



Gearing Up For Your Transitions

Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

You are getting close to leaving high school. You need to learn all you can about having a job and finding a career. This, of course, is really important if you want to live more independently, travel, buy things, pay your bills, save for a car, or do anything else you want to do. To live independently you have to have money and money may come from working. [The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation \(DVR\)](#) Transition Services can help put you on the right path for a successful working future.

The DVR Transition Services is a program for high school students which are implemented in all 19 public school districts (31 public high schools) as well as at alternative and private high schools. Each DVR office has staff focused on providing services for students who are going from high school to adult life. DVR transition services include activities for students that are designed to promote movement from school to post school activities such as post-secondary education, vocational training, employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living and community participation. DVR transition services link high school students to adult services and employment.

Employment First Legislation:

In July of 2012, Governor Markell signed House Bill (HB) 319 "Employment First Legislation". HB 319 requires state agencies that provide services to persons with disabilities to consider, as their first option, employment in an integrated setting for persons with disabilities. Early Start to Supported Employment (ESSE) is a collaborative program sponsored by the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the Delaware Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS), the Delaware Department of Education (DOE) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs). The ESSE philosophy is that all persons, regardless of disability and/or special health care need, should have opportunities to access integrated competitive employment. Representative Debra Heffernan was the sponsor of Delaware's Employment First Legislation. Representative Heffernan asserts that gaining meaningful employment and establishing a career should be the first priority for students with disabilities and/or special health care needs when they leave school. However, students that may not be able to do this without assistance from their core support group of parents/caregivers, school districts, Transition Coordinators, health care providers and others. (should we link to bill??)

Early Start to Supported Employment (ESSE):

The [ESSE program](#) begins two years prior to the student exiting high school and is a way to connect transition-age youth with employment services and work opportunities. Although ESSE started as a pilot in 2005, it quickly became recognized as a best practice in Delaware. This program offers students an opportunity to gain exposure to work in the community, assists them with learning and retaining employment related skills and provides a more seamless transition to alleviate student and family stress during the difficult transition from school to an unknown adult life. This program targets students who traditionally were not on the track for competitive employment.

Project Search:

This successful model is in its third year of operation at Christiana Care in partnership with the Red Clay School District, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Goodwill Industries. Approximately 10 students

attend class at Christiana Hospital, where their teacher provides soft skills training and job coaches instruct the students at internship sites throughout the hospital. Hospitals, banks, as well as Federal and County government agencies have served as SEARCH sites. Project SEARCH gives transition-age students the opportunity to experience work in a real business outside of school and learn to meet the expectations of the host business for its employees. Through replication of this model in Delaware, it is hoped that there will be at least one Project SEARCH site in every school district. The more realistic work experiences we can provide students prior to their exit from school, the more likely they are to succeed as adults in the workplace. (should we provide a direct link to DVR's site on this topic)

Research indicates that work experiences during high school are one of the strongest predictors of successful post-school employment for students with disabilities and/or special health care needs (Landmark, Ju & Zang, 2010; Test et al., 2009). These work experiences can be either paid or unpaid, but the result is still the same: students are more likely to find a job after they finish school when they've had previous work experiences during school. There are critical skills that are learned in a work setting that cannot be replicated in the same fashion in the classroom. These include:

- Learning the skills for a particular job. Work experiences provide an opportunity for an individual to gain training, practice and receive supervision on a number of skills. The structure of this training and supervision is typically quite different from a school.
- Experience the expectations of an employment setting. Most employment settings have very different rules than a school or classroom. There is typically less tolerance for being late or being out sick or on vacation. This is particularly true of special education settings, where the general rules of the school may also be "flexed" in order to ensure that the student is able to progress.
- Learn the social rules of the workplace. There are very specific social skills that are important to learn and understand in order to be successful at work. Students with disabilities, regardless of level of disability, have been shown to exhibit significant deficits in social skills. By spending time in a work setting, students can begin to learn these rules, apply them and get feedback. There is also value in modeling other employees at the workplace.
- Develop networks. Most individuals rely upon their networks to help them connect with future steps in jobs and careers. However, most students enter the workforce with very limited networks; typically consisting of family and special education staff. As a result, they miss out on these critical variables which promote employment success. By participating in work during high school, they can begin to develop their networks.
- Educate the business community. By facilitating connections between students and community employers, this also provides the business community with an opportunity to dispel incorrect perceptions they may have about employing individuals with disabilities and/or special health care needs. Short-term work experiences or internships provide a low-cost opportunity to the employer to recognize the benefits of hiring an individual with a disability and/or special health care need.