Over the past two years, Iowa legislators have deepened the state’s commitment to work-based learning, and thousands of young people are taking advantage of the opportunity. Through a bill passed in 2013 (HF 604), lawmakers laid the groundwork for the creation of 15 regional intermediary networks. The goal of these networks is to increase K-12 students’ access to career fairs, internships and job-shadowing opportunities in their communities.

With participation from a local community college, each network is responsible for developing a stronger connection between businesses and K-12 schools. The state provides 75 percent of the costs associated with expanding work-based learning opportunities; the rest of the money must be generated from local sources.

According to a study released in December by the Iowa Department of Education, 15,000 students took part in hands-on, work-based learning opportunities in 2014-15. Touring a work site was the most common experience.

With a grant from the National Governors Association, Iowa plans to focus more on work-based learning in careers related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.