Developing a Postsecondary Career and Technical Education Program to Support Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

2015

Replication Guide Based on Project Achieve at Florida State College at Jacksonville
ON THE COVER: A student enrolled in the welding program at Florida State College at Jacksonville. He receives supports from Project Achieve.

All students pictured in this guide are or were enrolled in Project Achieve and a Postsecondary Adult Vocational program at FSCJ.
SECTION 1:
An Inside Look at a Support Postsecondary Career and Technical Program at Florida State College at Jacksonville
Postsecondary Adult Vocational (PSAV) programs typically offer hands-on training, a short period of training (between one and two years), affordable tuition, and the opportunity to earn a credential that leads to employment in an in-demand occupation. Training of this sort can help students with intellectual disabilities (InDs) break through the barrier of low expectations that often traps them in dead end jobs with low pay, no job benefits, and few opportunities for growth.

However, students with InDs rarely take advantage of PSAV programs. This may be because such programs are not typically marketed to students with InDs nor typically considered as options during the transition planning process. The exit requirements for PSAV programs, which generally include minimum scores on a test of basic academic skills, may seem to be an insurmountable barrier for students with InDs. Additionally, the supports that students with InDs or other developmental disabilities need to succeed in PSAV programs are not provided within the programs themselves. Barriers related to cost, transportation, and independent living skills may also limit the participation of students with InDs in these career-oriented programs.

Given the limited postsecondary education options for students with InDs and their very high rates of unemployment and underemployment, it makes sense to develop strategies and initiatives specifically designed to expand access to postsecondary education and training for students with InDs.

This type of program gives students with disabilities access to career/technical training and accompanying supports that allow them to achieve a high degree of independence in their pursuit of academic, professional, and personal goals.
COLLEGE EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS

Florida is taking two complementary paths toward increasing postsecondary education and training opportunities for students with InDs. One approach is exemplified by college experience/on-campus transition programs such as those at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, University of North Florida, and Florida Atlantic University (originally established at Lynn University). These programs together form the Florida Consortium on Postsecondary Education and Intellectual Disabilities, which is funded through the federal Transition Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities into Higher Education (TPSID).

Such programs allow students with InDs and other developmental disabilities to audit college courses while participating in training and experiences designed to enhance their social skills, employability skills, and overall level of independence.

For more information on the Florida Consortium on Postsecondary Education and Intellectual Disabilities, click here or visit fltpsid.info.

SUPPORT POSTSECONDARY CAREER AND TECHNICAL PROGRAMS

The other approach is known as a Support Postsecondary Career and Technical (SPSCT) program. Since 2011, the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council has supported the implementation of a pilot SPSCT program called Project Achieve at Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ). Project Achieve enrolled its first 10 students that same year. In 2014-15, Project Achieve served approximately 30 students.

The purpose of Project Achieve is to make it possible for students with InDs to be successful in one of the PSAV programs offered by FSCJ. Project Achieve serves students from the college’s service district of Duval and Nassau counties. Project staff collaborate with college, school district, and agency personnel to eliminate barriers to students’ enrollment in these programs and to provide the academic assistance and other supports the students need to meet the requirements of the PSAV program and to earn any related industry credential.
Project Achieve

Although Project Achieve has evolved over its lifespan, its purpose has remained the same. Today, Project Achieve operates with multiple funding tracks to enable students to take advantage of the greatest array of funding options and the greatest level of support.

Students who are dual enrolled in their local school district use dual enrollment to fund their PSAV program tuition and other educational expenses.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), as a payer of last resort, covers the PSAV program tuition of students who are not eligible to participate in dual enrollment. Vocational Rehabilitation also supports the services of Project Achieve’s Assessment Instructors, who provide much of the tutoring and direct instructional support to the students. Additionally, VR supports students’ participation in an on-campus employment readiness class designed to help them succeed in their PSAV classes. Finally, VR helps students purchase tools and supplies they need for the PSAV program and assists them in transitioning to employment.

In this highly collaborative model, Duval County Public Schools uses dual enrollment funding to support an ESE teacher to serve students on the FSCJ campus. The school district also provides a part-time job coach.

The college provides administrative support, has purchased technology tools to assist students, and is increasingly integrating the program into the core structure of the institution.

The development and implementation of the pilot project was an initiative of the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, which supports the salary of the Project Coordinator.

“\textit{The students in Project Achieve are succeeding in ways that may seem surprising.}”

Daniel West
Project Achieve Coordinator

Project Achieve Funding and Support Tracks

Some students are part of the Vocational and Employment Readiness Training in Comprehensive Adult Learning (VERTICAL) program only. This means that they have already graduated from high school with a special diploma. Most of them are beyond age 22 and no longer eligible to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. They are served as clients of VR, which pays the tuition for the PSAV program and for the students’ participation in an employment readiness class called the VERTICAL class. The PSAV program is part of the VR client’s individualized plan for employment (IPE). The VERTICAL class is offered as a “workforce development” class and awards no course credit. As such, it cannot be supported through dual enrollment, because dual enrollment must lead to both high school graduation and postsecondary course credit.

Some students are part of the Transition Instruction and Employment Support (TIES) program only. Although they have completed the requirements for a special diploma, they have deferred official graduation from the public school system so they may continue to receive FAPE, using dual enrollment funding to access the PSAV program. TIES students also receive support from a school district exceptional student education (ESE) teacher located at FSCJ. However, these students are not clients of VR and so do not participate in the VERTICAL class. This “TIES-only” model is not recommended because it provides the least amount of support to the student. However, it may be appropriate for a student who does not need extensive support.

Most students are part of both VERTICAL and TIES. They are students with InDs who have completed requirements for a special diploma but have deferred high school graduation in order to use dual enrollment to access the PSAV program. They are served by the ESE teacher in the TIES classroom. They are also VR clients and receive support from VR to access the soft skills and employment readiness training provided in the VERTICAL classroom. This is the recommended model because it provides the most support and options for students.
How to Use This Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help partnerships around the state implement an SPSCT program at a state college, community college, or career and technical education center in Florida. These partnerships will typically include the postsecondary institution, one or more school districts, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and other agencies. Although each SPSCT program will reflect the needs of the students and community it serves, many of the steps that must be taken to implement such a program will be the same no matter where the program is located.

This first section of the guide includes photos of students, faculty, and staff connected with the program and a link to a video clip (page 5) of the students in action, taken from the FDDC-sponsored video series “Let’s Get Everyone to Work,” which was produced during 2011-12. This section may be a helpful information and marketing tool for partnerships striving to gather support for the creation of an SPSCT program.

Before going to section 2, users may want to review “The Student Experience” on the following pages. It presents a broad overview of the program’s daily operations, the supports provided to students, and collaboration with career/technical faculty.

Section 2 of this guide, “Launching an SPSCT Program,” provides step-by-step instructions for initiating the start-up year of a program for approximately five students to enroll in PSAV programs using dual enrollment as the primary funding model, along with additional support through VR and/or other sources. The guide includes links to resources that will be helpful to implementation teams as they set up and operate their programs.

To access “Let’s Get Everyone to Work” and other resources, visit the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council website:

www.fddc.org/publications
The Student Experience

There are approximately 30 students with intellectual disabilities enrolled in the program at FSCJ. The narrative below applies to students who are part of both the VERTICAL program and the TIES program, which means that they are served through high school dual enrollment and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Each student is enrolled in a PSAV program that he or she chooses based on personal interests and abilities and in consultation with teachers, family, and program staff.

Project staff work with the PSAV teachers and coordinators to identify programs that offer a good chance for success because they emphasize hands-on learning rather than reading, memorizing facts, or producing written information. It is also important to offer a wide variety of choices to appeal to students with a wide variety of interests.

The students are full participants in their PSAV program. These are intensive and demanding programs, and many students are in their PSAV classrooms and labs from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily—or longer. They attend lectures, complete hands-on activities, and do homework. The curriculum is not modified. Students are assessed to determine how well they are learning the knowledge and skills required to earn an initial credential in their chosen career field. The thing that sets their experience apart is that these students receive comprehensive supports from the SPSCT program to help them succeed in their chosen career/technical program.
To have the greatest chance to succeed, students must have the opportunity to thoroughly explore their postsecondary training options and choose a career goal that they will be highly motivated to achieve.

THE PROGRAM MUST FIT THE STUDENT

As part of the student selection process, students complete interest inventories and aptitude assessments so they can be matched with a career and technical program that they are truly interested in and that offers a good chance for success. While parents advise their student regarding the choice of a career/technical program, as with any college student, it is important that the final choice reflects the student’s interests, strengths, and needs, rather than parental influence.

FSCJ assists students in selecting a career/technical program and preparing for employment success by providing career assessments, tours of industry sites, career counseling, and related services.

SAMPLE PSAV PROGRAMS

- Welding
- Information Technology
- Carpentry
- Electrical
- Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning
- Automotive Collision Repair/Refinish
- Automotive Service Technology
- Heavy Duty Truck and Bus Mechanic
- Aircraft Coating Technician
- Commercial Vehicle Driving
- Cosmetology—Facials Specialty
- Cosmetology—Nails Specialty
- Basic Cosmetology
- Culinary
- Logistics and Distribution
- Child Care
- Articulated Nursing

DUAL ENROLLMENT

Students participate in their high school graduation activities but defer receipt of their diplomas. This allows them to continue as students of the school district and to dual enroll at the college. Dual enrollment has provided a reliable source of funding for Project Achieve students and allowed the school district to support an ESE teacher on FSCJ’s campus to work directly with dual enrolled students (the TIES Instructor). Dual enrolled students must also be enrolled in corresponding high school courses leading to graduation.
Supports for Student Success

**PSAV INSTRUCTOR**

The PSAV Instructor (such as the automotive repair or cosmetology instructor) is aware of the student’s learning needs and works closely with one of the program’s Assessment Instructors to help the student succeed with appropriate accommodations.

The students also benefit from a carefully developed system of supports designed to help them succeed even though most of them do not have the academic (especially the reading) skills typically needed to complete their PSAV program.

**ASSESSMENT INSTRUCTOR**

Each student meets at least weekly with an Assessment Instructor, who works closely with the PSAV Instructor to track the student’s progress and respond to any barriers or needs for support. The student and the Assessment Instructor might review the week’s technical program content and, if the student is having difficulties, work out a plan for practicing and mastering the material. The Assessment Instructor becomes familiar enough with the content of the PSAV program to help the student learn the material. The Assessment Instructor also helps the PSAV Instructor to understand the student’s learning needs and provide customized accommodations to allow the student to be successful.

If the student is absent too frequently, or is not keeping up with homework, the Assessment Instructor will address this with the student and may seek the input of other staff and family members.

**EMPLOYMENT READINESS CLASS**

Several times a week, students attend the VERTICAL class, where they receive specialized instruction and practice in employment readiness skills such as interpersonal communication and time management. The VERTICAL Instructor works with the Assessment Instructor to determine whether the student is applying a skill learned in the VERTICAL classroom (such as following step-by-step directions) in the PSAV program. If the student has not transferred that skill, the Assessment Instructor works with the PSAV Instructor to remediate the skill with the student.

**PLANNING AND SUPPORT TEAM**

Because they continue to be enrolled in the local school district and served through ESE, the students (and their families) attend IEP meetings, and the PSAV program and supports are part of the student’s IEP. Likewise, the PSAV program is part of the individualized plan for employment (IPE) if the student is a client of VR.

**GOOD ATTENDANCE IS VITAL**

PSAV programs are “clock hour” or “contact hour” programs. This means that students who miss too much class time will not be able to receive their certificate, even if they have learned how to do all the required skills. In some cases, PSAV Instructors have offered students who have missed hours an opportunity to make up those hours, but poor attendance will interfere with a student’s success.

Success means students are able to leave the SPSCT program with sustainable, independent employment as a skilled employee in a career/technical field.
ESE STRATEGIES AND TECHNOLOGY

The TIES classroom is an on-campus resource center where a Duval County School District ESE teacher assists students in learning and reinforcing the technical skills taught in the PSAV program. This teacher, the TIES Instructor, uses technology and other strategies to provide students with accommodations to help them learn the material and pass classroom assessments and any industry certification exams.

The school district uses funds generated through dual enrollment to support the full-time ESE teacher at FSCJ. The college supplies iPads and other learning tools and materials for the TIES classroom.

Students practice with digital flashcards that the teacher has created to reinforce the material taught in the PSAV classroom. They also use an iPad to view videos produced by the textbook publisher or other sources that will provide them with additional instruction in a nonprint modality. Students can prepare for an assignment or assessment while in the TIES class and receive one-on-one assistance from the TIES Instructor.

MENTORING

Some students also have a peer mentor—typically a student who is enrolled in the same PSAV program—who helps the student take advantage of social opportunities on campus and who may also act as a tutor or study partner.

ACCOMMODATIONS

The students may also receive services through the College’s Office of Services for Students with Disabilities, such as notetakers. In order to succeed, it is vital that students access the accommodations that are available to them and that they understand how to access accommodations and the benefits of doing so. This includes classroom accommodations and testing accommodations.

INCLUSION

The students are full members of the college community and have access to all the college’s facilities and resources. In order to help students have a complete college experience, project staff facilitate their participation in campus activities with nondisabled peers and also arrange activities such as social events and industry tours. Inclusion in the college environment prepares students and peers to be in inclusive work settings after leaving college.

TRANSPORTATION

Students use various methods of transportation to and from campus. Most of the Nassau County students take a restricted-access community shuttle bus to campus from a central pick-up/drop-off location in Nassau County. Some of the Duval County students take regular public transportation, while others drive to school or are driven by friends or family members. A school district Job Coach assists the students in developing a plan for transportation and provides travel training as part of their initial orientation to the program and to FSCJ. Students also learn how to get around campus.
EMPLOYMENT PLACEMENT

Each student’s goal is to earn a PSAV certificate and to pass the state certification exam (if any) associated with that program to be qualified to enter that career field. As the student approaches graduation, he or she receives supports designed to help the student pass the certification exam, along with assistance in identifying job openings and applying for jobs. A Job Coach provided by the school district or VR helps the student secure employment. It is critical that each student’s education culminate in employment. Students are not considered “program completers” unless they secure employment.

Most PSAV programs take two or three semesters to complete. However, Project Achieve students may continue to receive support from project staff if they need extra time to finish program requirements and prepare for the certification exam.

ADDRESSING INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

Team members work with offices and individuals all across campus (bookstore, services for students with disabilities, financial aid, administration) to break down barriers to their students’ participation and success in the PSAV programs.

READINESS FOR DUAL ENROLLMENT

Because dual enrollment is a method of acceleration, schools may use a test to determine students’ readiness for dual enrollment. Typically, students must demonstrate a sixth-grade reading level on the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to dual enroll in FSCJ’s workforce certificate programs. However, the college exempts Project Achieve students from this requirement.

BASIC SKILLS EXIT TESTING

PSAV programs have exit requirements, which at FSCJ may include a required exit score on the TABE. However, students can apply for a TABE waiver in certain academic areas related to their disability.
Collaborating to Support Student Success

The sharing of resources and information between Nassau and Duval county school districts and FSCJ has laid the foundation for dramatic improvements in the availability of career and technical programs to students with disabilities. One result of this collaboration is the Transition, Instruction, and Employment Support (TIES) Initiative.

Florida State College at Jacksonville has identified TIES as a Strategic Funding Initiative. The Strategic Funding Committee, comprised of FSCJ campus presidents, administrators, deans, and the college president, found TIES to be a valuable growth opportunity for the college and authorized funding in the amount of $100,000. This includes substantial funding to improve the inclusion practices of career and technical faculty, programs, and facilities. In the area of supportive technology, the TIES program is using this support to develop tools that will dramatically enhance learning outcomes for students in Project Achieve and across the college.

In addition, Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) has decided to use the FTE-based funding generated by its dual enrollment students to provide ESE instruction in the TIES classroom at FSCJ. The transition coordinator for DCPS was instrumental in developing the TIES initiative and securing support from DCPS administrators to provide a teacher to support students with disabilities at FSCJ.

The services provided by the TIES initiative are open to students with a variety of disabilities, not only InDs.
Future Directions and Sustainability

Project Achieve has evolved in many directions to better meet the needs of students and to serve more students. This will continue in the upcoming years.

For example, the team is working to connect all students with peer mentors, such as current students in the same PSAV program, recent graduates, and retired professionals. It is hoped that peer mentors will be able to provide some of the support currently provided by the Assessment Instructors, especially in learning and practicing specific career/technical skills and in developing positive work habits and social behaviors.

In order to serve more students, Project Achieve and FSCJ will apply for the SPSCT program to be approved by the U.S. Department of Education as a Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary (CTP) program. The only way that students with InDs who have earned a special diploma may qualify for federal financial aid, such as Pell Grants, is if they are served in a CTP program. The formation of a CTP program will open the door to a broader population of students, including older students and students from outside Duval and Nassau counties.

For Project Achieve to become a CTP program, certain curriculum and financial aid requirements must be met. However, becoming a CTP will greatly enhance Project Achieve’s long-term sustainability.

FSCJ has committed resources to completing this transition, including funding for an external consultant to assess the inclusion practices of the FSCJ career/technical programs targeted by Project Achieve and to provide training to improve classroom instruction and support services.

Elements of Success

- Collaboration is a defining feature of a successful SPSCT program. This includes collaboration among SPSCT program staff, PSAV program managers and instructors, VR staff, school district staff, and staff of departments across the postsecondary institution, including administration, admissions, financial aid, services for students with disabilities, library, and tutoring/learning center.

- Implementation teams gather information about their specific postsecondary institution, school districts, and other involved agencies and adapt the SPSCT program to meet local systems and needs.

- Students choose a career/technical program that reflects their interests and abilities.

- The program provides supports that allow students to succeed in the PSAV program. An action plan for support addresses the accommodations and supplemental instruction that each student needs to be successful and ways to address any barriers to success.

- Students are committed to their course of study and have a study plan that includes class and lab attendance plus time spent on assignments at home and working with tutors and/or a study group.

- The feedback loop is kept open, with the PSAV Instructor providing feedback to the SPSCT program staff on the student’s progress, the student providing feedback on his or her own progress, and the staff providing feedback to the student.

- Students’ time and energy are focused primarily on learning the career/technical skills that are central to the PSAV program. Learning tangential skills, such as how to complete college forms, is of secondary importance.

Becoming a Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary program can greatly enhance an SPSCT’s sustainability, because it allows students to access federal financial aid.
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