

Using the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan In Transition Planning Activities for Students with Disabilities

Quality *work-based learning experiences* can be a key part of transition planning for students with disabilities. Through work-based learning experiences, students have an opportunity to learn about various career areas and try different work styles, find out what type of work they enjoy, find out how they learn best in a workplace setting, and find out what natural supports are available. Students learn and practice basic foundation skills and begin to develop life-long career skills.

For all students, each work-based learning experience should be seen as part of a larger process of career development. Work-based learning program staff can work with employers to shape job descriptions so that students can practice a variety of skills while also learning about future career options.

Students with disabilities may require supports or accommodations in order to be successful in the job. Work-based learning program staff can work with the student and with a teacher or other person familiar with the student to identify “natural supports” or reasonable accommodations. Supports and accommodations may include pre-employment workshops, weekly workshops during the work experience, additional or modified job training and coaching, a person to “go to” as problems arise, adaptive technology or reasonable modifications in the job description.

In Massachusetts, schools start a transition planning process for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) beginning at age 14. The Transition Planning Form (TPF) identifies the student’s postsecondary vision, disability-related needs and an action plan. The TPF document, along with information from the student’s IEP, can provide helpful background and insights for planning a work-based learning experience. Additionally, insights from the work experience may be used as feedback to help to shape the next update of the student’s transition plan.

Online Resources: When developing a work experience and writing a Work-Based Learning Plan, it is important to focus on a student’s abilities and vision rather than on any disabilities. Planning should focus on student’s short-term and long-term goals, work interests, skills (what the student can do well) and any accommodations or supports needed, rather than on what the student “can’t do.” The online resource page includes readings on identifying natural supports, planning reasonable accommodations, using “People First” language, and other topics helpful for program staff.

Online resources are available at:
<http://resources21.org/transitionworkexp>

The *Work-Based Learning Plan (WBLP)* is useful as a planning document while developing the job, as a teaching tool for opening up conversations with the student, and as an evaluation tool for providing ongoing evaluation and feedback.

- The *Job Description* provides an overview of the job, including job duties and (optionally) on-the-job training.
- *Section 1: Foundation Skills* identifies the skills common to all careers. It is helpful to use this list of foundation skills as a guide when developing pre-employment workshops and materials.
- *Section 2: Career and Workplace-Specific Skills* provides an opportunity to identify skills specific to the work experience and to the student’s career development and transition goals. Examples are suggested below.
- *Section 3: Performance Review* can be used to structure feedback and goal setting meetings regularly throughout the work experience, with the frequency of meetings to be decided by the program staff, supervisor and student.

Skill	Tasks/Descriptions
Career-Specific Skills...	Skills such as using relevant equipment or technology, performing specific job tasks, etc. The WBLP may provide a fairly specific “task analysis” of relevant skills and tasks or a more general overview.
Customer Service	Identifying internal and external customers. Understanding customer needs and providing high quality service to meet those needs.
Problem Solving	Systematically identifying problems and identifying possible solutions.
Self-Advocacy	Finding and using natural supports in the workplace.
Professionalism / Workplace Behavior	Being able to describe the style of behavior expected in the workplace. Understanding policies and rules relevant to the workplace.
Workplace Communication	Learning and using vocabulary relevant to the workplace. Using a speaking style suitable for the workplace.
Career Exploration	Describing the work you are currently doing. Observing other jobs in the workplace. Reflecting on what type of work you enjoy. Identifying your work values and interests.
Other	Other skills may be identified as well. Skills that are already identified in Section 1 may (optionally) be repeated here if it will be helpful to provide additional emphasis and explanation.

