



School to Work Transition

Transitioning from youth into adulthood is challenging for most everyone. For young people with disabilities, this process may be especially difficult yet crucial for determining future life success. A successful life includes finding and keeping fulfilling work. School-to-Work educational programs create new opportunities for all students to make the connection between what they learn at school and what they learn at work. It is important that students with disabilities be given the chance to make choices not based on preconceived ideas about abilities or limited options available. All children should be given opportunities early in their education to explore careers and develop future job skills. School-to-Work planning starts as early as pre-school and continues through high school. As in all universal design concepts, School-to-Work programs benefit all learners.

The Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota asked students with disabilities across the country about their experience in School-to-Work programs. Here are some of their recommendations for best practices.

- Include more job-related components in classes, connect classes to work, show how to use academic information in a career and how it's connected to future skills we will need.
- We need more hands-on, contextual learning – we need to relate to something we like and enjoy. We need less paperwork and more activities like job shadowing, onsite visits and tours, mock interviews, and resume development.
- Don't ban the fun activities that can involve everyone in the school. They keep us motivated, and when we are doing things we are invested in, we get into less trouble and find school more worthwhile.
- We want teachers to be mentors and friends, and employers to know, understand, and support us.
- We need a broad range of exposure before choosing a career.
- It should be a mandatory requirement for every student to have many job shadowing experiences out in the work place, all four years of high school.
- Trust students and their ideas.
- Provide more opportunities in the "real world".
- Students need to be given opportunities to develop self-advocacy and leadership skills.
- Encourage creativity.

Resources:

All Means All School-to-Work Project, <http://ici.umn.edu/all/default.html>

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, www.ncset.org

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/guideposts>

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