

School to Work

The successful transition of students with disabilities from school to work and full community participation is a major policy initiative within several federal agencies including the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Labor. In recent years, school to work transition has also become a growing emphasis for the Social Security Administration (SSA). Nationwide, there are over 6 million youth served under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 13% of the student population. During the 1980's, only 10% of the school population was identified as such, and the increase has been attributed to an increasing proportion of children identified as learning disabled. In Pennsylvania, (1996-1997), there were over 222,000 students with disabilities, slightly more than 12% of the school population.

The inclusion of students with disabilities in employment-related transition programs reflects an understanding of the difficult time which many have in finding a place in the workforce after high school. A follow-up conducted on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education (National Longitudinal Transition Study, 1995) indicates that after three years of exiting school, only 55% of students with disabilities are employed. These individuals have an average annual compensation of \$5,524. Nearly 17% of students with disabilities were pursuing academic postsecondary education, and 15% involved in vocational training.

Community-based learning is an essential component of career education for many students in special education. Through job shadowing, and skill enhancement and identifying activities planned and implemented by AHEDD, students learn about themselves, employer expectations, and career opportunities. Work experiences for youth with disabilities during high school helps them acquire jobs at higher wages after they graduate. Also, students who participate in occupational education and special education in integrated settings are more likely to be competitively employed than students who have not participated in such activities. (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Colley & Jamison, 1998; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Rogan, 1997)

AHEDD values individualized services and goals to promote a successful transition from high school to adult life as identified in each student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). AHEDD works with the IEP team to develop a comprehensive plan and develops an individual program to assist students with overcoming employment barriers, and to determine services needed to best support the student's IEP goals. In addition, AHEDD has implemented programs for groups of students concentrating on employability and task related skills, exposure to various vocations, through job-shadowing and presentations by local employers. We are committed to assisting students achieve their goals of greater independence and self-sufficiency in their community.