



Bergen County's Project | SEARCH®

Transitioning Students with Disabilities to Work

Project SEARCH is a one-year, business-led, unpaid internship program for students with disabilities in their last year of high school that takes place entirely at a host business site. It provides students who want to work a chance to explore careers and develop transferable job skills. The combination of instruction and immersion in the workplace prepares young adults with disabilities to make successful transitions from school to productive adult life.

The Goal:

Independent adults working in a competitive environment

Internship Overview

Through the course of an academic year, Project SEARCH students participate in employment related instruction and rotate through two to three internships that are individually crafted to capitalize on each student's individual interests, and vocational goals and potential. Each rotation lasts about 10-12 weeks.

Interns work closely with an on-site team, including an instructor, job coach and job developer. The team assists the intern until the task assigned can be performed independently. Agencies are available throughout the program year to provide vocational counseling and guidance. The on-site team, student, family, vocational rehabilitation counselor, and school representatives meet regularly to discuss issues, progress, and career goals.

Graduates are prepared to meet employer expectations and to move into a job development phase. They leave the program with a professional portfolio which includes a resume, solid professional references, recommendations, and real-world work experience.

Job placement is the final goal of the program. Students can accept a job offer at any time during the school year if a match is found (at the host site or elsewhere in the community) and the team is in agreement.

Once successfully employed, graduates receive follow-along services to retain employment. Project SEARCH has been instrumental in dramatically raising the bar for employment of individuals with disabilities. According to 2016-17 Project SEARCH data, these programs have placed over 80% of their graduates into employment.

Basic Eligibility Criteria

- 18-21 years old
- In last year of high school
- All academic requirements for graduation met
- Agree to accept diploma at successful completion of program
- Basic communication skills (verbal or supported by technology)
- Appropriate social, grooming, and hygiene skills
- Able to pass drug screening and background check
- Updated immunizations
- Ability to access and willingness to use independent transportation options
- Have independent living skills and lunch routine
- Meet eligibility requirements for Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS)
- Maintain appropriate behavior in the workplace
- Ability to take direction and change behavior if necessary
- Desire to be competitively employed
- Desire to work in a healthcare setting

A Typical Day's Schedule

The program follows Bergen County Special Services school calendar.

- Employability and Independent Living Skills Class
- Internship Sites
- Lunch
- Internship Sites
- Debriefing/Planning/Journal Writing/Dismissal



Academic contact:

Tara Bohan

Bergen County Project SEARCH
Lead School Agency
Director of Instruction, Bergen
County Special Services

Phone: (201) 343-6000 x4079

Email: tarboh@bergen.org

Website: bcss.bergen.org

General contact:

Carol Polack

Bergen County Project SEARCH
Coordinator/Partner Liaison
Business Manager, Bergen County
Workforce Development Board

Phone: (201) 343-8830 x4093

Email: bcps@bergenworkforce.org

Website: bergenworkforce.org

Parents or students seeking additional information should contact their local school district's District Special Education Director or Child Study Team.

Businesses interested in becoming a Project SEARCH partner, contact Carol Polack.

**Project SEARCH
Progress to Date**

93% of sites reporting
2016-2017 Data

- Over 427 programs in 45 states plus four other countries
- 80% of graduates employed; 35% of graduates employed by host site; 65% employed elsewhere in the community

Application Process

Interested candidates must apply to be considered for acceptance into the program. Students are referred by their school district and apply the year before entering the program. Space is limited to 8-12 students, per site, each year. The selection is carried out by members of the Project SEARCH Advisory Committee. The application enables the Committee to assess each candidate's skills, abilities, interests, and background. Students accepted into the program will be matched to the most appropriate job site based on interest and skills.

All interested students must first request an application from their local school district's District Special Education Director or Child Study Team.

2018-2019 Academic Year Dates & Deadlines

- Student/Family Information Sessions - January 10, 2019
- Applications accepted - Year-round to April 12, 2019
- Interview and Skills Assessment Day - April 24, 2019 (TENT)
- Applicant determination notifications - week of May 28, 2019
- Incoming Intern Orientation (Students/Families) - July 11, 2019
- Intern Summer Travel Training - July & August 2019
- Program begins - September 2019

Current Bergen County Project SEARCH host business sites:

- **Hackensack University Medical Center**, Hackensack
- **Holy Name Medical Center**, Teaneck

Project SEARCH in Bergen County is coordinated by the **Bergen County Workforce Development Board** located at 60 State Street, Room 200, Hackensack, NJ 07601

For more information, email bcps@bergenworkforce.org, call (201) 343-8830 x4093, or visit bergenworkforce.org/projectsearch

Great things happen when a partnership exists for the benefit of others.

Project SEARCH in Bergen County is driven by a collaboration with the following community partners:



To ensure model fidelity and best practices, this program is licensed through the Project SEARCH national office. Project SEARCH, founded in 1996 at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, is a nationally and internationally recognized program for individuals with disabilities who are interested in training and preparation for competitive employment. Under the leadership of J. Erin Riehle and Susie Rutkowski, Project SEARCH has grown from one original program to nearly 400 programs across 45 states and four countries. Visit the national Project SEARCH website at projectsearch.us to learn more.