

EMPLOYMENT FIRST

Tennessee must increase employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- All students with I/DD receiving special education services should have access to **WORK BASED LEARNING PROGRAMS**.
- All school systems should be required to have work based learning programs for students with **TRAINED AND DEDICATED STAFF**.
- Tennessee should embrace Employment First policies across state agencies: **EMPLOYMENT IN THE GENERAL WORKFORCE IS THE FIRST AND PREFERRED OPTION** for people with disabilities participating in state programs.
- Tennessee state government should become a **MODEL EMPLOYER** of people with disabilities.
- Business and industry locating in Tennessee should be offered **INCENTIVES FOR HIRING** employees with developmental disabilities, including full support of disability employment programs administered by state government.

STATE DATA¹

- 83% of families consider employment in the community to be important for their family member with a disability.
- 19% of the people with disabilities who receive long term services from the state receive supported employment services.
- 23% of Vocational Rehabilitation cases close with an employment outcome.
- 52% of high school graduates without disabilities are working; 12% of students with intellectual or multiple disabilities or autism are working.
- Over 4,000 students with I/DD are expected to exit school over the next 5-7 years.

BACKGROUND²

It is well established that people with I/DD can hold jobs in the community and earn at least minimum wage. Data indicates that in Tennessee most people with I/DD who want to work do not have the opportunity to do so.

- Most students exit school without work experience leaving them unprepared for competitive employment.
- Students who participate in work based learning during their school careers return home without needed supports to help them transition into jobs or continuing education programs.
- People with intellectual disabilities continue to be considered “unemployable” by many programs that provide training and long-term services and supports.
- Tennesseans with I/DD who are employed and receive minimum or above wages limit their hours for fear of losing healthcare benefits (TennCare and SSI/SSDI).

1. <http://www.tennesseeworks.org/date-dashboard> and Tennessee Department of Education

2. Office of Disability Employment/US Department of Labor

