

Ty Ankrom's Here's What I Think ...

Consider high school students with special needs in Pickaway County schools will be able to take part in a new employment initiative next year.



Disabilities, was familiar with the program and credits Patrick Kilbane, the board's former transition services specialist, with encouraging the county to pursue the program.

"It's another opportunity for transition-age students to learn job skills," Mike said.

Project SEARCH places students with disabilities in internships at entry-level jobs. In Pickaway County, the program is being made possible through the collaboration of Berger Health System, Capabilities, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, the Pickaway County Board of Developmental Disabilities, the county's four school districts and Pickaway-Ross Career & Technology Center.

Project SEARCH exists at more than 300 sites across the United States and in Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland and Australia.

The Project SEARCH High School Transition Program allows students with disabilities who are in their last year of high school to be placed in an internship program. Students will spend the day at Berger, with an hour spent in an employability skills class taught by a Pickaway-Ross teacher, and the remainder of the day working at Berger.

Mike Pelcic, superintendent of the board of Developmental

Disabilities, reached out to Kristin Gardner, a Developmental Disabilities board member and the vice president of nursing at Berger. She liked the idea and shared it with Berger CEO and President Tim Colburn, who loved the idea.

IF YOU GO

What: Project SEARCH orientation

When: 6-7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 28

Where: Berger Health System
For more information, call (740) 477-3353, Ext. 20.

"Through Project Search, we want to positively impact our work environment and better our community by providing educational and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities," Tim said.

Once Berger was on board, Mike contacted Dennis Franks, superintendent at Pickaway-Ross, about being the education partner. Pickaway-Ross serves students from Circleville, Logan Elm and Westfall schools.



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Dennis researched how another career center had partnered with Project SEARCH and said they could make it work.

"We're already training students to do those jobs but it would be great to do it in a workplace setting," Dennis said.

The full school-year program allows students 10-week rotations among three departments to learn different skills and work with a variety of people.

The job-placement rate for students in Project SEARCH has been high, with about a quarter of the interns being employed at their host site after completing the internship and others gaining employment at other businesses in the community.

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