

Project Skills Manual for Students



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Vocational Rehabilitation Office Contacts

Website: dhs.sd.gov/en/rehabilitation-services

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Aberdeen | 605-626-2398 800-439-3417 | Brookings | 605-569-5904 800-382-2176 | Chamberlain | 605-734-4555 800-265-9677 |
| Huron | 605-353-7130 800-382-2176 | Mitchell | 605-995-8072 800-265-9677 | Pierre | 605-773-3318 877-873-8500 |
| Rapid City | 605-394-2261 800-439-8861 | Sioux Falls | 605-367-5330 800-265-9679 | Spearfish | 605-642-6817 800-439-8861 |
| Watertown | 605-882-5150 866-261-9261 | Yankton | 605-688-3050 800-265-9677 | | |



Transition Services Liaison Project (TSLP)

Website: tslp.org/employment



Working in High School

- Have you ever thought about getting a job?
- Why should you get a job in high school?
- How would a person go about getting their first job?

Students who work are more confident and possess better time-management skills than students who are not employed. In addition to offering a paycheck, some independence, and satisfaction, a part-time job can provide both training and experience. Employment teaches students about responsibility and can also reinforce what they are learning in school.

One way students with disabilities get their first job is through Project Skills. Project Skills offers paid work experiences for high school students with disabilities. Students learn skills in different jobs with the support of a job coach. Project Skills help a student build a work history and list of references.

This program is offered by the Department of Human Services vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies and your local school district.

Hopefully, the following information will help you with these and other questions you may have when it comes to going to work and getting connected with Project Skills.

Top Reasons to Get a Job While in School

- Money in your pocket by earning a paycheck!
- Gain experience to learn what it's like to be an employee!
- Start to develop a work history and references for your resume!
- Gain independence and take control of your future!
- A chance to explore what you might like for a career before committing to a specific role or industry!
- Makes you more employable for future employment opportunities!
- Build your confidence!
- Chance to practice budgeting!
- Develop transferrable skills!

Exploration and Planning

This part is all about you! Speak up and work with your IEP team to figure out what working looks like for you. You'll want to think about what jobs interest you and how to use your skills so you can be the best employee you can be.

Your IEP meetings with the school are fantastic opportunities to talk about and plan for your future and work. Once you've let your team know you're interested in Project Skills, the ball can get rolling to help you reach your goals! Having trouble figuring out what your interests are? There are activities your teacher and your VR counselor can do with your help.

In addition to Project Skills, the school staff can also assist you with career planning through the SD MyLife program (sdmylife.com) and teach you other important job-related skills.



Another website for career exploration is Pathful Explore (pathful.com/explore) which provides a combination of interactive tools, assessments, and real-world exploration videos to empower students so they can explore diverse career pathways. To obtain an account, you must visit with their VR counselor.

Before you start Project Skills, activities that may help you prepare to enter the workplace may include:

- Filling out a sample job application,
- Developing a resume,
- Interviewing with an employer, and
- Locating documents such as Social Security Card, driver's license or ID card, or, if applicable, Selective Services card.



Your Responsibilities

As a young adult eager to get to work, you have some responsibilities while participating in the Project Skills. It is important to attend scheduled meetings with your VR counselor. Communicate with your job coach, teacher, and employer on successes and concerns you encounter during your work experience.

During Project Skills, you will learn qualities that make a good employee!

| Attitude | Attendance | Appearance | Ambition | Accountability | Acceptance | Appreciation |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|--|
| Control the way you react when receiving constructive criticism. Stay positive. Be flexible. | Be on time, every time. Talk with your boss when you don't think you'll make it to work on time or at all. | Dress appropriately for the job. Make sure you and your outfit are clean when you start your shift. | Be responsible. Stay busy and take initiative. Do more than the minimum. | Be honest. Ask when you don't understand. Make good decisions and apologize if you are wrong. | Learn what is expected of you. Follow directions. Work as a team with coworkers. | Stay friendly and show manners to everyone, including coworkers, supervisors, and customers. |
| | | | | | | |

Your School's Responsibilities

The staff at the school plays a major role in the Project Skills program by helping you to get connected with a VR counselor and an employer in the community that will be interested in providing you a work experience. School staff will also support you in learning how to be a good employee and the necessary skills for the job. This support is often referred to as job coaching and is provided as needed to support you while on the job. Once you have learned your new job duties and become comfortable on the job, the school staff will continue to monitor your progress by checking in with you and your employer to help you adjust to any changes made at the worksite.

Job Development:

- Assist you in finding an experience in the community in areas that you like and are interested in.
- Contacting employers for potential work site openings.
- Telling you about the job demands.
- Negotiating and completing the Project Skills Work Experience Agreement and approval from the VR Counselor before the work experience begins.
- Helping identify your job tasks and skills you will learn on the job.
- Processing modifications, if there is a change in wages, agreement period, job title, or in your job duties.

Job Coaching:

Job coaches are individuals who specialize in assisting individuals with disabilities to adjust to the work environment while learning and accurately carrying out job duties. Job coaches provide one-on-one training tailored to the needs of the employee. They may first do a job analysis to identify the job duties, followed by developing a specific plan as to how they can best train the employee to work more and more on his/her own until completely self-sufficient and able to perform job duties accurately and effectively without assistance.



→ Ref: askjan.org/solutions/Job-Coaches.cfm



Job Coach

Monitoring:

Once you have learned your new duties and become comfortable on the job, the job coach will continue to monitor your progress by checking in with you and your employer to help you adjust to any changes made at the work site.

Paperwork Required BEFORE Starting Project Skills

- Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) with your VR Counselor
- Onboarding Form to set up your ADP profile
- I9 with copy of Social Security card and copy of driver's license or approved ID
- W4
- Selective Services Registration for assigned at-birth males over 18
- Employee Direct Deposit form
- Project Skills Work Agreement – requires employer signature

Employer's Responsibilities

Employers will be excited to have you work for them! They are to provide you with a “real life” job experience by helping you learn new techniques and skills to better yourself. All you need to do is come to work motivated with the willingness to learn!



Employers are looking for people who are hard workers, have a good work ethic, and can get along with others. They will assist in training for the job by following the training plan listed on your work experience agreement. They will also supervise you and will supply sufficient materials and equipment to perform assigned duties. Your employer will make sure that the working conditions are safe and that you will obey all safety practices.

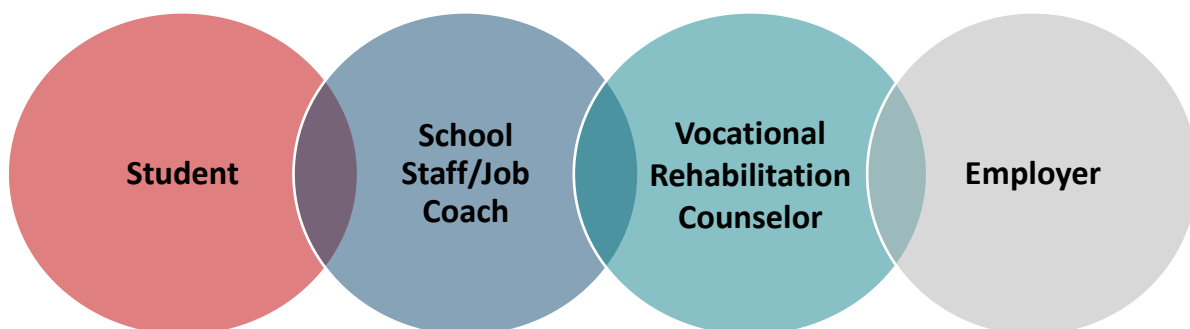
- Like any other job applicant, you may be asked to fill out an application and interview for possible work experience options.
- Collaborate with your Job Coach to determine your duties and expectations and help determine your work schedule.
- Provide feedback on your employment strengths and needs.
- Promote good work habits through an authentic work experience, where a participant will learn the benefits of doing a good job and the consequences of not.

VR Counselor's Responsibilities

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors have experience working with students just like you. They can help you figure out what those goals are and ways to reach your goals after high school. This includes matching your skills, interests, and abilities to opportunities in the community. With Project Skills, they will explain the program to you and your family and assist with getting paperwork completed and turned in so that you can get paid work experience!

Your VR counselor will also work with you to develop and sign an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) that identifies Project Skills as a service to help you reach your goals. Project Skills ends when you are no longer on an IEP. However, you and your VR counselor will continue to work together to help you reach your future employment goals.

In the event of a work-related injury during a Project Skills work experience, VR pays for workers' compensation insurance so needs to be notified immediately so the claim form can be completed.



A Note to Families

Please know that VR counselors acknowledge and appreciate the important role you play in your son or daughter's planning and activities toward building independence. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact your VR counselor or teacher. The purpose of this program is to help your son or daughter build independence, confidence, and maturity while being supported!

Actions you can take to help your son or daughter succeed may include:

- Offer encouragement and support in identifying possible career and job interests.
- Help provide information about his/her strengths and interests during IEP and IPE meetings.
- Provide opportunities to budget earnings from the work experience.
- Support learning life skills that will make him/her a valuable employee by giving them more responsibilities by assigning them chores.
- Let them try tasks that you're unsure if they can do. This is a learning process for everyone, so this is a great way for them to learn more about themselves in a supported environment!

We, as professionals, understand that parents may have some hesitation about their child working while in high school, please know that we understand your concerns and are happy to talk to you about those concerns. Please know that VR counselors are trained professionals in supporting individuals with disabilities to be successful in employment settings so we will work with your student and their school to ensure supports are in place to assist with success!

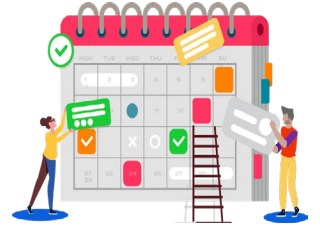
**IT'S OKAY TO BE NERVOUS ABOUT
STARTING A NEW JOB!
BEING NERVOUS MEANS YOU'RE ABOUT
TO DO SOMETHING BRAVE!**



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

➔ When can I work?

It's important to talk availability with your team (teacher, VR counselor, and parents), and a good place to do this would be in your IEP meeting! Your work schedule can be flexible (summer, weekends, after or before school, during school), and should be individualized according to your situation and job coach availability. The work schedule will be determined by the employer, the school, and you. All involved parties should have a copy of the student's schedule.



➔ How much can I work?

The work experience is a minimum of 30 hours and a maximum of 250 hours a student can participate in the Project Skills work experience during a school year. How these hours are used and distributed can be a team decision, oftentimes discussed at your IEP meeting.

➔ Where can I work?

Project Skills is an integrated, community-based employment experience. The Project Skills placement cannot be at the school unless approved by VR. **NOTE:** Labor laws or company policy may require that individuals be 18 years of age for some jobs.

The purpose of Project Skills is to provide as many employment opportunities as possible in multiple settings so you can determine what type of career you want to pursue after high school. It is preferred to try these opportunities in different employment settings but with your VR counselor's approval, a second opportunity could be an option at a previous business if new tasks are being learned.

➔ How do I get paid?



You have a choice between direct deposit or a payroll card. The payroll card is like a debit card except you can only make purchases in the amount available on the card. Another option may be a check mailed to you. It will take longer for you to receive your paycheck if this is chosen. If you want to change your payment option, you can do this through your ADP portal under the Pay tab.

Sign your timecard no later than Sunday at 11:59 PM CST/10:59 PM MST. Best practice is to sign your timecard after your last shift during that pay period. If cards are not signed on time, this could cause a delay in payment. You will get your paycheck every two weeks, typically the Friday after you sign your timecard.

➔ What if the job requires a uniform or special equipment?

Talk to your VR counselor about potential assistance with purchasing items, including uniforms or specialized equipment, the employer requires of their employees.

➔ How will Project Skills affect my Social Security benefits?

In general, earning wages may affect the Society Security (SSA) benefits a person receives. However, when participating in Project Skills, the student may be eligible for a work incentive called the **Student Earned Income Exclusion**. To qualify for the “Student Earned Income Exclusion,” an individual who is receiving SSI must be: under the age of 22; regularly attending school, college, or training to prepare for a job; and working. Regularly attending school means in a college or university for at least 8 hours per week; in grades 7-12 for at least 12 hours per week; or in a course of training to prepare him/ her for a paying job.



You need to contact your local SSA and inform them you are participating in Project Skills. Inform them that the program is a work experience and part of your individualized education plan (IEP). If this sounds complicated, you're not alone. You do have access to a Benefits Specialist that covers your area so ask your VR counselor to get connected.

➔ How will Project Skills affect my public assistance?

Because Project Skills wages are derived from federal training funds, public assistance programs such as SNAP, Housing, TANF, Energy Assistance, and others should not be affected. If you have concerns, contact your VR counselor or public assistance program.

➔ Can I participate in Project Skills for more than one year?

Yes, students may participate in Project Skills for more than one year; however, this is a decision that needs to be made by your VR counselor along with your IEP team.

➔ What happens if I get injured on the job?



VR provides worker's compensation insurance for all participants. If you are injured on the job, tell the employer, school staff, and VR counselor. A “First Report of Injury” form must be completed and submitted within three days from the date of injury. This form is available from your VR counselor.

All medical bills will be submitted to the VR counselor so they can forward them to the insurance company. **Note:** Employers are required to have general liability insurance which covers general accidents that may occur on the employer's property.

➔ How will I get transported to my Project Skills job?

This is a decision that needs to be made by your IEP team as Project Skills should be one of the transition activities listed on your IEP. If your shift is outside school hours, talk to your VR counselor about potential limited assistance.



Should I disclose my disability?

For many job seekers with disabilities, the issue of “disclosure” (if, when, and how to alert an employer to their disability) is a major area of concern. As you go about looking for a job, you will need to decide if and when to disclose your disability. There are no hard rules. It will be up to you to make those decisions. It will all be a strategic judgment call on your part.

Having a disability can be a liability in the job search – due to the possible misconceptions and/or prejudices of the people you will encounter. Sometimes, however, having a disability can be an asset!! When you are applying to proactive companies who have a reputation for hiring people with disabilities, they may have a specific interest in applicants with disabilities.

Probably more important than “when” you disclose your disability is “how” you do it. The way that you present your disability can greatly affect how the employer will view it. Are you presenting yourself as a person with a disability who has some skills – or a person with skills who happens to have a disability? Don’t be mistaken, this is an important distinction! Employers don’t hire people because they have disabilities – they hire people because they have skills. Make sure that you are presenting yourself as an enthusiastic and qualified candidate FIRST and someone with a disability, SECOND.

One of the key ingredients to disclosing your disability is to have a good understanding of who you are as an individual (self-awareness), including your interests, skills, and abilities, and be able to advocate these to the employer. You should also be able to communicate what accommodation your disability requires and how this accommodation will assist you in being able to perform the essential functions of the job you are seeking.

If you don’t have a visible or otherwise obvious disability, you have the choice of when, how, and if you will disclose it to any employer. Even if you do require a reasonable accommodation on the job, you do not need to disclose your need for it until after you have been offered a job.



Resources on Disclosing Your Disability

THE 411 ON DISABILITY DISCLOSURE

bit.ly/411DisabilityDisclosure

JAN – THE JOB ACCOMMODATION NETWORK

askjan.org/

YOUR VR COUNSELOR

Create an Employee Profile on ADP

Let your counselor know if you have a smart device to get the instructions to set up your ADP profile. You will also get instructions on how to download the ADP app so you can clock in/out and access paystubs. **Instructions must be followed to avoid any issues when setting up your employee profile.**



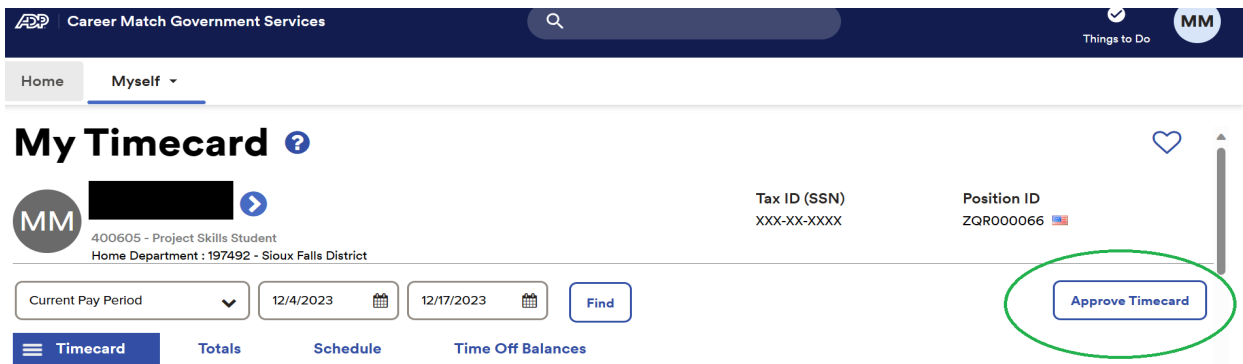
If you don't have a smart device, your VR counselor will send instructions to set up your ADP profile on a computer. You will need to write down your time on a paper timecard until you have access to a computer to input your time, sign your timecard, and access paystubs.

bit.ly/SDDHS-ADP-client-link



Approve your Timecard

- Every two weeks, you will need to verify that your hours are accurate and click on the Approve Timecard button (circled in green below).
- Lunch time is not paid time so make sure your timecard does not include this time.
- You must sign your timecard every two weeks by Sunday at 11:59 PM CST/10:59 PM MST.
- Ask for assistance from your Job Coach to clock in/out and sign the timecard.
- **BEST PRACTICE – sign your timecard after your last shift during that pay period.**



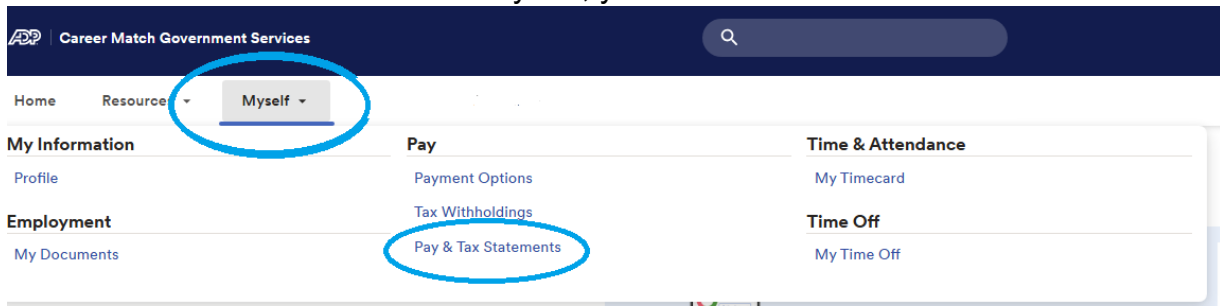
Get Paid

- **Paychecks will be received every two weeks on Fridays via your deposit choice during the onboarding process.**
- If you are receiving SSI/SSDI benefits, it is your responsibility to save ALL your paystubs in case the Social Security Administration requests them for wage verification. You are encouraged to reach out to the local SD Benefits Specialist to learn how your SSI/SSDI could be impacted by earning a paycheck. Talk to your VR counselor to get connected!



Accessing your Paystubs

- Click on MYSELF and under the Pay tab, you'll click PAY & TAX STATEMENTS.



- Here you will be able to view any pay statements issued by CMGS.
- The most recent pay will be displayed in the middle of the screen where you can see a summary of gross wages, taxes, deductions, and take-home pay.
- To view the details of a prior pay, select the box next to that pay (circled in blue in the photo below) and it will then be displayed in the middle of the screen.
- You can click on View Statement (circled in orange in the photo below) to view or print your full pay statement in PDF format which can be printed or saved.
- At the end of the year, you will be able to access your W2s in the upper right corner listed as Tax Statements.

Pay & Tax Statements

The screenshot shows the 'Pay & Tax Statements' page. On the left, there is a 'My Pay' section with a table of pay stubs. The row for 'Jan 27, 2023' is circled in blue. The table has columns for 'Date', 'Take Home', and 'Gross'. The 'Take Home' amount is \$1,610.96 and the 'Gross' amount is \$2,000.00. In the center, there is a donut chart showing the breakdown of the pay stub. The 'Take Home' portion is green (80%), 'Taxes' is red (8%), and 'Other' is purple (12%). To the right of the chart, there is a summary of 'Take Home' pay: \$1,610.96. Below the chart, there is a table with columns for 'Type', 'Units', 'Rate', and 'Amount'. The 'Regular' pay is 80 units at a rate of \$2,000.00, for a total amount of \$2,000.00. On the right side of the page, there is a 'Tax Statements' section with a 'View statement' button circled in orange. Below that, there is a 'Go Paperless' section with a 'Go paperless' button.

Don't forget that VR services can and will continue once you finish high school. Be sure to keep communicating with your VR counselor about further services and support!