

February, 2025

Iowa Work-Based Learning & Iowa School Performance Profiles Frequently Asked Questions

This resource serves as a collection of questions, concerns or feedback the Iowa Department of Education (Department) received during the January 13, 2025, WBL Coding & Reporting Support webinar regarding recent changes to the definition of “[work-based learning](#)” (WBL), the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA) state plan and the new [Postsecondary Readiness Index](#) (PSRI) measure within the [Iowa School Performance Profiles](#) (ISPP). Questions have been organized as closely as possible to common themes or topics. Please refer to educate.iowa.gov/ccl for that webinar’s recording and slide deck, plus additional information, related reports, toolkits and other resources.

Data Collection & Reporting for ISPP/PSRI

What is now being measured in the Postsecondary Readiness Index (PSRI) in the Iowa School Performance Profiles (ISPP)?

The PSRI was changed to focus more on student outcomes or outputs, such as college credit, work-based learning and industry-recognized credential ([IRC](#)) attainment, than on student inputs, such as ACT or SAT participation, ACT or SAT success and college-level coursework.

How does the department know which courses count as WBL? What data elements are you looking for in our Student Reporting in Iowa (SRI) files?

The Department looks for specific School Courses for the Exchange of Data (SCED) codes, course names/keywords and embedded work-based learning indicator codes transmitted through the Winter collection of the SRI data to determine if courses qualify under the [new state definition](#) for work-based learning. District staff are also able to manually flag individual students within the Secondary Career & Technical Education Reporting Application (SCTERA) system for “CTE concentrators” (students earning 2.0 credits in a specific CTE area). The Department’s CTE and data teams coordinated to identify the list of qualifying SCED codes, course names/keywords and embedded WBL indicator codes for the analysis. The Department released an updated list of these codes in December 2024 in the [Work-Based Learning Course Naming & Coding](#) resource. Please find additional information, toolkits and resources on the Department’s [Career-Connected Learning](#) page.

Why is the Winter SRI file data used to measure WBL?

The primary purpose of the Winter SRI collection is to collect and report data to ensure districts meet their “offer and teach” [requirements](#). Districts report this data during the Winter submission after they have scheduled their second semester, third trimester or final quarter, representing student courses taken through the remainder of the school year. This is the ideal time to collect data related to the ESSA school accountability measures that rely on course-taking data.

Won't some experiences be missed if we are using the Winter file and not the Spring file that would account for dropouts, new experiences added during the semester (e.g., a business teacher has an employer reach out mid-semester to start a project in class), etc.?

While possible, it is unlikely that something may be missed. Educators have planned and built out courses for the academic year well in advance, making the addition of internships or in-depth projects unlikely without the need for additional pre-planning, time/resource consideration, employer outreach, etc. In the 2025-26 collection, the Department is considering adding a WBL indicator at the student level that could be entered into the Student Information System (SIS) and reported in Spring SRI. District staff are encouraged to sign up for related Department newsletters or user groups to ensure they remain informed on this decision and process.

How do districts/schools capture experiences not tied to a course, such as students completing work after hours, on their own, etc.? Do those not count?

Most school-based activities are course-based. Therefore, our data collection systems collect data in this manner. Currently, there is no mechanism to capture WBL experiences that are not tied directly to a course at the school/district level. Except for students heavily focused on CTE courses/career pathways ("CTE concentrators"), the Department cannot pull in additional data sources or have schools manually send us data for these types of experiences without the risk of losing data integrity, accuracy, etc. However, a new student-level measure is being discussed and planned for the 2025-26 collection that could alleviate this issue by allowing districts to add qualifying experiences that may not be tied to courses or that occur outside of the academic year.

How do districts/schools capture Summer experiences? Many students participate in summer internships that may or may not be tied to the school/district in some way.

As mentioned in the reply above, summer experiences that are not tied to an actual course during the academic year at the school/district level would not be counted. Most of these summer experiences, especially if they were not part of the initial course set up and continued oversight of the experience and related students, fall into this category. Schools/districts should hesitate to tie themselves to such an experience without some initial discussion with all parties involved and an agreement or assurance/attestation process put in place with regards to safety, liability, quality, etc. The aforementioned student-level WBL experience data element would alleviate this issue and allow a student the opportunity to self-report and sign the assurance statements/resources. The school could then enter the WBL indicator on the student record within their SIS.

What must be done to create a student-level WBL flag in SRI like the one for IRCs? This would help districts/schools gather all our WBL experiences, not just the course-level ones. Although this could be a lot of work for some districts, it may help ensure everything is counted and raise scores.

The Department is considering adding a student indicator for the 2025-26 collection and needs to discuss with the various SIS vendors/providers to determine the best way to handle this new data element and any potential opportunity for bulk uploads or automated feeding of related student information (e.g., a group experience over the summer).

What if my school is a tri-semester or other nontraditional two-semester format? Does that change when data is collected and used?

This is not an issue. The Winter SRI collection already accounts for these types of schedules and covers them appropriately.

It seems like there is a lag between when data is collected and when it gets reported? Why are seniors that graduated in the 2022-2023 academic year (2023 cohort) reported in the 2024 report for instance? The Technical Guide reads “The students who are reflected in this data are seniors from the 2022-23 school year who were in Iowa public schools for the four years leading up to that year.”

The PSRI, as a whole, lagged in reporting on 2022-23 seniors in the 2024 reporting year due to the timeline the source data for the College Credit indicator (concurrent enrollment credit data from the Department’s Community College Management Information System and Advanced Placement test data from College Board) becomes available. Those don’t become available early enough to report on the most recent academic year seniors without substantially delaying the release of the Iowa School Performance Profiles results.

How are these scores being calculated? Which students are being assessed? Is it only grades 9-12?

The ISPP [Technical Guide](#) outlines all of this information for those interested in learning more about the calculations and targeted audiences. The population for the PSRI is seniors who were in Iowa public schools for the four years leading up to that year. Currently, the PSRI only measures experiences earned in grades 9-12. WBL could potentially occur outside of those grades, but there would be challenges due to age or work hour restrictions, among other things.

What cohort or students will be used for next year’s ISPP scores, and which codes will be used?

The [same list](#) of SCED codes, course names/keywords and Embedded WBL Indicator codes will be used for next year’s (2025) analysis, focusing on seniors from the 2023-24 school year. As previously mentioned, however, the Department hopes to have the opportunity for schools/districts to begin flagging individual students with a new indicator at the student level, which would supplement the use of SCED and embedded WBL codes.

For those graduating seniors, are only experiences attained in the senior year counted or their entire academic career? If they completed experiences every year, are they only counted once?

Any experience gained during the four years leading up to their senior year counts, not just senior-year experiences. If a student completes multiple experiences throughout their academic tenure, the student will still only be counted once for the ISPP and Perkins WBL indicators. With the new student-level WBL measure, however, the Department would have access to much more data and could potentially run additional studies.

Districts/schools did not have the knowledge or ability to code things two years ago based on the new state definitions that just rolled out this year. Is the Department measuring old data with new definitions/codes?

The Department considered this when identifying which SCED and embedded WBL codes to focus on for this analysis as much as possible. However, the data will continue to become more accurate and meaningful as more districts use the updated list of codes and recommendations available through the new [Work-Based Learning Course Naming & Coding](#) resource.

The new PSRI is so different from previous years that average people get confused that they are not apples-to-apples. Our school board, newspaper and other stakeholders think schools have stopped doing a good job of preparing our students since our scores dropped. What is being done to explain this on the site or in the media?

The measures in the PSRI are different as the new accountability system intended to focus this indicator on student output rather than input. The Department highlighted these changes in communications to the field both during consultations in the winter/spring of the 2023-24 school year and in webinars leading up to and around the time of the ISPP release, but more is planned to continue highlighting these changes on the website itself and through continued technical support, webinars, conference sessions, email newsletters and other outreach.

If the PSRI only counts towards 11.1% of a school's total score, does that mean WBL only counts for 5.55%? How will adding IRCs affect this in the future?

Although the PSRI only accounts for a small portion of the ISPP accountability index score, it is an important topic for many students, parents, school boards and other community stakeholders and is likely to be viewed separately from the overall scores. This is why it is crucial for schools/districts to coordinate with staff, ensuring courses are correctly coded and reported. The Department has staff available to consult with districts to discuss solutions, one of which is identifying courses that may already offer experiences that qualify as WBL under the new state definition or could with some minor tweaks or adjustments. The Department is still determining how to approach the inclusion of IRCs in this measure and will provide guidance to the field soon.

What if a score needs to be corrected? Is that even possible?

No, there is no option to manually change or "correct" a score if a school determines they made a mistake coding or reporting on their courses. Department staff are available to consult with the school/district to determine what may have occurred and work with them to identify solutions to address or otherwise fix the error before the next Winter SRI data collection period, which occurs each December-January timeframe.

Would it be possible to allow schools to review or make changes somehow to their data before the 2025 ISPP scores are tabulated? It is understood that scores may not be changed once created, but can the data used to create the scores be corrected beforehand somehow?

In the past, the Department has not allowed retroactive changes to data submitted and certified by districts, and it does not plan to change this practice. With that said, the Department will be reviewing this issue along with all of the input that it received as it considers changes in the future.

Is the Winter SRI submission deadline going to be extended since schools are expected to make so many changes with these new code recommendations and guidelines?

There are currently no plans to extend the Winter SRI submission deadline, which was January 29, 2025. However, Department consultants will work with districts to make corrections throughout the month of February as part of the normal SRI and CTE team review processes and procedures. Districts are also able to bypass any large-scale changes to SCED codes or course descriptions as long as they are utilizing the Embedded Work-Based Learning codes available in a separate location than the SCED codes in their Student Information Systems for each course.

General WBL Definition & Program Review

If districts/schools have high-quality CTE programs at a regional career academy where students are learning about careers, doing projects, conducting lab experiments, etc. Do those count as work-based learning?

While CTE courses are extremely valuable in preparing our students for the jobs of the future, they do not automatically qualify as WBL under the new state definition. Even if business and industry representatives helped design the programs, occasionally visit the career academies or regional centers, sponsor the programs or events, etc., a course or experience must still meet one of the new state definitions to qualify. Career academy courses present a unique opportunity for districts to partner with local community colleges to meet multiple PSRI measures with a single course, such as a Certified Nurse Aide (CNA) course that awards college credit and counts as WBL.

What if a district/school does not want to change the SCED codes for some courses since it will mess up parts of the system and other reporting measures or metrics? Do districts/schools really have to change all of the SCED codes, change course names and include an Embedded Work-based Learning Code to count as WBL?

No. There is no requirement that schools must change all three areas for a course to count. Some courses may need to actually retain their current SCED codes and course names to avoid risking issues with educator licensing crosswalks, Regents Admission Index (RAI) transferability or NAIA/NCAA athletics considerations. In these cases, however, it is essential to utilize the Embedded Work-based Learning Codes to ensure accurate collection and reporting of qualifying experiences. A new [Career-Connected Learning Education Credential List](#) resource was also just released to outline the licensing or credentialing options for educators interested in teaching or supervising career-connected learning experiences for various audiences.

Some districts/schools cannot afford to hire, or even find for that matter, someone able to get licensed to cover internships and higher level WBL experiences. What are these districts/schools supposed to do to increase their scores?

Districts are encouraged to review their current course offerings and identify ways to incorporate or “embed” qualifying WBL experiences before starting new programs from the ground up. Embedded WBL experiences count the same as dedicated WBL courses for the ISPP/PSRI measures. For instance, an Internship course counts the same as a Business course with embedded internships. Districts should also consider exploring [operational functional sharing](#) as an option to share these critical staff members with another qualifying partner, such as a neighboring district, community college or Area Education Agency (AEA).

Do courses have to be considered “CTE” before they can count as WBL?

No. Courses do not need to be classified as CTE to count as WBL. Any course can count as WBL as long as it includes a qualifying WBL experience. Some examples might be project-based learning in partnership with an employer as part of a math class, a school-based enterprise as part of a science class or a student learner program as part of a government/social studies class.

Is it possible for student-led initiatives like yearbooks, prom/event planning or school newspapers to count as WBL?

These could all potentially count as one of the qualifying WBL experiences, as long as the students are completing work (paid or unpaid) that is providing value to an employer, which in these cases would likely be the school/district. A school would need to ensure the students are doing more than simply helping with planning or setting-up for an event or resource, however, and should consider things like budget management, identifying/securing sponsors, inventory/supplies management, time/schedule management, communications/outreach and other work duties that would be comparable for a similar occupation held by a paid professional.

Are districts/schools able to count a concurrent enrollment course with a community college as WBL?

Yes. Concurrent enrollment courses in which high school students earn both high school and college credit can count as WBL if they meet one of the qualifying definitions. An example would be a CNA course that includes clinical work hours or an Early Childhood Education course with practicum work hours. These courses would count towards both the college credit and WBL measures within the ISPP Postsecondary Readiness Indicator. If students are also earning an IRC, such as Child Development Associate (CDA), they would also count as earning an IRC.

Are colleges aware of these changes and making their own changes to help districts understand what counts and does not count as WBL?

Yes. The Department is working closely with the community colleges to ensure they are aware of these coding and reporting changes. Due to the recent definition changes, some of their WBL courses may no longer qualify as WBL, such as courses focused on workplace readiness and job shadowing. The Department is working with the colleges to ensure these non-compliant courses will no longer be referred to as WBL. Many of them are also exploring additional ways they may be able to support districts by incorporating new or expanded WBL experiences into their courses. Specific questions should be directed to community college partners and reference any existing contracts, agreements or related course catalogs and documents.

How should districts/schools code our Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE) for students?

SAEs can present a challenge for reporting purposes since they are often fairly unique to each individual student. Districts can currently flag individual students known as “CTE concentrators” within the SCTERA system. The planned inclusion of a new student-level WBL indicator in the SRI data collection during the 2025-2026 academic year will assist with ensuring a broader set of students are counted more accurately. In the meantime, districts are asked to use their best judgment at the course level for when and if SAEs would count as a qualifying WBL experience under the new state definition. An assurance and verification process is being developed and coordinated by the Department’s Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) CTE content area consultant to ensure district SAEs qualify as WBL experiences.

How can districts/schools stay updated on these and other changes that seem to be happening quickly?

There are a number of monthly or quarterly newsletters that help to inform the field on these types of changes or related plans, funding opportunities, etc. Two specific groups to consider joining would be the monthly [Iowa Work-Based Learning Coordinators newsletter](#) and the [Superintendent and Education Leader Update newsletter](#).

In districts/schools that have special education students with Individualized Education Program (IEP) plans or students with 504s participating in WBL experiences that appear to qualify under the new definition, do these need to be coded differently?

No. These experiences would not need to be coded any differently to count as qualifying WBL. As previously mentioned, the data used for the ISPP measures is collected and analyzed based on course enrollment data from the Winter SRI files. As long as the student(s) are enrolled in a course with one of the recommended SCED or Embedded WBL Indicator codes noted in the new [Work-Based Learning Course Naming & Coding](#) resource, the qualifying experiences will be counted. Depending on the WBL experience, a district may consider coding these under an existing internship or other WBL course code, embedding it in an ‘Independent Living’ or ‘Life Skills’ course, or embedding it in a core content course that aligns more closely with the subject area.

Connection to Industry-Recognized Credentials (IRC)

If students are earning an IRC, it counts as WBL as well, right?

While earning an IRC is strongly encouraged and extremely valuable for students, it does not count as WBL by itself. The student would still need to be actively participating in a qualifying WBL experience for it to count as WBL. If IRCs are being earned as part of a course, it is highly likely that only minor changes would need to be made for the course to count as WBL.

Do students need to actually earn an IRC to be considered a “simulated work experience aligned with an IRC”?

No. Students do not need to actually earn the IRC as part of the course in order to be counted as WBL. They do, however, need to be intentionally working towards an IRC that appears on the [state approved list](#). Simulated work experiences, such as School Based Enterprises, would not count if it was not aligned with and students were not working towards a state-approved IRC. Information about how to request IRCs be added to the state approved list can be found at <https://educate.iowa.gov/higher-ed/cte/irc>.

How should IRCs be coded? Does it matter if some are not tied to a specific class?

Districts must code individual students as having earned IRCs. This is not done at the course-level. A student is able to have up to five (5) IRCs added to their student record/ID each year. If an IRC does not appear on the state approved list, the Department still recommends adding them to a student's record/ID and using a code of '999'. Refer to additional guidance and information about IRCs at <https://educate.iowa.gov/higher-ed/cte/irc>.