Additional Graduation Options for the Class of 2020 Work or Community Service Experience Guidance for Districts and Schools

House Bill 491 extended the temporary class of 2018 graduation options to the classes of 2019 and 2020, with modifications. For the class of 2020, the legislation directs the Ohio Department of Education to work with the Governor's Office for Workforce Transformation to develop guidance outlining requirements for district or school approval of students' work or community service experiences, as well as requirements for verifying them. The law also says that students preferably should complete their work or service experiences with businesses or nonprofit organizations registered in Ohio.

Introduction

Each Child, Our Future, Ohio's strategic plan for education, calls for enhanced career-focused opportunities for all students. Increasingly, the skills students gain through work-based or community service-based experiences connect their academic and technical preparation with real-world learning opportunities, either in a place of employment or the community. These experiences, when properly designed, also equip students with professional skills and the leadership, reasoning, and social and emotional skills they need to succeed in today's workforce. Work and community service experiences also allow students to access a profession, industry or sector; learn more about potential career paths; and think about their plans after high school.

To increase these opportunities for students, Ohio has called for student work and community service experiences to be integrated into existing graduation requirements for the class of 2020. Encouraging students to connect the skills and knowledge they are learning in the classroom to their work or community service experiences will promote high-quality results for students.

High-quality work experiences will:
- Empower students to make connections between learning and doing and apply academic and technical knowledge and skills to real work experiences;
- Accelerate the development of professional skills in students, such as teamwork, collaboration and discipline;
- Allow students to acquire new knowledge and skills that can support their future pursuits and success;
- Help students understand industry career paths and educational pathways to achieving them;
- Encourage productive dialogue between student and adult peers, including receiving feedback on performance and areas for improvement; and
- Result in meaningful professional connections and give students a clearer understanding of the many different fields of work in which they are interested

High-quality community service experiences will:
- Lead students to reflect on and address the needs of the communities in which they live and work;
- Promote meaningful community connections and a clearer understanding of the organizations and agencies that support community needs;
- Allow students to apply knowledge and skills in practical settings;
- Give students opportunities to gain new knowledge, skills and understanding that can support their future pursuits and successes;
- Connect students to the careers and professions available in the public, nonprofit and philanthropic sectors;
- Offer opportunities for students to show attributes such as foundational knowledge, social and emotional skills, and leadership and reasoning abilities that demonstrate their readiness to transition to an identified next step after high school; and

- Promote a better understanding of the importance and value of civic engagement, individual or group contributions and volunteerism in a local community.

General Requirements

Students must document at least 120 hours through community service experiences or work in employment positions, which can include activities such as paid or unpaid internships, work studies, co-ops and apprenticeships. Students' experiences must take place during the senior year, as defined by the district. The successful completion of work or community service experiences must include approval and verification of the work as outlined in the following paragraphs.

State law documents Ohio's preference that students complete work or community service with businesses or charitable organizations registered in Ohio. To verify businesses or nonprofit organizations are registered in Ohio, see:

- For-profit and nonprofit businesses and organizations: https://businesssearch.sos.state.oh.us/
- Charitable organizations: https://charitableregistration.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/charities/Research-Charities.aspx

Districts and schools may require students to complete experiences with businesses or nonprofit organizations registered within the state and may determine the types of activities that qualify as work or community service experiences.

Approval of the Experience

Students must have their planned work or community service experiences approved for graduation before completing those experiences. Schools can communicate deadlines or specific periods for having experiences approved or allow for an approval process, as needed. Students must complete experience agreements outlining four key components of the work or community service experiences they will complete. Each student must submit:

1. **A description of the proposed work or community service experience.**
2. **A list of duties, responsibilities and learning outcomes (scope of work).**
   a. The student must define the duties and responsibilities of the work or community service experience he or she will complete (or an existing job description, if currently employed);
   b. The student must identify at least three competencies related to professional, technical or academic skills he or she will demonstrate throughout the work or community service experience.
3. **A timeline or plan for completion.**
   a. The student must outline a clear plan to meet the required hours for the work or community service experience;
   b. The Department strongly recommends schools set intervals to check in with students to monitor their progress. This also will give students opportunities to ask questions and schools opportunities to provide feedback and support positive work or community service experiences for students and employers.
4. **A work or community service experience agreement.**
   a. The student must identify an **advisor from his or her district or school** and a **work or community service supervisor who will oversee the duties and responsibilities of the experience**. The advisor and supervisor must be willing to observe, encourage, guide, support and evaluate the student as the student works through the experience.
   b. The school advisor, work or community service supervisor, parent or caregiver, and student must approve the agreement.

Verification of the Work

Each student must verify his or her work or community service experience to the school in three ways:

1. **Documented hours**
   The student must maintain and submit a time log of the hours he or she has worked, along with supporting documentation (for example, pay stubs or an approved work schedule), when possible.

2. **Student reflection**
   The student must reflect on his or her work or community service experience at least three times during the minimum 120-hour experience.

   The reflections may include:
   - A description of the work the student completed during the hours on which he or she is reflecting;
   - Aspects of the work the student enjoyed the most that he or she would like to do more of or what tasks the student excelled at or was challenged by;
   - A self-evaluation of what the student could be doing better while still engaged in the experience; and
   - The student's progress toward demonstrating the competencies or skills identified in the experience proposal.

3. **Student and supervisor verification and evaluation**
   Evaluations of performance are critical to assess progress and grow a student's potential for post-high school success.
   a. The student must submit a self-evaluation of his or her work or community service experience;
   b. The student must submit a supervisor evaluation that verifies the work and reports on the demonstration of the identified competencies or skills.

Visit the Work or Community Service Toolkit for tools, such as a sample agreement form, hours log, reflection questions, and verification and evaluation form. This toolkit is for illustration only. Districts and schools may modify materials to meet local needs, develop their own forms that reflect the criteria above or modify existing, locally established materials as needed.

Connecting Students to Quality Work or Community Service Opportunities

Many students already are working part time or completing community service experiences during their senior years. Ensuring these are high-quality experiences should be a priority for districts. If students plan to use this option to satisfy graduation requirements but currently are not connected with organizations to do so or if students' current experiences are proving to be unsatisfactory or unrelated to their post-high school aspirations, districts have many options to help students find quality experiences.

Strategy 1 – Have students visit OhioMeansJobs.com to search the area for open positions. Advise students through the job application or internship application processes. Or, help students contact organizations looking for talent to ask about possible work or community service experiences that last at least 120 hours, so they satisfy this graduation option.

Strategy 2 – State law says each Ohio school district must have a Business Advisory Council. Districts should use their Business Advisory Councils to help place students in meaningful work experiences. Find a map with contact information for Business Advisory Council hosts here.

Strategy 3 – Take advantage of the area Chamber of Commerce to discuss options for finding meaningful experiences for students. A partnership with the local chamber also can help keep local talent in the community.

Strategy 4 – Take advantage of Ohio's partnership with Adecco to support student learning through on-the-job learning – work-based and apprenticeship experiences that supplement and enhance classroom learning.

Strategy 5 – Connect with the local Career-Technical Planning District lead and regional Tech-Prep chief administrator to help the district establish practices.

Strategy 6 – Communicate to all K-12 parents in the district the need to place students in work or service experiences. Provide a way for parents to let the school or district know they have employers or own businesses that would help give students authentic experiences.

Strategy 7 – Connect with local colleges and universities to explore opportunities for students to participate in community service opportunities and paid or unpaid work.

This list of strategies for connecting students to these valuable experiences is not exhaustive. What works in one area and for one district may not work for another. The key to success is reaching out to many partners in different ways and discovering what helps each district connect its students to meaningful experiences in the community.

Options for Implementation

Districts may utilize a variety of strategies to implement work or community service experiences into their schools. Districts are encouraged to be creative in how they allocate time and resources toward students completing these experiences. The following strategies may assist when considering options for implementation:

Utilize an advising period or study hall

Advising periods and study halls during the senior year provide students daily time to create goals for their future and connect what they are learning to life outside of the classroom. These periods are ideal for teachers, mentors, coaches or other school advisors to help students secure work or community service experiences and perform check-ins during their experiences.

Integrate into existing school programming

Often, senior year elective courses focus on preparing students for their next steps after high school. This time also could be used to oversee the approval and verification of student work or community service experiences.

Align with existing career advising initiatives

Career advising policies and initiatives provide students and their families with information they need to make informed choices about their futures. Schools may consider integrating the oversight for work or community service experiences into new or existing career advising initiatives that may exist within the district or school.

Identify and select appropriate staff to serve as advisors/evaluators

Schools have discretion over the staff within the district or school who serve as advisors throughout students' work or community service experiences. They should carefully identify staff with the capacity to serve as advisors and/or evaluators to ensure successful oversight of the approval and verification of the experience. Appropriate staff may include but not be limited to administrators, teachers, school counselors, other administrative staff, etc.

Ultimately, districts and schools may identify strategies to implement this option for students. What may work as a strategy in one district may not be an option in others. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to overseeing the approval and verification of work or community service experiences.

Implementation Resources

Work-based Learning Toolkit
This toolkit contains documents to help partners get started with the framework and documentation they need to build quality work-based learning programs.

SuccessBound
The SuccessBound website has many tools to help partners connect to critical data that can help drive decisions, as well as connect partners to ensure cross-institutional alignment.

Credit Flexibility
Work and community service experience may be eligible to earn high school credit when designed correctly. Read the "Framework to Issue Credit for Work-Based Learning" for more information.

OhioMeansJobs.com
OhioMeansJobs K-12 is Ohio's free career exploration resource. OhioMeansJobs K-12 Backpacks can be useful for districts seeking an online management system. OhioMeansJobs K-12 helps students choose work or community service experiences that align to their post-high school interests. If students are not sure what they want to do, encourage them to develop OhioMeansJobs K-12 Backpacks to learn more.

The Career Plan function in OhioMeansJobs.com can incorporate deadlines and approvals needed for students' plans. Additionally, the OhioMeansJobs Career Plan allows students to create activities, enter notes and keep track of the dates and times of their hours. Students can enter their schedules for their service or work hours and will receive reminder emails to keep them organized and on track.

Also, work or community service experience agreements can be scanned into students' OhioMeansJobs Backpacks for storage and verification. For more information on how OhioMeansJobs K-12 can support schools in monitoring progress toward satisfying the work or community service graduation option, click here.

OhioMeansJobs Readiness Seal
The OhioMeansJobs Readiness Seal is attached to a student's high school diploma and transcript when the student has demonstrated proficiency in 15 professional skills. Three mentors validate the student's skills in these areas, and students assess their own progress.

Apprenticeships
On average, apprentices who complete their programs earn $60,000 annually upon graduation. Apprenticeships are programs to help students learn skilled occupations that can lead to registered apprenticeship agreements.

Pre-Apprenticeships/Internships
The Pre-Apprenticeship program teaches basic technical and job readiness skills for a designated apprentice occupation or sector to prepare students for a formal Registered Apprenticeship training program.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Can a student combine work experience and community service hours to reach 120 hours?**

   State law specifies that students must complete a work or community service experience to satisfy the criterion for graduation purposes.

2. **Can the community experience hours a district requires for graduation count as part of the 120 hours?**

   Yes. Districts that already have community service requirements for students can begin implementing this guidance to use their current community service hour requirements as a graduation option.

3. **We have several students who already have jobs or are in programs that place students in jobs – does this work experience require approval?**

   Yes. Students who already have jobs can begin documenting hours once the school district approves them.

4. **Can the work experience include paid and unpaid work?**

   Yes. Any experience that meets the requirements of the work experience can be used whether a student is paid or not paid for the work.

5. **What if an employer expresses hesitation in supervising the work experience?**

   It may benefit the student to take initiative to ensure a supervisor does not view a student's use of the work experience to meet the graduation requirement as an extra burden. If a student takes responsibility to document the experience, it can lessen the responsibility of the supervisor.

6. **Can a student include hours during the summer as part of the required hours?**

   School districts may determine when the senior year officially begins for a student. If the district has designated a time of year that allows for summer employment and preapproves the experience, summer hours would be eligible.

7. **When does approval of the experience take place?**

   The school district determines when it issues approvals. The state encourages districts to set up several approval periods throughout the year.

8. **Who needs to approve the experience?**

   The school district determines who approves the experience. The state encourages the party that approves the experience also to work with the student periodically throughout the experience. Doing so ensures proper alignment and implementation of the proposal.

9. **Can the student's work experience take place in a business or organization owned by his or her family?**

   Yes, but the student should work with the school advisor to establish an appropriate method for verification and evaluation of the work. A parent or family member should not verify or evaluate the work experience.

10. **Do in-school experiences qualify as a work or community service experience?**

    There are few instances when an in-school experience would be considered high-quality. The student must have a supervisor for the experience who is not his or her current teacher. The state also recommends

student experiences take place with recognized entities. If the experience is built on outside partnerships and the student has both a supervisor and an educator to support the experience, an in-school experience may be appropriate.

11. Will a work-based learning experience satisfy the work experience requirement for graduation?

Yes; while there are differences between a work experience and a work-based learning experience (as defined here), a work-based learning experience will satisfy the work experience requirement for graduation.

Work-based learning takes place at a work site during or after school. Work-based learning is designed to provide students authentic learning experiences that link academic, technical and professional skills. Business and education partners work together to evaluate and supervise the experience, which must be documented with training or learning plans and evaluation forms.

While many "work experiences" essentially may be work-based learning projects, what gives them the official "work-based learning" label is that educators and supervisors co-evaluate them, and these experiences intentionally link technical, academic and professional skills.

In a simple work experience, a student may be evaluated only by his or her employer, and the skills the student learns on the job are mostly technical.

12. Will a service learning experience satisfy the community service experience requirement for graduation?

Yes; while there are differences between a community service experience and a service learning experience, a service learning experience will satisfy the community service experience requirement for graduation.

A community service experience usually is designed to offer a student direct experience with people or project planning, aiming to improve the quality of life for community members. A few examples of these experiences are tutoring, literacy training, neighborhood improvement, increasing environmental safety and taking part in other philanthropic programs that have a positive impact on the community.

A service-learning experience combines classroom learning with community service to provide a quality learning experience for the students and simultaneously meet community needs.

13. What are the benefits of my school having a high-quality work-based or service learning program?

Many high-quality work and community service experiences can expose students to life lessons they are unaware of yet benefit from greatly. When business and education partners come together to reflect thoughtfully and intentionally on learning outcomes, students are likely to make deeper connections with the learning taking place throughout these experiences.

As students complete these experiences to satisfy graduation options, districts will grow their relationships with their business communities and may consider undertaking more intentional work-based or service learning experience programs. Below are a few benefits that can occur.

For schools:
* Strengthens partnerships between a school and community;
* Reinforces instruction for better student comprehension; and
* Serves as an alternative to building more classrooms and laboratories to accommodate growth.

For the students engaged:
- Reduces drop-out rates;
- Increases understanding of the relevance of school; and
- Develops problem-solving and life skills.

There are many ways to implement these programs as part of the school day and have them bear high school credit for students. The programs can help students prepare to earn credentials and more accurately understand how their academic preparation will ready them for their post-high school lives. Visit the Department's website for more information on work-based learning.