



Kenton County School District | *It's about ALL kids.*

Issue Paper

DATE:

May 20, 2026

AGENDA ITEM (ACTION ITEM):

Consider/Approve KCSD partnerships with Cincinnati Children's – Project SEARCH, Northern Kentucky University (NKU), and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), including the corresponding Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), pending board attorney review

APPLICABLE BOARD POLICY:

01.11 General Powers and Duties of the Board

HISTORY/BACKGROUND:

KCSD has the opportunity to serve as the host educational partner, in collaboration with Project SEARCH, a nationally recognized, high-impact transition program designed to secure competitive, integrated employment for students with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities. This program supports students in their final year of high school prior to aging out by transitioning them from a traditional school setting into a fully immersive business environment, resulting in a 70% to 100% rate of competitive, integrated employment. Students participate as interns while learning tasks aligned to high-turnover, entry-level business needs. By focusing on the development of marketable and transferable skills while supported by instruction in areas such as technology and financial literacy, the program prepares students to be transition ready and productive participants in the 21st Century economy. Project SEARCH is a nine-month immersion program that takes place at the host business, Northern Kentucky University (NKU), with students following the KCSD school calendar and participating daily. This immersion model is designed to build the mental and physical stamina necessary for successful participation in a minimum 20-hour work week. The program is a strategic partnership between KCSD, Cincinnati Children's Hospital – Project SEARCH, NKU, and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). If approved, this opportunity would be available as a regional program for districts throughout Northern Kentucky, with KCSD serving as the host educational partner. The program has the capacity to serve up to 15 students each school year. Other districts may request student participation through a MOU with KCSD. Participating districts would be responsible for a per-student cost based on a sliding scale tied to each district's Average Daily Attendance (ADA).

FISCAL/BUDGETARY IMPACT:

Estimated costs is \$74,000 for one FTE Special Education teacher funded by IDEA.

RECOMMENDATION:

Approval KCSD partnerships with Cincinnati Children's – Project SEARCH, Northern Kentucky University (NKU), and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), including the corresponding Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), pending board attorney review

CONTACT PERSON:

Danielle Rice

Principal/Administrator

District Administrator

Superintendent

Use this form to submit your request to the Superintendent for items to be added to the Board Meeting Agenda. complete, print, sign and send to your Director. Director –if approved, sign and put in the Superintendent's mailbox.

Principal –

PROJECT SEARCH AGREEMENT
Between
Northern Kentucky University
and
Kenton County School District
and
Proudworks
and
Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

This Project SEARCH Agreement ("Agreement") is entered into by and among Northern Kentucky University ("NKU" or "University"), an agency and instrumentality of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Kenton County School District ("KCSO"), a public school district and political subdivision organized under the laws of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Proudworks ("Supported Employment Agency"), a Kentucky nonprofit corporation providing supported employment, vocational rehabilitation, and workforce development services, and the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation ("OVR"), an agency of the Commonwealth of Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. Collectively referred to as the "Parties."

I. PURPOSE

Project SEARCH is an internationally recognized transition-to-work program model that focuses on securing employment for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Parties desire to collaborate in the development and operation of a Project SEARCH transition-to-employment program hosted at Northern Kentucky University for students with disabilities. The purpose of the program is to provide education, training, internship experiences, and employment preparation opportunities designed to promote competitive integrated employment and independent living skills.

This Agreement is intended to outline the general roles and responsibilities of the participating entities supporting the Project SEARCH program hosted at NKU.

The Parties acknowledge that the Project SEARCH program is intended to promote competitive integrated employment outcomes for participating students and that the Parties will collaborate in good faith to support successful program implementation and employment opportunities consistent with the Project SEARCH model.

II. TERM

This Agreement shall become effective upon the date of the last signature by a Party below ("Effective Date") and shall remain in effect unless and until terminated in accordance with this Agreement.

Any Party may terminate its participation in this Agreement upon ninety (90) days' prior written notice to the other Parties.

Termination by one Party shall not automatically terminate the participation of the remaining Parties, unless the remaining Parties determine that continuation of the Project SEARCH program is no longer feasible or appropriate.

III. NKU'S RESPONSIBILITIES AS HOST BUSINESS

NKU shall serve as the host business for the Project SEARCH program and, subject to the availability of personnel, facilities, funding, and operational needs, shall:

1. Provide classroom space and related meeting space reasonably necessary for operation of the Project SEARCH program, including reasonable access to furniture, internet connectivity, and related resources.
2. Identify and coordinate internship opportunities within participating University departments and operational units.
3. Designate a University liaison to assist with coordination between participating departments and Project SEARCH personnel.
4. Provide participating students and authorized program personnel with reasonable access to designated internship and program areas, subject to University policies, procedures, safety requirements, and operational needs.
5. Issue or coordinate temporary identification badges, parking access, or similar access credentials as reasonably necessary and in accordance with University policies and procedures.
6. Encourage participating departments to provide mentoring, workplace orientation, feedback, evaluations, and workplace training opportunities to participating students during internships.
7. Encourage participating departments to designate supervisors or points of contact for internship placements as appropriate.
8. Encourage participating departments and supervisors to communicate workplace expectations, safety requirements, productivity expectations, and internship-related responsibilities to participating students and Project SEARCH personnel.
9. Participate in advisory committee, steering committee, employment planning, and program coordination meetings as reasonably necessary.
10. Make reasonable efforts to provide access to conference rooms or meeting space for Project SEARCH orientation sessions, open houses, recognition activities, or similar program-related events, subject to availability and University procedures.
11. Support reasonable marketing and outreach efforts relating to the Project SEARCH program, subject to University approval of all use of NKU's name, logos, trademarks, and branding.

12. Coordinate with the Parties regarding communications with Project SEARCH headquarters or affiliated Project SEARCH representatives as appropriate.
13. Consider qualified Project SEARCH participants for employment opportunities in accordance with applicable University hiring procedures and employment requirements; provided, however, nothing in this Agreement guarantees employment with NKU.
14. Require participating students, instructors, job coaches, and other program personnel to comply with all applicable University policies, procedures, rules, safety standards, and conduct expectations while on University property or participating in University-related activities.
15. Reserve the right to restrict or revoke access to University facilities or internship placements for safety concerns, operational needs, conduct issues, legal compliance concerns, or policy violations.
16. NKU's responsibilities under this Agreement are limited to serving as the host business and providing classroom space and internship opportunities. NKU shall not be responsible for providing transportation, educational instruction, medical services, counseling services, personal care services, or direct day-to-day student supervision except as may relate to ordinary workplace supervision during internships.

IV. KCSD'S RESPONSIBILITIES AS EDUCATIONAL PARTNER

KCSD shall serve as the educational partner for the Project SEARCH program and shall:

1. Provide a full-time, on site, certified instructor who is exclusively assigned to the Project SEARCH program and is responsible for coordinating and delivering all educational components of the program.
2. Develop or provide curriculum, instructional materials, employability skills instruction, and transition-related educational programming consistent with the Project SEARCH model.
3. Coordinate student recruitment, eligibility determination, admissions, selection, and enrollment activities.
4. Coordinate family engagement and communication activities as appropriate.
5. Assist with internship coordination, student supervision, and day-to-day program implementation activities.
6. Coordinate educational and employment-planning activities for participating students, including employment planning meetings and student progress discussions.
7. Collaborate with internship supervisors, skills trainers, and participating agencies regarding student placement, accommodations, support needs, and internship

success strategies.

8. Ensure participating students receive appropriate educational supports, accommodations, and related services required under applicable law.
9. Coordinate periodic student progress meetings involving appropriate team members, family members, and participating agencies as appropriate.
10. Maintain responsibility for student educational records maintained by KCSD and comply with applicable student privacy laws, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA").
11. Maintain any insurance coverage required by law or deemed appropriate by KCSD for participating students and personnel, including any student accident or liability coverage maintained by KCSD.
12. Coordinate transportation training or transportation-related support services as appropriate.
13. Participate in advisory committee, steering committee, employment planning, and program coordination meetings.
14. Collect and report program outcome data as appropriate and consistent with applicable privacy laws and Project SEARCH reporting requirements.
15. Coordinate with Project SEARCH headquarters or affiliated Project SEARCH representatives regarding implementation and program operations as appropriate.
16. Be responsible for supervision, conduct management, educational programming, and student support services for participating students while participating in the Project SEARCH program.
17. Be responsible for salaries, travel reimbursement, benefits, and personnel-related expenses for KCSD employees assigned to the Project SEARCH program.

V. PROUDWORKS' RESPONSIBILITIES AS SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT AGENCY

Proudworks, as the Supported Employment Agency, shall:

1. Provide skills trainers, job coaches, or related personnel to support participating students during internships and employment preparation activities.
2. Assist with identification and development of internship opportunities and workplace supports.
3. Assist with job analysis, workplace skill development, employment readiness training, job coaching, and employment support activities.
4. Assist participating students with development of workplace skills and successful completion of internship responsibilities.
5. Collaborate with internship supervisors, instructors, and Project SEARCH personnel to address workplace support needs and performance issues.

6. Coordinate with participating University departments regarding internship expectations, student support needs, accommodations, and workplace integration.
7. Participate in planning meetings, employment planning meetings, student progress discussions, and program coordination activities.
8. Assist with job development, employment transition, retention support services, and follow-along services as appropriate.
9. Assist with public awareness and outreach efforts relating to the Project SEARCH program as appropriate.

VI. KENTUCKY OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation ("OVR") shall:

1. Participate as a member of the Project SEARCH team in intern selection, employment planning, and program improvement efforts.
2. Receive referrals for participating students and determine eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, policies, and procedures.
3. Provide vocational rehabilitation services and funding support for eligible participants as authorized and approved by OVR.
4. Provide input to the Project SEARCH team regarding career goals, employment objectives, workplace supports, accommodations, and transition planning for participating students.
5. Coordinate or assist in securing supports and services necessary to help participating students achieve competitive integrated employment goals, subject to applicable eligibility and funding requirements.
6. Participate in advisory committee, steering committee, employment planning meetings, and student progress discussions as appropriate.
7. Collaborate with NKU, KCSD, the Supported Employment Agency, participating students, and other appropriate team members regarding employment opportunities, transition planning, and community employment resources.
8. Assist with career planning, job development, employment readiness, workplace accommodations, assistive technology, and related vocational rehabilitation support services as appropriate.
9. Coordinate with the Parties regarding transition-to-employment activities and long-term employment support planning as appropriate.
10. Maintain responsibility for compliance with applicable confidentiality and privacy laws relating to vocational rehabilitation records and services.

VII. LONG-TERM FOLLOW-ALONG SUPPORT SERVICES

The Parties acknowledge that certain participating students may receive long-term follow-along or developmental disability support services through local or regional service providers.

Such providers may assist participating students with job-retention support, workplace adjustment, skills reinforcement, transportation coordination, community integration, or other employment support services as appropriate and authorized.

The Parties may coordinate with such providers regarding transition planning and ongoing employment support services for participating students, subject to applicable confidentiality requirements and appropriate authorizations.

VIII. STUDENT STATUS

Participating students are not employees of NKU solely by virtue of participation in the Project SEARCH program or participation in internships under this Agreement.

Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed as creating an employment relationship between NKU and any participating student unless and until the student is formally hired by NKU through the University's regular employment processes.

Participating students shall not be entitled to wages, compensation, employee benefits, workers' compensation coverage, unemployment benefits, or other employment-related benefits from NKU unless separately employed by the University.

IX. BACKGROUND CHECKS AND SAFETY

The Parties acknowledge that certain internship placements or activities may require criminal background checks, training, confidentiality agreements, or other screening requirements.

KCSD and/or Proudworks shall be responsible for coordinating any required student background checks or screenings unless otherwise agreed in writing.

All participants shall comply with applicable University safety requirements, emergency procedures, confidentiality obligations, and operational protocols.

X. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

The Parties agree to comply with applicable federal and state privacy and confidentiality laws, including FERPA, HIPAA (if applicable), and any other applicable legal requirements relating to student, educational, medical, or employment-related information.

The Parties shall not disclose confidential information except as authorized by law or as necessary for legitimate program operations.

The Parties shall obtain any consents or authorizations required by applicable law for the sharing of student information necessary to support program operations and employment planning activities.

XI. NONDISCRIMINATION

The Parties agree to comply with all applicable federal and state nondiscrimination laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Title VI, Title VII, Title IX, and other applicable laws and regulations.

XII. USE OF NAME AND MARKS

No Party shall use the name, logos, trademarks, or branding of another Party in advertising, promotional materials, press releases, or public communications without prior written approval from the applicable Party.

XIII. LIMITATION OF LIABILITY / SOVEREIGN IMMUNITY

Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed as:

1. A waiver of sovereign immunity, governmental immunity, official immunity, or any other immunity, defense, or limitation of liability available to any Party under federal or Kentucky law;
2. Consent by any Party to suit, liability, or jurisdiction beyond that expressly permitted by applicable law;
3. An assumption of liability for the acts or omissions of another Party or another Party's officers, employees, agents, contractors, or representatives; or
4. Creating contractual liability or indemnification obligations beyond those permitted under applicable law.

Each Party shall be responsible for its own acts and omissions and those of its officers, employees, agents, contractors, and representatives, to the extent provided by applicable law.

XIV. INDEPENDENT PARTIES

The Parties are independent entities. Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed to create a partnership, joint venture, agency relationship, or employment relationship between the Parties. No Party shall have authority to bind another Party.

XV. TERMINATION

Any Party may terminate its participation in this Agreement upon ninety (90) days' prior written notice to the other Parties.

Termination by one Party shall not automatically terminate the participation of the remaining Parties, unless the remaining Parties determine that continuation of the Project SEARCH program is no longer feasible or appropriate.

NKU may immediately suspend or terminate internship placements or participant access to University facilities for safety concerns, operational needs, conduct issues, legal compliance concerns, or policy violations.

XVI. NOTICES

Any notice required under this Agreement shall be in writing and delivered by personal delivery, overnight courier, certified mail, or email to the appropriate Party at the address designated by that Party. A Party may change its notice information by providing written notice to the other Parties.

To University:

Northern Kentucky University

Attention: _____

Nunn Drive
Highland Heights, KY 41099

Email: _____

To KCSD:

Kenton County School District

Attention: _____

Email: _____

To: Proudworks

Proudworks

Attention: _____

Email: _____

To: OVR

Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

Attention: _____

Email: _____

XVII. ENTIRE AGREEMENT

This Agreement constitutes the entire understanding of the Parties relating to the Project SEARCH program and supersedes prior discussions relating to the subject matter herein.

This Agreement may only be modified by written amendment signed by authorized representatives of the Parties.

XVIII. GOVERNING LAW

This Agreement shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Any legal action relating to this Agreement shall be brought in a court of competent jurisdiction within the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

XIX. SIGNATURES

NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

By: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

KENTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

By: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

PROUDWORKS

By: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

KENTUCKY OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

By: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

