

Maryland's High School/High Tech programs aim to fill jobs

Maryland students with disabilities recently had the chance to build a Web site for NASA, operate cameras at a local television station and work as counselors at a summer science camp, thanks to new innovative programs in the state.

The programs were modeled around High School/High Tech, a national program funded by the **Labor Department's Office of Disability Employment Policy**, which offers high school students with disabilities the opportunity to explore high-tech careers. In Maryland, the program is administered by the state **Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services**.

"Leveling the playing field for students with disabilities means being proactive in making sure your career training program will serve these students," said **Adele Connolly**, High School/High Tech project director at the Division of Rehabilitation Services.

She said anyone interested in improving access for local students with disabilities should not assume that these students can't take part in certain career training activities. Instead, they should investigate the accommodations that would allow students with disabilities to participate in the same activities as their nondisabled peers.

And, she added, "Be sure that you are training students for real jobs."

Diverse high-tech offerings

In Maryland, state and local officials have devised several programs to promote career exploration for students with disabilities:

- The **National Federation of the Blind's** Transition to Independence Club provides career exploration activities for blind students. It enables students to participate in workshops, seminars and workplace training activities. It also involves parents in discussions about college planning, disability benefits and disability support services.

- The **University of Maryland's** Young Scholars Program offers high school juniors and seniors the chance to spend three weeks participating in summer academic workshops at the College Park campus of the university.

Last summer, the university gave students with disabilities the opportunity to complete one technology-related academic course for three college credits and to participate in career development, leadership and advocacy seminars. Students were eligible for three-week paid internships in settings such as the nearby **Goddard Space Flight Center**. The program mentors also worked with students to explore postsecondary educational options.

Officials point out that only a small percentage of adults with disabilities receive high-tech training,

The '5 Guideposts' are used in program planning

Each of Maryland's High School/High Tech programs was built to address the national model's *Five Guideposts of Success*, design features that have become best practices for implementing career training programs for students with disabilities.

- **Preparatory experiences.** Students should get the opportunity to explore work environments similar to those in which they may one day work.
- **Connecting activities.** Students should take part in activities that bridge the gap between academic and technical training. They should be able to see how their school education can be applied in the workplace.
- **Work-based learning experiences.** Internships are a great way for students to delve into what a particular high-tech job may involve. Students can learn through hands-on activities what high-tech professionals do on a day-to-day basis.
- **Youth development and support.** A key element of an effective career exploration program is an internal support system. Students need mentors and role models within the program who can encourage them and help them decide whether a high-tech career is a good fit.
- **Family involvement.** Parents should be involved when students consider their workplace opportunities. Staff members within the program can help parents determine what postsecondary training is needed for the student and how to go about getting disability support from the postsecondary institution.

so high school students with disabilities need to be exposed to the vast array of careers in high technology to help meet Maryland's high-tech demand.

- The **United Cerebral Palsy of Prince George's and Montgomery Counties** recently received funding to enhance its career exploration services for students with disabilities. The nationally recognized Web-based program enables students to test their interest in technology training, and gives them the opportunity to experience technology through field trips and summer internships.

- **North County High School**, in conjunction with **Anne Arundel Community College** and the **Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation**, recruits high school sophomores with interest and aptitude for high-tech careers and pairs them with mentors for tutoring, worksite tours at local businesses, job shadowing, leadership seminars and in-school retreats.

For more information about the national High School/High Tech program, visit www.dol.gov/odep/programs/high.htm.

—Heather Lash