

Dear Project SEARCH Partners,

As a multi-agency collaborative, Project SEARCH involves several entities, including Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD), the Ohio Department of Education, local education agencies, county boards of developmental disabilities, business partners and providers. Over the past several months, OOD and the Department of Education have taken on a more active role in the statewide coordination of Project SEARCH. This increased involvement was initiated by Project SEARCH National to align the state of Ohio with other states where Project SEARCH programs exist. This means that OOD and the Department of Education are working collaboratively to: plan and coordinate quarterly Project SEARCH meetings; ensure OOD participation in transition planning and IEP meetings; develop tools to assist students and families in making informed decisions about services; and be involved in decisions regarding the development of new programs. To that end, OOD and the Department of Education would like to share the following information with all partners.

OOD Participation in IEP Meetings

When IEP team discussions involve consideration of Project SEARCH to meet a student's service needs, it's critical that OOD is part of these decisions. As a joint funder of services, and in accordance with [Ohio's Operating Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities, 3301-51-07](#), to the extent appropriate and with the consent of the parents or child who has reached the age of majority, schools are **required to invite a representative of any participating agency (e.g. OOD)** that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services. OOD should be involved in discussions regarding a student's participation in Project SEARCH as early as possible and, at a minimum, must be part of the decision-making process PRIOR to applying for Project SEARCH. This earlier involvement will ensure that students who apply for Project SEARCH need and require intensive job readiness training services to meet their transition and employment goals. IEP teams also should ensure consideration of individual student needs in relation to the least restrictive environment when making these decisions.

Project SEARCH Performance Report

To ensure students and families have information needed to make informed choices about transition services, OOD and the Department of Education have convened a workgroup of providers, school instructors, VR staff, Project SEARCH National, business partners and others in the creation of a new performance report for each Project SEARCH program in Ohio. This tool will capture performance metrics, including the number of student interns hired by the host business, and employment outcomes like wage and hour information. OOD will publish the performance reports on its website and update regularly.

New Project SEARCH programs

When a new Project SEARCH program or site is being considered, **OOD and the Department of Education must be involved in all discussions with the potential business partner.** As a joint funder, OOD must approve all new Project SEARCH programs PRIOR to development of a new program. More details can be found on Page 131 of the [OOD VR Provider Manual](#).

We strongly encourage you to actively participate in above-mentioned quarterly meetings in order to receive the most current information about Project SEARCH and have an opportunity to network with colleagues from across the state. For more information, please contact Emilie Coen at Emilie.Coen@education.ohio.gov or Julie Hance at Julie.Hance@ood.ohio.gov.



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