Preparation of High School Students with Disabilities for Employment

E-Connect is a mentoring program that utilizes e-mail and school-supervised face-to-face meetings to connect high school students with disabilities with employees from local companies. These local companies and their employees represent a full range of careers and offer students the opportunity to learn about the skills necessary for future employment. E-Connect was developed at the University of Minnesota’s Institute on Community Integration, and implementation funded by Pathways to Employment.

How it works...
• Schools connect with local employers to form a mentoring partnership, with employees committing to spend a short period of time weekly corresponding with students via e-mail.
• Teachers guide and monitor the process, integrating the mentoring experience into class activities and into career exploration and awareness.
• Several times during the program, mentors and students meet face-to-face at structured, school-sponsored visits; one at the business and twice at the school.

Our philosophy...
• E-Connect sees students with disabilities looking forward to learning at school, developing social competence through mentoring relationships with caring adults, and developing plans for their careers.
• We see schools forming dynamic partnerships with employers, forging new community collaborations, and increasing the opportunities for competitive employment for youth with disabilities.
• We see students engaged in a mentoring relationship, learning about employment related to skills which they can take with them into the world of work.
• We see mentors in communities immersed in sharing their gifts, experiences, humor, encouragement, and career knowledge while their mentees awaken to new possibilities in their lives.
• We see employers and community members learning more about the capabilities of youth with disabilities while youth gain the skills and confidence to strive with determination toward their highest goals.

How electronic mentoring differs from traditional mentoring...
• Communication occurs mostly through e-mail
• The mentoring relationship is time-limited
• Screening and monitoring procedures differ
• Mentors can usually engage in e-mentoring during their work day
• E-Connect is curriculum-based mentoring—each week the teacher posts questions relevant to career and work for the mentor and mentee to discuss over e-mail. In the face-to-face visits,
E-Connect also includes unstructured interactions in which mentor and mentee can get to know each other and discover common interests.

The E-Connect model includes...
- One-to-one mentor matches of limited duration
- Mentoring within the context of a school setting
- Partnerships between schools, communities, and employers
- Oversight by a program coordinator, teacher, and employer-liaison
- Training for all participants provided by a program coordinator
- A flexible model that can be adapted to the needs of each school and each company
- A youth development approach to build resiliency and self-reliance
- A career and work emphasis

For more information on E-Connect contact:

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