

Spotlight on Work-Based Learning: Hamilton County

Hixson High School Provides a Wealth of Opportunities

Earlier this month, principals from schools across Hamilton County were invited to a special presentation of Hixson High School's Work-Based Learning (WBL) opportunities. Hosted by students, teachers, and administrators, participants received a comprehensive overview of Hixson's available programs, toured some of the unique classrooms and resources, and got insight into the students' perspective through a question and answer period with a panel of current WBL students. The administration prioritizes WBL, the teachers have a passion for guiding student experiences, and students benefit by facing postsecondary experiences with a sense of purpose.

Hixson High School made a commitment to a focus on WBL three years ago, after students at the time requested to learn "how to live outside of school". With the support of the administration, the leadership of passionate teachers, and the flexibility of a "skinny block" within their scheduling, Hixson High School made the students' request a reality through enrichment time.

In 2014, Hixson's WBL program began with six students. Two years later, the program serves 154 students. Principal Lee Sims explained that scheduling has been the key to the increasing numbers of student participants, and making WBL work for Hixson High School. The school schedule includes a "skinny block" during which students are able to engage in WBL and enrichment activities with the 10 WBL coordinators in the school. Based on their successes so far, the school's goal is to provide every student a capstone WBL experience during their senior year.

One stand-out feature of the Hixson WBL program is the sheer number of opportunities available to students. Types of WBL opportunities available include: co-ops, internships, service-learning, transitions courses, supervised agriculture experience, and health science capstone courses. Students can participate in either school-based or off-site placements that are paid or unpaid.

Hixson High School's WBL program demonstrates why WBL is important to students, teachers, and administrators, the benefits that students receive from participating in WBL, the importance of a variety of experiences, and the direct impact WBL can have on student's lives.

Students Value and Benefit from WBL Experiences

Hixson High School students are developing vital employability skills, and specifically call attention to their technical skills, public speaking, confidence, and increased clarity of career paths. The teachers are noticing these changes as well, finding that students in WBL experiences often demonstrate more responsibility in class.



Hixson High School students provide great insights into why WBL is important to them and what teachers and administrators can do to support student WBL experiences. Main takeaways from the student panel are below:

- WBL makes school better because students receive a strong education coupled with real-world experience, which prepares them for life after high school.
- Hands-on experiences allow students to apply what they're learning in a meaningful way.
- WBL experiences challenge students to do things that they may otherwise not have considered.
- It is important to ask students what they want, listen to their responses, and take action toward helping transform their WBL interests into guided, high-quality experiences.
- Regardless of whether students love or hate their WBL experiences, they gain valuable insight into their interests, skills, and abilities.
- Sometimes eliminating a career pathway is just as important as discovering one.
- Partnering with transitions students is a great opportunity to get students involved in WBL and may lead to a more inclusive school culture.
- It is important to provide WBL opportunities to all students, including transitions students.
- It is important for students to explore multiple opportunities, beginning in elementary grades.
- WBL mentoring programs for middle school students provide early exposure to academic and career options and allow them to create connections with high school students prior to making the difficult transition into high school.

Commitment to WBL by Administration is Vital

Lee Sims, principal of Hixson High School, and Joyce Perdue, teacher, work-based learning coordinator, and member of the Work-Based Learning Leadership Council believe that WBL is critical for preparing students to be successful in life after high school. They are committed to providing a range of experiences that allow students to grow and explore. Their work is paying off in the Hixson High School culture. There is a sense of unity as students find their purpose and passion, and make friends who share their interests. They learn to be friends and work alongside others who are different from them.

Hixson High School WBL Highlights

Nursing Education & HOSA

Students in the nursing education course are exposed to the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue careers in nursing. In addition to classroom clinical instruction, students complete site-based clinical hours, and those who have earned all classroom and site-based hours are eligible to take the certification examination as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA).

Additionally, students can participate in HOSA, the career and technical student organization (CTSO) for future health care professionals. For two years in a row, Hixson students have placed first in the nation for nursing aid and top ten for physical therapy through HOSA.

Cooperative Education (Co-ops) & Internships

Cooperative education is a structured method of instruction whereby students coordinate their studies with a paid job in a field related to their academic or career and technical education course. Placements are dependent on the student's goals and program of study.

Service-Learning

Service-learning combines community service with a structured school-based opportunity for reflection about that service, emphasizing the connections between service experiences and academic learning. Students benefit by acquiring skills and knowledge, realizing personal satisfaction, and learning civic responsibility.

Transitions

The transitions programs are designed to facilitate community-based instruction, employment experiences, and socialization skills for the student with moderate to severe disabilities. The focus is on work readiness, job skills, and responsibility. In partnership with several local business partners, the students have the opportunity to work, gain more self-esteem, and demonstrate independence.

Supervised Agriculture Experience (SAE)

An SAE is a structured experiential learning opportunity that takes place in a setting outside of regular school hours. SAEs allow students to experience the diversity of agriculture and natural resources industries and to gain exposure to agricultural-related career pathways.

Hixson High School Student Highlights



Lexie (left-side of photo) is a junior who has already achieved CNA status. She plans to apply to the University of Tennessee – Chattanooga and complete a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. She currently serves as a peer to other students in the nursing education course.



Danny is a senior who started in WBL as a waiter in a restaurant. However, thanks to a developing partnership with nearby manufacturing company, Gestamp, he is now pairing his interest and education in mechanical engineering with a cooperative placement working on the assembly line. He will soon be learning Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs), and was offered a full-time position at Gestamp after he graduates.



Thomas is a student in the transitions program. His WBL placement is as a volunteer at McKamey Animal Center. Thomas spends most of his time getting the rescue dogs used to spending time with people. He does so well with his position, that he has been called “the dog whisperer.” Thomas has also been offered employment after graduation.



Amanda is a student in the Supervised Agriculture Experience and a member of FFA. She manages a flock of 20 birds. Through collecting and selling their eggs, she has learned about veterinary care, food management, and entrepreneurship. Amanda entered six of her birds into a competition in which four won second place ribbons, two won first place ribbons, and one of the first place birds also won Best in Show.

Interested in Starting a WBL Program?

If you are interested in starting a Work-Based Learning program in your school or district, please review the WBL Policy Guide, WBL Implementation Guide, Building a WBL System, and Building a WBL System: Roles and Responsibilities. Contact WBL.Training@tn.gov for information on WBL training and certification. For more information about WBL, visit <https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/work-based-learning>

If you have a great WBL program that you would like to highlight, please email Mikki.Hornstein@tn.gov.