

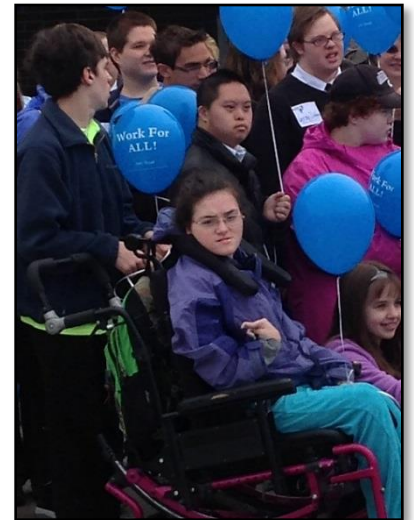
Engaging with Policy-Makers on Employment

School districts in Wisconsin have faced budget and policy challenges in recent years and those challenges have affected transition services and student outcomes. At the same time, the long term care system that provides supports to adults with disabilities has also faced changes and budget cuts. Efforts to help policy-makers understand the employment needs and goals of youth with disabilities can have a positive impact on local and state-level policy decisions. And, involving students to advocate for policies that are important to them is a great way to support development of self-advocacy skills and civic responsibility. Finding contact information for legislators and policy-makers in your area is only a few clicks away at whoismyrepresentative.com.

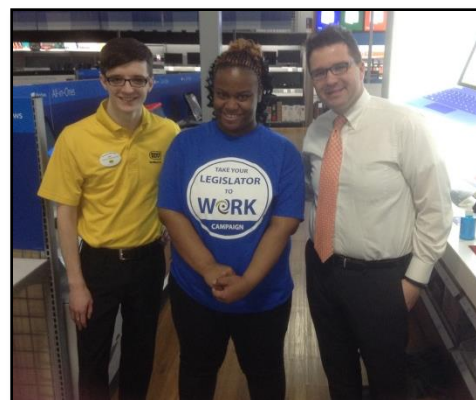
Below are four ideas for engaging with policy-makers that proved successful for a Let's Get to Work school. These ideas do require some investment of time and funds, but can have big yields in terms of relationship-building and impact. Mini-grants and donations may be available in your district, through the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities, business groups or civic associations to off-set costs.

Hold a Breakfast or Luncheon to talk with multiple policy-makers about the need for employment opportunities and other resources, such as transportation. Organize a gathering with a select invitation list to keep the number of people in attendance relatively low. Have the breakfast or luncheon at your school, a restaurant or another public space where food can be served, people can network, and students can present. In addition to legislators and policy-makers from your area, local employers are also invited. This is a great opportunity to showcase your school's work and transition program.

Host a Town Hall Meeting to engage a broader range of stakeholders and community members in a discussion about employment with one or two legislators or policy-makers. This type of event has a larger number of attendees than a breakfast or luncheon. The Town Hall portion of the event is typically led by the legislator(s) who attends as they take questions and comments from the audience. Information and a set of questions for the policy-maker(s) are developed and provided ahead of time to assist with preparation. Legislators and policy-makers have the opportunity to get to know constituents in addition to hearing about the importance of employment for youth with disabilities.



Participate in "Take Your Legislator to Work," a campaign that demonstrates to legislators firsthand the desire people with disabilities have to work in their community and shows them when people with disabilities are working they are also contributing to the local economy, which strengthens our state's economy. For more information or to arrange a visit: <http://wi-bpdd.org/takeyourlegislatorwork/>.



Steps for Convening a Breakfast, Luncheon, or Town Hall Meeting:

1. Contact one or more of the legislators/policy-makers that represent your area to extend the invitation.
2. Set a date, time, and location based on the availability of the legislator(s) willing to attend.
3. Create and send out invitations to a range of stakeholders based on the type of event (students, family members, teachers, employers, DVR personnel, adult service providers, and community members).
4. Make personal contacts by dropping off invitations face-to-face and placing calls in follow-up to e-mailed and mailed invitations.
5. Plan an agenda that incorporates the introductory presentation by students and an introduction and thank you for legislator/policy-maker(s).
6. Support students to develop and practice a presentation to introduce the topic of employment for youth with disabilities (can include a brief formal presentation with data points, personal stories, and/or video).
7. Send the legislator/policy-maker(s) information to help them prepare. This could be the introduction students plan to use along with briefs about employment from the WI Board for People with Developmental Disabilities and other organizations, along with potential questions that might be asked. Helpful resources can be found at www.wiemploymentfirst.com.
8. Invite local media, including newspaper, television, and radio to cover the event (intention to do so should be shared with the legislator/policy-maker(s)).
9. Plan for the food that will be needed.
10. Have one or more topic experts at the event to guide discussion and support policy-maker(s) as needed.

Create a Proclamation to declare that your city or town supports employment opportunities in the community for everyone. This action, in conjunction with meetings and events convened to generate discussion with policy-makers, is another great way to increase attention to the needs of youth with disabilities to have job opportunities in the community. The picture to the right is from an event held at a grocery store where a student from the school district works. The Mayor was in attendance to sign the proclamation and have a bagging contest with the student. The store supplied snacks and the entire event happened during regular store hours. The “Work for ALL” proclamation is alive and well in that community!

