

BOCES SPOTLIGHT

Work Based Learning Program

April 2012

The Dutchess BOCES Work-Based Learning Program (WBLP), under the Direction of Norah Merritt and guidance of Community-Based Teacher Roger Risko, is a great venture that is enjoying widespread success as a job-prep and socialization program for special and alternative education students. The ongoing success of the program is evident in the amount of students who received paid positions. The WBLP has grown from two participating employers and one bus driver to over fifty participating employers and five bus routes. The BOCES WBLP had its first job site in Poughkeepsie, and now has job locations all over Dutchess County that provide on-site work experience for students in our thirteen component school districts.



The WBLP finds job internships that are a great match for our students and provides transportation to and from the work site. They are very successful with routine jobs; those jobs that are entry level, very visual and repetitive. More challenging skill development is provided according to the students' capability and progress at their work sites. Students seventeen to twenty-one are eligible to participate. Risko works out a schedule with each student's teacher based on preferences, staff appropriateness, availability, employer priorities, and cost effectiveness. Discovering new and maintaining existing work sites, hiring and assigning youth aides, hiring bus drivers, and determining bus routes are all part of Risko's responsibilities.

The student's Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) may suggest work-based learning anywhere from one to five days per week. Students do not necessarily work at the same place each day. Sometimes they have two days at one place and one day at another. Risko comments, "The great part of the program is that the students get to experiment with different sites during their first and second year. By the third year, when they may be ready to graduate, we know their strengths, what they enjoy, and what is near the home. We try to accommodate the students using all of the input given by their teachers and counselors."

For those students entering their last few years in our PEACCE Program, an effort is made to place them in a job experience that will utilize their strengths so that they excel and demonstrate their true potential. Dutchess BOCES/Arlington High School PEACCE Program Teacher Lisa Slagle comments, "We've been really successful. Most of our student internships have been converted to paying jobs upon graduation. By the time the students have completed their internships, the hosting business does not want them to leave."

Patrick Crisci, a teaching assistant at Pawling High School shares, "I can't say enough about what WBLP does for the students' confidence and self-esteem in being able to accomplish tasks in a work environment. At the same time, employers and the community are getting a look at their abilities rather than their disabilities." What Risko and his staff do best is help the students learn to do specific job-related tasks according to the



students' abilities, providing minimal or no supervision. The program utilizes "faded observation" techniques to encourage independence and productivity. Some students may require more guidance than others, but the idea is that the students are exposed to the workplace and the responsibility of having a job. The youth aides do a great job in facilitating and focusing on what the students are able to do on the job. This program is mutually beneficial--the local folks get to help kids with special needs and at the same time they are learning to be more tolerant and understanding. It's definitely a win-win program!

Another program benefit is the social interaction that the students receive from the employers. Engaging in conversation, they learn how to ask questions when they need clarification, should they need permission to do something, or just to simply locate something. They also learn how to be appropriately assertive. Because of their delayed development, some of the students are still learning how to socialize. A job such as bagging groceries gives them an opportunity to establish relationships particular to a work environment--between employee and employer or employee and customer. They are coached not only on their work behavior, but also on dressing appropriately for the job.

Phyllis Cort, current youth aide and United Nations liaison, has been assisting at more than twenty-one work sites for several years. Currently Cort is at Vassar College. She comments, "I have very much enjoyed working for a peace-keeping organization such as the United Nations. However, I get much more of a substantial reward from seeing the students come into this experience with some fear and trepidation, only to see them grow in their understanding. They bring themselves into the equation of the experience and discard the, 'I don't know, no and I can't', replacing it with, 'I can, I will, and I must!'" She recounts with delight how one of her students, who at first could not bring herself to speak, was hired by Walmart, starting her working career as a greeter, and has now been working there for the past eleven years.



The store manager of Big Lots in Wappingers Falls, Tom Schlegle, has been very impressed with Will Williams, a BOCES/Arlington High School student in Timothy White's class. He remarks how Williams has always done exactly what he's been asked. Schlegle approached Williams' youth aide, Patricia Hayden, with the idea of conducting a simulated interview. The store manager's evaluation of him: "He is a very nice young man, he dressed impeccably and he did a great job during his interview. He has been a wonderful help and it's about time he gets paid for it. He has earned it. He is hired!" Williams now joins the growing list of WBLP interns offered jobs as a result of their successful internship and hard work!



The Poughkeepsie-Arlington Rotary, TEG Federal Credit Union and Bridgeway Federal Credit Union honor students each month for their outstanding work at an awards luncheon. The staff of WBLP is also grateful for each of the participating employers. They honor them with an annual breakfast, presenting each employer with a certificate of appreciation.



Regardless of whether the student becomes fully employed or not, the WBLP program provides students with a wonderful experience. The contacts they have made and the learning experience will last a lifetime, no matter what their goals or objectives may be.

BOCES Youth Aide Rosemary Tanner comments, "The students in our program are great and they bring such a wonderful element of humanity to the work sites. They're not judgmental or pretentious; they are enthusiastic and they love working with people. They feel it's an honor to be given the task to accomplish. What employer would not want to hear that?"

The following students in the BOCES WBLP have been successfully employed at these work locations. This supervised job internship program currently has over 50 job sites, 60 student interns and 30 youth aides.

STUDENT	DISTRICT	BOCES TEACHER	YOUTH AIDE	EMPLOYER
Stephen Carcone	Graduated	Lisa Slagle	Rona Waxman Monica Lewis	Perkins
Mark Gomez	Arlington	Lisa Slagle	Claudia Dellaventura Robin Kubikowski Rona Waxman Maureen Dennett	McDonald's
Stephan Chamberlin	Wappingers	Lisa Slagle	Sonny Armeno Claudia Dellaventura	Pizza Hut
James Cornett	Wappingers	Lisa Slagle	Sue Carr Claudia Dellaventura	Houlihan & Lawrence
Joseph Yamouh	Arlington	Lisa Slagle	Claudia Dellaventura Phyllis Cort	Hannaford
Victoria Bechtler	Beacon	Lisa Slagle	Claudia Dellaventura Monica Lewis	Elant
Jonathan Degatano	Wappingers	Tim White	Phyllis Cort Claudia Dellaventura	Hannaford
Jaydon Pegram	Beacon	Lisa Slagle	Maureen Dennett Kathy Gately Marie Villa Sue Carr	Ruby Tuesday
Josh Roth	Pawling	Tim White	Betty Coffey	Dutchess Automotive

Dutchess BOCES
ALTERNATIVE AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

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