

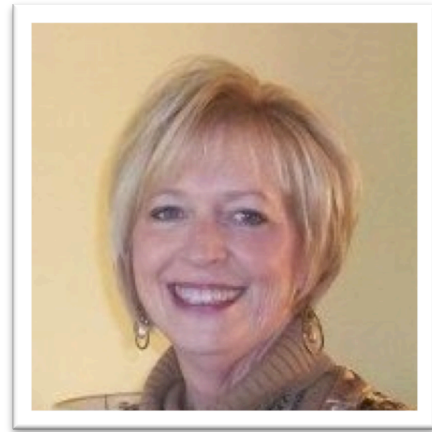
School to Business Partnerships Prepare Students with Special Needs for Jobs

For ten years, Betsy Gentry worked as a Transition Coordinator in the Special Education Department of the Bradley County School District in Cleveland, TN. Because of her insight and the support of local businesses, many high school students with special needs now work in the community.

Teaching Best Practices to Special Education Teachers

Today, as a supervisor at Lee University, Ms. Gentry teaches college students studying to become special education teachers. In lectures, students hear about her classroom experiences and about resources and best practices that Gentry implemented as a K-12 educator. "I want these pre-teachers to walk away with a clear vision to help more students reach their true potential and be productive citizens," she said.

"When more students are able to contribute to society, everyone wins! I'm thankful for so many caring business owners who helped us to provide an employment framework."



Betsy Gentry

District Program Successfully Helping High School Students Graduate With Marketable Skills

Thanks to Gentry's vision, more students with disabilities, both cognitively and physically, did participate in full inclusion at Bradley High School. They explored careers and worked with relevant on-the-job tools using a career development curriculum called Project Discovery, which comes in the form of hands-on job kits. More than 150 titles provide students with real-world job skills and



fundamental math and reading. Each module includes teacher instruction, hands-on activities, tools, assessments and performance data. Students identified job interests, took field trips, shadowed employees, shared what they learned and grew independently. As students flourished in the vocational program, Ms. Gentry knew she had to take one step further, so she reached out to businesses to form partnerships. "It was a great success! We appreciated the support of families, businesses and the community."

By graduation time, many students honed their natural abilities. They felt confident graduating with marketable skills. "When more students are able to contribute to society, everyone wins! I'm thankful for so many caring business owners who helped us to provide an employment framework."

School District-Business Partnerships Offered Students Real Work Experience



Partnerships were formed with the Golden Corral, Hobby Lobby, BILO, Cookes grocery chains and Watson Supermarket. Students were given options for internships

and transportation. They worked in groceries, assisted living facilities, retail and



department stores, automotive repair shops, manufacturing plants and restaurants and in beauty salons, greenhouses, childcare, and nursing. One student who uses a wheelchair delivered mail to the elderly in an assisted living home. "Business people who support social causes are the best people," says Gentry. They are eager to help!"

Alternative Education Students Excel with Early Career Education and Dropout Rates Decline

Ms. Gentry encouraged students who were higher functioning to mentor students who were lower functioning. Some volunteered as teaching assistants in Headstart. Some students in alternative education were accepted in general education certification programs after completing Project Discovery courses!

"Every human being wants to feel needed. They want a reason to get up in the morning and give back to the world. I hope I've played a part in making this a reality for students and for new teachers."

In her college course, Ms. Gentry discusses the reasons why career and technical education should be taught earlier in the learning process. She estimates that her high school's dropout rate reduced by 10% during her tenure.



Teaching Students with Autism Social Skills with Project Discovery

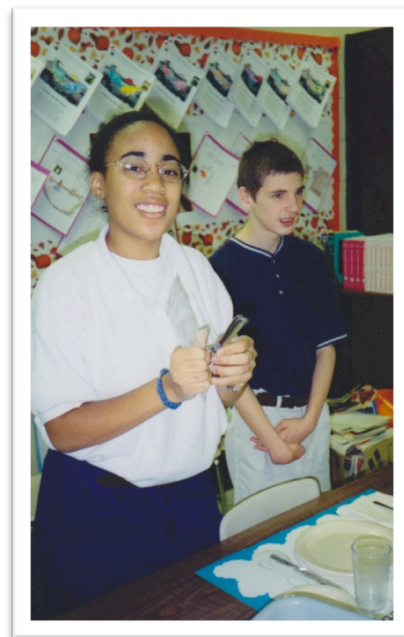
Ms. Gentry used the Project Discovery curriculum life skills units to teach students with autism social skills. She videotaped them to teach them how to make eye contact and simple communication.

Parent Praise for District's Career Readiness Program

"Parents loved our program," she said. "I would give them our "Race for Success" brochure and say this is what your students will be exposed to. They were excited and wanted to lend a hand. Often, parents only hear bad things about their children in alternative classes. They thanked me for making a difference!"

Success with Self-Contained and Inclusion Programs Gives More Students with Disabilities Workforce Education Options

Gentry's hope is that more administrators will look at self-contained and inclusion programs and give more students with disabilities workforce education options. She is teaching her college students to set higher expectations when they begin



teaching in the classroom. She admits that she would like to see more allocated funding needed to sustain career readiness programs. "There are great resources to engage students at any ability level," she says. "Every human being wants to feel needed. They want a reason to get up in the morning and give back to the world. I hope I've played a part in making this a reality for students and for new teachers."