



# Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services

Vocational Rehabilitation

[www.okdrs.gov](http://www.okdrs.gov)

To Whom It May Concern,

The Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) has many services to offer to help students and youth with disabilities prepare for competitive integrated employment, some of which are in partnership with local school districts, private schools, charter schools, and CareerTechs. One of our leading services is School Work Study (SWS) where students with disabilities are provided paid work experiences during the school day, evenings, weekends, and during school breaks. Experiences take place within the school district and in the community. The success of this program is due to the partnerships we have with all of the schools who implement the program and the various relationships they have begun to develop in the community for their students. Research demonstrates students with disabilities who have a paid work experience sometime during their high school years tend to have better employment outcomes after they complete high school.

Over the last three full school years (i.e., FY 2015-2017), DRS has paid **\$3,425,565** in wage reimbursements for students in SWS. Now, let's see how many students benefitted from that service—**2,547!** That is an average of **\$1,603** in wages earned per student and **\$13,648** reimbursed to each school/district. However, only **251** school partners contract with DRS to provide that service. Imagine how many more students with disabilities could benefit from this paid work experience and how much more money could be going back to local communities if more schools partnered with us to provide SWS.

SWS is merely one of many services DRS offers. There are others that schools can choose to help coordinate with us for students with disabilities. One such example is our Work Adjustment Training (WAT) program in which students with the most significant disabilities are taught foundational work skills, pre-employment transition skills, and spend time in the community learning more about the world of jobs that are available. Students participate from one to three hours daily, and DRS provides payment to the school in the amounts of \$125, \$250, or \$375 per month, depending on the amount of time students are authorized for the service. The funds are then put back into further developing the school's WAT program, purchasing transition resources and activities, paying for gas to take students into the community, etc.

DRS is also the lead agency in the development of Project SEARCH sites in Oklahoma. Project SEARCH is a program in which DRS partners with the University of Oklahoma National Center for Disability Education and Training, a school partner, a business partner, and a local community rehabilitation provider to provide unpaid internships at the host businesses to students with the most significant disabilities. The program lasts the duration of a typical school year, and, instead of reporting to their high school or CareerTech each day for class, selected students report as a group to the host business. The day consists of group employability skills instruction, followed by at least four hours of independent internships in a designated area of the host business, and ending with time in the afternoon for additional instruction, debrief, or reflection. Students are out

*Empower Oklahomans with Disabilities*

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on each of their rotations for ten weeks, have a week of additional instruction and independent living skills activities, followed by two more rotations in different areas of the business again 10 weeks each, with a week in between for additional instruction.

Finally, other ways in which schools can partner with DRS to provide programs and services to students with disabilities so they can learn pre-employment transition skills include:

1. **Tech-Now, Inc.**—a community-based enrichment program designed to provide technology skills training to Oklahoma high school and middle school students with disabilities, prepare them for postsecondary education/training and employment, and connect them with state and federal agencies for necessary supports. Students work on projects, such as desktop publishing, computer animations, and digital media production. Students gain valuable technology skills while showing improvement in teamwork, leadership, self-esteem, and conflict resolution. Tech-Now meets the International Society for Technology Education standards and is offered for class elective credit toward graduation.
2. **iJobs Sumer Work Experience Program**— a summer work training and experience program for high school students with disabilities that typically runs from the beginning of June to the end of July. The program occurs during the months of June and July. Students participate in one week of employability instruction and independent living skills in the classroom before beginning their part-time jobs. Students work up to 25 hours per week for a business in their local community in an area of their individual interest, and earn a paycheck. The employer submits weekly progress reports and time sheets. Students return to the classroom ½ day per week to discuss their work experience and to receive further employability instruction.
3. **Working On the Wichitas (WOW!)**— is a summer camp and work experience opportunity for high school students and young adults with disabilities who have an open case with the DRS or is an active participant with COWIB. After safety orientation each week, the participants spend the week working with the park ranger, WOW! staff, and volunteers doing such things as painting gates, picking up trash, clearing hiking trails, or moving invasive species. Students spend 1/3 of their day working, 1/3 doing employability skills activities, and 1/3 of the day in leisure activities. They camp overnight all week in tents preparing all meals by grill or campfire. Students received hourly pay for the work performed at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. This program can be replicated anywhere across the state.
4. **STEM Camps**—DRS partner with Tech-Now, Inc. to challenge students with disabilities at Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) camps in different locations across the state. During these three-day camps, students ages 14-18 used computers and related technologies to design, build and race multiple gravity vehicles and document their project development with digital cameras and video production software. The trainings culminate with the students racing the cars they built themselves.

In an effort to expand our service delivery and achieve statewideness, DRS is seeking your partnership to expand existing programs and develop new programs in your local areas. If you are interested in more information or having a conversation, please contact Larry Hartzell, Programs Field Representative, at (405) 635-2759 or by email to [lhartzell@okdrs.gov](mailto:lhartzell@okdrs.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KO', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kimberly Osmani, Transition Coordinator