



What Parents Should Know... About Preparing Youth for Employment

Promoting self-determination is a skill set that will benefit your son or daughter in all aspects of his or her life. They need to learn to believe in themselves - to believe in their own capacity to get things done.

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Making the Most of High School Programming

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Your son or daughter is getting ready to graduate from high school. What an exciting time, full of hopes and dreams for a happy, productive, and quality adult life filled with work, community, friends, and activities. Let's turn the clock back and re-visit the many things throughout your child's life that make this outcome possible.

First, we need to remember that the process for achieving this big transition starts early. It is a coordinated set of activities that is future driven and outcome oriented. That means having high expectations as a child with a long range post-school vision in mind. The Individualized Education Planning (IEP) process should include an employment or post-secondary goal with each annual IEP outlining the steps for achieving it.

It is important to create every opportunity to be exposed to work starting in the elementary years and continuing throughout their education. For example, completing chores at home, talking about places that you visited in terms of what jobs people are doing and what it would be like to work there, asking your child what he or she would like to be when they grow up, and promoting a strong work ethic.

At the same time, your child's school can provide experiences that have been found to be effective in promoting employment outcomes.



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Exploring jobs and careers through websites, talking to different people, visiting businesses in the community, and participating in job shadow, internship, and apprenticeship opportunities can help students learn about different job requirements and what is important to them in a job. The Job Observational Self-Assessment Form is a useful tool to assist individuals themselves with communicating what they like and don't like about the workplace, the people, the job duties, and the overall job (*Parent & Wehman, 2011*).

Participating in real work experiences while in school is a critical factor contributing to post-school employment. A good rule of thumb is to think about providing a range of opportunities early on and moving to a more specific area as your child moves closer to graduating. Remember this is a time of exploration so consider offering a variety of different types of jobs and settings. It is essential that these be representative of real jobs in the community with similar demands and expectations, providing a chance for your child to learn new things and understand what is expected of them as an employee and coworker in a real business. This is the time to teach job tasks, social skills, and work-related behaviors such as taking a break, interacting with coworkers, handling down time, and asking the supervisor questions. Identifying how your son or daughter learns best, what kinds of supports they like and are effective, and addressing any challenging issues on the job site is an important contribution towards permanent paid employment.



Promote Self-determination

Similarly, promoting self-determination is a skill set that will benefit your son or daughter in all aspects of his or her life. They need to learn to believe in themselves — to believe in their own capacity to get things done. Self-determination skills contribute to improved outcomes in all facets of one's life. Providing opportunities for your child to set goals, make decisions, problem solve, and direct events in his or her life are invaluable. Remember it is not all or nothing, encourage your child to learn these skills frequently over time with increased responsibility and support.

An often overlooked element in transition is the business community. It is important to be familiar with the local labor market and hiring needs. In addition, finding out what businesses are looking for in an employee and providing instruction to prepare students for employment can insure we are focusing efforts on those attributes valued by employers. Developing business relationships and utilizing personal and community connections are critical in the job development and hiring process.

Remember that all of these experiences collectively contribute to the identification of the features

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essential for making a good job match. In every context and situation — try to operate from a “strengths-based” perspective. Find out what your child likes and doesn’t like, their interests and preferences, and the types of supports that are desired and helpful to share with the school or adult service personnel who will be responsible for pursuing employment. Think about the specifics, such as different environmental characteristics, such as loud or quiet, fast-paced or slow, close proximity or independent of coworkers, as this richness is often overlooked despite its benefit in distinguishing the setting, in addition to job type, that is the best match for your son or daughter. As linkages with adult services including vocational rehabilitation, developmental disability services, and community support providers are made, the sharing of information gathered is a critical piece for facilitating employment and insuring that the many features important to your son or daughter are not lost in the process.

So now your child is graduating. Remember anything is possible if we don’t lose sight of our dreams, maintain our high expectations, operate from a perspective of what does it take, work together, think creatively, and provide essential services and supports to turn those dreams into a reality.

Just Getting Started? Parents and Youth Can...

Identify passions, skills, likes and dislikes...

Think beyond the school day. Are there extra curricular clubs or activities that interest your youth? What are the chores they may have at home or for family members (childcare, cleaning, laundry, lawn mowing, repairs, painting, etc.), volunteer experiences, hobbies, church and/or community activities? What, specifically, does the young person like/dislike about certain activities? For instance, do they prefer routine, repetitive activities or a variety of tasks? Do they prefer physically active or sedentary tasks? Do they prefer working independently or with others? Do they prefer quiet or active environments?

Self-confidence comes from opportunities to be successful, and it generally takes more than one attempt to achieve success. If youth are not yet engaged in chores, hobbies, volunteer work, or activities at school or in the community, now is the time to begin.



Explore jobs that connect to identified interests and skills...

Utilize networks in school, the community, and through family and friends to visit with individuals in fields of interest to learn more, tour a business, or participate in a job shadow or volunteer experience. Students can research jobs and required skills, training, and education; attend job fairs or career exploration events. There are generally many diverse job opportunities related to a specific career interest, don’t focus narrowly on a specific job title.

Gain work experience...

Temporary jobs, summer jobs, and part-time jobs all provide valuable work experiences. One of the most important findings from the research shows that work experiences for youth with disabilities during high school (paid or unpaid) help them acquire jobs at higher wages after they graduate (Colley & Jamison, 1998).

Aim High, Start Early in Expectations for Your Child With Special Needs

High Expectations—these words are tossed out by professionals, parents and in grant proposals, as it relates to children with special needs. *Webster's Dictionary* defines expectation as a belief that someone will or should achieve something. "Students had high expectations for their future." Too often, we place limitations on what we can expect our child with special needs to know and be able to do as we work our way through many systems. And...those who work with our children can limit our planning and dreaming for the future as well.

South Dakota Parent Connection's grant for the Parent Training and Information Center included addressing this priority:

Provide high-quality services that increase parents' capacity to help their children with disabilities improve their early learning, school-aged, and postsecondary outcomes. To meet this requirement the applicant must include information as to how the services will increase parents' knowledge of the nature of their children's disabilities, including their children's strengths, and academic, behavioral, and developmental challenges and the importance of having high expectations for their children and how to help them meet those expectations.

What does having high expectations for your son or daughter with disabilities look like? What can parents do to help their child and others who support him/her to have high expectations? What does it mean to be a valued member of a community?



Having expectations requires teaching and supporting our children to gain responsibility — believing that everyone can contribute to family, school and community life. Beginning at a young age, teach self-care skills, helping others, taking turns. Yes it may take longer to get those socks on the first time but continue to have that expectation and progress will be made. Have your child help you—put dirty dishes in the sink, put away toys, take dirty clothes to hamper. Model responsibility; use the words "We can do this and here's how." Use praise and avoid rewards. Accept approximations—a five-year old's bed making skills may not match your own but with practice and age your child will improve. Provide structure and routine. Consistency in having expectations is important for you and your child. When others tell you what your child can't do, remember to share what they can do and continue to move forward.

Dr. Paul Wehman, Virginia Commonwealth University, points out the importance of having the expectation that our children with disabilities can and should be encouraged to think about and plan for employment as a life goal. The planning cannot wait until high school; it begins early on. It is important for parents to start early with toilet training and self-care. Research has shown that gaining these skills can help a child with special needs make gains in other areas of their learning. Pay attention to developmental milestones and expect and support your child in continued growth at every age.

Continued research and use of evidence based practices are allowing more youth and adults with special needs to be employed and live independent lives. That does not happen by accident — it takes believing in the potential of our children and teaching and supporting them in ways that lead to being involved in and a valued member of their community.

Providing Practical Hands-On Experiences

Project Skills

Project Skills is a paid work experience program for high school students with disabilities in South Dakota. The program is a cooperative arrangement between the state vocational rehabilitation agencies and the local school districts. Rehabilitation Services provides funding for wages, FICA, worker's compensation and other costs. The local school district provides matching funds through development, job coaching and on-site monitoring.

Project Skills provides students the opportunity to learn different skills in a variety of job placements, with the assistance of a job coach. Project Skills helps to build the student's work history, references and helps them move into different and better jobs as they mature and are ready to take on new challenges.



During the 2013-14 school year at West Central High School, Kelsey Peterson participated in Project Skills with two jobs. "These were my first real jobs," said Kelsey. "At Augustana I was working around big crowds and I don't like big crowds. The first day, was nerve-racking being in the middle of all those people, but I learned to adjust and started to like it there. Both jobs were a good learning experience and I would recommend Project Skills."

Kelsey learned to navigate the mass transit system while working two jobs. "I can read any bus schedule now."

Kelsey's success in Project Skills at SDPC translated into a summer job as an office assistant and permanent part-time employment at SDPC.

Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH is a unique business-led transition program for students with disabilities. Students who want to work have the chance to explore careers and develop transferable job skills. The goal of the Project SEARCH program is competitive employment for each intern. Designed as an internship program, Project SEARCH affords students the opportunity to put employability skills into practice. For five days a week, students report to the host business and learn employability skills in the classroom and job skills while participating in targeted internships.

Project SEARCH was established in 1996 at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and currently there are over 200 Project SEARCH sites. In South Dakota, the first Project SEARCH programs started in August 2010, with host sites at Avera McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls and Avera St. Luke's Hospital in Aberdeen. In August 2013, South Dakota State University in Brookings became the third host site and a fourth site was added in 2015 at Rapid City Regional Hospital.

During Project SEARCH, the students receive support with accommodations, adaptations, and on-the-job coaching. Students who have completed all academic requirements for graduation from high school may apply for enrollment in Project SEARCH. Participants referred by the school district are typically 18 to 21 years old. In addition to serving students from the school districts, the Division of Rehabilitation Services may also refer individuals who have "aged out" of the secondary school system up to age 25 years old, if additional slots are available at a host site.

The internships are typically 10 to 12 weeks in length. Students are matched to the most appropriate job site based on interests and skills. A job coach works with the student until the tasks assigned can be performed independently. The time and instruction is individualized. Students are evaluated by the job coach, the instructor and the department supervisor. Job placement is the final goal of the program. Students can be employed after the first semester of the school year and continue in Project SEARCH.

To learn more about these programs contact your local Rehabilitation Services office.

Healthy and Ready to Work

Lack of attention to health needs and health management can jeopardize even the best developed plans to reach goals for post high school education/training, achieving the job of choice, and living as independently as possible while fully participating in the community.

As parents, we have been responsible for protecting the health of our son/daughter: making sure they have insurance; finding providers; making appointments and providing transportation; talking to care providers; picking up and administering meds (or giving reminders). It is often faster and easier to do it ourselves, and we can remove some of the fear that our son/daughter will mismanage their health. But if we want to support the growing autonomy that is appropriate for their peer group, increase their ability to successfully engage with others to maintain their own health and well-being, and allow youth to develop confidence and competence to support their overall health — TO THE GREATEST EXTENT POSSIBLE — parents must provide opportunities for youth to practice these skills.

Successful health care transition includes:

- **Transition from child-focused to adult-focused providers.** Pediatric providers are family-centered and have a developmental perspective. Adult providers are person-centered and have a disease prevention focus. Adult providers include medical, mental, dental, vision, and hearing health professionals.
- **Young adults taking charge of their own health.** Youth can begin making appointments; arranging transportation; making their own refill orders and arranging for pickup or delivery; understanding their medical condition/history; recognizing when they may be having a medical emergency and having an emergency plan in place; communicating directly with providers; advocating if they need interpreters; understanding their insurance or how payment will be made. Youth should participate in the selection of their adult provider(s) that will: offer a quality provider/youth “fit,” accept insurance/payment method, provide a facility that is accessible, provide needed accommodations, and respect the culture of youth/family including decisions regarding care and level of family involvement.
- **Insurance coverage for age 19 and beyond.** Develop a health insurance plan for age 19 and beyond. Contact SD Parent Connection if assistance is needed in identifying options to maintain medical, mental, dental, and vision health insurance.
- **Getting needed services and supports to achieve goals.** Identify needed supports (home health care, durable medical equipment, assistive technology, modifications for accessibility, medical supplies, etc.), available providers, and payment options. Contact SD Parent Connection if assistance is needed in identifying options.



Work Force Innovation and Opportunity Act...

What It Means for Youth, Schools and Vocational Rehabilitation

The Work Force Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law on July 22, 2014. It is the long overdue reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 which expired in 2003. There was a lengthy process to develop the regulations to implement the changes mandated by the law and final regulations were made public January 22, 2016 with an implementation date of July 22, 2016. This article will provide information on what the changes mean to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), public schools and ultimately youth with disabilities and their families.



Pre-Employment Transition Services

WIOA focuses on issues about transition for students, services for young people, and people who are working at sub-minimum wages. The group of individuals described as “Students with Disabilities” is defined in WIOA as those persons between the ages of 16 and 21 who are potentially eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services (currently on a 504 plan or an IEP, but not necessarily a VR client). WIOA regulations mandate that 15% of each state’s VR budget must be allocated to Pre-Employment Transition Services. These services can include supporting efforts in job exploration counseling, providing student with learning experiences in a work environment, pre-college counseling, independent living skills, and fostering self-advocacy. The SD Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) is well positioned to meet this requirement with existing programs such as Youth Leadership Forum, Catch the Wave, Project Skills, and Project Search. New programs include summer transition projects to engage students in learning when school is not in session.

Competitive Integrated Employment

Another key element of WIOA is that the employment experiences must be provided in an integrated setting at a wage that is comparable to anyone else that does the same work with similar experience. This concept is known as “competitive integrated employment” and ensures that students with disabilities will not be isolated from non-disabled workers and paid less than similarly situated employees. Schools cannot simply send students to low-paying sheltered workshops and call it Transition Services. WIOA has a strict prohibition on the practice of educational institutions contracting with sub-minimum wage providers for services relating to transition. The SD DRS is working with agencies such as South Dakota Advocacy Services and SD Parent Connection to ensure that these requirements are observed in all school districts in South Dakota.

Substantive Employment

Another provision within WIOA addresses youth with disabilities (ages 14-24) who are eligible for VR. WIOA makes employing this group for less than minimum wage more difficult. The process ensures that people in this category are given adequate opportunity to achieve substantive employment with necessary supports and evaluation.

For further information on WIOA contact SD Division of Rehabilitation Services, <http://dhs.sd.gov/drs/>, or SD Department of Labor and Regulation www.dlr.sd.gov or 605-773-3101.

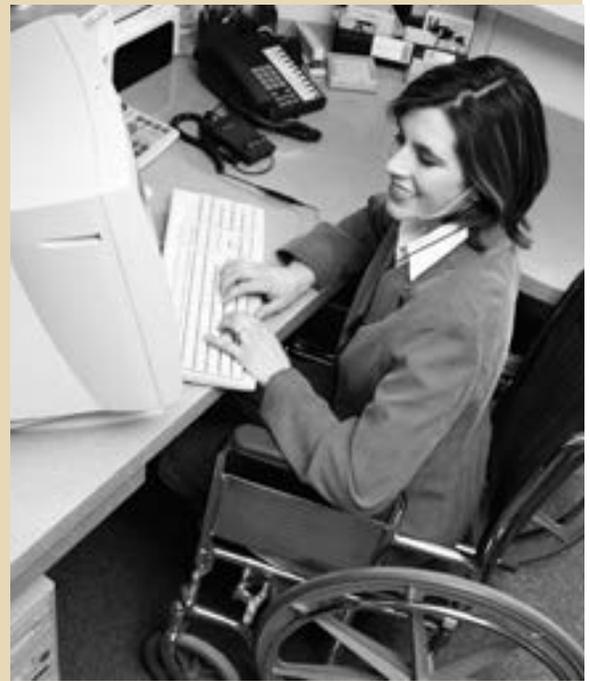
Employment Assistance Resources

Career Learning Centers — Provides education and employment training. http://dlr.sd.gov/workforce_training/clcs.aspx. • Call 605-773-3101

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability — This website looks specifically at what youth with disabilities need to know to prepare themselves for careers or meaningful jobs, and what parents need to know to ensure that their children are getting all of the things they need to succeed.

www.ncwd-youth.info

- Helping Youth Build Work Skills for Job Success: Tips for Parents and Families
- Helping Youth Develop Soft Skills for Job Success: Tips for Parents and Families (article + podcast)
- Tapping into the Power of Families: How Families of Youth with Disabilities Can Assist in Job Search and Retention
- Understanding the New Vision for Career Development: The Role of Family
- *Guideposts*: Can help steer families, institutions and youth themselves through the transition process. www.ncwd-youth.info/guideposts.



Vocational Rehabilitation Services — A program that provides individualized vocational rehabilitation and supportive services to assist eligible individuals with disabilities to get and keep jobs compatible with their skills and abilities. <http://dhs.sd.gov/drs/vocrehab/vr.aspx> • Call 605-773-3195

Workplace Flexibility Toolkit — Provides employees, job seekers, employers, policymakers and researchers with information, resources and a unique approach to workplace flexibility. Searchable by type of resource, target audience, types of workplace flexibility (place, time, task). www.dol.gov/odep/workplaceflexibility/

CareerOneStop — A source for employment information and inspiration. www.careeronestop.org

Drive of Your Life — A fun online career exploration game that helps middle-school and high school students learn more about themselves, higher education and careers. <https://www.driveofyourlife.org>



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