

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Camden County Educational Services Commission

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Project SEARCH Contract Awarded to Camden County Educational Services Commission

School To Work Transition Program To Help Young Adults Find Jobs and Independence

Project SEARCH, is a unique, business led, one-year school to work program that takes place entirely at the workplace. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and relevant job skills training through strategically designed internships.

Clementon, NJ, February 2, 2017 — One of the greatest challenges for a parent of a child with a disability is lifespan planning. The challenge becomes significantly greater when a child becomes an adult and transition planning begins for life after high school. For some young adults with disabilities, college is an option, but for many it is not. Parents are often faced with the pressure of finding options that will facilitate independent living. One of the keys to independent living is gainful employment.

Students with disabilities who age out of school-based services have a much lower rate of gainful employment after high school than their typically developing peers. According to a study in 2010-2012 by the U.S. Department of Labor, approximately 33% of adults with disabilities are employed, compared to approximately 72% of adults who are not disabled. Of the adults with developmental disabilities, the need is even greater, as 85% are not employed at all (ARC FINDS survey 2010). Of the remaining 15% of employed developmentally disabled adults surveyed, 54% are working in sheltered workshops, which do not provide integrated, competitive employment. Also, for those who are employed, only half are earning minimum wage, leaving many developmentally disabled adults living at or below the poverty level. The outcome of underemployment and substandard wages creates a financial burden for these individuals, their families, and communities.

Project SEARCH provides education and training to young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities through an innovative workforce development model. The program's impact will go beyond just helping adult students with disabilities; it will also benefit their families and communities. According to the same ARC FINDS survey cited above, 52% of family members caring for adults with developmental disabilities stated that individuals are unable to get proper job training or other assistance in securing and retaining employment. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, approximately five million adults have intellectual or developmental disabilities. Over 75% of these adults live with family members as caregivers. As these young adults age, so do their caregivers. Therefore, family

support systems diminish as caregivers become less capable of providing support. The Project SEARCH program will help to address these familial and community challenges, and work to provide young adults the tools necessary to acquire and develop skills required for independent living.

Camden County Educational Services Commission (CCESC) has a responsibility as a shared services provider to build the capacity and provide an economical option for school districts. There are reasons for the lack of programming options in public schools, such as the inability to obtain economies of scale (not enough students), lack of staff expertise, or no capacity. The CCESC believes that implementing Project SEARCH would have a compounded benefit. First, it will offer districts an economical program, which saves taxpayer dollars. Second, it provides students with disabilities a return to the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), exposure to typically developing peers, community based instruction, and job experiences leading to employment.

“When I first became aware of Project SEARCH, I was immediately on board,” says Daniel Del Vecchio, CCESC Superintendent. Mr. Del Vecchio’s 25-plus years of experience in the business sector, and 10 years as a special education professional made the Project SEARCH partnership a perfect match for the CCESC. He added, “Children and adults with disabilities are capable of many things, often outperforming their typical peers. They need opportunity, access, and supports to make them successful. Project SEARCH offers this to our students.”

In partnership with Project SEARCH, the Arc of Camden County, New Jersey Department of Labor-Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS), and New Jersey Department of Human Services-Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), the Camden County Educational Services Commission is seeking a partnership with two businesses, one in Camden City and one outside of the city, in Camden County. The first program is scheduled to begin September 1, 2017.

About Camden County Educational Services Commission

The Camden County Educational Services Commission (CCESC) is a New Jersey public school district operating as a shared services provider for public school districts, nonpublic schools, in the southern region of New Jersey, and the Camden County Juvenile Detention Center. The CCESC provides student transportation, staffing for teachers and educational services professionals, child study team evaluations, and cooperative purchasing services. The mission of the CCESC is to fulfill the promise of every child through engagement, education, and empowerment.

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