

Making the Most of Summer: 3 Ways Let's Get to Work Pilot Schools Expanded Summer Employment Opportunities

For many high school students, summer is not only about being off from school but time to work and earn money for spending, toward a car, or maybe saving for college. High school is also a time for first “real” jobs, not only for the purpose of making money, but to learn soft skills that employers are seeking such as responsibility, work ethic, following directions, showing up on time, attending to personal appearance, and being a team player. So it stands to reason that youth with disabilities need to be afforded the same opportunities to gain these skills – and earn money – as their peers without disabilities through summer work experiences.

1) **Continued School Support** – Extended School Year (ESY) funding can be used for students at paid jobs over the summer months to maintain job coaching and personal assistance deemed necessary for employment and other skill levels to remain constant. Summer School classes can be geared toward the attainment of employment skills and designed to match the structure of summer programming available. Here are some examples from the Let's Get to Work Pilot Schools.

- One school held a three-week summer program called “World of Work” through which students toured local businesses and spent time engaged in activities related to their employment goals. Students and teachers alike expanded employer connections during that time. Most recently, this school offered participating students work experiences with several local employers and paid the students stipends through district funds.
- Another school created a two-week summer school session focused on employment, which included instruction on using public transportation, going on business tours, and talking with local employers about job qualifications. Students practiced asking employers if they were hiring and picking up applications and learned how to answer common interview questions.
- Another school created a three-day “Employment Academy” for students to engage in job shadows and an immersion into employment planning, giving everyone a jump start for the fall.
- Schools also developed summer options by collaborating with nearby districts to pool resources for summer offerings. At one pilot site, three districts collaborated to provide a summer school class that focused on continuing life skill development (e.g. shopping, cooking, laundry, etc.).

Begin planning for summer early.
At age 14, talk with students and families about preparing for future summer work. Once a student is interested in working, begin planning several months before summer as it might take that long to find a job.

2) **Collaboration with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)** – When students with disabilities have established services from DVR, including an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), a variety of services can be used over the summer months. Below are some examples from Let's Get to Work Pilot Schools.

- The transition coordinators or teachers arranged work experiences or part-time summer jobs (even if the work is just seasonal). Once the employment situation was lined-up, DVR provided funding to a vocational services agency to provide job coaching and check-in support for the students at work.

- For students still exploring employment through work experiences, the DVR counselor worked with an employment support agency or individual job developer to set up one or more short-term, paid experiences for the student during the summer months.
- A student who had a paid job during the school year and required assistance on the job was supported by DVR funded services (job coaching and transportation) over the summer months because school supports were not available. Services were planned well ahead of time with the DVR counselor.

Collaborate with Transition

Partners well in advance. DVR and service providers can provide the resources for students to have work experiences and paid jobs over the summer. However, determining eligibility and setting up services typically takes time just like finding a job. So plan ahead!

- Schools connected students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to youth employment programs funded through the Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act (WIOA), such as the Job, Education, and Training (JET) Program. More information about such programs can be obtained from the student's DVR Counselor or your local job center.

3) Family Support – Families can be critical partners in finding and supporting summer jobs and volunteer experiences. Many youth with and without disabilities find their first jobs through personal connections. Here are some examples of how Let's Get to Work Pilot Schools partnered with families for employment experiences.

- One pilot student was supported by his family to volunteer at community baseball games and work at festivals over the summer months. These experiences enabled him to develop job skills and have a valued social role in his community.
- Several students worked for family members over the summer by babysitting for younger siblings or cousins, mowing lawns, working at an uncle's masonry business, and helping a family member's delivery business.
- Families provided transportation for work and volunteer experiences over the summer. A young man walked to work at his permanent paid position with a bank during the school year (the bank was a few blocks from the school). His family provided transportation over the summer months.

Involve Families. Remember that most young people find their first jobs or volunteer experiences through their family connections. Engage families in discussions about who they know and how they can support summer experiences – and why these are just as important for youth with disabilities.