

# 5 ways to give students virtual work-based experiences

With a little creativity, those who support students with disabilities can help ensure they gain work experience, even while learning remotely.

By: [Cara Nissman](#) | November 11, 2020

<https://districtadministration.com/5-ways-to-give-students-virtual-work-based-experiences/>

Students with disabilities who are nearing postsecondary transition need to figure out what they want to do with their lives after high school and have work-based learning experiences. These needs don't change because students are learning remotely. Adults just have to be creative in how they communicate and collaborate to ensure students get the most out of virtual activities.

Transition coordinators, vocational-rehabilitation counselors and others who support students at this stage also have to ensure they track their work with students on virtual activities and experiences to make sure they meet their transition goals in their IEPs.

"You need to be documenting what you're doing," says Michael Stoehr, a knowledge development and technical assistance specialist for the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. "You have to follow up on virtual activities. If you're not following up and documenting it, how are you going to know what's happening with kids?"

Also follow these tips to provide students virtual work-based learning experiences:

## 1. Prioritize collaboration, consistency.

The transition coordinator should be communicating and collaborating with vocational rehabilitation and other community providers and strive to have everyone use the same platform to connect with the student that the district is using for remote learning, Stoehr says. "Be consistent as you can be."

Also ensure everyone working with the child has realistic expectations. For example, no one should have a student sitting at the computer for an hour-long career exploration activity. Try 15 minutes or less, then seek student feedback. "We want to make sure what we're putting out there is appropriate and reasonable," he says.

## 2. Promote virtual job shadowing.

Just because students can't shadow someone in an industry of interest in person does not mean they have to wait to see what different jobs entail. Many states and organizations offer websites with free videos that lend insight into various careers. For instance, [www.nebraskacareerclusters.com](http://www.nebraskacareerclusters.com), sponsored by Nebraska's Department of Education, Department of Labor, and Department of Economic Development, offers videos of nearly 20 different industries in which professionals discuss job requirements, workplace environments, job

expectations, salary ranges, and other details. Discussion guides with worksheets accompany all the videos, so transition coordinators or others can go over with students what they learn.

Students can also explore various careers while visiting [www.CareerOneStop.org](http://www.CareerOneStop.org), which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment, and Training Administration, Stoehr says. They can watch videos to learn what a job is like, the level of education and skills needed, average salary, and the likelihood of job opportunities in the future.

### **3. Encourage online self-exploration.**

Students can research online what is involved in getting a job and maintaining it. For example, at [explore-work.com](http://explore-work.com), a collaboration between the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center and The George Washington University, students can go through training modules, including ones about self-advocacy, work experiences, career planning, and workplace readiness, Stoehr says. “The cool thing about the site is it provides staff a summary of how the student did [on a course] and the student can receive a certificate of completion.”

To ensure students have practice writing resumes, doing job interviews and engaging in other aspects of career exploration and preparation, Stoehr says transition coordinators or others may want to have them go through the free modules on [www.cctstfolio.com](http://www.cctstfolio.com). The T-Folio, created by the Center for Change in Transition Services at Seattle University with funding from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, offers everything from skills, strengths, preferences and needs assessments to guidance on how to write a thank-you note after a job interview, and how to set goals for self-advocacy.

### **4. Promote inspiration.**

Encourage students to watch Roadtrip Nation documentaries on YouTube, at [www.youtube.com/roadtripnation](http://www.youtube.com/roadtripnation), for inspiration and insight into careers. The videos offer behind-the-scenes looks into industries and interviews with celebrities and noncelebrities around the country about their careers. Then talk with the student about what he found interesting. You can also have him write an essay about what he might want to do and the requirements to be able to do it.

### **5. Connect students with professionals.**

Help students connect remotely with community members to learn about what different jobs entail, Stoehr says. For example, if a student is interested in becoming a baker, help set up a phone call or videoconference with a local baker for an informational interview. The student can ask about what kind of training may be required, what kind of hours the baker works, and other questions about day-to-day work. The student may learn that a baker rises early, spends eight hours on his feet every day, and spends most of the day in the heat. This may prompt him to want to look into other careers in the food industry or a different industry altogether. “The young person has a choice in all of this,” he says.

*Cara Nissman covers autism, school psychology, and IEP team issues for [Special Ed Connection](#), a DA sister publication.*

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