

Learning Skills to Pay the Bills

During the 2013-2014 school year, the Wexford-Missaukee Career Technical Center (CTC) piloted a career skills program for students with disabilities. It is a federal reporting requirement that all students complete the CTE segments of their chosen program. However, for a certain population of students, fulfilling the entire curriculum may not be possible. Many local districts struggle to find appropriate programs for students who may not be able to complete a CTE course of study. In order to be career and college ready, all students should be given the opportunity to explore career pathways and develop skills which would lead to becoming independent adults. With the help of local counselors, 16 students are selected to participate in Career skills (CS). These students rotate through five different programs during the school year; Applied Construction Technology, Hospitality Retailing and Entrepreneurship, Automotive Technology, Agricultural Science, and Business Management Administration. Students also gain practical skills by participating in projects such as learning checkbook math and partnering with YMCA to learn water safety and to develop good habits for a healthy lifestyle. Students build relationships with school personnel and learn basic job skills such as working with building maintenance. Students also visit local restaurants and learn table manners, provide assistance with the Salvation Army, and utilize public transportation.

Who is the Ideal Student for the Career Skills Program?

The ideal CS student is a 10th grade student. If the student begins in 10th grade, then a better placement can be made for their 11th and 12th grade years. Students in the 11th and 12th are also accepted. Students must be able to work independently and without direct supervision, if needed. They must be willing to try new things and have new experiences. Finally, students must be kind to fellow students and cooperative with staff members.

What is required for the Program to be Successful?

Strong collaboration among CTE personnel, special education personnel, and community business partners is important to make the CS program successful. Wexford-Missaukee has partnered with YMCA, local restaurants, Salvation Army, Walgreens, and local banks.

What are student outcomes from this program?

Seven students participated in the program. Three of the seven students were able to successfully join a program at the Career and Technical Center program.

- One student graduated
- One student's skills did not meet the requirements to participate in a program
- One student returned to Career Skills for a second year
- One student began a program with Hope Network

Due to the success of the Wexford-Missaukee Career Technical Center Career Skills program, they received an award from the Michigan Occupational Special Populations organization in 2014 for the extraordinary work that they are doing to help students realize their career potential.

For more information about this program, contact Charlie Schwarz at 231-876-2203, cschwarz@wmisd.org, or Melinda Cucinella at 231-876-4823 or mcucinella@wmisd.org.

Thank you to Charlie Schwarz and his team for sharing their success with the Career Skills program.