



# Community Connection

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## Orientation for Project SEARCH students set

By Ty Ankrum

Older high school students with special needs in Pickaway County schools will be able to take part in an employment initiative.

Project SEARCH pairs 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 has grown from a program at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Cen-

ter to one that is found at more than 300 sites across the United States and in Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland and Australia.

Project SEARCH's 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 for Berger.

Mike Pelcic, superintendent of the developmental disabilities board, was familiar with the program and credits Patrick Kilbane, the board's former transition services specialist, with encouraging Pickaway

### 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.

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

Mike 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 Tim Colburn, who loved the idea.

"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 the project had a business partner, Mike contacted Dennis Franks, superintendent at Pickaway-Ross, about being the education partner. Pickaway-Ross serves students from Circleville, Logan Elm and Westfall schools.

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.

## Preschool aides enjoy time spent helping students grow

Three new ESC employees are having a big impact on the youngest students at Pickaway-Ross Career & Technology Center.

Ali Free, Kayla Love and Deanna Redfearn all started this year as preschool aides, working with 4- and 5-year-olds who attend either a morning or afternoon program.

Each woman brought a similar work experience with her: Ali has a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and worked as a home health-care aide; Kayla and Deanna have associate's degrees and worked at a child care center and Paint Valley High School, respectively.

Each also had a connection to Pickaway-Ross and were happy to apply when the positions opened.

"My daughter went to preschool here and I knew Betty (Pettit). She told me she was retiring," said Deanna, who had worked for Pickaway-Ross from 2007-2010 and knew it was a good place to work.

In addition to working with the preschoolers, the trio also helps the high school juniors and seniors in the Early Childhood Education program.

"We're guiding the high school students and being role models by helping them learn to be independent and be a professional in the field," Kayla said.

Similarly, they also help the preschoolers become independent and get ready for kindergarten, helping them learn the social skills that they will need. For example, a recent interaction showed a child's unique perspective on problem-solving.

"We had a 5-year-old who was trying to get a necklace off her head and it was stuck," recalled Ali. "She said, 'I guess I'm just going to have to shave my head.'"

Working with the preschoolers is, of course, a big part of the job. And the part that all love.

"There are days where you have the best day ever but you leave exhausted," Ali said.



From left, preschool aides Ali Free, Deanna Redfearn and Kayla Love

"I've learned that you need to be in shape," Kayla said. "You have to sprint," Ali added. The investment is always worth it, the women agreed.

Deanna recalled a day that she came in to work for a few hours one afternoon. Two boys were playing Jenga and invited

her to play with them.

"I had things I needed to do but I said yes because I didn't want to disappoint them. And I had the best time. They were really sweet about making sure that I got my turn," Deanna said.

"Every day," said Kayla, "no matter what, somebody makes your day better."

## SUPERINTENDENT'S CORNER: Lessons from experience stick for a lifetime

Having worked in education all of my career, I'm fortunate to be able to look back on experiences I've had that have helped me become, at various times, a better teacher, principal and superintendent.

The expression that "experience is the best teacher" is certainly true. Yes, we learn from books but real-life experiences can provide a lifelong lesson.

I remember when I was a new principal I made the mistake of thinking I knew more about teaching than those who had been doing the job longer (and



Ty Ankrum

better) than I had. While evaluating a primary grade teacher, I gave her poor marks for a reading lesson. I then added my expertise about how the lesson would have been better. When we met to review the evaluation, she took me to task. I stood my ground - after all, I was the

boss. The teacher invited me back in to observe her teaching the same lesson, but using my suggestions. It was a disaster. I apologized and learned that I could learn from others while I improved my skills.

To quote Confucius: "By three methods we may learn wisdom: first, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third, by experience, which is the bitterest."

It is a true statement, as I obviously remembered that experience these many years later.

I was fortunate. The primary teacher was willing to speak her mind and I learned from it. But there are other ways to get experience.

In a SmartBrief article, Nathali Hoff recommends gaining experience quickly by taking advantage of learning opportunities, such as educational conferences.

He also encourages professionals take advantage of a mentor or peer group. "Mentors can cut down the learning curve significantly by offering of their experiences and sharing their views on how they would

handle certain situations," he writes.

And, as I learned from that primary teacher, ask for feedback. Hoff writes that "feedback is critical for the reflective process."

Read the full article at [http://smartbrief.com/original/2017/02/how-gain-more-experience-less-time?utm\\_source=brief](http://smartbrief.com/original/2017/02/how-gain-more-experience-less-time?utm_source=brief).

Ty Ankrum is superintendent of the Pickaway County Educational Service Center. He can be reached at [ty.ankrum@pickawayesc.org](mailto:ty.ankrum@pickawayesc.org).

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