

# SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Recruitment Super Strategies

Introduction

## WHO ARE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?

The term “disability” means with respect to an individual... a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such an individual, a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment. (The term “impairment” does not include characteristics of or predisposition to illness or disease). For the purpose of Perkins special populations, an individual with disabilities can be defined as an individual who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the employment position (or academic program) that such individual holds or desires to hold. Consideration shall be given to the employer’s judgment as to what functions of a job are essential, and if an employer has prepared a written description before advertising or interviewing applicants for the job, this description shall be considered evidence of the essential functions of the job. (Section 3 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 2010 (42 U.S.C. 12102)).<sup>1</sup>

When designing recruitment and retention efforts for students with disabilities it is important to consider the wide range of students that qualify under this category and the unique barriers they face. Do not limit your efforts to removing barriers for just one type of disability and ensure you consider potential situations that may arise.

Recruiting learners with disabilities into Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs can be challenging due in part to the myths and stereotypes held by instructors, parents, and/or learners themselves about the ability of individuals with disabilities, the requirements of CTE programs, and individual’s ability to meet those requirements. When recruiting for CTE programs, it is critical to first consider the learner as an individual with personal strengths and interests. Then proceed to providing appropriate academic support, self-advocacy, and skill development instruction. Simply having support services and advertising them is not enough to affect recruitment of students with disabilities. Effective recruitment requires a multilayer approach to identify students with disabilities, reach them with your message, reduce barriers to their postsecondary enrollment, and meet the needs of other stakeholders that can assist in recruitment and retention of those students.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Research has found that the determining factors in the college selection process for students using wheelchairs were the academic majors available at the university, the physical accessibility of the campus, and a strong office of disability services. Independence was key to successful transition to college environment. Self-advocacy was also highlighted as a key factory in college success. <sup>2</sup>

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educational  
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Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support,  
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# SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

## Recruitment Super Strategies

## Recommendations

A multilayer recruitment strategy should develop relationships with key stakeholders to identify students with disabilities for recruitment and provide information or training on the benefits of Career and Technical Education that overcomes stereotype threat. These relationships foster a productive recruitment network that will be more effective than advertising alone.

Seek out assistance from potential recruiting partners.

### Secondary schools

- Multiple gatekeepers can pose difficulties. Programs should develop strong relationships with school administration, staff, and faculty.
- Use students' word-of-mouth as a mechanism for spreading the recruitment message.

### Parent's groups

- Reach out to major organizations and face-to-face or online support groups.
- Include parents in recruitment and career exploration activities to encourage word-of-mouth recruitment.
- Participate in professional conferences for secondary education and special education professionals in order to engage with industry professionals with access to students during their decision making and transition periods.

### Current Students with disabilities

- Attempt to use students in recruiting efforts formally or informally. Students with disabilities can provide a more honest assessment to other potential students and actively demonstrate that all students can succeed in CTE programs.

### Adult Education (AE) programs

- Students with disabilities are statistically more likely to drop out of high-school. Develop partnerships with AE programs at your institution and around the community to assist in identifying students with disabilities that can be funneled into your CTE recruitment pipeline.
- Provide AE programs or organizations with information relevant to disability services you provide.

Create targeted recruitment materials.

- Design content to send the message that students with disabilities belong in CTE because they are capable and have the necessary talent, not the message of "if they have talent... then they belong."
- Publicize and strategically disseminate marketing material that supports CTE programs by using various forms of media that potential students are likely to access. Social media, email, website marketing as well as more traditional mediums of TV, radio, and newspapers.
  - ✓ Ensure electronic media is designed in accessible formats.
- Include photos and images of individuals with disabilities in recruitment materials.
- Provide materials to members of your recruitment network.
- Publicize support services and presence of disability resource centers.
  - ✓ Presence of disability services are a key factor in students with disabilities decision making process related to postsecondary institutions.
- Encourage all students to explore CTE fields and make decisions separate from stereotypes or preconceived notions.
- Establish a center with flexible hours where learners may access computerized career information software to assist them in determining their interests and aptitudes.
- Present a realistic picture of the skills involved to work in a field. Assumptions about skills needed for a career can act as a barrier even if they are untrue.

### SOURCES:

<sup>1</sup> Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act S. 250, 109th Cong., 6 (2006) (enacted). Print

<sup>2</sup> Wessel, Roger, Darolyn Jones, Christina Blanch, and Larry Markle. "Preenrollment Considerations of Undergraduate Wheelchair Users and Their Post-enrollment Transitions." *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability* 28, no. 1 (2015): 57-71.

# SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

## Retention Super Strategies

## Introduction

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Studies identified six critical areas where students with disabilities are disadvantaged:

- Study skills,
- Organizational skills,
- Social interactions,
- Specific academic areas with reading and written composition being the most frequent,
- Low self-esteem and,
- Higher school dropout rates.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Research has found that faculty members’ unwillingness to make accommodations and lack of accessibility were primary reasons for student’s with disabilities’ withdrawal from postsecondary education. In fact, this sample of students with disabilities reported that “laboratory instructors” were the least accommodating of all faculty and students with disabilities believed they were seen as an “inconvenience” in laboratory settings.<sup>2</sup>

This study illustrates the importance of seeking the support of the larger college community in serving special populations. Training faculty and staff on disability services and the value of accommodations for students with disabilities is a useful strategy for fostering this support.

# SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

## Retention Super Strategies

## Recommendations

Retention efforts for students with disabilities can be divided into two broad categories: providing supports services and using accessible instructional strategies. Specific approaches must vary according to the individual disability encountered, however, making use of recommended strategies may provide benefits for all students, including those with disabilities that are undisclosed.

- Examine the possibility of using alternative instructional strategies to increase learner persistence in the program. Examples include Direct Instruction, Universal Design, and Strategy Instruction.
  - ✓ Direct Instruction: ensure equitable standards and accessible options for all students.
  - ✓ Universal design: a method in which the instructor
    - uses multiple means of representation to provide varied means of acquiring knowledge,
    - uses multiple means of expression to allow students to demonstrate their knowledge in various ways and formats,
    - and uses multiple means of engagement to make use of student's interests.
- ✓ Strategy Instruction: a method that teaches students about learning strategies and increases their ability to self-regulate, self-monitor, and self-evaluate.
- Create a challenging, non-stigmatizing learning environment that meets the individual learner's needs.
- Provide learner support programs such as group discussions, individual meetings, active mentoring, core academic support, and other community service activities.
- Implement comprehensive retention initiatives to target at-risk CTE learners that include orientation and peer-mentoring programs.
- Send introductory letters to **all** learners and inform them of available support services (i.e., childcare, transportation, and disability services).
- Engage in the interactive process of determining what other accommodations are needed to achieve successful retention.
- Offer support services that include: counseling services, reading remediation, tutoring, attendance monitoring, or after-school clubs.
- Provide professional development for instructors and advising staff to allow them to provide better service to students with disabilities.
  - ✓ Provide incentives to make use of the knowledge base on instructing and serving students with disabilities.

### SOURCES:

<sup>1</sup> Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act S. 250, 109th Cong., 6 (2006) (enacted). Print

<sup>2</sup> Hill, J. L. "Speaking Out: Perceptions of Students with Disabilities Regarding Adequacy of Services and Willingness of Faculty to Make Accommodations." *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability* 11, no. 1, 1-13.