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Empowering Students, Creating Connections, Transitioning into Careers

Manatee County students with disabilities are finding open doors to gainful employment. It takes a team of job coaches and employment specialists to serve all of the students with special needs, and it takes energy, excitement, passion, and dedication to lead the way. Those are the exact qualities that Ms. Diane Roberts possesses!

Diane serves as the District's Florida Diagnostic Learning and Resource System (FDLRS)/Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Transition Specialist, and together with six job coaches and five employment specialists, her team works tirelessly through ESE programs, On the Job Training (OJT), and Transitions Services for Manatee County students. Together they work to ensure that all students are inspired to learn, dream, and achieve.

ESE OJT is a cooperative education work program for students who have intellectual or learning disabilities, or an impediment to employment. "We have a career experience OJT program where students earn credits and receive training prior to employment," Diane stated. "We also have the OJT Competitive program where students are working, getting paid, and earning credits. In both programs, students are monitored by their ESE teacher/job coach and must complete specific criteria. We also have the Diploma Option II program, under the leadership of Diploma Option II Coordinator Stewart Bergmann, where students secure their own employment and must meet stringent requirements in order to graduate."

Diane and her team provide ongoing staff development with an emphasis on current assistive technology. During staff in-service training, guest speakers present strategies on hot topics such as bullying. The team promotes student empowerment through self advocacy and training on achieving success at work, always with an eye on meeting the student's needs as they journey out of the classroom and into the workforce. Successful transitioning from the classroom and into a paid job is always the goal, and the team promotes that goal by matching specific student's skills with specific employer's needs.

"We enjoy tremendous business community support which is essential to the success of our programs," Diane continued. "Our students are gainfully employed in over 100 job sites, including the hospitality and medical industries. They work for Goodwill, the Humane Society, the YMCA, and many other places of business."

To help create job opportunities for students and promote awareness of employing individuals with disabilities, Diane's networking and partnership efforts are expansive. She works with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Manatee County Transition Interagency Committee, the Manasota Business Leadership Network (an affiliate of The ABLE Trust and the United States Chamber of Commerce), Manatee County Children's Services Committee, the Manatee Chamber Education and Workforce Committee, and the SunCoast Workforce Youth Council, to name a few.

By empowering students, creating job connections, and aiding in the transition from classroom to job site, students with disabilities are finding success in the workplace.



Diploma Option II Coordinator Stewart Bergmann with FDLRS/ESE Transition Specialist Diane Roberts.



JOB



Entry level jobs: retail
Workplace: grocery, department stores, convenience stores
Hours: 24/7, flexible
Minimum wage: \$7.25



Entry level jobs: other services
Workplace: housekeeping, babysitting, janitorial, labor
Hours: 24/7, flexible
Minimum wage: \$7.25



Entry level jobs: food services
Workplace: fast food, coffee shops, restaurants, pizza delivery
Hours: 24/7, flexible
Minimum wage: \$7.25



The mission of the Manasota Business Leadership Network (BLN) is to educate and encourage employers to recruit, hire, train, and retain employees with disabilities as part of promoting good business practices.

PARENT CORNER

- Discussion starter: Talk to your child about employability skills. Examples of skills that employers value are dependability, punctuality, honesty, the ability to listen and follow instructions, teamwork, a positive attitude, a willingness to learn, and the motivation to work hard.
- Help your child to set goals to improve a weak area that would negatively affect employment. Often late? Set a goal for being on time. Undependable? Set a goal to do what you say you will do.
- "By networking with the business community, we continue to improve and expand the career opportunities available to our students and support their successful transition into gainful employment." Diane Roberts, OJT Transition Specialist. For further information about Transitions and ESE programs, contact Diane at robertsd@manateschools.net or 941-708-8770, ext. 2186.

FCAT reading comprehension QUESTION

★ What does ESE and OJT stand for?

Answer: "Exceptional student education and On-the-Job Training"

What's on the WEB?

- www.abletrust.org
- www.myabilities.org
- www.rehabworks.org
- www.fdlrs.com
- www.service@cec.sped.org