pipeline to my career?

- Projects should include background research using credible sources; students conducting their own research to gather and analyze quantitative and/or qualitative data from surveys, interviews, experiments, etc.; sharing of project results through presentations, products, etc., beyond the classroom (school, community, internet, etc.)

It is also important to note the distinction between PBL and a classroom project. While projects can be an exciting activity to connect a student's career interest to learning, PBL requires students to lead the process of learning while connecting various elements of learning and career. To view other differences view the table below:

Doing Projects	Project-Based Learning
Can be done at home without teacher guidance or teamwork	Requires teacher guidance & team collaboration
Used year after year, focused on product (poster, diorama, video)	Timely, complex, multiple Oklahoma Academic Standards, significant implementation time
Can be outlined in detail on 1 piece of paper by the teacher	Includes layers of learning for teachers & students
Teacher work occurs mainly after the project is complete	Teacher work occurs before, during, and after the project
Based upon directions	Based on Driving Question
Closed—every project has the same goal	Open—students make choices, determine research/outcome
Not used to solve real-world problems	Can provide solutions in the real world, even if not implemented
Doesn't resemble real-world work	Same/similar to real-world work

IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES

Classroom Integration
When designing a PBL program remember that projects should connect to students' career interests and be designed to address Oklahoma Academic Standards for Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Additionally, projects can involve elements of fine arts and physical education and health. Other project considerations include:
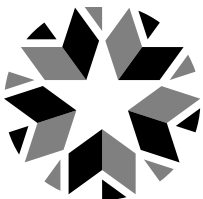
- Critical thinking skills develop as content is learned

- Application of knowledge and skills to the real-world problem makes learning relevant and fun

Afterschool / Out - of School Time Integration
Making PBL part of out-of-school time gives youth new opportunities to become leaders, thinkers, and problem-solvers. Through projects that they help design, students become more engaged in their communities and add their voice to discussions about local issues. PBL is also proving to be a winning strategy for energizing after-school and summer programs. (www.edutopia.com)

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

- Consider using the state curriculum frameworks to identify activities and resources to ensure your PBL program connects to course standards.

- Districts should consider sending business partnership letters and agreements to their local businesses or chambers of commerce to collect feedback for possible real-world industry-related problems.

- K-12 school districts can initiate or continue relationships with their local tribal nations by contacting appropriate tribal leaders. This helpful guide shows appropriate leaders to contact at each Oklahoma Tribal Educational Agency.

- Consider using a resource for students to reflect upon their work-based learning (WBL) experiences to show how WBL can help achieve their career goals. Each ICAP online tool will have a section to provide this information, encourage students to add as much detail as possible.

- Consider increasing access to effective college and career advisors or counselors.

- Consider leveraging your Oklahoma 21st Century Community Learning Center as a space to build quality PBL programs.