



Senate Bill 22-140 Expansion of Experiential Learning Opportunities

Legislative Fact Sheet
March 15, 2022

Sponsors:

Senator James Coleman, Representative Barbara McLachlan, Senator Bob Gardner

Background:

The global pandemic has exacerbated challenges businesses face in finding the talent they need. As our economy recovers from the pandemic, Colorado also faces a looming worker shortage over the coming decades. To address this, many businesses are interested in providing high quality work-based learning for students and adults, but face challenges in making them a reality. A recent survey of Colorado employers shows 50%+ of businesses are seeking more support to adopt these models.

Expanding experiential, career connected learning opportunities for students before they graduate from high school is a worthwhile state investment. Evidence shows that students benefit from experiential learning opportunities – higher GPAs, greater engagement, and stronger postsecondary outcomes and career readiness after high school.

At the same time Colorado has untapped talent pools that can meet the demands of business in the near term. In Colorado, one in eight workers is an immigrant. Twenty percent of Coloradans speak a language other than English at home, the majority of these Coloradans representing immigrant families. Addressing language barriers through the alignment of education and employment can create immediate access to talent for business.

Across the U.S., 72% of the population lacks sufficient digital problem solving skills, including 58% of millennials, about 1/3 of workers have limited or no digital skills. In Colorado, more than 60,000 households with children in the K-12 system have inconsistent access to computers and the internet. Closing the digital divide for disconnected Coloradans creates new opportunities for participation.

This bill supports businesses, workers, and learners, and aligns the talent development ecosystem to maximize economic impact. For businesses, the bill will reduce barriers to adoption of quality work-based learning models and shores up their talent pipeline. For learners and workers, the bill addresses systemic barriers to accessing quality work-based learning and employment through the creation of programs that close the digital divide and eliminate language barriers.

This bill contains the following elements totaling \$6.1 million:

- » Provide incentives for businesses to create high quality work-based learning opportunities, including apprenticeship programs for adults and youth. CDLE will distribute incentive funds in a way that complements other incentive programs, maximizes regional diversity and business uptake to eligible entities like business intermediaries, such as local chambers, and individual businesses to increase work-based learning. (\$3 million)
- » Invest in strategic interventions to shore up the talent pipeline:
 - *Close the digital divide*: Deploy community-based digital navigators to address digital inequities (access to technology, digital skills, and affordable internet), that prevent people from accessing work-based learning, job-training and employment opportunities. (\$2 million)
 - *Eliminate language barriers*: Invest in virtual career-aligned ESL programming to ensure English language learners have access to work-based learning, job-training and employment opportunities. (\$1.1 million)
 - *Address challenges for foreign-trained professionals*: Establish an 18-month task force, staffed by the Office of New Americans, to recommend ways to improve integration of foreign-trained professionals in our workforce and work-based learning opportunities.
- » Align and accelerate work-based learning and skills-based hiring in existing state-funded programs in education, training and employment.
 - *Develop quality expectations*: OFOW and BEL Commission to develop quality expectations for the work-based learning continuum.
 - *Accelerate adoption*: Embed definitions of skills-based hiring and work-based learning into existing programs to promote adoption.

Supporting organizations:



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