



Transitioning students with disabilities to work

Project SEARCH is a unique business-led transition program for students with disabilities. It provides students who want to work a chance to explore careers and develop transferable job skills. The ultimate goal: independent adults working in sustainable employment.

Designed as an internship program, Project SEARCH places students in real-world situations where they learn all aspects of gaining and maintaining a job. Large organizations—such as banks, hospitals or universities—host the program. This process of immersion facilitates the teaching and learning of new work skills on-site.

Individualized internship development and placement occurs based on the student's experiences, strengths and skills. A series of internship rotations, lasting 10 to 12 weeks, allow students to seek positions that best suit their interests and skills. They 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 may be 18 to 21 years old.

Black Hills Special Services Cooperative provides Project SEARCH through a partnership with Regional Health, Black Hills Special Services Cooperative, South Dakota Department of Human Services and DakotaLink.



Time required Full days for one school year

Grade levels Upon completion of high school credits, ages 18-21





A typical day's schedule

- 8 - 8:15 AM: Students arrive and have a brief 'morning meeting'. We discuss employability topics of the day, rotation check-in and work related items.
- 8:15-1:30 PM: Students participate in non-paid internship rotations throughout the host site. Lunch and breaks are taken with the department hosting the student.
- 1:30-2:30 PM: Students attend employability skills class at the internship site. Lessons are based on daily living such as banking skills, nutrition, resume' writing and how to be a good employee.

Internship rotations

- Internship rotations last about 10-12 weeks.
- Students are matched to the most appropriate internship site based on interest and skills.
- A skills trainer works with the student until the tasks assigned can be performed independently. The time and instruction is individualized.
- Students are evaluated by the skills trainer, the instructor and the department supervisor.

Internship placement

Job placement is the final goal of the program. Students can be employed at any time throughout the school year and continue in Project SEARCH. The IEP team including the student, family, Project SEARCH instructor, affiliated school representative and vocational rehabilitation counselor, meets regularly to discuss performance at internship sites. The team assists each student in defining a career goal.

Eligibility criteria

- Be at least 18 years of age.
- Has met high school completion requirements.
- Agree this will be the last year of student services provided by their resident district.
- On an IEP with their resident school district.
- On an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) with Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Demonstrate workplace behavior and social skills.
- Take direction from supervisors.
- Be able to communicate effectively.
- Committed to work competitively by the end of the program.
- Have updated immunizations

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