

Simulated Work Experience Aligned with an IRC Toolkit

What is a Simulated Work Experience?

Simulated work experiences aligned with industry-recognized credentials (IRCs) are **work-based learning (WBL)** experiences that allow students to immerse themselves in realistic worksite activities without leaving their school grounds or campus. When carefully planned and managed by an educator, these experiences simulate real-world business experiences that lead to direct skill development, authentic learning and the earning of industry-recognized credentials (IRCs). To ensure these experiences are following industry expectations:

- an industry partner **must be actively involved** to assist with evaluating and providing continuous consultation, and
- students **must be directly engaging** with an employer and **working toward** a state-approved industry-recognized credential.



Simulated work experiences aligned with an IRC help enhance programs of study with real-world experiences, and expand opportunities for learners who may be disconnected from employers due to barriers such as geographic location, access to transportation or lack of resources.

Note: Programs or courses that include a laboratory, “lab” or simulated learning experiences (i.e. virtual reality) do not automatically qualify as work-based learning under this experience type.

Developing a Simulated Work Experience in Your Classroom

Identify a Target Industry-Recognized Credential and Related Skills

- **Research IRC requirements:** Investigate the skills and competencies required for a specific IRC relevant to your CTE course.
- **Align classroom curriculum:** Link the IRC’s learning objectives to your existing CTE curriculum to ensure students are building foundational knowledge and skills to be successful in the simulated work experience.
- **Identify potential employer partners:** Research local employers whose work aligns with your curriculum’s learning objectives. Use your own professional network, contact the [Education Program Consultant](#) for Work-Based Learning and Industry Recognized Credentials, [reach out to Iowa Workforce Development](#), speak with other contacts at local school districts or talk to your RPP coordinator to find a business partner with a genuine interest in collaborating.
- **Establish clear goals:** Hold a meeting with your chosen employer partner to define the simulated experience’s goals. Discuss expectations for students, the employer’s direct involvement and the specific skills students will gain that will be helpful in leading to an IRC.

Design the Simulated Work Experience

- **Create a realistic context:** Design a simulated workplace that reflects a real industry environment. This could be a physical space or a digital one depending on the CTE field of interest.
- **Develop realistic projects and tasks:** Create projects that mimic the types of tasks and problems an employee in that industry would encounter.

- **Scaffold student learning:** Identify the knowledge and skills students need to complete the tasks and organize the necessary resources. This may involve tutorials, workshops, guided research, etc. to ensure students have the foundation to succeed.

Implementing a Simulated Work Experience in Your Classroom

Launch the Simulated Work Experience

- **Schedule the experience:** Structure the simulated work experience to require a significant time commitment, similar to a real job, with clear start and end times.
- **Provide ongoing feedback and assessment:** Give students frequent feedback on both their technical and employability skills, helping them to correct mistakes and improve their performance.

Integrate Employer Involvement

- **Establish regular check-ins:** Maintain regular contact with students and employer mentors to monitor progress. Employer feedback is crucial for keeping students on track and ensuring the simulated work experience remains relevant.
- **Provide expertise:** Arrange for the employer partner to offer expert consultation, demonstration or in-class support. Learning a skill directly from a professional in the field offers an authentic learning experience.

Support Student Process

- **Build collaboration skills:** Structure groups to require teamwork and interdependence. Consider using strategies like assigning rotating team roles to help students build communication and conflict-resolution skills.
- **Provide ongoing assessment:** Regularly observe students and provide constructive feedback throughout the simulated work experience.

Evaluating a Simulated Work Experience in Your Classroom

Incorporate post-simulation activities

- **Debriefing sessions:** Hold regular discussions which help students reflect on their experiences and connect them to the IRC and their career path.
- **Conduct reflection sessions:** Dedicate time for students to reflect on what went well, what challenges they faced and what they would do differently. This helps reinforce the learning process.

Evaluate and Reflect on the Experience

- **Gather feedback:** Collect feedback from the employer partner on the quality of the students' work throughout the simulated work experience. Also, have students self-assess their own performance and learning.
- **Measure return on investment (ROI):** As a final step for the school and the employer, assess how the simulated work experience met its initial goals. This helps evaluate the program's success and also helps identify areas for improvement in future collaborations.

Simulated Work Experience Examples

School-Based Enterprises (SBEs)

School-based enterprises (SBEs) provide students with an opportunity to develop professional skills and career skills as students learn the different roles and aspects of a successful business while directly managing and running a school store.

- **The simulated work experience:** Some examples of an SBE include: a school store, an online merchandise store, a restaurant, a coffee shop, a greenhouse, product development and manufacturing and an IT Help Desk. Please see the [School-Based Enterprise Toolkit](#) for more information.
- **Student roles:** Students are responsible for all aspects of the SBE, including but not limited to purchasing or creating products, marketing goods, managing finances, scheduling of shifts, etc.
- **Employer collaboration:** School districts often act as the employer for a school-based enterprise. The school district holds the primary responsibility for the business while using it as a work-based learning opportunity for students. The school's role is not primarily commercial, but educational, focusing on providing practical, real-world experience that reinforces classroom instruction and prepares students for future careers.

Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs)

Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs) allow students to explore careers in agriculture, food and natural resources (AFNR), and related fields and apply what they have learned in the classroom in a real-world work setting. SAEs can vary greatly between schools and districts across the state, as well as individual students since they are custom-designed to fit the career goals of each and every student under the direct supervision of a qualified agriculture educator and FFA Advisor.

- **The simulated work experience:** Some examples of SAEs include: 1) Entrepreneurship—growing and marketing sweet corn, mowing lawns, cow/calf production; 2) School-Based Enterprise—school garden, school greenhouse, BBQ sauce project.
- **Student roles:** Students are responsible for all aspects of the SAE. These roles may include:
 - *For an Entrepreneurship SAE:* students own the enterprise, equipment and supplies, make management decisions and assume all responsibility for producing a product or service.
 - *For a School-Based Enterprise SAE:* students manage the enterprise. The school-based enterprise must provide goods and services that meet the needs of an identified agricultural market and should replicate a workplace environment.
- **Employer collaboration:** The employer acts as a mentor and stakeholder in the SAE. They provide technical oversight and offer feedback and support on the student's business endeavors and employability skills. The employer's involvement is crucial for ensuring the SAE is a genuine representation of an agricultural business.

Family & Consumer Sciences/Human Services Programs with Work Experience/Practicum

Some education, child care, culinary arts and other family and consumer sciences (FCS) or human services programs or courses may include simulated or live hands-on work experience required to earn various certifications or licensure to practice or work in Iowa. These programs often include both theory-based courses and hands-on clinical or work experience courses. Only those courses that include a clinical, practicum or other qualifying work experience will count and should be coded and described by the districts as such.

- **The simulated work experience:** Some examples include, but are not limited to, educators, paraeducators, direct support professionals (DSP), child development associates (CDA) and ProStart culinary arts and restaurant management.
- **Student roles:** Students rotate through various roles, taking ownership of their learning and practicing their technical skills. This may include, but is not limited to, planning, organizing and ensuring protocols are followed, food preparation, childcare activities, customer service and upholding safety standards.
- **Employer collaboration:** Employers actively contribute to the simulated work experience by providing input on curriculum, participating in the design of the simulated work experience and offering mentorship and guidance to students. This collaboration ensures simulated work experiences are relevant to current industry standards.

Health Science Programs with Work Experience/Clinicals

Some health science programs or courses may include a simulated or live hands-on work experience required to earn various certifications or licensure to practice or work in Iowa. These programs often include both theory-based courses and hands-on clinical work experience courses. Only those courses that include a clinical, practicum or other qualifying work experience will count.

- **The simulated work experience:** Some examples include, but are not limited to, Certified Nurse Assistant/Aide (CNA), Pharmacy Technician or Emergency Medical Technician (EMT).
- **Student roles:** Within each health field, students rotate through various roles to gain a comprehensive understanding of the healthcare environment and the specific demands of the specific healthcare role.
- **Employer collaboration:** Employers are crucial to the success of the simulated work experience, providing an authentic context and clinical expertise. Employers also serve as “external evaluators” for student simulations, offering authentic feedback on performance and technical professional skills.

Reporting Simulated Work Experiences

The Department will rely on multiple specific data points to accurately collect and report work-based learning experiences for students across the state. Data will be used to calculate the work-based learning sub-measure of the Postsecondary Readiness Accountability Measure for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and School Performance Profiles (percentage of students participating in work-based learning while in high school). Data will also be used to determine the Perkins Secondary Career and Technical Education (CTE) 5S3 work-based learning indicator of performance (percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school having participated in work-based learning). A CTE concentrator is defined in Iowa as a secondary student who has earned credit for two (2.0) or more Carnegie Units within a state-approved CTE program (e.g., health science).

While each of the following data points provides value, the combination of all three for each course is ideal to ensure the most accurate work-based learning data collection, analysis and reporting by Department staff. All of these data elements will be provided to the Department through the Winter collection of the Student Reporting in Iowa (SRI) data during the time period of December-January of each academic year:

1. School Courses for the Exchange of Data (SCED) Codes
 - a. The SCED code initiative is a voluntary and nationally accepted common classification system for K-12 school courses that allows for an easier and more efficient process to collect, analyze and report information on various aspects of our education system. SCED is based on a 5-digit coding structure that provides a basis for classifying course content, while additional elements and attributes can provide descriptive information about each course.
 - i. A few Iowa-specific SCED codes have been added to provide additional distinction in work-based learning course offerings.
2. Embedded Work-Based Learning Indicator
 - a. An embedded work-based learning indicator was added starting in the 2022-2023 academic year to assist districts with clarifying which type of experience is being offered to students, as well as situations where the work-based learning experience may not be the primary focus. This is especially important for courses that may not be classified as CTE, but still include an opportunity for students to benefit from work-based learning experiences. Refer to Appendix B for additional information on this measure.
 - i. In order to qualify for usage, all students within the course must be provided with the reported experience, not just a select few (i.e., 100% of students take part in sustained project-based learning in partnerships with an employer, not just a few, in order for the course to be considered as embedding qualifying work-based learning).

3. Course Titles and Keywords

- a. With Iowa’s expanding offerings of different work-based learning courses, specific course names/titles and keywords will be used to recognize districts offering quality work-based learning experiences.
 - i. Course titles and keywords are used primarily to review data records and provide targeted guidance to districts who may need to correct or modify SCED codes or embedded work-based learning indicators used in future data file submissions.

Reminder: All three of these data points should be used in combination with one another for each course, when appropriate, to ensure the most accurate data collection, analysis and reporting by Department staff.

A fourth measure is available for districts wanting to count students who have completed work-based learning experiences that are not connected to course SCED codes or any Embedded WBL Indicator codes referenced in this resource.

4. Individual Work-Based Learning Code

- a. Districts can manually flag individual student(s) who participated in a qualified work-based learning experience within their student information system (SIS). This field is specifically designed for students who completed non-credit WBL or WBL not connected to SCED codes or Embedded WBL Indicator codes referenced in this resource. Districts need to manually review and make appropriate changes to this data field to ensure accurate coding and reporting by the end of June each year. Refer to Appendix C in the [Work-based Learning Course Name and Coding document](#) for additional information on this measure.

Course/Content Area	Keyword(s) to Include in Course Title	SCED Codes	Embedded Work-Based Learning Indicator
Information Technology	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	10998	12
Communication and Audio/Visual Technology	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	11998	12
Business and Marketing	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	12998	12
Manufacturing	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	13998	12
Health Care Sciences	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	14998	12
Public, Protective and Government Services	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	15998	12
Hospitality and Tourism	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	16998	12
Architecture and Construction	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	17998	12
Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	18998	12
Family and Consumer Sciences (Human Services)	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	19998	12
Transportation, Distribution and Logistics	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	20998	12

Engineering and Technology	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	21998	12
Miscellaneous	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	22998	12

School-Based Enterprises (SBEs)

School-based enterprise (SBE) courses provide students the opportunity to learn about and manage an entrepreneurial operation related to a content or subject area within a simulated work environment in a school setting. Students will develop interpersonal and professional skills while engaging with fellow students and customers. Topics may include operations, product services management, pricing, distribution and marketing. A growing number of districts are pursuing SBEs as a way to stimulate learning for their students, potentially benefit from generated revenues and create opportunities for new industry connections.

Course/Content Area	Keyword(s) to Include in Course Title	SCED Codes	Embedded Work-Based Learning Indicator
Information Technology	Name of the Business/SBE	10993	12
Communication and Audio/Visual Technology	Name of the Business/SBE	11993	12
Business and Marketing	Name of the Business/SBE	12993	12
Manufacturing	Name of the Business/SBE	13993	12
Health Care Sciences	Name of the Business/SBE	14993	12
Public, Protective and Government Services	Name of the Business/SBE	15993	12
Hospitality and Tourism	Name of the Business/SBE	16993	12
Architecture and Construction	Name of the Business/SBE	17993	12
Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources	Name of the Business/SBE	18993	12
Family and Consumer Sciences (Human Services)	Name of the Business/SBE	19993	12
Transportation, Distribution and Logistics	Name of the Business/SBE	20993	12
Engineering and Technology	Name of the Business/SBE	21993	12
Miscellaneous	Name of the Business/SBE	22902*	12

*Note: The “Miscellaneous” code of 22902 referenced above is an Iowa-specific SCED code.

Supervised Agricultural Experiences

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since they are custom-designed to fit the career goals of each and every student under the direct supervision of a qualified agriculture educator and FFA Advisor.

Note: In order to qualify as work-based learning, every student in the class must be getting the work-based learning experience. If only some students in the class are participating in a work-based learning experience or students are getting different types of work-based learning experiences in the course, please use the individual-level work-based learning codes outlined in [Appendix C of the Work-Based Learning Course Naming and Coding document](#).

Course/Content Area	Keyword(s) to Include in Course Title	SCED Codes	Embedded Work-Based Learning Indicator
Simulated Work Experience with IRC for SAE	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	18998	12

Health Science Programs with Work Experience/Clinicals

Some health science programs or courses may include simulated or live hands-on work experience required to earn various certifications or licensure to practice or work in Iowa, including, but not limited to Certified Nurse Assistant/Aide (CNA), Pharmacy Technician or Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). These programs often include both theory-based courses and hands-on clinical work experience courses. Only those courses that include a clinical, practicum or other qualifying work experience will count and should be coded and described by the district as such.

Course/Content Area	Keyword(s) to Include in Course Title	SCED Codes	Embedded Work-Based Learning Indicator
Simulated Work Experience with IRC for Health Science	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	14998	12

Family and Consumer Sciences/Human Services Programs with Work Experience/Practicums

Some education, child care, culinary arts and other family and consumer sciences (FCS) or human services programs or courses may include simulated or live hands-on work experience required to earn various certifications or licensure to practice or work in Iowa, including, but not limited to educators, paraeducators, direct support professionals (DSP), child development associates (CDA) and ProStart culinary arts and restaurant management. These programs often include both theory-based courses and hands-on clinical or work experience courses. Only those courses that include a clinical, practicum or other qualifying work experience will count and should be coded and described by the district as such.

Course/Content Area	Keyword(s) to Include in Course Title	SCED Codes	Embedded Work-Based Learning Indicator
Simulated Work Experience with IRC for Human Services	“Simulation IRC” or “Sim IRC”	19998	12

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship courses help students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to own and operate their own businesses through a series of projects, experiences and other interactions with industry partners.

Students may work on sustained projects in cooperation with local businesses, community organizations or non-profit agencies to develop and solve real-world problems that develop skills and knowledge essential for entrepreneurship success. These projects provide a foundational understanding of economics, marketing principles, human relations, finance, laws, communication and strategic management. Throughout the course and projects with industry, students are working to develop their own businesses. Entrepreneurship courses may also be structured to fit other qualifying work-based learning experiences as well, so districts should consider their coding and naming options carefully.

Course/Content Area	Keyword(s) to Include in Course Title	SCED Codes	Embedded Work-Based Learning Indicator
Simulated Work Experience with IRC for Entrepreneurs	"Simulation IRC" or "Sim IRC"	19998	12

Additional Resources and Support

Districts are encouraged to contact a Department representative with any additional questions or to set up a consultation at any point during the year. A wide range of robust and insightful guides, toolkits and other resources are also available to assist stakeholders in this important work at <https://educate.iowa.gov/higher-ed/cte/iowa-quality/career-connected-learning>.