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Attitudes of Employers toward Exceptional Students (Ages 14-17) in Vocational Education Programs

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ATTITUDES OF EMPLOYERS TOWARD EXCEPTIONAL
STUDENTS (AGES 14-17) IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

A Research Study Presented to the Faculty of
the Department of STEM Education and Professional Studies
at Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Science

By
Eunice A. Ervin
December 2015

SIGNATURE PAGE

This research study was prepared by Eunice A. Ervin under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in SEPS 636, Problems in Occupational and Technical Studies. It was submitted to the faculty as partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Master of Science degree.

Approved by: _____

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Eunice A. Ervin

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to determine typical employer attitudes toward allowing high school students (ages 14-17) to participate in the Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS) Vocational Employment Program. It is important to recognize that there is no formal survey presently that all Vocational Resource Teachers use to survey employer attitudes toward allowing exceptional children to participate in the Employ III/IV Internship programs in PWCS. Three of the ten schools presently participating will be used in this study. These schools were chosen due to their commonalities. This represents a 30 percent sampling of the schools in Prince William County Virginia who are currently participating in the Vocational Employ Internship Programs.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act Amendments (P.L. 101-476) was signed into law on July 26, 1990, by President George W. Bush (Hunt, 2006). P.L. 101-476 under Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) noted the importance of student's ages 14-22 who receive special education services be introduced to life and work skills for after high school. The law created the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP), a part of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which must contain transition plan goals for each student between the ages of 14-21 for receiving special education services in middle and high schools. These goals must address life after high school and were fully integrated into academics leading to a 4-year college or university, vocational-technical school, general life skills education for competitive employment, and semi-independent living to include community and life skills education for supported employment and supervised living (Johnson & Thurlow, 2003).

The American with Disabilities Act (ADA), P.L. 101-336 (Hunt, 2006), protects the civil rights of people with disabilities using four major areas related to the workforce. These are private sector employment, public services, public accommodations, and telecommunications. The Vocational Employment Program internship sites are in the public realm, to include: restaurants, hotels, theaters, doctors' offices, retail stores, museums, libraries, parks, and private schools and day care centers. The majority of these are areas of employment in which students in the Employment Internship Program participate within Prince William County Schools.

The three schools used in this study have exceptional students in the following disability areas: Mental Retardation (MR), Mild Autism, and Learning Disabilities (LD), to include (ADD/ADHD) – Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders and Severe Brain Injury (SBI).

The summary will validate the need for a common method of surveying employer's attitudes about the employment of teenaged public high school exceptional education students in the Prince William County Vocational Employ Programs. Upon completion of this study, a sample survey will be offered for adaptation and use throughout the PWCS Vocational Education Programs with appropriate modifications made by Prince William County Schools Vocational Staff, for a formal adaptation throughout the Vocational Employment Internship Programs in Prince William County Schools.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to evaluate employer attitudes toward exceptional education students participating in vocational employment internships within Prince William County public high schools.

Research Questions

This survey seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Why do employers prefer hiring exceptional students ages 18 and older as opposed to younger age groups 14 -17?

RQ2: What changes are needed in the employment curriculum to address the recent hiring practices of hiring older vs. younger students?

RQ3: Would a common survey help employers evaluate exceptional students ages 14-17 and be beneficial in the placement of exceptional students at various worksites for students participating in vocational education?

RQ4: Should employers have access to student's cognitive differences and exceptionalities for placement in the best possible work settings and vocational work programs?

RQ5: How will a formal survey that records employers' attitudes toward exceptional students benefit Prince William County Schools Vocational Education Employ Internship Programs?

Background and Significance

The background and significance of this study is to examine laws that warrant fairness in attitudes by employers toward exceptional education students involved in high school employment programs. The study will help to develop a formal common survey to track employer attitudes using a sampling of thirty percent of the school programs in Prince William County Virginia for exceptional education students ages 14-17. The following study and survey came about due to a lack of a common formal survey within the Prince William County Vocational Employment Programs. Discussions among Vocational Resource Teachers (2010) stated a need for such a survey, not only in evaluating student performance, but also to evaluate employer attitudes toward students who participate in training and workforce employment at work sites throughout the community. The need for this survey is to monitor attitudes of employers not wanting students due to lack of teamwork, basic skills, and maturity levels when participating in past internship programs. The researcher will look at federal public laws that govern transition and workforce entry through Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), P.L. 101-336, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1990). The following laws mandate that exceptional students have rights to a free appropriate public education and be provided an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) from high school to the world of work (Hunt, 2006). These laws support the Employment Internship Program for exceptional

students. There is a need to monitor employer attitudes toward exceptional students due to these laws.

Limitations

A sampling of thirty percent of Vocational Education Programs in Prince William County Virginia Public High Schools will be used in this study. The findings from this research study were limited by certain factors and conditions. The limitations associated with this study were whether it may not be applicable to other vocational internship programs outside of Prince William County Virginia Schools. There may be program variations outside the sample which may not be identified in the sample variations, i.e., attendance issues, ages in which students are allowed into the program due to prerequisites in the program, and cognitive ability levels of the students participating in the program. The transient nature and inconsistency in attendance of students participating in the program may impact employer's decisions about students used in the sample. There may be other surveys that other vocational resource teachers want to focus on as opposed to surveys on employer attitudes. Lack of information provided on students ages 14-17 by other schools participating in the sample may be a limiting factor.

Assumptions

The assumptions included in this study established items the researcher believes to be factual and unchanged. The assumptions made in this research study included the following:

- Vocational resource teachers in Prince William County Schools agree that there is lack of a common formal survey to use for the Prince William County

Vocational Employment Programs. Vocational resource teachers have stated a need for such a survey not only in evaluating student performance but also to evaluate employer attitudes toward our students who participate in training and workforce employment at various places of business throughout the community.

- Teachers need a means of monitoring attitudes of employers not wanting students due to lack of teamwork, basic skills, and maturity levels who participate in Prince William County Schools internship programs.

Procedures for Collecting Data

The following procedural methods for collecting data for this study began with identification of potential employers from which the researcher could gather data. The researcher determined that various businesses around the community would provide the best evaluation and effective representation of current and relevant Employment Internship Curriculum. The population for this study was employers of PWC high schools, vocational resource teachers, and transition specialist which participate in the Employment Internship Curriculum. Face-to-face interviews with employers who participate in the Vocational Internship Programs were conducted at various worksites in the community.

Interviews with vocational resource teachers from Hylton and Forest Park High Schools in Woodbridge, Virginia, were also conducted to determine the need for a common survey. The survey was given to participating and non-participating employers

in face-to-face interviews. Employers completed the voluntary survey in this interview process at a scheduled time as not to interfere with their jobs.

Definition of Terms

Special education terms used in the study are explained. Most of these terms deal with federally mandated public laws. The definitions will ensure an understanding of terminology used throughout the research study.

1. **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** - Protects the civil rights of persons with disabilities.
2. **Disability** – Persons who have limitations as to what he or she can do such as: see, hear, or walk. Gifted students do not fall into this category.
3. **Exceptional** – Describes a range of students including blind, gifted, deaf, and others who receive special education services. Some Learning Disabled and Emotionally Behaviorally Disabled (LD/EBD) students may fall into this category.
4. **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** - Mandates that exceptional education student's age 3-21 years with a disability be provided a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The law that supports this act is P.L. 94-142.
5. **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** - Mandated by federal P.L. 94-142. This Law mandates a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, treating each exceptional student's disability individually.

6. **Individual Transition Plan (ITP)** - Includes all workforce components dealing with independent living, work, further education, and other options for life after high school. The ITP is part of an exceptional education student's IEP.
7. **Local Education Agency (LEA)** – Board of Education generally governed by state governmental entities.
8. **The Office of Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)** – Support programs that assist in educating children with special education needs.
9. **Transition Services** – Include career planning, self-advocacy, social life, community participation, postsecondary education, leisure services, advocacy, legal services, daily living, and physical care. Transition services are included in the ITP as part of the IEP.

SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

This research is organized into five chapters. Chapter I of this study presents the laws which mandate workforce policy for special education students under P.L. 94-142 and the Individualized Education Plan. It then explains the need for a common survey to assess employer attitudes toward student's ages 14 to 17 years of age, who participate in the Prince William County Employ Programs. The main goal of the survey is to give insight to vocational resource teachers on employer attitudes toward special education students within the Prince William County Employment Programs due to their age, lack of ability, maturity, and basic skills. This will help teachers make the right decisions for the best placement of their students.

Chapter II is a review of literature. The review covers federal, state, and local laws, and school district implementation of policies, which mandate workforce policy for special education students. It concludes with the Employment Curriculum and how the survey will be implemented into Prince William County Schools as an evaluation instrument for all vocational resource teachers. Chapter III describes how the data will be collected, how the survey instrument will be designed, and statistical information to be used. Chapter IV will include the report of findings and a summary on how the instrument will be implemented into Prince William County Public Schools. Chapter V will include recommendations for implementation of the survey to satisfy the need for a common survey to assess employer attitudes toward special education students in the Employment Program within Prince William County Schools.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature related to the stated problem.

The sections in this chapter include: Introduction to Exceptional Children (Historical Precedent for Free and Appropriate Education as a Property Right), Brown versus Board of Education 1954, Laws and Amendments, School District and County Board Implementation of Policies, Vocational Employment Curriculum, Recommendations for Implementing Survey, and Summary.

Introduction to Exceptional Children

Federal Legislations

Public Law 94-14, Education of All Handicapped Children Act, was introduced into Congress 1975. It had the most significant impact for children with disabilities. The law states that in order to receive federal funds, states must develop and implement policies that assure a free appropriate public education to all children between the ages of 3-21 with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The state plans must be consistent with the federal statute, Title 20 United States Code Section 1400 et. Seq., (20 USC 1400) which states the education falls under federal and state sources. State regulations may provide more rights, but not less rights provided by the federal government. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is one of the most significant parts of this legislation. The law affects the educational rights of exceptional children as a public school's obligation to afford all eligible children with disabilities a free appropriate

public education in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their individual needs requiring an IEP for each child (Jasper, 2004). As a result of *Brown v. Board of Education*, a civil rights case, the plight of exceptional children was changed forever.

Brown vs. Board of Education

Questions arising in reference to a disproportionate number of minority children being placed in special education programs brought about the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* 1954 (2003). This case provided for a separate v. equal education among black and white students. This law was used as a springboard for many parents having students in special education, stating a misrepresentation of minority students in special education and a push for equal education for exceptional students. The National Center for Educational Statistics stated that 48.6 million students enrolled in public schools during 2005, a little more than half are white, about 20% are Hispanic or Latino, and 17% are African American. In the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* 1954, Section 347 U.S. 483, it was established that all children must be guaranteed an equal educational opportunity. In *Brown* the courts found that segregated public schools were unequal and deprived African-American children of equal rights and protection under the law. The courts felt that any child denied the opportunity of a reasonable education may not be expected to succeed in life if he or she were not afforded an equal and more adequate education under the law. Shortly after *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided, parents of disabled children started to file lawsuits with their school districts for segregation of their students with disabilities, arguing the exclusion of disabled children was discrimination as well (Jasper, 2004).

Laws and Amendments

(Federal, District, and State Policies)

The Individuals with Disabilities Act made it a requirement for the public school systems to provide all eligible children with disabilities a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. This education must be provided in the least restrictive environment as prescribed in their IEP. The American Disabilities Act of 1990, P.L. 101-336, contains five provisions which address specific areas of concern within special education:

1. Title I: Equal Employment Opportunity for Individuals with Disabilities - this title is designed to remove barriers that would deny qualified individuals with disabilities access to the same employment opportunities and benefits available to others without disabilities.
2. Title II: Nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in state and local government services - This title prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities, including elementary and secondary schools, and provides the basis for disability discrimination claims.
3. Title III: Nondiscrimination on the basis of disability by public accommodations and in commercial facilities - This title prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by private entities in places of public accommodations, and requires that all new places of public accommodation

and commercial facilities be designed and constructed so that they are readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities.

4. Title IV: Telecommunications - This title requires telephone companies to have developed interstate and intrastate telephone relay services in order to allow people with speech and hearing impairments who use TDDs to communicate with individuals who do not have this equipment.
5. Title V: Miscellaneous Provisions - Includes provisions prohibiting either coercing, threatening, or retaliating against the disabled or those attempting to aid people with disabilities in asserting their rights under ADA (Williams, 2010).

The U.S. Department of Education enforces these laws and Title II in public elementary and secondary education systems. Title II covers the Employment Internship Program under the public secondary education systems and institutions, public institutions of higher education, and vocational education. School-to-work programs are covered under any public entertainment or lecture series a school system offers, after-school activities, and social events offered by a school system, parent/teacher meetings, classroom activities, field trips, or other special events, and all other services provided by private contractors on behalf of the school system must comply fully with relevant provisions of Title II (Jasper, 2004). P.L. 101-476 recognized the importance of preparing exceptional students for life and work after school. It mandated the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) that would prepare each adolescent student receiving special education services for life after high school. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

of 1973 included provisions in the American Disabilities Act, (ADA), a civil right legislation that would cover four major areas to include private sector employment; public services, including public facilities, buses, and trains; public accommodations, including restaurants, hotels, theaters, doctors' offices, retail stores, museums, libraries, parks, private schools, and day-care centers; and telecommunications, making telephone relay services available 24 hours a day for persons with speech and hearing impairments (Hunt, 2006).

Understanding the school system under which a child's school operates is important, since state laws can vary from state to state. State laws may be stricter, but they can provide greater rights to its people without conflicting with federal laws or the U.S. Constitution. State laws can be subject to federal judicial reviews. In a school district governed by state governmental laws there must be a local education agency, LEA, known as the Board of Education. The "Board" has the right to make and enforce reasonable rules and regulations necessary for efficient conduct of schools within its district, but it is derived from state legislature, constitution, and judicial decisions. The board will oversee the educational process within its jurisdiction to include: formulating budgets, establishing policies and procedures, hiring certain officials, such as the superintendent of schools, and making sure that schools are in compliance with state and federal education laws (Jasper, 2004).

School District and Board Implementation Policies

The Office of Rehabilitative Services, OSERS, supports programs that assist in educating children with special education needs which provide rehabilitative services for youth and adults to improve the lives of persons with disabilities, to include such Acts as School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994. These were jointly administered by the U.S. Department of Education and Department of Labor. The school-to-work system combined school/work-based learning with activities designed to prepare students for their first job. The Transition Coordinator for Special Education Regional Programs for Prince William County Public Schools, D. Williams, stated in a telephone interview that implementation of the School-to-Work Employment Program classroom component has been operating since the early 1990s. D. Snoot, vocational resource teacher at Stonewall Jackson High School, stated in an email correspondence that the vocational internship program in Prince William County Schools (PWCS) started with three pilot schools, Osbourn Park, Stonewall Jackson, and Hylton High Schools, in September 2004. The other seven schools participating in the Employment program started their internship components with the class in September 2007, as stated by M. Aiken, Gar-Field High Schools Transition Specialist, in a telephone interview. Some students did volunteer in the community through a program known as Community-Based Instruction (CBI). These students performed tasks with a job coach, whereas the vocational internship students are more independent.

Vocational Employment Curriculum

The Employment Vocational Work Program component was designed and updated for a consistency within all Prince William County Schools participating in the Vocational Work Program in a meeting between David Williams (Transition Coordinator), Maxine Aiken (Transition Specialist), and Eunice Ervin (Vocational Resource Teacher) in 2007. The program consists of five parts, Employ I-V. All are prerequisites of the others, except Employ V.

A student who is not performing well in a regular school setting and is of working age may be pulled out of the regular classroom settings for early release or simply asked to find a job along with a job coach to earn credit for graduation. Parts of Employ I-IV are different. Employ I and II are the classroom components of the program. A student should take Employ I before entering Employ II. Student's in Employ I are usually 9th grade freshmen, Employ II consists of 10th -12th graders depending on the students circumstances, e.g., a student entering school in the middle of the program who is coming from another district not having the Internship Program, who may be past the age or grade level to complete prerequisite requirements. These students need to be put into either Employ III or IV to prepare them for the world of work they are preparing to enter. Students are taught lessons on career and life skills to include: Math, English, and Writing for the World of Work, cooking, how to do laundry, setting realistic life and career goals, choosing a job or career, family life, and recreation and leisure. As stated on the Prince William County Transition website, the Vocational Work Program is

designed to prepare and support students with disabilities in their transition from high school to adult roles by:

- Assisting students in identifying a postsecondary vision for themselves based upon their interests and preferences.
- Assisting students in identifying their transition related needs and in planning for their transition plan.
- Providing instructional opportunities to students so that they may acquire the skills necessary for adult life.
- Providing opportunities for career awareness, career exploration, and the development of appropriate work behaviors and marketable job skills.
- Facilitating linkages with adult services, vocational training, and postsecondary education providers.

By partnering with businesses to develop community-based learning opportunities, including paid and unpaid occupational experiences, the Vocational Work program is able to provide employment related services to include:

- Support for students in their career development.
- Sharing occupational, community labor market, and job referral information.
- Coordinating job shadowing and situational assessment opportunities.
- Résumé preparation, job-seeking, and job-retention skill development.

- Community-based job development and placement.

The ultimate goal is for students to participate in meaningful activities that will equip them with the requisite skills to live successful and rewarding lives. The components of these lessons have six domain levels that are set up as follows:

1. Advocacy
2. Employability
3. Exploration
4. Independence
5. Job-Related Social Skills
6. Self-Understanding

The Prince William County website shows that Community-Based Instruction (CBI) takes place at elementary, middle, and high schools. Students receive instruction in the community that focuses on eight significant Life Skill Strands which include: Personal Management, Recreation and Leisure, School and Community, Vocational, Functional Academics, Communication, Social Competencies, and Motor Skills. The following forms are used at Gar-Field, Hylton, and Forest Park High Schools Internship Programs to monitor students' behavioral issues during the internship program. A monthly student evaluation sheet, and parent, student, and staff contracts are used and are shown in Appendices A and B. Students in the internship programs III and IV go out on block scheduling two to three days a week. Some students can be hired while working an

internship. Students must change worksite locations at the end of each semester, giving them the opportunity to work at two worksites for the year.

Summary

Chapter II, Review of Literature, was organized based upon the problem statement and research related questions. The first section covered the Introduction to Exceptional Children, a historical precedent for free and appropriate education as a property right. The brief history of laws and amendments affecting the educational rights of exceptional children and public schools obligation to afford all eligible children with disabilities a free appropriate education in the least restrictive environment appropriate to the student's individual needs requiring an IEP for each child (Jasper, 2004). Covered secondly are the five Title I - V provisions addressing specific areas of concern within special education through the American Disabilities Act of 1990. The following laws are governed by local, federal, and state, mandates which support the right to work and vocational programs within the public school systems.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of Chapter III, Methods and Procedures, is to outline and discuss the population studied, the instrument used, the procedures used to collect data, statistical analysis used, and the summary. The following sub-sections will explain how the data for the research was collected, analyzed, and will be used within Prince William County Public Schools Vocational Employ Programs.

Population

The population for this research study consisted of community employers who do and do not participate in the Vocational Internship Programs within Prince William County. This population was composed of twenty-five potential employers from the following businesses: an auto mechanic, a beauty shop, a daycare, and several food service establishments.

Instrument Design

The instrument used in this study consisted of survey questions asked by the vocational resource teacher of employers who would possibly participate in the Employ Internship Programs. Questions were based on student's age, maturity levels, and basic skills. The survey consists of closed-ended questions on student work ethics and employer preferences in allowing participation of students under the age of 21 into the internship program. Appendix C includes survey instrument used.

Methods of Data Collection

The employers received a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey questions as well as a copy of the actual survey questions asked by the vocational resource teacher. Appendix D includes the employer cover letter. The initial survey questions were validated by administering to a small sample of thirty percent of teachers, transition specialists, and employers in May 2010. Once all the community employer survey questions are answered and analyzed, the information will be used to assess a need for a common survey of this type for employers and a possible school-to-school curriculum revision, since the programs can vary from school to school based on exceptional education student ratios.

Statistical Analysis

Each of the community employer's surveys will be tabulated based on the frequency of their responses for Questions 1 through 10. The frequencies and means of responses will be calculated. The information will be used to make suggestions for a common employer survey questionnaire in reference to students they would be interested in training before the student begins at the worksite, thus establishing a successful for worksite environment for the student involved in the internship program.

Summary

This chapter discussed and outlined the methods and procedures used to complete the survey study. Chapter III included the population, instrument design, and the procedures

used to collect data, the statistical analysis used, and the summary. The data collected from the survey questions will be presented in Chapter IV, titled Findings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate employer attitudes toward exceptional education students participating in vocational employment internships within Prince William County Virginia Public High Schools. The School-to-Work Employment programs classroom component has been operating since the early 1900 in Prince William County Schools. In September 2004, three pilot schools were given the opportunity to participate in a vocational internship program. The other seven schools in PWCS participating in the Employment Program entered the internship in 2007. The program was developed to enhance student's employability skills through paid and unpaid employment and occupational experiences. The purpose of this study was to devise a formal common method of surveying a sample of typical employer attitudes toward allowing high school students (ages 14-17) to participate in the Prince William County Public Schools Vocational Employment Program. This was accomplished by surveying employers participating in vocational internships throughout Prince William County Schools. The data received from these surveys is presented in this chapter.

Response Rate

Surveys were distributed to 25 employers participating in vocational programs around Prince William County. Twenty (80%) of the employers responded to the request of November 18, 2013, to complete the surveys on November 22, 2013. In December a follow-up letter was sent to the other five employers (20%) of non-respondents to encourage their participation. The remaining five surveys were completed in an

interview and returned by the respondents. All data and results were computed based on the total responses that were returned. See Table 1. See Table

Table 1

Survey Response Rate

Surveys Given	Number of Responses	Response Rate (%)
25	25	100%

Data on Employers

Toward Hiring Students Ages (14-17)

The survey dealt with employer's attitudes toward hiring exceptional student's ages 14-17 as opposed to hiring students 18 and older. The survey consisted of ten open-ended questions (Questions 1-10) based on a Likert 4-point scale. Participants were asked to answer items on a continuum of responses ranging from Definitely Yes (4), Maybe (3), Undecided (2), and Never (1).

Findings from the study are as follows.

Question 1 was used to establish employer's willingness to hire students ages 14-17 with prior experience. Would employers be more willing to hire exceptional students ages 14-17 that have already participated in an internship with the company? Twenty-five (100%) of the employers responded to this statement. Sixty-four percent responded "Definitely yes"; 27% percent responded "Maybe"; zero responded "Undecided;" Zero percent responded "Never". The computed mean was 3.64. This indicates that the majority of the respondents were in the "Definitely yes" level indicator (See Table 2).

Question 2 addresses whether employers would expect exceptional students involved in vocational internships to be skilled in all tasks within the company or business? Twenty-five (100%) of the employers responded to this statement. Forty-four percent responded “Definitely yes:” 27% percent responded “Maybe”; zero percent responded “Undecided”; and 5% responded “Never”. The computed mean was 3.04. This indicates a mean response at the “Maybe” level indicator (See Table 2).

Question 3 addresses whether employers could provide basic accommodations for exceptional students participating in vocational internships? Twenty-five (100 percent) of the employers responded to this statement. Eighty-eight percent responded “Definitely yes”; 9% responded “Maybe”; zero percent responded “Undecided”; and zero percent responded “Never”. The computed mean was 3.88. This indicates a mean response at the “Definitely yes” level indicator (See Table 2).

Question 4 would you expect exceptional students participating in an internship with your business to possess the following characteristics and work traits: attendance, punctuality, safety, appearance, work ethics, and acceptable academic GPA. Twenty-five (100%) of the employers responded to this statement. Eighty-eight percent responded “Definitely yes”; (9%) responded “Maybe”; zero responded “Undecided”; and zero responded “Never”. The computed mean was 3.88. This indicates a mean response at the “Definitely yes” level indicator (See Table 2).

Question 5 stated when considering a student for an internship do you consider the following: age, maturity level, and basic skills satisfied? Twenty-five (100%) of the employers responded to this statement. Eighty-four percent responded “Definitely Yes”;

(12%) responded “Maybe”; zero percent responded “Undecided”; and zero percent responded “Never”. The computed mean was 3.84. This indicates a mean response at the “Definitely yes” level indicator (See Table 2).

Question 6 asked would the identification of exceptional student’s cognitive differences and exceptionalities be beneficial in the placement of students in vocational work programs and settings. Twenty-five (100%) of the employers responded to this statement. Thirty-six percent responded “Definitely yes”; (45%) percent responded “Maybe”; (2%) responded “Undecided”; and zero percent responded “Never”. The computed mean was 3.32. This indicates a mean response at the “Maybe” level indicator (See Table 2).

Question 7 asks as a manager do you think training an exceptional student under the age of 18 is more tedious than training one 14-17 years old. Twenty-five (100 percent) of the employers responded to this statement. Twelve percent responded “Definitely yes”; (39%) responded “Maybe”; (10%) responded “Undecided”; and (4%) responded “Never”. The computed mean was 2.60. This indicates a mean response at the “Maybe” level indicator (See Table 2).

Question 8 addresses whether there are advantages and disadvantages for employers participating in vocational internships for exceptional students whether the student is ages 14-17 or 18 year olds. Twenty-five (100%) of the employers responded to this statement. Sixty-four percent of employers responded “Definitely yes”; 12% responded “Maybe”; 4% responded “Undecided”; and 3% responded “Never”. The computed mean was 3.32. This indicates a mean response at the “Maybe” level indicator (See Table 2).

Question 9 asked, as a hiring supervisor or manager, do you feel that changes should be made in the Employ curriculum to address employer and company age limit policies? Twenty-five (100 percent) of the employers responded to this statement. Eight percent responded “Definitely yes”; (48%) responded “Maybe”; (22%) responded “Undecided”; and zero responded “Never”. The computed mean was 3.12. This indicates a mean response at the “Maybe” level indicator (See Table 2).

Question 10 asks if rules permitted, I would allow exceptional students ages (14-17) the opportunity to participate in a school-to-work vocational internship as a hiring manager. Twenty-five (100%) of the employers responded to this statement. Eighty percent responded “Definitely yes”; (15%) responded “Maybe”, zero responded “Undecided”; and Zero percent responded “Never”. The computed mean was 3.80. This indicates a mean response at the “Definitely yes” level indicator (See Table 2).

Summary

Twenty-five employers in retail, restaurant, and other business venues responded to the survey providing a total of 100 percent participation by employers of exceptional students from Prince William County Public Schools. Data were presented that provided information on employer’s attitudes toward hiring exceptional students ages (14-17) as opposed to hiring 18 year olds based on the questions presented. Conclusions were drawn from the information presented and are included in Chapter V.

Table 2

*Survey Questions 1-10**Employers Surveyed Twenty-five*

Attitudes of Employers toward Exceptional Students	Participants Response	% of Total	Def. Yes	%	Maybe	%	Und.	%	Nev.	%	Mean
1. Students participating in vocational internships with your company are gaining work experience. Would you be more willing to hire exceptional students ages 14-17 that have already participated in an internship with your company?	25	100	16	64	9	27	0	0	0	0	3.64
2. Would you expect exceptional students involved in vocational internships to be skilled in all task within the company or business?	25	100	11	44	9	27	0	0	5	5	3.04
3. Could you provide basic accommodations for exceptional students participating in vocational internships?	25	100	22	88	3	9	0	0	0	0	3.88
4. Would you expect exceptional students participating in an internship with your business to possess the following characteristics and work traits: attendance, punctuality, safety, appearance, work ethics, and acceptable academic GPA?	25	100	22	88	3	3	9	0	0	0	3.88
5. When considering a student for an internship do you consider the following: age, maturity level, and basic skills satisfied?	25	100	21	84	4	12	0	0	0	0	3.84
6. Would the identification of exceptional student's cognitive differences and exceptionalities be beneficial in the placement of students in vocational work programs?	25	100	9	36	15	45	1	2	0	0	3.32
7. As a manager do you think training an exceptional student under the age of 18 is more tedious than the training of 14-17 year olds?	25	100	3	12	13	39	5	10	4	4	2.60
8. Do you think there are advantages and disadvantages for employers participating in vocational internships for exceptional students whether the student is ages 14-17 or 18 years old?	25	100	16	4	12	2	4	3	3	3	3.32
9. As a hiring supervisor or manager do you feel that changes should be made in the Employ curriculum to address employer and company age limit policies?	25	100	2	8	12	48	11	22	0	0	3.12
10. If corporate rules permitted, I would allow exceptional students ages (14-17) the opportunity to participate in a school-to-work vocational internship as a hiring manager.	25	100	20	80	5	15	0	0	0	0	3.80

Note: $^aM = 3.44$ $n = 250$

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter contained a summary which included the research problem, an overview of the School-to-Work Vocational Program in Prince William County Public Schools, a description of the survey, and information on the responses received. The conclusions, based on the data received, determined Employer Attitudes toward Hiring Exceptional Students Ages 14-17 at Prince William County Schools. Recommendations were made by the researcher to improve the education for employment programs in Prince William County High Schools.

Summary

The problem of this study was to determine employer's attitudes toward hiring exceptional students ages 14-17 from Prince William County High Schools. The study also identified some of the types of jobs for which students participate. The Employment School-to-Work Vocational Program has been in existence in Prince William County Schools since 2004. The program provides exceptional students an opportunity to develop employability skills at various work locations of interest around the community. The Employment program is designed for exceptional students in grades eleven through twelfth who need a more traditional hands-on occupational preparation program.

A survey was constructed containing 10 closed-ended questions. The surveys were given to 25 employers (100%) of the employers responded. After the return of all surveys the data and results were computed. The number and percentage of varied

responses for each item were tabulated. A mean was also calculated for the items presented.

Conclusions

Based on the data analyzed, this study has revealed several findings.

1. The Employ School-to-Work Vocational Work Program in the Prince William County Schools has identified the attitudes of employers toward hiring exceptional students. The attitudes of the employers was identified through survey responses which included the following:
 - A. Employers would be more willing to hire exceptional students ages 14-17 that have already participated in an internship with their companies. The mean was 3.64.
 - B. Employers would never expect exceptional students involved in vocational internships to be skilled in all task within the company or business. The mean was 3.04.
 - C. Employers could definitely provide basic accommodations for exceptional students participating in vocational internships. The mean was 3.88.
 - D. Employers would expect exceptional students participating in an internship with their business to possess the following characteristics and work traits: attendance, punctuality, safety, appearance, work ethics, and an acceptable academic GPA. The mean was 3.88.
 - E. Employers when considering a student for an internship would consider the following: age, maturity level, and basic skills satisfied. The mean was 3.84.

- F. Employers stated the identification of exceptional student's cognitive differences and exceptionalities would be beneficial in the placement of students in vocational school-to-work programs and settings. The mean was 3.32.
- G. Employers stated as a manager they maybe think training an exceptional student under the age of 18 is more tedious than training one 14-17 years old. The mean was 2.60.
- H. Employers do think there are advantages and disadvantages for employers participating in vocational internships for exceptional students whether the student is ages 14-17 or 18 year olds. The mean was 3.32.
- I. Hiring supervisors and managers are undecided that changes should be made in the Employ curriculum to address employer and company age limit policies. The mean was 3.12.
- J. Employers stated if rules permitted, they would allow exceptional students ages (14-17) the opportunity to participate in a school-to-work vocational internship as a hiring manager. The mean was 3.80.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this survey, the researcher has made the following recommendations.

1. School-to-work vocational programs should continue to work with employers and corporate sponsors who are willing to allow student participation in internships.

2. School-to-work educators should provide the necessary skills involved in vocational internships within businesses and companies.
3. Educators should urge students to make employers aware of accommodations needed based on individual student need.
4. Educators should teach work ethics, and characteristics to include punctuality, safety, appearance and acceptable academic performance for exceptional students prior to their internship experience.
5. Educators should observe and admit students to a vocational school-to-work program based on student's age, maturity level, but basic skills can be learned on the job from employers in an internship position.
6. Educators should urge students to speak to employers about their disability if they feel comfortable sharing it so that employers can place them in an appropriate internship position.
7. Educators should provide more occupational activities for students in the classroom component of the Employ program before students enter their internship during the 11th and 12th grades.
8. Educators and Employers should work together to improve the Employ program so that the advantages can outweigh the disadvantages in vocational school-to-work internship programs.
9. Employers should identify problems and suggestions for the Employ School-to-work program with educators that will address employer and company age limit policies.

10. Educators should form bonds with businesses and companies that agree to participate in school-to-work internship programs stating the advantages to employers participating in these programs.

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Appendix A

Student Monthly Evaluations

GFHS Employ Internships

Monthly Progress Report for: _____ Month of: _____

Please rate the student for the following factors:

	Excellent	Acceptable	Needs Improvement
Attendance:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attends internship assignment regularly with minimal absences. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absences are excused within reasonable limits. (Note from parent or doctor) 			
Punctuality/Safety:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins and ends shift as scheduled 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep work area clean 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow safety regulations 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates work stability Remains on the job until task completed 			
Appearance:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniform is clean. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wears full uniform as required. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Displays good personal hygiene/dress 			
Work Attitude:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is courteous to customers. 			

• Works well with peers.			
• Is respectful to supervisors.			
• Is self-motivated, needs little prompting or reminders.			
• Maintains positive attitude on the job.			
• Is a reliable/dependable worker.			
• Seeks help as appropriate			
• Demonstrate willingness to learn new skills (Shows Initiative)			
• Displays positive attitude toward work			
• Works effectively under pressure or within limits			
Employer Comments:			

Job Site Supervisor

Ms. Eunice Ervin
Vocational Resource Teacher

Parent

Student

Please forward a copy to the student's case manager: _____

Students in the internship programs III and IV go out on block scheduling two to three days a week. Some students can be hired while working an internship. Students must change worksite locations at the end of each semester, giving them the opportunity to work at two worksites for the year.

Appendix B

Employ Internship Contract

The following is a contract highlighting the responsibilities of the following: parents, students, and staff in reference to the Employ Internship Program. These guidelines are set up to insure that each and every student is provided proper work ethics and etiquette pertaining to their job assignments while attending the Employ III/IV internship programs at Gar-Field High School. Certain work etiquette must be addressed at home as well as at school such as proper dress, hygiene, and grooming appropriate for work. I am asking that parents please read

Family Responsibilities:

- To make sure students have their proper uniforms required for their job site (some uniforms have to be purchased), but most students are given shirts from employment sites requiring a uniform. Students should be prepared daily with uniforms on their class assignment dates.
- Make sure students are well groomed for employment (no baggy pants, shirts must be tucked, belts worn, hair cut or braided nicely for work no rubber bands holding back unbraided hair)
- To provide or make sure students have transportation to their jobs in the event they are hired for paid employment.

Student Responsibilities:

- Each student will follow the PWCS Code of Behavior standards to include: NO CELL PHONES or ELECTRONIC DEVICES these items are to be left at the school in a locked file cabinet or left with the job coach during internship work hours.
- No book bags at job sites these are to be left at school for the student's safety.
- Students are to call their employers by 9:25 a.m. if they cannot attend work on their assignment date with a responsible explanation as to why they can't attend.
- Students missing a total of five (5) unexcused absences can be dismissed from the program. Absences for sickness must be accompanied by a doctor's note or signed note from the parent. Absences will be handled by the same procedures that Gar-Field High School uses.

- Student is expected to work the entire two hours work shift. Students will eat A Lunch then report to Internship Class on time, change and be ready to leave by 10:55
- Personal hygiene/grooming to include washing of uniforms every Friday
- To let teacher or staff member present know upon arrival to class by 8:30 a.m. that they are unprepared for class, not when it's time to leave the building.
- NO SHOPPING at mall unless given permission on special occasions (Christmas). If you see something you like, you must have your employer hold it for you and return on your own time to purchase. THIS IS FOR YOUR SAFETY!

Teacher Responsibilities:

- Transportation to Internship Sites
- Evaluations for each student at the end of each month and weekly for some students
- Scheduling for Internship Sites
- Provide clear expectations of program to students
- Provide consequences for students who don't comply to internship contract to include:
 - a. 1st consequence – Warning
 - b. 2nd consequence – Warning/Call to parent/e-mail case manager
 - c. 3rd consequence – Disciplinary referral/meeting with case manager/student before returning to work site
 - d. 4th consequence – Meeting w/administrator, case manager, and parent
 - e. 5th consequence – Parent contact, case manager/administration dismissal from program

Case Manager Responsibilities:

- Check with Vocational Resource Teacher before entering students into Employ III/IV
- Meet with Vocational Resource Teacher/Student if problems persist with student
- If student is dismissed from program, find another class for that student.

SURVEY

Appendix C

Closed-Ended Interview Questions

Employers Attitudes toward Hiring Exceptional Students Ages (14-17)

Purpose: The following interview is to determine employer attitudes toward hiring exceptional students between the ages of 14-17 as opposed to those 18 years of age based on lack of ability, maturity, and basic skills.

Directions: Please complete the interview while I record the responses to these questions using the numbers on the scale below that most closely aligns with your beliefs as a hiring supervisor or manager. Circle (4) for “Definitely Yes,” (3) for “Maybe,” (2) for “Undecided,” and (1) for “Never.” Your participation in this study is voluntary and your identity will be kept confidential.

There is no right or wrong answers for these questions. I am simply interested in how you feel about the statements.

	Def. Yes	Maybe	Undecided	Never
1. Students participating in vocational Internships with your company are gaining work experience. Would You be more willing to hire exceptional students ages 14-17 that have already participated in an internship with your company?	4	3	2	1
2. Would you expect exceptional students involved in vocational internships to be skilled in all task within the company or business?	4	3	2	1
3. Could you provide basic accommodations for exceptional students participating in vocational	4	3	2	1

- internships?
4. Would you expect exceptional students participating in an internship with your business to possess the following characteristics and work traits: attendance, punctuality, safety, appearance, work ethics, and acceptable academic GPA? 4 3 2 1
5. When considering a student for an internship do you consider the following: age, maturity level, and basic skills satisfied? 4 3 2 1
6. Would the identification of exceptional student's cognitive differences and exceptionalities be beneficial in the placement of students in vocational work programs and settings? 4 3 2 1
7. As a manager do you think training an exceptional student under the age of 18 is more tedious than the training of 14-17 years old? 4 3 2 1
8. Do you think there are advantages and disadvantages for employers participating in vocational internships for exceptional students whether the student is 4 3 2 1

ages 14-17 or 18 year olds?

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9. As a hiring supervisor or manager do you feel that changes should be made in the Employ curriculum to address employer and company age limit policies? | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. If corporate rules permitted, I would allow exceptional students ages (14-17) the opportunity to participate in a school-to-work vocational internship as a hiring manager. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

APPENDIX D
COVER LETTER

Date: 11-18-2013

Dear School-to-Work Employers

We hope this letter finds you in good spirits.

I am conducting research to determine employers attitudes toward hiring exceptional students ages (14-17) who participate in a Vocational Resource Program within Prince William County Public Schools. The study will ask employer's opinions about hiring under aged exceptional children based on lack of ability, maturity level, and basic skills. You have been identified as employers presently participating in school-to-work internships who can provide the information I seek.

My study will give insight to vocational resources teachers on employer's attitudes toward special education students within Prince William County in Vocational Employ Programs. Students who may lack certain employment skills, such as abilities, age related social skills, and basic academic skills may have problems without a job coach during vocational internships. Your participation in the interview is vital in the success of our program; however, if you decide not to complete the interview it will not jeopardize your agency's participation in the program. I simply wish to capture your judgments of exceptional students' abilities to perform in a business environment and as a professional employee. I value your opinions and hope the information you provide will help vocational resource teachers in the county in the placement of exceptional education students.

The interview invites you to respond to 10 open-ended questions. Your participation is voluntary. Your responses to each question will be aggregated with the responses from all participants. Thus, no individual employer will be identifiable by name, so there is limited risk to you if choosing to participate. Benefits to you as the employer are the opportunity to evaluate potential hires for future employment and the input into areas that need to be evaluated in consideration of the use of these student employees, and lastly your participation in the survey will aide in the placement of exceptional students for future years. If you wish to participate in the study, please complete the interview questions and return to me.

The instrument will identify you with a coded numbering system in order to keep your answers confidential. Thank you for your participation. If you should have any questions, I can be contacted at christianervin@yahoo.com.

Sincerely,
Eunice Ervin
Graduate Student Old Dominion University

APPENDIX E**FOLLOW-UP LETTER****PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY SCHOOLS**

14715 Bristow Road

Manassas, Virginia 20112

(703) 791-7200

Dear Employer,

Your help is greatly needed to help me determine Employer's Attitudes toward Hiring Exceptional Students Ages (14-17) from Prince William County Schools.

On November 18, 2013, you received a survey to determine Employer's Attitudes toward Hiring Exceptional Students Ages (14-17) from Prince William County Schools School-to-Work Vocational Employ Program. Your assistance in completing this survey will be very useful in completing my research project. To date, I have not received your response. Your information is very important to my research.

Please take a few minutes to fill out the attached survey. After you have completed the survey, promptly return it to Ms. Eunice A. Ervin in person by December 4, 2013.

Thank You Very Much for Your Cooperation.

Sincerely,

Eunice A. Ervin

Ms. Eunice A. Ervin

eervi002@odu.edu