



# Collaborating to Support Meaningful Work- Based Learning

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“Employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred outcome in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age citizens with disabilities, regardless of level of disability.”

APSE Statement on Employment First

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# How are we doing?



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The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) reports 17.9% of people with disabilities were employed compared to 62.8% of their peers without a disability.

Longitudinal data demonstrates that schools can improve employment outcomes for youth with disabilities through job readiness instruction. (Park & Bouck, 2018)

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# How can we improve?



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Data from the second National Longitudinal Transition Study indicate that high school employment experiences and parental expectations of a post-high school employment were the strongest predictors of post-secondary competitive employment.

Wehman P, Sima AP, Ketchum J, West MD, Chan F, Luecking R. Predictors of successful transition from school to employment for youth with disabilities. *J Occup Rehabil.* 2015 Jun;25(2):323-34. doi: 10.1007/s10926-014-9541-6. PMID: 25240394.

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# Texas A&M's Work-Based Learning Project



# Background



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- Funded by TWC and implemented by Texas A&M's CDD
  - Competitive application process
  - Public, private, and charter schools can apply.
  - Accept up to 30 projects per year
  - Applications are reviewed monthly by TWC and CDD staff.
  - Projects must provide authentic, integrated work experience for students with disabilities.
  - Recently renewed through the 2024-25 school year
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# Lessons Learned

# Build a Collaborative Team



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- Campus and district leadership
- Local business partner(s)
- VRC and Hireability Navigator
- Teachers and job coaches
- Parents
- CTE and campus organizations

1. Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources
  2. Architecture and Construction
  3. Arts, Audio/Video Technology, and Communications
  4. Business, Marketing, and Finance
  5. Education and Training
  6. Energy
  7. Health Science
  8. Hospitality and Tourism
  9. Human Services
  10. Information Technology
  11. Law and Public Service
  12. Manufacturing
  13. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
  14. Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics
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# Know the local labor market



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- Who's hiring in your community?
  - What are your growth industries?
  - Where are the hidden careers?
  - Are there any disability-friendly employers?
  - What transferable skills can you teach in your WBL project?
  - [Conduct employer informational interviews](#)
  - Work with your Hireability Navigator and VR Counselor.
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# Conduct Market Research



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- Identify an unmet need
  - Choose consumable items or replicable services
  - Look for ways to sell items in bulk
  - Move beyond selling to school staff
  - Avoid competing with other district projects or organizations
  - Develop a marketing plan
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# Think Like an Entrepreneur



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S	W	O	T
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Things you do well</li><li>• Unique products or services</li><li>• Internal resources such as your expertise</li><li>• Assets you already have (space, time, equipment, etc.)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Things you lack</li><li>• Things your competitors do better than you</li><li>• Limited resources</li><li>• Lack of clarity, vision, etc.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Underserved markets</li><li>• Growth industries</li><li>• Emerging markets</li><li>• Limited competition</li><li>• Visibility and connections in the community</li><li>• Positive reputation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong competitors</li><li>• Regulatory limitations</li><li>• Negative press or poor image in the community</li><li>• Small potential market</li><li>• One-time purchases</li></ul>



# Business Plan

Create a shared focus and a foundation for growth.

- Mission
  - Goals
  - Products and/or Services
  - Target Market
  - Projected Income
  - Projected Cost
  - Plan for Program Evaluation
  - Plan for Growth and Expansion
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## Use Industrial Equipment and Create Quality Products

### Industrial Equipment:

- PPE
- Point of sale systems
- Commercial-grade equipment
- Picture-supported customer interfaces
- Industrial accommodations such as [Recipeasy](#)

### Quality Products:

- No one should be purchasing your goods or services out of pity or to be nice.
  - Create managerial and quality control positions.
  - Seek honest feedback from customers.
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# Add Complexity



- Create job descriptions.
  - Have students apply and interview for positions.
  - Include all aspects of the business.
  - Watch for any tasks completed by adults. What accommodations would enable students to handle them?
  - Have students train their replacements before moving on to new positions.
  - Have students set individual and workplace goals and track their progress.
  - Conduct employee evaluations.
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# Involve Parents



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- Family expectations are one of the strongest predictors of post-secondary success.
  - Hold informational meetings in the spring for prospective students and in the fall to set expectations.
  - Use families' business and community connections.
  - Provide photo, video, and in-person proof of students' abilities and workplace accommodations.
  - Help families connect with VR services.
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# Plan to move beyond the campus



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Use the labor market analysis, input from your Hireability Navigator, and business contacts we discussed earlier to plan paid work experience, internships, and CIE.

Work together to plan individual work experiences, rather than group assignments.

Create written agreements for any unpaid work experience.

Talk with your VRC to see what skill gaps interfere with success. Provide Pre-ETS training and hold your student workers to that standard.

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# Connect With Us



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- We are here to support projects before, during and after the application phase.
  - We can brainstorm ideas
  - We can connect you with schools that have similar projects
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