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Project SEARCH™ for Family Care, Family Care Partnership Members, and IRIS Participants

Purpose: This resource memo is intended to explain Project SEARCH, an evidence-based approach for vocational training, and the manner in which a managed care organization (MCO) or IRIS (Include, Respect, I Self-Direct) consultant agency (ICA) may be involved in supporting members and participants in Project SEARCH. Typically, Project SEARCH students are supported through their school district and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). However, if a young adult in Family Care, Family Care Partnership, or IRIS (ages 18+) has already graduated from high school and would benefit from the employment training available through Project SEARCH, the interdisciplinary care team or IRIS consultant, including the member or participant and his or her representatives, will determine whether to refer that individual to apply for Project SEARCH and provide a portion of the program funding. Wisconsin offers High School Only, Hybrid of High School and Non-High School, and Non-High School Only Project SEARCH programs throughout the state. The Department of Workforce Development/Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DWD/DVR) may also fund a portion of the Project SEARCH cost per their Project SEARCH fee schedule: dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/programs/project-search/serviceproviders.htm.

Project SEARCH Background

Project SEARCH was developed in 1996 by Nurse J. Erin Riehle, then the director of the emergency department at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. All Project SEARCH sites must be licensed by Cincinnati Children's Hospital and must comply with program model fidelity standards. In Wisconsin, DVR is the agency that assists state sites to become licensed as Project SEARCH sites.

The Project SEARCH High School Transition Program is a unique, business-led, one-year school-to-work program that takes place entirely at the Project SEARCH business site. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. Project SEARCH provides real-life work experience to help young adults with significant disabilities make successful transitions from school to adult life. At the completion of the training program, students with significant intellectual disabilities are prepared for employment in competitive integrated employment (CIE). The presence of a Project SEARCH High School Transition Program can bring about long-term changes in business culture that have far-reaching positive effects on attitudes about hiring people with disabilities and the range of jobs in which they can be successful.

For more information about Project SEARCH, visit www.projectsearch.us. If you have any specific questions regarding Project SEARCH in Wisconsin, please visit dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/programs/project-search or email dhs1tcemployment@dhs.wisconsin.gov.

Selection Criteria for Project SEARCH Interns

Each Project SEARCH site has a formal application process that must be followed by all applicants. Potential Project SEARCH applicants may obtain applications from the Project SEARCH sites. A selection committee comprised of program stakeholders reviews each application to identify young adults whose vocational goals will be well served by the program.

Project SEARCH is a business-led program. This means that students learn relevant, marketable skills while immersed in the host business, and that the host businesses are active partners, participating without subsidies. **The sole definition of a successful outcome is CIE for each Project SEARCH intern, including:**

- Employment in an integrated setting (that is, working alongside coworkers with and without disabilities)
- Year-round work (not seasonal employment)
- Working 16 hours per week or more
- Paid the prevailing wage

In addition to be considered for Project SEARCH, applicants are young adults that have appropriate hygiene, social and communication skills, must not be harmful to self or others, and are independent in self-cares and in medication administration.

Project SEARCH participants must have an open active DVR case upon starting Project SEARCH. Project SEARCH prioritizes participation for currently enrolled high school students. Some of those high school students may also be Family Care, Family Care Partnership, or IRIS members or participants since special education students are eligible to remain in school up to age 22. A Project SEARCH site may, at times, enroll young adults who have already graduated from high school, so they can reach full capacity in the specific program. Most Project SEARCH sites require 10-12 young adults to be sustainable.

The MCO may determine, through the Family Care individualized assessment and the Resource Allocation Decision (RAD) process, that Project SEARCH would be an appropriate and effective support for a member and then authorize those services to support them. A young adult who is a Family Care or Family Care Partnership member may also approach their MCO and, with their interdisciplinary care team, determine if Project SEARCH is appropriate for them.

If the participant in IRIS determines and demonstrates that they have a need for Project SEARCH, they can chose to utilize their IRIS budget for such services.

The Project SEARCH Experience

Each day, young adults report to the host business and learn employability and job skills in the classroom while participating in three or four unpaid internships at the host business during the year. The classroom curriculum stresses employability and independent living skills: self-esteem, communication, career exploration and job search, interviewing skills, job retention, money management, and independent living. In the work internships, young adults build communication

and problem solving skills, as well as job-specific skills. Project SEARCH interns are encouraged to use public transportation to the Project SEARCH site, if available.

The goal for young adults upon program completion is CIE at a minimum of 16 hours per week, at or above minimum wage, in non-seasonal employment.

For an up-to-date list of Project SEARCH sites in Wisconsin, go to the link below and click on the “location” tab: dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/programs/project-search.

Partnerships in Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH is based on a partnership and braided funding structure that typically includes a local business, school partners, and DVR. All partners are vital to the success of the program.

The host business provides a training classroom, a business liaison, and internships for on-the-job training and orientation services.

The school partner hires and supports a classroom instructor for each site. For a Family Care or Family Care Partnership member or IRIS participant who is no longer in high school, the MCO or the IRIS participant’s budget may be utilized to fund the portion for classroom instruction typically funded by the school system.

DVR provides funding for onsite skills trainer, funding for UW-Whitewater credit for adult interns, vocational counseling and coordination, and additionally funds a vocational service agency to support young adults in their internships and assist them with final job placement. DVR may also provide other necessary services to assist individuals with their employment goals.

Transportation

Interns participating in Project SEARCH are expected to learn how to independently commute to work, as this skill will be needed after the intern completes the program and is working in CIE.

Transportation solutions should be individualized for each intern. Wherever public transportation is available, Project SEARCH programs should take advantage of this resource. It is essential that the Project SEARCH team work towards the most cost-effective solution for transportation for each intern.

If the intern is not able to find transportation independently:

- High school student: High school funds transportation. Based on individual needs, DVR may braid funding with the high school.
- Non-high school student: Long-term support funds transportation. Based on individual needs, DVR may braid funding with long-term support.

Family Care or Family Care Partnership Project SEARCH authorization for a young adult in or not in high school

For Project SEARCH participants still in high school, the individual's school and DVR funds Project SEARCH. Once the individual is employed in the community, either at the Project SEARCH site or elsewhere, the MCO would provide individualized follow along services as determined by the individual's member-centered plan (MCP).

For young adults who are not in high school, the MCO pays for the training component of Project SEARCH, whereas DVR pays for the job coaching component and a credit from the UW-Whitewater. The MCO pays the instructor¹ portion of the costs associated with the young adult. The training component of Project SEARCH can be included in the Family Care benefit package as either community-based pre-vocational services or consumer education and training. The specific payment rate is negotiated by the MCO with the school to provide the trainer or instructor. Care teams may decide, by using the RAD process, that providing funding for the Project SEARCH instructor and administrative support is the most cost-effective way to help meet the member's long-term care employment outcome. Once the member is employed and DVR closes the member's case file, the long-term care support agency would continue to provide their typical interdisciplinary care team support for the member and long-term job support as determined by the MCP.

IRIS Project SEARCH Funding for a young adult in or not in high school

For Project SEARCH participants still in high school, the individual's school and DVR would pay for Project SEARCH. Once the individual is employed in the community, either at the Project SEARCH site or elsewhere, the ICA would update the service plan and budget to reflect the supports and services needed to maintain the participant's employment outcomes.

For young adults who are not in high school, the participant may decide that they would like to pursue Project SEARCH services. If they are able to demonstrate this need, the ICA will update the individual support and service plan (ISSP) and IRIS budget to include Project SEARCH. They will also ensure that the cost for the Project SEARCH instructor and administrative support is the most cost-effective way to help meet the participant's employment long-term care outcome. Once the participant is employed and DVR closes the participant's case file, the long-term care support agency would continue to provide their typical support for the participant as determined by the ISSP.

Coding for Project SEARCH as a Family Care and IRIS benefit

MCOs should code Project SEARCH services by using the correct procedure code and modifiers for community-based prevocational services or training and consumer education.

ICAs should code Project SEARCH services by using the correct procedure code and modifiers for Project SEARCH program fee. The following tables provide further detail related to the correct procedure code and modifiers.

¹ The instructor must be a certified special education teacher with experience in school-to-work transition, which is a requirement of the Project SEARCH model.

Family Care Service Codes

Service	Time Units	Procedure Code	Modifier	Project SEARCH	SPC
Community-Based Pre-Voc	15 min	T2015	UA/U8	HB	108
	1 hour	T2015	UA	HB	108
	per diem	T2014	UA	HB	108
	each	T2014	UA/U7	HB	108
Consumer Education & Training	15 min	S9445		HB	113
	each	S9445		HB	113

Primary Modifiers;

UA = Community Based Pre-Vocational

Secondary Modifiers;

U7 = Each

U8 = Periodic (1 unit = 15 min, 4 units = 1 hour, etc.)

HB = Adult Non-geriatric

IRIS Service Codes

Service	Time Units	Procedure Code	Modifier	SPC
Project SEARCH Program Fee	15 min	T2015	HB/U8	108.10
	Hourly	T2015	HB	108.10
	Each	T2014	HB/U7	108.10
	Daily	T2014	HB	108.10