

Gov. Walker: Congratulates Sentry Theater Project SEARCH Graduates

Posted on Tuesday, May 30, 2017

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STEVENS POINT - Governor Scott Walker joined local partners today in celebrating the graduation of six Project SEARCH interns at Sentry Theater in Stevens Point. Project SEARCH is a business-led internship program providing employment opportunities in the workplace environment to Wisconsin youth with disabilities.

“Congratulations to the latest class of Project SEARCH graduates,” Governor Walker said. “A strong Wisconsin workforce is a diverse one – one that celebrates the unique abilities of each and every employee, including those with disabilities. Removing obstacles to employment for people with disabilities is a win-win. It benefits businesses, individuals with disabilities, their families, and the public at large. By helping our workers with disabilities gain the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in the workplace through programs like Project SEARCH, we’re improving businesses’ bottom line and spurring growth throughout the state.” Governor Walker’s 2017-19 biennial budget includes the following initiatives to support the employment of people with disabilities:

- **\$7.6 million in funding to support and expand programs that ensure students with disabilities gain the practical skills they need for life after high school.** This includes \$6.1 million to fund awards for school districts that successfully place students with disabilities in employment as well as \$1.5 million to support the developments of school district efforts to connect students with disabilities with employment opportunities.
- **Requires the Department of Health Services (DHS) to implement reforms to the Medicaid Purchase Plan (MAPP),** to eliminate the disincentive to work for people with disabilities, while protecting the most vulnerable by:
 - **Eliminating the premium cliff** by changing the program’s premium structure to replace the existing premium cliff with incremental premiums.
 - **Strengthening the work requirement** through proof of paid employment, substantial in-kind work, or participation in pre-employment programming.
 - **Incentivizes work by** allowing people with disabilities on the MAPP program to earn money and build up assets and plan for retirement without being penalized now or later in life.

Project SEARCH is part of Governor Walker’s *Year of A Better Bottom Line*. Developed in 1996 by Nurse J. Erin Riehle at the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, the cornerstone of Project SEARCH is total immersion in a business environment for students with disabilities. In 2014, Governor Walker announced an expansion of the Project SEARCH program and allocated \$850,000 to expand the number of Project SEARCH sites in Wisconsin from seven to 27 in the following years. Project SEARCH sites in Wisconsin have an average employment success rate of 88 percent, beating the national Project SEARCH employment rate by 15 percent. Learn more about Project SEARCH [here](#).