

Background

The Minnesota Department of Education reached out to our District based upon interest from Fairview Health Services to expand Project SEARCH to Southdale Hospital. Exploratory conversations included representatives from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Project SEARCH, Edina Public Schools, Fairview Health Services, and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). Exploratory conversations were also held with Intermediate School District 287 regarding tuition rates for transition-age (18-22) students.

Project SEARCH originated at Cincinnati Children's Hospital, where many children with disabilities receive medical care. From there, a deep commitment to employing persons with developmental disabilities has grown. In 1996, Cincinnati Children's Hospital committed to training and hiring persons with disabilities to fill positions within their organization by forging a relationship with their local school district. Together they transformed the idea of creating a few jobs into a comprehensive, internationally recognized model—Project SEARCH. Today Project SEARCH has over 700 programs across 48 states and 11 countries. Some of their business partners include Fifth Third Bank, Dow Chemical, the Smithsonian Institution, Medtronic, the National Institutes of Health, and the Mayo Clinic.

Project SEARCH's primary objective is to secure competitive, integrated employment for persons with disabilities. To achieve their objective, Project SEARCH is a nine-month internship program for persons with developmental cognitive disabilities who desire competitive employment. The program takes place in a healthcare, government, or business setting where interns experience total immersion in their workplace where they are taught and learn processes as well as the acquisition of employment and marketable job skills. Interns participate in three internships to explore a variety of career paths. The interns work with a team that includes their family, an instructor, and local and state agencies to create an employment goal.

Project SEARCH outcome data indicates that about 70% of interns are employed following their internship, the average hourly pay is \$13.23, are working about 25 hours a week, and 41% of interns are hired by the host business following their internship. Part of the reason why interns have such outcomes is because the Project SEARCH interns learn skills that are reflected in five of the ten most in-demand career fields.

Benefits to Students:

- Participate in a variety of internships within the host hospital/ business.
- Acquire competitive, transferable, and marketable job skills.
- Gain increased independence, confidence, and self-esteem.
- Obtain work-based individual coaching, instruction, and feedback.
- Develop linkages to Vocational Rehabilitation and other adult service agencies.

Benefits to the Business:

- Access to a new, diverse, talent stream with skills that match labor needs.

- Interns and employees with disabilities who serve as role models for customers.
- Access to a demographic of the economy with intense buying power: people with disabilities represent one of the fastest-growing market segments in the United States.
- Increased regional and national recognition through marketing of this unique program.
- Increased performance and retention in high-turnover, entry-level positions.

The Strategic Plan for Edina Public Schools aligns with the purpose of Project SEARCH, to prepare young people with significant disabilities for success in competitive integrated employment. Three of our district's priority strategies align with Project SEARCH programming.

1. **Strategy A (3): Provide expanded, timely and effective interventions for students based upon data and individual needs, through all school phases, Pre-K-12 and throughout the school year.** Project SEARCH allows for the District to include in-house programming for students in the next phase of their education as they transition to adulthood.
2. **Strategy C (5): Create environments that are conducive to learning and facilitate constructive student interaction.** By providing an internship at Southdale Hospital, the District can create a high-quality, inclusive learning environment. Community-based employment opportunities expand the possibilities of Unified programming for students aged 18-22.
3. **Strategy E (4): Leverage partnerships with community groups, businesses, local and state agencies, and individuals to strengthen and foster relationships with Edina Public Schools.** A partnership with Project SEARCH leverages partnerships with a business (Fairview Southdale Hospital) and two state agencies (MDE and DEED).

Edina Public Schools, special education students, and parents have long desired transition programming within Edina Public Schools so that students can continue to live, learn, and work within their community. A partnership with Project SEARCH will provide the opportunity for the District and its students to take steps toward the creation of our own transition program by partnering with an established program that provides a gold-standard employment experience for students aged 18-22.

Proposal for Project SEARCH at Fairview Southdale Hospital, Fall 2024

Fairview Hospital is operating Project SEARCH at Lakes Medical Center where they partner with the Forest Lake School District and at Fairview Ridges Hospital where they partner with Burnsville Public Schools. Fairview Hospital would like to expand Project SEARCH to Southdale Hospital and partner with Edina Public Schools for the 2024-2025 school year.

Students interested in becoming Project SEARCH interns participate in a skills assessment and interview with a Project SEARCH team that includes county providers, vocational rehabilitation service providers, and hospital staff.

During the nine-month internship experience, students will build a variety of transferable skills, including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Interns typically train from 9-2 each school day. Most of the student day will be real-life work where students will complete three 10-week rotations in various departments and report to the hospital on school days. Interns also have one hour of classroom time each day where they learn about topics that will support their transition to adulthood such as team building, workplace safety, technology, self-advocacy, maintaining employment, financial literacy, health and wellness, and preparing for employment.

Examples of Internship opportunities at Fairview sites include:

- Millcarts: The intern works with the Medical, Surgical, and Intensive Care Unit to restock medical supplies onto patient carts.
- Facilities Assistant: This intern is in charge of delivering oxygen and carbon dioxide tanks to eight different locations daily to replace empty tanks. They work with the facilities department to help fix hospital equipment, perform indoor and outdoor maintenance, organize, and provide side-by-side assistance.
- Store Keeper/ Supply Chain: The intern restocks medical supplies for up to four departments and checks expiration dates monthly.
- Nutrition Services: Interns learn how to run the dishwasher, put dishes away, assemble breakfast trays, make sandwiches, assist the baker and the cook, stock cafeteria supplies, run the pizza oven, and stock the salad bar.
- Environmental Services: This internship starts with cleaning and disinfecting before moving into independent work that includes partnering to clean patient rooms.
- Security: Interns create employee badges, walk the parking lot with the patrol contractor, access lost and found recovery, make hourly rounds, and answer security office phones. Interns also learn how to determine the urgency for calling supervisors and develop problem-solving skills.
- Clerical: Interns sort and deliver mail and packages to most of the clinics. Interns will also perform light cleaning, schedule conference rooms, deliver paper to departments, and restock patient rooms.

Students who are eligible to apply for an internship must be a special education student aged 18-22 in their last year of programming. They also must have workplace communication skills appropriate for a business environment, the ability to take directions and change behaviors, and apply to be eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Services and County Developmental Disabilities Services.

Resource Commitments

Edina Public Schools' commitment would include providing students for internships, staff to support the students, and student transportation if needed. The district would use funds that have previously been used to pay tuition at Intermediate School District 287 (\$42,000 to \$45,000 per student) to offset the cost of additional staffing, which is predicted to be one full-time teacher and paraprofessional (\$147,000). Project SEARCH would be cost-neutral to the District with the enrollment of four interns. Our goal would be to serve six interns on an annual basis. Additional implementation expenses are approximately \$6,000 for district attendance at the National Project SEARCH conference in July, and \$9,000 for 15 days during the summer for advanced teacher preparation.

Fairview Southdale will provide classroom and office space to Project SEARCH interns and our staff working on-site.

The Minnesota Department of Education will provide a grant to pay the initial licensing fee of \$18,000. The licensing fee includes all start-up training and technical assistance for the first year of planning and implementation. The annual renewal fee is \$350, which covers the cost of upkeep and maintenance of materials in the member portal.

School districts also provide ancillary support such as printer paper, binders, and office supplies needed for instruction. Districts have the option to provide students with technology for learning, such as laptops, and work uniforms if required as an intern.

After a district and local business have committed to Project SEARCH, a team member from Cincinnati will provide initial onsite technical assistance from a Project SEARCH Program Specialist.

Revenue	Amount
4 students at \$45,000	\$180,000
MDE Grant	\$18,000
Total Revenue	\$198,000
Expenses	Amount
1.0 FTE Teacher	\$118,000
6.5 Hour Paraprofessional	\$40,000
Renewal Fee	\$350
Project SEARCH National Conference	\$6,000
15 days of Summer Work	\$9,000
Total Expenses	\$173,350

References:

Project SEARCH. Available online at: <https://projectsearch.us/>

Project SEARCH Minnesota. Available online at: <https://mn.gov/projsrch/>

M Health Fairview, *Project SEARCH Makes Professional Training and Employment Accessible to All*. Available online at:

<https://www.mhealthfairview.org/blog/project-search-helps-young-people-with-disabilities-start-a-career-in-healthcare>

SUN This Week, Hospital Will be Training Ground for Students in Transition. Available online at:

https://www.hometownsource.com/sun_thisweek/community/burnsville/hospital-will-be-training-ground-for-students-in-transition/article_98ee5cb2-5989-11ee-9065-8745d907985f.html