

Wyoming School-University

Partnership

Wyoming Transition Programs Case Study

Park County School District #1

Powell, Wyoming

Microcertification Program

Program Goals and Inception

Powell High School's Microcertification Program began when the special education director and special education teacher reflected on how they wanted students on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to be successful in the workplace. They decided to redesign their already existing work experience program to have more coaching and intensive feedback. Before starting the Microcertification Program, they realized that a lot of students on IEPs were having trouble finding jobs. They designed the program to provide a systematic approach to meeting the needs of students on IEPs. The first group of students started the Microcertification Program in August of 2018.

The Microcertification Program goals are to provide students on IEPs with a realistic work experience that enables students to develop a positive work ethic and values. The ultimate goal of the program is for students to become career ready and to empower students to focus on career pathways that allow students to utilize and apply their academic and professional skills. The goals of the program are also to integrate academics with work-based experience and increase student achievement.

Program Description

Each student on an IEP must complete the Microcertification Program as an upperclassman. Students get paired with community business and work as a class on professional skills. The students earn a microcertification in an area of their choice by completing 40 hours of work-based experience in combination with learning professional skills in the classroom. Professional skills highlighted in the program include communication, conflict resolution, resume building, applying for jobs, interviewing skills, and presentation skills.

Students are placed in working environments in a way that is similar to applying for a job. They work like a regular employee while learning how to communicate in the workplace. The district has two job coaches that are employed by the district and help with the program. The job coaches can work one-on-one with individual students to help them learn. Microcertifications are created by a print shop within the school district. The certifications are laminated on cardstock with the student's name, school logo, special education director and coordinators' signatures, and it certifies the students has completed a microcertification within a specific field.

Stakeholder Perspectives

According to the program coordinator, one of the promising aspects of the Microcertification Program is providing students with realistic work experience. He emphasized how building positive rapport and relationships is important. Not every student who is in the program earns a microcertification; and it was important to the program coordinators that students work hard to earn microcertifications.

Learning how to communicate when there is conflict in the workplace helps students. The students do a lot of role playing to deal with certain situations they may encounter in the workplace. Students work with people who are different from them, they work with colleagues from different races, cultures, and religions.

The program coordinator said they encourage job site supervisors to be as honest as they can on their evaluations. If the students are struggling in their work placement, the school needs to know. The program coordinator sends out a form every year asking how they can improve their program. They use job site supervisor feedback to reflect in the areas that are positive and negative. He stated one of the barriers is getting students where they want to be placed and also helping them understand they need to have a little bit of background in an area before they can be placed.

A current student who wants to go into cosmetology has been working at a salon for 2 years. She described how her initial placement didn't work out, so she moved to another business where she felt successful. The student described how the program helped her learn about life. She particularly enjoyed building confidence, developing communication skills, learning to budget and how to stand up for herself at the workplace. She felt the celebration for students who completed the Microcertification Program at the end of the year was particularly meaningful and made her feel proud of her work. The student appreciated how the program helped her see things from different points of view, get on track for her future, and get out into the community.

A recent graduate, now in the beginning stages of entering college for a career in Political Science, went into the Microcertification Program because he wanted some kind of job shadowing and job experience that was tied to an employment commitment. He described the positive aspects of the program's structure, flexibility, and transparency. The thing that stuck with him the most was the symbol of earning a paycheck each week. He found this very fulfilling, and earning a paycheck meant much more to him than the monetary value. Since his interests changed over time, going through the Microcertifications Program helped him chart his future plans. He felt the program would be especially impactful for a student who was going into one of the CTE fields.

Having hosted four microcertification students in her place of business for two years, a community member explained that the students who worked in her business received an opportunity to build work skills and ease the transition from high school to being employed. The

community member emphasized that some students need a little extra help transitioning and she valued seeing students thrive after they learned new skills. Another community member emphasized that students and families are very grateful for the program, highlighting how it is a very rewarding program for high school students and propels students to start working towards their goals. Empowering students with information helps them with the transition, especially if they are not going to college or into the military.

Program Data: Data for Powell High School's Microcertification Program are as follows:

Number of students currently enrolled: 19

Number of students who completed the program: 65

Examples of local student microcertification placements: kindergarten teacher, accounting, cosmetology, "paramedic" program

Examples of student certifications: fork lift certification

Examples of student post graduation outcomes: enrolled at Northwest College

Grants received: 5-year award for \$5 million from Department of Vocational Rehabilitation

Promising Practices

1. Students earn microcertification;
2. Students learn workplace professional skills on Fridays and become more confident, assertive, and independent;
3. Interviews with administrators, jobsite supervisors help with student anxiety;
4. Students learn new skills and get to use them and figure out what employment works well for them;
5. Students work with people from different races, religions, and cultures.
6. Local businesses fill out a form at the end of the year indicating how the school can improve the Microcertification Program.
7. Program coordinators seek out ways to improve;
8. Students learn skills to help them navigate and succeed in the workplace.