

## Workplace Challenge Guide

### Introduction

This guide is designed to support Workplace Challenges that work for students, employers and teachers. It is part of the Work-Based Learning Toolkit developed for NYS P-TECH that provides quality approaches and strategies to create high-quality, safe and legal Workplace Learning experiences for P-TECH students.

### Workplace Challenge Overview

A Workplace Challenge is a Career Preparation activity where small groups of students (four to six per team) are engaged in solving a problem or a challenge issued by a P-TECH employer in consultation with a P-TECH classroom teacher. The structure of the challenge is based in effective project-based learning approaches, enhanced by a focus on the targeted Career Pathway and an authentic problem or issue faced by an employer partner. The students are engaged in career-focused, project-based learning and work as a team over time to identify possible solutions. They then create and deliver a presentation on their solution to the employer.

### Developing the Challenge

The challenge or problem is initially identified by the employer collaborating with a P-TECH representative (usually a classroom teacher). Typically, the employer will present a number of possible problems or issues that might constitute the challenge and work with a P-TECH teacher who helps select and develop a challenge that is a good fit with the current focus in the classroom. Selection will also reflect student interests and the availability of resources to support students and teachers in addressing the challenge.

### The Workplace Challenge Process

The challenge itself is most effective if delivered by an employer (ideally at the workplace) to a group of students who are familiar with the industry and ideally the particular employer, through exposures in the classroom or the workplace. Students then work together over six to eight weeks to address the challenge in the classroom, supported by teachers and in some cases the employer (one or two formal touch points between the students and a designated representative of the employer sometimes take place). At the completion of the challenge, students provide a presentation on their solution to the employer or a team of employees (again ideally at the worksite), engage in dialogue and receive feedback on their approach. While bookending the challenge with visits to the employer's workplace is desirable, care should be taken to minimize the impact on small- to medium-sized businesses.

### Workplace Challenge Enhancements

Workplace Challenges are powerful experiences for students, teachers and employer partners. Within the basic framework of the challenge, P-TECH schools and their partners are encouraged to be creative in designing challenges that include activities and approaches to enhance the value of the experience, and integrate challenges into the curriculum design of the P-TECH program overall.

Some enhancements to consider include the following:

- Have several teams of students address the same challenge and reward the most innovative solutions through a competition—with the employer or a team of employers serving as the judge(s).
- After the presentation of the solution and critique by the employer partner, have the team(s) revisit their approach, define a new solution and present it to the employer partner(s).
- Sequence a series of challenges for the same team of students so that they build on one another.
- Model aspects of the challenge after reality TV shows such as “Shark Tank” (with the students pitching a group of employers with their solutions).
- Have the challenge flow into an Internship for successful students.

### **Benefits for Students**

Industry/Workplace Challenges are designed to promote

- The opportunity to develop, practice and demonstrate new skills, including:
  - ✓ Identified academic, technical and occupational skills
  - ✓ Problem solving and research skills
  - ✓ Presentation skills
  - ✓ Teamwork skills
- The opportunity to explore and practice in a field of interest
- Student exposure to jobs, careers and working adults
- Enhance the relevance of academic instruction through the application of applied knowledge

A Workplace Challenge is a prime example of the benefits to students, employers, teachers, and schools described in section one of this toolkit. While Workplace Challenges are part of the continuum of authentic workplace learning experiences provided to every student, not all P-TECH employer partners need to participate in a Workplace Challenge.

### **The Importance of Structured Activity**

Effective Workplace Challenges include structured activity before, during and after the experience. These activities help ensure that all involved parties have meaningful, productive experiences that result in enriched student learning. Proper planning and preparation, attention to legal and safety details, maximization of learning potential, and communication and support for the student and employer will help ensure success.

### **Workplace Challenge Support Materials**

Tip sheets and checklists for P-TECH coordinators, employer partners, and students and teachers are provided in this toolkit to help design, structure and support Workplace Challenges to maximize student learning. Each tip sheet supplements the Work-Based Learning essential elements described in section three of this toolkit, and provides a set of success factors and lists of activities or tasks to perform before, during and after the experience. A fact sheet for prospective employers is also provided.

## Tip Sheets and Fact Sheets

### **P-TECH Coordinator Tip Sheet: Workplace Challenge Success Factors**

*A tip sheet for P-TECH coordinators or intermediary partners responsible for implementing and supporting Workplace Challenges*

### **Teacher Tip Sheet: Workplace Challenge Success Factors**

*A tip sheet to help teachers support the Workplace Challenge in the classroom*

### **Student Tip Sheet: Workplace Challenge Success Factors**

*A tip sheet to help students get the most out of the Workplace Challenge*

### **Employer Tip Sheet: Workplace Challenge Success Factors**

*A tip sheet for participating employers*

- What's my role in the Workplace Challenge?
- How do I pick the challenge?
- How should I design the challenge?
- How does this all work?

### **Employer Fact Sheet: Workplace Challenge**

*A fact sheet that describes what's involved in a company providing a Workplace Challenge*