



Employment First Florida Success Stories: Employment Services

Integrating employment training and communication skills development

Introduction

The Employment First Florida Success Stories Series highlights examples of innovative employment services, innovative state agency employment practices, and individual employment success stories in Florida. The series is a product the EmployMe1st project, a joint project of the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services.

Description of the Practice

The Nassau County public school system offers several opportunities for transition age youth to develop their work skills. Two of these are the Hornet's Nest Café at Yulee High School and the Transition to Adult Program (TAP). Both the Café and TAP provide an opportunity to deliver functional speech and language instruction to students to support them to meet their communication goals while the students are developing on-the-job work experiences.

Speech and language practitioners work directly with students on-the-job to help them learn and practice employment related customer service skills and employment related vocabulary, and to develop problem solving language, financial skills, and team work skills. Practitioners support students to initially practice skills during traditional speech and language sessions and then provide on-the-job supports to shape and refine student skills in the moment. Additionally, the practitioners' experience in the field helps them to identify and develop pragmatic social goals and objectives that address the skills students' need to be successful in employment.

School district administrators and principals at individual high schools are an important part of the success of this strategy. School officials believe in and value the importance of developing employment and communication goals that are grounded in students' post-school goals outside of traditional special education settings was reported by practitioners as one element to making this strategy successful. Without their permission it would be very difficult for staff to integrate student goals in a practical way.

The focus on not just employment related communication but overall soft skills development benefits students not only at work but in all areas of their life. Most importantly as a result of the integration of employment and communication skills education, students are developing

skills in the setting in which they will be using them after exiting high school and this has increased students' soft employment skills as well as self-confidence and self-esteem as they transition to the work world.

Lessons learned

- *Make therapeutic goals authentic and relevant to real life.* By promoting speech and language instruction during work experience, rather than traditional therapy sessions, practitioners felt that students learning was deeper and more easily generalized to the world outside of school.
- *Integrate staff roles.* The partnership between special education, employment, and speech and language practitioners is an integral part to putting this strategy into practice. The partnership is focused on addressing student needs and breaking down silos between staff so that speech and language pathologists are a welcome part of the team that provides on-the-job supports.
- *Connect with school leaders.* School administrators have a deep understanding of the educational opportunities students with disabilities need to be successful in adulthood and support the use of this strategy.

For more information about the Hornet's Nest Café and TAP initiatives and the integration of communication and employment goals contact:

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