

School-Based Enterprises: Steps for Successful Implementation

School-Based Enterprises provide students with work-based learning experiences, opportunities for career exploration, development of workplace readiness skills, and the chance to actively create, design, and implement businesses with students at the forefront. Consider the following steps to support your students during the implementation process.

Step 1: Identify Student Interests, Strengths, & Community Needs

The first step is to identify student interests, understand what skills they need to develop, and confirm what products or services may be needed within the school or community. Conduct student interest inventories and career assessments to help students develop self-awareness about their interests and strengths. Assess workplace readiness skills to identify students' learning needs. Finally, gather input from families, educators, and community partners to help students select business ideas that are meaningful, manageable, and aligned to student interests and goals.

Step 2: Develop the Business Plan

Create a simple business plan that outlines how the enterprise will operate and how the students will participate. Consider the mission and purpose of the business, whether the business will sell products or provide a service, and the size and location of the enterprise. What materials are needed? How will you market the enterprise? What is the daily schedule and workflow? Student involvement is essential during this step and will help promote ownership and authentic learning.

Step 3: Teach and Practice Workplace Readiness Skills

Before launching, explicitly teach the workplace-readiness skills students will need to succeed. Focus on important skills such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, time management, and customer service. Ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge and application of these skills in the workplace. Use role-playing activities, task analyses, visual supports, peer mentoring, and reflection to support students' use and understanding of these critical skills.

Step 4: Launch and Operate the Enterprise

Begin operating the enterprise in authentic school or community settings while providing ongoing coaching and support to students. While students may have big ideas, it is important to start small and scale gradually to support success. Create and assign student responsibilities and encourage them to establish consistent schedules and routines. During this phase, it is important for educators to shift from direct instruction to facilitation and coaching. This helps students learn from their mistakes and also celebrates their growth and successes.

Step 5: Evaluate, Reflect, and Sustain

Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the enterprise and use feedback to improve and sustain the business. Evaluate student skill growth, workplace readiness outcomes, and customer satisfaction. Encourage student self-reflections, family and stakeholder feedback, and an annual business plan review. Use these findings to refine operations, expand opportunities, and build long-term sustainability within the school program.

Conclusion

Use these steps to implement a successful school enterprise that is student-centered. School enterprises offer students the opportunity to explore careers, build self-awareness, and develop workplace readiness skills. When implemented effectively, school-based enterprises empower students to build confidence, contribute to their school community, and prepare for life beyond graduation.