

Memorandum

To: Board of Trustees

From: Tracy Barill, Director of Education

Date: December 19, 2022

Subject: **Project SEARCH**

Origin: Susie Lee-Fernandes, Superintendent of Student Services

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide summary information regarding Project SEARCH.

Background

Project Search is an internationally successful 10-month transition-to-work program for young adults with developmental or intellectual disabilities. The primary objective is to secure competitive and meaningful employment for persons with disabilities. During their final year of high school, students will be fully immersed with a host business, gaining employment skills through a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on career training.

Project SEARCH is a licensed and Ministry of Education sanctioned program originating in the United States. Project SEARCH currently runs in nine school boards in Ontario: Grand Erie District School Board, Hamilton Wentworth District School Board, Halton District School Board, Halton Catholic District School Board, Waterloo Catholic District School Board, Thames Valley District School Board, Rainbow District School Board, Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board, and the Toronto District School Board. The attached document provides a brief overview of the program. More information about Project Search in Canada can be found on their website – [direct link](#).

In September 2021, DCDSB signed a Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA), Developmental Disabilities Pilot – Student Transitions, to explore the possibility of running Project SEARCH at DCDSB. During the 2021-2022 school year, extensive research and steps were taken to understand the goals and structure of the program and explore possible business partners.

A member of the Student Services Department attended the annual Project SEARCH Conference from July 25-29, 2022 in Baltimore Maryland. The conference provided an excellent opportunity for networking and significant information and learning was gained about how the program runs and the resources that are available.

DCDSB is currently on track to start the program in September 2023.

Information

Program Description: Students in their final year of high school, diagnosed with an intellectual and/or developmental disability will be immersed in a 10-month transition-to work program. Students may be working toward any certificate or diploma. The program would be facilitated by one Teacher and two Skills Trainers with a maximum of 10 students, who will be referred to as “Interns”. The program is structured around three internship rotations in a host business site for career exploration and job skills acquisition. Interns will receive feedback on a daily basis to ensure progress in their development and will be supported to finding quality employment one year post-graduation.

Business Host Site: DCDSB’s business host site is the Region of Durham and the internship placements will take place at one of the Region’s long-term care facilities. The role of the business host is to provide the classroom, internship placements, and on-the-job mentors. Students/interns would participate in classes and internship placements at the business host site.

Employment Service Provider (ESP): DCDSB and the Region of Durham have developed a partnership with the Abilities Centre who will be the Employment Service Provider. The Abilities Centre has written grants to secure salaries for Skills Trainers who will help to facilitate transit training and employment planning support at the host business site. After graduation, the ESP will also support job development and retention for interns.

Intern Criteria: Interns can be anywhere from age 17-21 years and in their last year of high school with the goal of moving straight to employment upon graduation. With appropriate accommodations, interns must be able to work towards using appropriate social and communication skills in the workplace, take direction and change behaviour as indicated, and use public transportation.

Benefits to Interns: Interns will experience a variety of work experiences within the host business site and acquire competitive, transferable, and marketable job skills. They will gain increased independence, confidence, and self-esteem supported through individualized coaching, instruction, and feedback. Through this program, interns will also develop important connections with community partners such as the Abilities Centre and adult service agencies.

Next Steps

Project SEARCH Durham Steering Committee: This committee continues to be developed and will support marketing to local schools and agencies, including information sessions for families, host businesses, schools, etc., help plan and implement the application process and Skills Assessment Day, along with transparent and timely communication with all applicants.

Business Advisory Committee (BAC): DCDSB in partnership with the Region of Durham and the Abilities Centre is in the process of developing a Business Advisory Committee (BAC) to broaden opportunities for employment for interns across a variety of industries. The BAC will help support access to resources and serve as a platform to further educate business professionals about the benefits of employing individuals with disabilities, serve as ambassadors to other companies, and discuss competencies and skills based on employer demands.

2022-2023 Highlights and Timelines

- November 2022 – Information sessions for Program Support, Guidance and Co-op Teachers, and Secondary Administrators
- December 2022 – Finalize job description and posting for Project SEARCH Teacher; school meetings to discuss candidates
- February 2023 – webpage and promotional materials ready
- March 2023 – Parent/Guardian Information Session; application packages available
- April 2023 – Application packages due
- May 2023 – Interviews and Skills Assessment Day; successful candidates informed
- August 2023 – Transit training
- September 2023 – Instruction begins at host business site

TB/SLF

Attachment: School-to-Work Transition Program



School-to-Work Transition Program

Project SEARCH: An Overview

An internationally successful 10-month transition-to-work program for young people with developmental or intellectual disabilities. During their final year in high school, students are fully immersed with a host business gaining employment skills through a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on career training.

Program Description

A maximum of 10 students, 1 Teacher and 2 Skills Trainers are immersed in the host business culture through a combination of classroom instruction and internship rotations for career exploration and job skills acquisition with continual feedback. Students are supported upon graduation to find quality employment and for one-year post-graduation.

The Host Business

A host business works in partnership with DCDSB to provide both the space for a classroom and internships (co-op placements) while also acting as a business liaison to promote the hiring of graduates to other local businesses.

Employment Service Provider (ESP)

An Employment Service Provider provides employment planning and support during the training year through 2 Skills Trainers (job coaches) that provide in-class and on-the-placement support. In the post-training year, the ESP provides employment support through job development (if needed) and job retention support.

Community Champions

Other community agencies and local businesses serve as community champions networking to support employment opportunities for graduates.

For More Information

Contact:

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Watch:

[Project Search Hamilton](#)

[Project SEARCH Halton](#)

[Project SEARCH Toronto Graduation](#)

