

Youth with disabilities are much more likely than their same-aged peers to drop out of school and to be unemployed and to experience poverty as adults.

How do you avoid that outcome?

The most prominent factors show to be associated with successful post-school employment outcomes are the completion of a high school diploma and paid and unpaid work experiences during the last years of high school. Research has shown that youth with disabilities who participate in work experiences, especially paid work, while in high school, are significantly more likely to hold jobs after they exit school than students who didn't.

To ensure that your child is provided appropriate and rich work opportunities, here are some questions you need to be asking at your child's IEP meetings. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions (well ... almost). The point is for you to become aware of your school district's activities regarding a "work for everyone" agenda and to know where you need to push your advocacy for your child.

1. Does the school have a dedicated job/transition counselor who works with youth with disabilities? If not, how is this task accomplished?
2. How does the school use a variety of work opportunities with youth -- things like volunteering, job shadowing, internships, general work experiences, and customized work experiences?
3. How are parents informed regarding work/transition planning needs and processes?
4. Who is responsible for identifying an employer/job site for a student? (Hint: it can't be the parents.)
5. How many different work sites/opportunities do students go through (i.e. are they limited to one experience or are there multiple placements)?
6. What are the employers currently serving the school's students and what kind of jobs are being done by these students?
7. What is the range of hours which students work at these settings?
8. How is transportation provided to get the student to the job site? (Hint: It's the school's responsibility.)
9. How does the school develop new employer relationships in the community?
9. How does the school ensure that the students' interests mesh with the job sites at which they're placed? What is the assessment process used to determine an appropriate job placement?
10. What is the grade or age at which experiential work experiences begin for the school's students? Is it JUST their last year in school? Is that enough?
11. What is the nature of the supports provided to the students while on the job site? Who pays for and provides them? (School? VR?)
12. For children with significant behavioral issues - how does the school specifically prepare them for work and then support them at job sites?

13. What is the nature of the disabilities of the students doing work experiences (i.e. are they placing students with more significant cognitive, physical and mental disabilities)?