



Garrett Center

SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Finding a Job Coach for Work-Based Learning Programs in Special Education

One of the most difficult tasks is that of hiring a job coach for work-based learning programs under special education. The role of a job coach, who provides services to students with disabilities on an Individual Education Plan/Program, is conducted in the community as well as potentially on the child's secondary campus. Services, provided on a secondary campus, are under the direct supervision of multiple educators: the teacher of record, the special education department chair, and the campus principal. Services provided in the community are conducted under the direct and indirect supervision of the teacher of record, which is usually the Vocational Adjustment Coordinator (VAC) or a special education administrator from the central office special education department.

Work-based learning programs are designed for students who require intensive training and support needs that cannot be met in general education career and technical education (CTE) programs, even with support. According to the American's with Disabilities Act, a job coach is a person who works to train an individual on work-related behaviors, specific work skills related to employability, and/or trains an individual new to employment on daily job tasks and functions of the new job. The job coach may be called back to the job to train if there are new responsibilities or the individual begins to experience difficulties with existing work tasks.

The philosophy of the position of a job coach is to:

- Provide small group instruction such as on CBVI sites or one-on-one for students on either CBVI sites or in paid employment.

It is the role of the job coach, with assistance from the WBL teacher, to:

- Identify how the student learns best;
- The demands of the work environments for each student;
- The teaching strategies that best meet the student's learning styles;
- The support needs required for each student; and
- Collect data to determine progress and make needed instructional and/or support adjustments

Attributes of an Effective Job Coach

The following are attributes of an effective job coach that should be considered in the hiring process. The individual should possess:

- Good communication skills to interact with students, parents, teachers, and community partners.
- A positive attitude that sees strengths instead of weaknesses, possibilities instead of limitations, and windows of opportunity that promote student success.
- Professional demeanor as the individual is in the community representing the district, the special education department, the high school campus, and the field of education.
- Energy. The potential job coach should exhibit an energy that indicates the individual is committed to results, is a self-starter, and does not require direct supervision to meet the roles and responsibilities of the job coach position.
- Problem solving skills that have been evidenced in past experiences.
- The ability to instill in students, self-determination skills that facilitate employability.
- An understanding not only the roles and responsibilities of the job, but also the WBL district procedures, and district policies.

Paraprofessionals as Job Coaches

A paraprofessional may serve as a job coach in Work-Based Learning Programs as documented in the Texas Administrative Code. The following is the specific TAC code addressing paraprofessionals as job coaches.

§89.1131. Qualifications of Special Education, Related Service, and Paraprofessional Personnel.

(c) Paraprofessional personnel must be certified and may be assigned to work with eligible students, general and special education teachers, and related service personnel. Educational aides may also be assigned to assist students with special education transportation, serve as a job coach, or serve in support of community-based instruction. Educational aides paid from state administrative funds may be assigned to special education clerical or administrative duties.

Work-Based Learning in the Community

Work-based learning in the community has 4 distinct components [*Improving Secondary Education and Transition for Youth With Disabilities: Handbook for Implementing a Comprehensive Work-Based Learning Program According to the Fair Labor Standards Act. (3rd Ed. Feb. 2005). Minneapolis, MN: NSTTAC, University of Minnesota.*]: vocational exploration, vocational assessment, vocational training, and paid employment.

Vocational Exploration:

During vocational exploration, students rotate through a variety of employment settings designed to provide work-related experiences that represent potential employment opportunities in the community. During the exploration activities, students can experience a variety of employment options to make decisions about strengths, needs, preferences and interests based on the activities, tasks, and work environments of each WBL site. It is key to ensure WBL site development reflects community employment options to prevent the collection of data that is irrelevant to future needs and employment options.

Vocational Assessment:

The vocational assessment component of WBL is designed to collect information that can be used in the development of IEP Goals and Objectives. It is also used to collect information using tasks analysis, work-related behavior checklists, and other data to determine training and support needs. The collection of assessment data on WBL sites is used to determine IEP progress and grades for report cards.

Vocational Training:

The job coach and/or WBL teacher conduct vocational training. Collaboration with training site managers and employers to be involved in the student's training and support needs is critical to the future success of the student. The collaborative model between the school and business enables students to learn to interact with co-workers and utilize natural support systems within work environments. The purpose of vocational training is to provide instruction and support to teach students work behaviors and specific skills to enhance employability.

Paid Employment:

Although students may move through the sequence of non-paid WBL to employment, the program for each student must be individualized. While some students may require non-paid training, others may be able to move into the VAC paid employment program that provides less intensive support than the non-paid training sites but requires more support than the general education paid employment coop.

Job Coaches Provide Direct and Indirect Support:

Direct and indirect supports are provided to students who participate on WBL non-paid, while indirect support is provided to students on VAC paid training sites. Students who participate in the general education work coop are also provided indirect support. The type of support and amount of support needs are to be determined by ARD/IEP Committee decision. Although the supervision of students in the WBL program may be shared with the employees of the business, the supervision remains the primary responsibility of the school district.

Direct Supervision

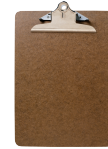
- One-on-one instructional time
- Small group instructional time
- Observation in close proximity

Indirect Supervision

- Observation in close proximity at frequent intervals
- Observation in close proximity at infrequent intervals designed to fade support
- Observation from a distance designed to provide support
- Observation by business employees who provide feedback to the VAC or Job Coach

It is important to note that as a student becomes independent, if the student is able to master the skills and requires little or no support, non-paid training becomes unpaid employment, which is in violation of the Department of Labor Child Labor Laws. When a student reaches this level of success, the VAC or WBL teacher must move the student to enhanced training options and expectations and/or go back to the ARD/IEP Committee to consider the appropriateness of a paid employment program.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Job Coach In Work-Based Learning Programs



Responsibilities

1. Work collaboratively with campus special education staff and VAC teacher to plan WBL instruction, assessment, data collection, and progress reporting.
2. Analyze the work environment for layout and physical design, along with skills and behaviors related to training expectations.
3. Develop ecological inventories and task analysis related to the work-based training for each student for the purpose of data collection.
4. Provide work-related training aligned with the student's IEP.
5. Collect and analyze documentation related to instruction and performance for the purpose of re-teaching, providing appropriate supports, and/or making adjustments to the WBL site, teaching, supports, or placement.
6. Provide on-going supervision of students in the WBL setting.
7. Communicate with students, teachers, VAC, employer, and student's co-workers.
8. Work to move from job coach assistance to co-worker and/or employer assistance.
9. Work with the VAC to move student from training to paid employment.
10. Adhere to district expectations for work ethics and behaviors at school and in the community.

Roles

1. Arrive at the community training location prior to or with the WBL students.
2. Develop work schedules for the WBL students.
3. Teach WBL student's work-related behaviors and routines.
4. Collaborate with business employer and employees to integrate into the business routines, activities, and social events.
5. Work with each student to increase skill acquisition, work speed, work accuracy, and independence
6. Work with the employer and co-workers to transition training and supports to the natural training methods and employee supports within the business.
7. Work to identify the student's interests and preferences related to postsecondary employment.
8. Work with the VAC to move the student from training to paid employment related to the student's postsecondary goals for employment.
9. For students in paid employment, work with the student to increase the job responsibilities, skills, and behavior competencies for the specific purpose of increasing work hours, wages, benefits, and employment opportunities.

Job Coaching and Paid Employment

Once the student obtains a job, the WBL Teacher/VAC and Job Coach analyze the requirements of the job site several days before the student begins work. This allows the staff to develop a training strategy for the job coach in preparation for the student to begin his/her job. The job coach that first works with the student is an employee of the district. It is the goal of district WBL program to teach the family to support the job monitoring and maintenance so it does not fall apart once the district is no longer in the picture after high school.

A second action taken is to identify adult agencies that will help with job monitoring and maintenance after the student leaves public school. It is essential that the role of the job coach be as natural as possible and fade support as quickly as possible. The presence of a job coach is an unspoken message to other employees in the business that the newly hired individual requires special knowledge and skills in order to train the person with a disability and existing business employees or trainers are not sufficient to meet the training needs of the individual with a disability. This may have a tendency to decrease interaction among co-workers, as well as social relationships and cooperative support among co-workers. If at all possible, it is preferred that the newly hired student be trained by existing store staff with the district staff as a co-trainer or simply "support on the side". This allows the business to see they are able to train and support the new hire, and build's on-site capacity for the time when the school district is no longer in the picture. It also immediately puts the WBL student as a member of the business and not separated from "typical co-workers". If the student is to be a meaningful and valued employee in the business, then start the paid employment using strategies that promote employment normalcy.

Additional on-the-job support issues that must be considered are:

- Changes in managers;
- Changes in co-workers who serve as natural supports to the student; and
- Change in job responsibility or task location.

Job Monitoring for Students in Paid Employment:

The traditional method of job monitoring within public education work-based learning programs is for the case manager and/or job coach to make visits to the job to observe the student in the work environment and meet with his/her supervisor regarding progress. This typically continues until the student graduates or ages out of public school. If agency connections were made and the graduating student is the client of an agency, the adult agency may take over the job coaching and monitoring activities. However, in the real world that often does not happen because adult services are not entitlements. The availability of support after public school will depend upon state and local budget constraints of the service provider, eligibility of the client, and availability of staff to meet the support needs. There are no entitlements after public school so the young adult may qualify for support but if the money or personnel is not available, the need goes un-met.

Transitioning students from paid supports to natural supports provides the same system all adults use to meet the needs of everyday life and the world of work. “No man is an island” (John Donne). Most adults have some type of support system at work whether it is built into the system, like the mentor system for new teachers, or whether it is an informal network of friends and colleagues. For the student with a disability, the family typically remains a strong component of the young adult’s support system. This includes immediate and extended family. If the student moves into a supervised apartment or group home, another type of support system becomes available.

To move into natural monitoring system, the WBL teacher/VAC or Job Coach must teach the student to monitor his or her own progress. There are several components to self-monitoring:

- Determine the self-evaluation process
- Determine the frequency of the self-evaluation
- Develop self-evaluation tools specific to the job
- Identify the individual(s), besides the student, who will provide feedback
- Teach the student how to interpret the feedback and who to report the progress report to (example: the job coach and parent)
- Teach the student to celebrate the positives and develop an intervention plan for the areas that “are not working”

Resources for WBL Teachers/VAC and Job Coaches

The following are regional and Internet resources for WBL Teachers/VAC and Job Coaches:

- The Education Resource Center (ESC) Transition Specialist and WBL Specialist
- Council of Exceptional Children’s (CEC) Division of Career Development and Transition (DCDT): www.dcdt.org
- Texas Workforce: <http://www.twc.state.tx.us/siteindex/twbsite.html>
- Achieve Texas: www.achievetexas.org
- Texas Transition Network: www.transitionintexas.org
- Career Technical Special Populations Center: <http://ctsp.tamu.edu/>