

Summer work experiences provide important opportunities for students to learn basic skills and work habits that are common across occupations. These work experiences may help students with disabilities to maintain or extend employment skills learned during the academic year. Despite the potential benefits of summer employment, most students with extensive support needs do not participate in work experiences during the summer (Carter et al., 2010; Carter et al., 2011; Trainor et al., 2008). To address this issue, there are several steps that transition personnel and community members can take to build capacity for engaging youth in these important career development experiences.

What Does It Mean to Build Capacity for Summer Employment?

Building capacity for summer employment refers to the process, steps, and activities that will increase or improve opportunities for students to obtain summer employment. There are a variety of activities that can help build capacity for summer employment (see Table 1). Some activities focus on the knowledge, skills, and experiences that prepare students for summer employment. Other activities emphasize actions that teachers, parents, and employers can undertake to create a community in which summer employment is accessible to all students.

Table 1

Activities to Build Capacity for Summer Employment

Students	Teachers	Parents	Employers
Engage in work experiences throughout the year	Create and maintain connections with surrounding business communities	Network with businesses in the community to build connections for child	Connect with local schools who support students with disabilities
Utilize volunteer opportunities to gain early work experiences	Provide early work experiences (paid and unpaid) for students with disabilities	Share responsibility for supporting child with planning for and finding employment	Learn how hiring students with disabilities has a positive impact on businesses
Participate in career preparation and exploration activities	Deliver high-quality transition related instruction (workplace readiness skills)	Collaborate with teacher on resource mapping viable work options for child	Participate in school events that promote hiring people with disabilities
Identify potential businesses for employment in the local area	Promote the creation of transition positions to support students over the summer	Identify potential supports child will need for summer employment	Provide WBLEs to build partnerships with schools
Learn important workplace readiness skills and set goals related to post-secondary employment	Educate the community on the importance of hiring students with disabilities	Support child by modeling social and self-determination skills important to employment	Consider customized employment options for students with significant disabilities

Note. Ideas taken from Carter et al. (2009), Carter et al. (2010), Carter et al. (2011), & Trainor et al. (2008).

What the Research Says

There are several key variables that predict positive summer employment outcomes for students with disabilities. Carter et al. (2010) found that students with extensive support needs (i.e., intellectual disability, autism, multiple disabilities) were more likely to have a summer job if they had participated in a work experience during the spring and their teachers expected them to obtain summer employment. Self-determination skills, social skills, and problem behavior were not associated with summer employment outcomes. In a subsequent study, Carter et al. (2011) investigated predictors of overall weekly summer earnings for students with high incidence disabilities (i.e., emotional and behavior disorders, mild intellectual disability, learning disabilities). Two variables predicted higher weekly summer earnings: having paid or unpaid spring work experiences and having employment related skills. More recently, Williams et al. (2019) examined variables associated with the number of work hours students receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) completed in the summer. Having a job related to the student's interests, a case manager who accompanied the student to the local work force office for the first visit, and prior work readiness training was predictive of students completing a higher number of work hours.

Although the existing research identifies several variables that predict positive summer employment outcomes, transition personnel face numerous challenges to creating summer jobs and supporting students in those jobs. Reported barriers include problems associated with having few paid staff available for job coaching during the summer months, lack of family support, few transportation options, employers' hesitancy to hire students with disabilities, limited availability of jobs, scheduling difficulties, and lack of student motivation (Carter et al., 2010; Trainor et al., 2008). Research into methods for overcoming these barriers and connecting students with summer employment is limited. Carter et al. (2009) developed an intervention

package that provided students with summer-focused planning, a community connector (from the school), and an employment liaison (from the community). The study found that students who received the intervention were four times more likely to have paid, community-based jobs in the summer and maintain their jobs throughout the summer than students who did not receive the intervention.

Guidelines for Practice

There are several strategies transition professionals can use to build capacity for summer employment (see Table 1). An important place to start is by creating a strong connection between the school and surrounding business community. Initial activities might include:

- Attending a local chamber of commerce meeting to highlight students' strengths and summer employment goals.
- Holding community conversations with students, families, teachers, service providers, and business managers to gather information about summer employment options.
- Engaging in resource mapping to compile information about formal and informal resources that could support students in employment.
- Embedding conversations about summer employment into existing IEP meetings (e.g., goals, interests, student/family connections with businesses).

In addition, prior research has found that providing students with work experiences during the spring and having supportive teachers who expect students to gain employment is associated with students obtaining summer employment. Employing these practices may increase the likelihood that students with extensive support needs are successful in finding summer work.

Additional Resources

Connecting Youth with Significant Disabilities to Summer Employment

www.youtube.com/watch?v=H66_M1oZmVY&feature=youtu.be

This ICTW video describes the value of summer employment, shares strategies for obtaining summer experiences, and identifies methods for supporting students to obtain summer work.

Community Resource Mapping Research Brief

ictw.illinois.edu/resources/research-briefs/other-topics/brief-community-resource-mapping

This ICTW research brief describes community resource mapping and how it can be used to identify resources in the community to support a student's transition.

References

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