



# Workforce Issuance

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☐ Policy ☒ Information

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**To:** Chief Elected Officials  
MassHire Workforce Board Chairs  
MassHire Workforce Board Directors  
MassHire Career Center Directors  
MassHire Fiscal Officers  
MDCS Operations Managers

**cc:** WIOA State Partners

**From:** Alice Sweeney, Director  
MassHire Department of Career Services

**Date:** December 6, 2021

**Subject:** **Promoting Access to Work Experiences and Employment for Youth and Young Adults with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities**

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**Purpose:** To provide MassHire Workforce Boards, MassHire Career Center Operators, WIOA Youth Service Providers and other workforce partners with guidance for promoting access to work experiences and employment for youth and young adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD).

**Background** While Massachusetts' unemployment rate continues its recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the unemployment rate in Massachusetts is nearly double for youth ages 16 -24<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, Massachusetts ranks 31<sup>st</sup> in the percentage of people with disabilities who are employed at just 41.4% (compared to the highest state at 57.2%). <sup>2</sup> These statistics project an unfavorable employment outlook for youth and young adults with IDD age 16-24 that are transitioning into adulthood. Exposing youth and young adults with IDD to work experiences and employment during the high school years can mitigate

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/lau/table14afull20.htm> - U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics preliminary 2020 annual averages.

<sup>2</sup> Citation: <https://disabilitycompendium.org> 2020 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, compiled by the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire.

this unfavorable unemployment outcome and increase the likelihood of participation in employment post high school.

MassHire Department of Career Services (MDCS) is committed to ensuring that all youth and young adults regardless of disability have access to programs and activities that provide career pathways to employment. This general commitment is inclusive of Individuals with IDD (including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder - ASD).

In 2010, the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services instituted an [Employment First Policy](#) that prioritizes employment in the general workforce for individuals with IDD. In the 10+ years since, an ongoing series of capacity-building efforts have been undertaken to ensure that youth and adults with IDD are able to access employment in the general workforce. MDCS is a critical component of that capacity-building.

As the need for a skilled workforce continues to grow it is essential that youth and young adults with IDD are included in talent pipelines for employers. MassHire career centers and WIOA youth service providers can support the development of inclusive talent pipelines by providing access to work experiences and employment opportunities to youth and young adults with IDD in integrated settings alongside youth and young adults without disabilities.

Integrated work experiences and employment opportunities provide a foundation for the skills, training, and experiences necessary for competitive integrated employment and play an important role in preparing youth and young adults with IDD as contributing members of the workforce.

Attachment A provides recommendations for service enhancements and increased participation of youth and young adults with IDD into workforce development programs.

Disability definitions and resources related to promoting access to work experiences and employment for youth and young adults with IDD can be found in Attachment B.

**Action**

**Required:** Please share with all appropriate managers, staff, and partners.

**Inquiries:** Please direct inquiries regarding this information Issuance to [sacha.stadhard@detma.org](mailto:sacha.stadhard@detma.org).

**Attachments:** A - Guidance for Promoting Access to Work Experiences and Employment for Youth and Young Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)  
B - Definitions and Resources