



Self-Advocacy/Mentoring Overview

The Best Buddies Self-Advocacy/ Mentoring curriculum currently includes five units: *This is Me!*, *Building Your Path to a Self-Determined Life*, *Defining Disability*, *Communication and Networking Skills*, *Maintaining Personal Wellness*. These lessons enhance students' self-awareness, understanding of their individual strengths and needs, plus empower students to become independent self-advocates in the workplace and their community. Additionally, program participants will enhance their confidence in public speaking skills allowing them to engage in effective and meaningful communication in a variety of settings: job interviews, job settings (engagement with supervisors, co-workers, and customers), and with peers. Individuals may also engage in the Best Buddies Ambassador Program or Best Buddies Peer Mentoring Program, extensions of the Self-Advocacy/ Mentoring Curriculum.

Skills to be Acquired:

- Knowledge of self, rights, and responsibilities
- Identity
- Empowerment
- Empathy & Self-Reflection
- Communication and leadership skills
- Disability Awareness
- Confidentiality
- Decision-making
- Self-Confidence
- Personal Advocacy
- Self-Regulation Skills

Each unit currently includes 5-7 lessons (over 30 workshop options total) which can be implemented as a self-advocacy series or stand-alone workshop. Workshops are developed to last one – 2 hours in duration to ensure peak student engagement; some sessions, as noted in each lesson plan, offer extended learning opportunities, as well. Program participants can engage in virtual or in-person small group, classroom-based sessions. Individualized sessions may be offered to accommodate individual student needs, when appropriate. Students will enroll in Self-Advocacy/ Mentoring workshops based upon their current level of understanding, personal and career goals as discussed during individualized intake meetings. Self-Advocacy / Mentoring activities & workshops can include:

This is Me!

1. **Getting To Know Myself as a Vocational Being** - Students will begin to explore their transition from “student” to their adult identity (personal and professionally). As a result, students will create Vision Boards to share information about themselves while encouraging them to think about goals, hopes and dreams for the future.
2. **How to Be My Best Self** – Students will begin to identify personal skills, strengths & individual learning styles and work habits to guarantee success in the workplace.
3. **Finding My Voice** Students will develop the skills to share their life stories, network, and advocate personally and professionally for diversity and inclusion in their community and professional settings.
4. **Putting the “I” in my Identity** – Teenagers often struggle with understanding their changing identify – from child to teen to adult. This workshop will engage students in exploration about their own changing their identities and what makes them who they are. Students may discuss ideas of identity and the relationship between individual and group identities. Students will then be encouraged to explore aspects of their own lives that contribute to their identity.
5. **Character Strengths & Building a Growth Mindset** – Having a growth mindset helps you focus on developing your abilities rather than proving how smart or talented you are. Compared to a fixed mindset, a growth mindset encourages you to embrace challenges, sustain effort, and try new strategies. This workshop will help students develop a more positive attitude; develop strong character strengths like diligence, self-control, grit, resilience and a sense of responsibility. Students will also learn and practice self-reflection strategies.
6. **One Word – Goal Setting** After reflection on the value and importance in goal setting, students will choose a one-word goal to focus and reflect on throughout the year.
7. **My Strengths, Interests & Goals – Presentation** Students will prepare a student-led presentation on the student's strengths, challenges, interests, and post-school goals to be presented to a group, reinforcing presentation and self-advocacy skills learned through previous transitions workshops.



Communication and Networking Skills

1. **Effective Communication** – This workshop will introduce participants to the essential qualities of effective communication: Conversation Skills - Formal vs Informal, Active Listening, and the role/importance of empathy in communication.
2. **Asking for Help** – Students learn that it's okay to ask for help and appropriate ways to do so.
3. **Let's Talk "Small Talk"** - Students will be introduced to and will practice "small talk" to help prepare them for personal and professional networking opportunities in their communities.
4. **Conflict Resolution** - Learn more about your personal Conflict Management Style. Then, students will reflect on personal experiences and determine strategies to utilize in similar future situations.
5. **Feedback & Self- Reflection** Self-reflection is important for strong leaders. You must be able to take feedback and then reflect on yourself, your abilities and your strengths. Self-reflection gives you a place to think through the feedback and make important informed decisions about your next steps. During this lesson, students will practice how to give and receive feedback while reviewing their own best self-reflection techniques.
6. **Building Your Personal Network** - Who you know will help get you where you want to go - The importance of networking as you develop your career path, strategies and practical implementation.
7. **Public Speaking in a Variety of Settings** – In this workshop, students will learn how to apply public speaking skills to engage in effective and meaningful communication in a variety of settings: job interviews, job settings (engagement with supervisors, co-workers, and customers), and/or with peers

Defining Disability

1. **Defining Disability** - This lesson will help students begin to humanize the experience of disability by focusing on student-voice videos, recognize diversity within the disability community, and discuss ways to promote accessibility.
2. **Disability - Rights & Responsibilities at Work & School** - By the end of this lesson, students will be able to identify, advocate, and understand the rights and responsibilities that all people with disabilities have, with emphasis on school and workplace environments.
3. **Knowing Your Supports & Your Role on Your Team** – As students prepare for adulthood, it is essential they identify the natural supports available in their community. As a result, this session will focus on relationship building, identifying expectations and limitations for such resources, and practicing strategies to access community-based resources when needed. Student transition or IEP meetings may be appropriate settings to model learned skills, when appropriate.
4. **To Disclose or Not to Disclose** – Students will learn about disability disclosure, their role in disclosure, assessing when it's necessary to disclose, strategies to engage in conversations about disclosure, as well as best practices when requesting reasonable accommodations when needed.
5. **Advocating for Accommodations** – To ensure students can access the community and workplaces independently, students will need to be increasingly familiar with the types of accommodations beneficial to their learning style and/or which meet their individual needs. Thus, in this session, students will review current work habits and essential accommodations necessary to be successful as outlined in 504 Plans or IEP's. Then, students will learn about the types of reasonable accommodations available in a workplace; students will practice requesting such accommodations to help develop increased confidence as they prepare to advocate for themselves accordingly.



Building Your Path to a Self-Determined Life

1. **Building Your Path to a Self-Determined Life**– It is important to learn how to make decisions for yourself about how you want to live your life. Students will define Self-determination and will practice Informed Decision Making.
2. **My 50 Year Old Self** - It's not just about the now; it's important to start connecting life & career goals to overall happiness. Students will connect the benefits of living a fulfilled, happy life now with planning future personal and professional goals.
3. **SMART Goals** – Students will be introduced to SMART Goals, the importance of setting realistic/ measurable goals and will be directed to create 2-4 measurable life/ career goals.
4. **Developing Your Leadership Skills** – Students will learn why leadership skills matter, the qualities of a leader while then assessing their own leadership skills.
5. **Leading with Intention** - Students will learn and practice the importance of motivation, delegation, strategizing, organization, evaluation and adaptation to help them become stronger leaders in their community.

Maintaining Personal Wellness

1. **Importance of Positive Self-Talk** – Positive Self-Talk can have a big impact on how we think and feel. Engaging in positive self-talk can help reduce stress, improve self-esteem, increase motivation, and improve overall health. Strategies to encourage positive self-talk will be discussed and rehearsed.
2. **Healthy Boundaries** - In this lesson, students will be able to set and identify healthy boundaries in a workplace environment.
3. **Self-Esteem & Confidence** - Students will learn about self-esteem and confidence, the importance of having high self-esteem/confidence and the negative effects of having low self-esteem/confidence as well as how stress affects their self-esteem/confidence.
4. **Stress Management** – Not all stress is bad! Attendees will discuss the impact of stress and effective strategies to reduce unhealthy stressors.
5. **Overcoming Obstacles – Managing Anxiety** Students will learn more about the topic of anxiety, how to discuss mental health concerns and identify coping strategies that can be used personally and professionally.
6. **Active Engagement in Your Community** – As they prepare to enter their adult year, it is increasingly important students begin to explore opportunities for civic engagement in their community. In this workshop session, students will learn more about the opportunities for active membership in their local community.
7. **Gratitude – See the Good Challenge:** People who practice gratitude consistently report a host of physical, psychological, and social benefits. Students will learn how demonstrating gratitude can support positive mental health in themselves and others.
8. **Self-Regulation-** Students learn what self-regulation is and how to independently manage their behaviors and emotions.

Best Buddies Ambassador Program

The Best Buddies Ambassador Program provides training in areas of speech writing, public speaking, and self-advocacy. Ambassadors develop the skills to professionally share their life stories, promote Best Buddies programs, network, and most importantly, advocate. The Ambassadors program prepares people to become active agents of change and informed, engaging advocates for the disability rights movement.

Ambassadors are of all ages and backgrounds and are leaders in their schools, communities, and workplaces. By sharing their firsthand experiences with inclusion, ambassadors are the most effective messengers of the Best Buddies mission. At the conclusion of the training process, ambassadors are often offered the opportunity to present their speech and can build a portfolio of speeches for various occasions.



Best Buddies Peer Mentoring

Peer mentoring is a process where two people of similar ages, experience levels, or both work together to help each other grow. They provide support, advice, and function as a resource for inspiration and new opportunities.

The **Best Buddies Peer Mentoring Program** pairs transition-aged students with IDD with a peer close in age (within approximately 6 years) in a mentee/ mentor relationship. The Program provides a framework to reinforce job readiness skills; enhance professional communication abilities; and teach students how to self-advocate for community, social, and professional services and supports as they enter adulthood.

Mentors: A mentor is an experienced individual who offers support, encouragement, knowledge, and a unique perspective to a mentee. They may be paired, in-person or virtually, with one mentee at a time to ensure a mutually enriching connection or a small group of mentees who share similar goals or interests.

Designed specifically to bridge the gap between programs, adults with disabilities, actively engaged in Best Buddies Integrated Employment, Ambassadors, or other Best Buddies programs are ideal candidates to mentor transition-aged youth with disabilities. Community or corporate volunteers may also become trained mentors, as best suits the needs of the enrolled mentees. Participation in the Peer Mentorship provides essential professional development opportunities to volunteers to support desired career advancement.

Mentees:

Students enrolled in the Best Buddies Transitions Program may be selected to participate as mentees in the Peer Mentoring Program. Selected students will apply learned self-advocacy skills learned during career readiness workshops throughout this work-based learning opportunity. Participation will help students with IDD train for a job, continue their education, gainful employment, and have a fulfilled life.

Peer Mentoring Program models should be focused on developing mutually beneficial relationships. Thus, the purpose of the match is to:

- create a professional relationship between a future worker and an experienced professional who has a few years (or more) of employment
- develop appropriate boundaries for professional relationships
- empower Best Buddies Jobs participants (adults with disabilities) to demonstrate their leadership skills by leading training sessions and sharing work experience with students who are preparing to transition into adulthood
- enhance transition-aged students' abilities to self-advocate, to help identify additional paths to achieve his/her post-secondary career goals, and to encourage increased confidence and independence as they enter the workforce

Peer Mentoring Workshops – currently under development as of October 2024

- **New Mentee**
 - Orientation
 - Connecting Virtually with Your Mentor
 - Connecting In Person with your Mentor
- **New Mentor**
 - Orientation
 - Connecting Virtually with Your Mentee
 - Connecting In Person with your Mentee
 - Fading support with your mentee

Additional Workshop Topics to Come – January 2025



Job Exploration Counseling Overview

The Best Buddies Job Exploration Counseling curriculum currently includes two units: *Exploring Your Career Path* and *A Day in the Life of a Vocational Being*. Program participants will identify career interests and aptitudes; develop an understanding of labor markets and career potential within their expressed area of interest; explore a variety of job settings through site tours and informational interviews to develop an understanding of qualifications and requirements for specific careers and develop appropriate SMART goals to accomplish their stated career goals. Students will be given access (username/ password required) to engage in activities, self-paced and/or during group sessions, on the Pathful Explore (formerly VirtualJobShadow.com) online learning platform, as well.

Skills to be Acquired Include:

- Personal, social, and financial benefits of employment.
- Identity of personal skills, strengths, interests, and values
- Awareness of types of work and identification of career pathways
- Developing personal and professional relationships
- Conversation & Communication Skills
- Personal and Professional Goal Development
- Self-Reflection

Each unit includes 5-9 lessons or experiential learning opportunities (or 14 options total) which can be implemented as a job exploration series, stand-alone workshop, or experiential learning opportunity / event. Workshops are developed to last an hour - 90 minutes each to ensure peak student engagement; experiential learning opportunities are best implemented in 2-4-hour blocks of time. Program participants can engage in virtual workshops, small group classroom-based instruction along with community-based engagement with peers and employers to develop necessary skills needed for the workplace. Students will enroll in Job Exploration Counseling workshops based upon their current level of understanding, personal and career goals as discussed during individualized intake meetings. Individualized sessions may be offered to accommodate individual student needs, when appropriate. Job Exploration Counseling activities & workshops can include:

Exploring Your Career Path

1. **Why Work?** Program participants will explore the personal, social, and financial benefits of employment.
2. **What are Your Work Values?** Program participants will complete a work value assessment while engaging in conversation about the global aspects of work that are important to a person's job satisfaction.
3. **What Are My Options? Exploring Vocational Themes** - Students will successfully generate a Career Cluster Inventory and begin exploration of jobs within their desired vocational clusters to develop a personal Pathways to Employment Plan.
4. **Exploring the Wide World of Work** – Utilizing a Career Cluster Inventory, Skills and Interest Assessments, Program participants will explore vocational options and opportunities that match their strengths and interests.
5. **Supports & Strategies – Reasonable Accommodations at Work** – Every workplace environment is different; program participants will identify characteristics of an ideal work environment that meets their individual needs, accommodations and interests while rehearsing ways to request reasonable supports on the job.
6. **Are You IN To Hire?** Participants will research and identify potential employers within specified vocational areas that match their personal vocational interests. Students may also connect with hiring managers to conduct informational interviews, as able, to learn more about what managers look for in candidates, responsibilities of the position, while receiving feedback to help make him/her the best candidate for a position in the future.
7. **Turning your Personal Connections into a Professional Network** – Program participants will learn more about the types of work and roles people in their personal network engage in to help further develop their own professional network via a series of surveys and conversations about employment.
8. **SMART Goals for the Future Professional:** Program participants will develop multiple, detailed SMART goals to help guide their path to employment. SMART Goals can be included in Post-Secondary Planning and/or Transition IEP meetings, as deemed appropriate.
9. **Becoming an Entrepreneur: How to turn your hobbies into potential income** Do you love to sew? Cook? Or Dance? Not all hobbies can lead to a full-time job, but some can help you jumpstart your own small business. Special guests will share how they turned their interests into opportunities to make money (sometimes from home).



A Day in the Life of a Vocational Being

1. **Virtual Work Exploration** – Using a variety of web-based media including the VirtualJobShadow.com online learning platform, participants will learn more about responsibilities in vocational fields of interest, determine eligibility/ qualifications to fulfill such roles and explore possible work-based learning opportunities in his/her community in the relevant field.
2. **Informational Interviews** – Program participants will complete an informational interview, speaking to a professional in a vocational field of interest. Interviews will be conducted on site or virtually to provide an authentic interview experience while allowing students to experience the workplace, as best able. Program participants will then compose and send a follow-up “thank you” letter to the new business contact.
3. **Site Tours** – Program participants will visit job sites to learn more about the variety of roles and responsibilities at each workplace. This exploration will allow participants to develop a greater understanding of the types of work and array of environments which support their individual interests and career goals.
4. **Job Fairs** – As available, participants will attend local job fairs (in-person or virtually) to learn more about hiring practices and vocational opportunities in a variety of industries in their community. Networking and professional communication strategies will be practiced during these events with support from Best Buddies staff. Following each event, Program participants will reflect on the experience and send a follow-up “thank you”, if appropriate.
5. **Career Panel Discussions** – Program participants will hear from professionals, including individuals with IDD, gaining knowledge about career paths including what motivates them to work, steps taken to enter the work force, how they connected with Best Buddies Jobs (if appropriate), how to advocate for accommodations and their plans for professional growth



Workplace Readiness Overview

The Best Buddies Workplace Readiness curriculum currently includes five units: *Getting the Job Done*; *Workplace Expectations & Effective Communication*, *Business and Information Technology*, *Independent Living*, *Financial Literacy*. Program participants learn how to prepare the job development process; importance of using appropriate and effective communication strategies with hiring managers, colleagues, and supervisors; introduced to community-based resources to support independent living as an adult.

Skills to be Acquired:

- Resumes – writing, updating, how to use as a tool during the application and interview process
- Cover Letters – writing, usage, and benefits
- Time management strategies
- Workplace communication skills
- Banking Skills –savings vs checking account, understanding your first paycheck, direct deposit, budgeting
- Understanding of the role of a job coach., how to advocate for assistance
- Employment Support Services, including the Best Buddies Jobs Program

Each unit includes 5-10 lessons (or 37 workshop options total) which can be implemented as a work readiness series or stand-alone workshop. Workshops are developed to last an hour - 90 minutes each to ensure peak student engagement. Program participants can engage in virtual workshops, small group classroom-based instruction along with community-based engagement with peers and employers to develop necessary skills needed for the workplace. Students will enroll in Workplace Readiness workshops based upon their current level of understanding and goals as discussed during individualized intake meetings. Readiness activities & workshops can include:

Getting the Job Done

1. **Resume Building** - During this activity-based lesson, program participants will develop a working resume, highlighting a combination of qualifying skills and work experience to help set them apart from other applicants. Feedback from cooperating corporate hiring managers will be sought, as available, to ensure Program participants are entering the workforce with competitive resumes.
2. **But Do I Actually Need a Cover Letter?** Participants will learn how employers and hiring managers utilize cover letters in the hiring process. Program participants will produce a sample cover letter to complement their working resumes and/or future job applications.
3. **Apply Yourself: How to Find a Job** – Ready to look for a job? Where should you start? Program participants will learn how to utilize online Job Search sites in addition to other traditional avenues to help find potential job openings in their area. Participants will explore the variety of positions currently available in their field of interest, expectations of such roles, average salary, and/ or unique employment requirements included on job listings.
4. **Apply Yourself - Completing Job Applications** - Program participants will then complete a hands-on practice of both paper and online applications.
5. **Apply Yourself – The Summer Edition** Program participants will review the benefits of obtaining a summer or short-term employment opportunity; emphasis will be on identifying job options which help develop skills and experience to support continue growth and development as students near the end of their transition's programs.
6. **Interview Preparation - Getting Ready Professionally** - Program participants will review interview best-practices and how to prepare for interviews in this session. Students will have an opportunity to practice preparing answers to common interview questions, how to actively engage with resumes during an interview, and will review professional practices (dress, body language, eye contact, questioning strategies) to ensure success during future interviews.
7. **Interview Preparation - Getting Ready Personally** Students will review personal time management skills (setting alarms, mapping out travel time), personal readiness (hygiene, picking out appropriate attire, coordinating transportation to/from), coping strategies, and other steps needed to be prepared for a job interview.
8. **Mock Interviews** - Participants will have a practice interview session with a community-based employer partner and/ or Best Buddies staff member. After each practice interview, participants will reflect on their experience(s) to ensure preparedness for future job interviews.
9. **After the Interview** – Phew – the interview is over.... Now what? Participants will learn more about what to expect after the interview including wait time, proper communication with human resources and/or the interview team as well as preparing for additional meetings or evaluations.
10. **Resume Re-Build** – Already have a resume? Have you recently finished school, completed an internship or have acquired new employable skills? This lesson will prompt students to Re-Build their resumes to include the most up-to-date information to help promote their employability as they enter the workforce.



Workplace Expectations & Effective Communication

1. **It's all about Teamwork!** Program participants will explore the essential characteristics for success in the workplace. Topics include dependability, timeliness, attitude, and stamina.
2. **Professional Time Management** – Students will discuss work productivity and expectations, how to develop a professional routine, prioritize tasks, and evaluate quality of work.
3. **Personal Time Management** - Program participants will engage in hands-on activities to develop an understanding of a variety of issues related to time management. Topics to be covered include: determining work availability, checking and adhering to work schedules, clocking in & out, and break times and work productivity expectations.
4. **Who's in Charge Around Here Anyway?** Program participants will learn more about the typical structure of a variety of workplaces in their area to help understand the differences between job titles, responsibilities, and relationships between co-workers.
5. **Yes, May I Help You? Customer Service Strategies & Etiquette** - Program participants will learn best customer service strategies including face-to-face communication with customers, troubleshooting challenges, and phone skills.
6. **Understanding Your Communication Style** - Program participants will examine the 6 basic types of communication styles to identify their style and how it impacts communication and teamwork in the workplace.
7. **Workplace Communications: Online Professionalism & Email** - We will discuss virtual communication options and best practices to stay connected with friends, teachers, employers, co-workers, and service providers. Additionally, students will learn how to use email personally and professionally as a primary means of communication daily, with emphasis on how email can keep people connected during a period of remote learning/ work.
8. **Addressing Conflict at Work** – students will practice conflict resolution skills in authentic workplace scenarios including interactions with colleagues, supervisors/ boss, customers, and other professionals.
9. **Personal & Professional Boundaries** – Boundaries are complicated in both personal and professional settings. Students will apply workplace and online professional communication skills in this session as the importance of setting and identifying boundaries is further discussed.

Business & Information Technology

1. **Introduction to Virtual Meeting Platforms** – Students will be introduced to commonly used Virtual Meeting Platforms used in the professional setting: Microsoft TEAMS, ZOOM, Webex, Google Meet, etc. Technical usage, troubleshooting and how to best to represent yourself professional on these platforms will help prepare students to enter a variety of hybrid work opportunities.
2. **Introduction to Microsoft Office Suite** – Students will be encouraged to complete online webinars, hosted by Microsoft, to learn more about the Microsoft Office Suite: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Publisher, etc. Upon completion, students will receive a certificate of completion; students will be encouraged to add earned credentials to their current resume(s) to promote the skills acquired.
3. **Being Social - Your Digital Footprint** Social media plays a large part in how you promote yourself, personally and professionally, to the world. In this session, we will discuss the Do's and Don'ts of social media, learn how sites like LinkedIn can help expand your network, and discover what your digital footprint says about you.
4. **Developing Your Virtual Professional Network** - Students will be introduced to what a virtual professional network is, and how to develop one, utilizing LinkedIn.
5. **Internet Safety** - These workshops will review digital safety fundamentals and help students be responsible digital citizens.



Independent Living

1. **Are You Ready to Live Independently?** This lesson will provide students with an overview of what independent living options, realistic expectations for independent living, and how to best prepare for this next step towards independence and adulthood.
2. **Healthy Habits** – This workshop will discuss how to maintain a healthy work life balance, develop and stick to routines, time management for life skills, and self-management tools.
3. **Civic Rights & Responsibilities** - Students learn that they are citizens at many levels of society: home, school, city, state, and nation; rights and responsibilities at these different levels of citizenship; how to become an active member of their community.
4. **Safety First! Protect Yourself** – It's important to keep yourself safe as you become an active member of your community. We will review trustworthy community-based natural supports (ie. friends, family, first responders, VR agencies/ counselors, medical professionals, etc.) plus will identify precautions to take to protect yourself from common phone & internet scams, financial vulnerability, solicitors, etc.
5. **Safety First! The Workplace Edition** - Explore workplace safety procedures including first aid, fire safety, emergency evacuation/shelter-in-place procedures and typical safety protocols. Additionally, we will review common certificate/ training requirements in specialized industries (ie. OSHA, SERV Safe, etc.) and how to prepare to acquire such credentials.
6. **Self-Management - Personal Identifiable Information** – As an adult, you will be managing many important documents and proof of you identify. In this lesson students will review essential documentation commonly used to seek employment and/or provide proof of identity including birth certificates, photo identification, driver's license, social security cards, etc.
7. **Accessing Your Community Independently** - We all get to work using a variety of modes of transportation. Before you apply for a job, however, you need to know which mode of transportation is best for you. In this session, we will explore options available in your community (walking, biking, bus/public transportation, ride share). Additionally, we will discuss technology (ie. WAZE, Google Maps, Google Earth & local public transit apps) which can help ensure your safety along the way.
8. **Accessing Adult Services** – Guest presenters from local Adult Disability Service agencies, Vocational Rehabilitation, Work Force offices, and/or other Transition Support programs will be invited to share knowledge of their programs with students. Parents/ guardians and local educators will be invited to participate, as well. Transition Fair events may be held quarterly to ensure families have access to transitional supports, in-person or virtually.
9. **How to Best Utilize Job Coaching Supports & An Introduction to the Best Buddies Jobs Program** – Best Buddies Jobs Staff will be our guest presenters; staff will share details about the Best Buddies Integrated Employment Program, how to access the program, and how to best utilize the supports of a Job Coach while on the job.

Financial Literacy

1. **Financial Literacy 101** – Guest presenters from local banks/ financial institutions will be invited to guide students on how to be financially responsible. Presenters can provide an overview of: the difference between a savings and checking account; how to open an account; what is direct deposit; planning for the future – budgeting; or any other relevant topic.
2. **Your First Paycheck – Now What?** Program participants will learn the difference between checking & savings accounts, how to enroll in direct deposit, online banking and budgeting strategies.
3. **But I Want It! Balancing Wants vs Needs** It's so hard to resist impulse purchases, however we will discuss best practices in prioritizing *wants vs needs* and planning out savings plans to help you achieve your financial goals.
4. **Balancing Your Benefits** - During this session, Program participants will attend a presentation/Q & A discussion with a benefits counselor to learn about topics such as the impact of work on SSI/SSDI benefits, insurance, and financial planning tools. This session will be offered on a bi-annual basis.



Work-based Learning Opportunities

The Best Buddies Work-Based Learning Opportunities curriculum currently includes nine experiential learning opportunities. This component will be conducted in small group or 1:1 sessions and will be highly individualized; number of hours engaged will vary between 1-4 hours per session, depending on the activity, agreement with cooperating employment partner, and ability/ stamina of each student. Activities will consist of school-based or simulated work experiences, workplace job shadowing and/or mentorship. Program participants will maintain reflection journals for each work environment toured, assessing relevance to their career goals, Program participants will be expected to demonstrate appropriate workplace etiquette and meet pre-determined expectations of each employment partner.

Skills to be Acquired:

- Develop work skills through work experiences in community integrated employment
- Gain greater understanding of soft skills important to the success in the workplace
- Learn from individuals currently practicing in the occupations and career of interest to the student
- Professional communication skills
- Task and time management skills through practical application

1. **Job Shadowing** – Program participants will be provided valuable opportunities to “test drive” careers so that they can formulate their future career plans and their pathways to success. Program participants will directly observe the day-to-day requirements of the job and engage in hands-on activities as allowed. An opportunity for reflection with site supervisors will assist Program participants as they determine how each job site fits into his/ her career goals.
2. **Corporate Mentoring Day Engagement** – Program participants will be matched with corporate partner sites to engage in Mentoring Day activities. Typical events will include site tours, opportunities to observe multiple departments/ staff engage in typical work responsibilities, networking engagement, and time to address questions and/or reflect on observations made during the event.
3. **A Day at Work - Workplace Simulation** – You’re at work... now what? Best Buddies staff will help simulate an average day at work, prompting students to help make decisions about time management (if you’re late or early), workplace communication (with co-workers, supervisors, etc), task management, and other average workplace processes.
4. **Internships** - Program participants may participate in internships, either paid or unpaid in workplace settings. Job coaching will be provided as necessary throughout all work-based learning activities; there will also be a weekly reflection/assessment. Best Buddies may support students through a variety of internship models, as best fits student needs:
 - **Project Based Internship:** Students will be assigned a specific project to complete with a short-term deadline for a cooperating host site. With support of the corporate supervisor and Best Buddies staff, internship logistics (scheduling, format, timeline of completion) will be determined while students will have regularly scheduled check-ins with Best Buddies staff throughout the project. Students may complete a Project-Based Internship in-person or remotely.
 - **Short Term:** Students may begin an internship by shadowing one or multiple departments to observe a variety of roles and employee responsibilities. Then, students will be assigned specific tasks with emphasis on opportunities for skills acquisition and increased independence on task completion. In-person execution is most ideal, however virtual accommodations may be offered as needed. Internships are most often 6 weeks in length (one or more days per week), up to 40 hours total.
 - **Long Term:** Internships will reflect workplace expectations typical to a part-time employee. Students will be held responsible for task completion as outlined in the internship job description. A long-term internship will provide students with authentic work experience; students will be ready to secure paid employment after the completion of a long-term internship. Host sites will be asked to consider extending employment opportunities to interns, when appropriate.
 - **Project SEARCH:** Best Buddies currently supports **Project SEARCH** sites in California, Florida, New Mexico, and New Jersey (New in September 2024). Project SEARCH provides real-life work experience, in the form of a nine-month, three-rotation internship program combined with training in employability and independent-living skills to help young people with significant disabilities make successful transitions to productive adult life. Best Buddies provides job coaching and job development support throughout the duration of the internship rotations to ensure student placement in competitive integrated employment upon successful completion of the program.
5. **Volunteerism** – Students may engage in volunteer activities which provide opportunities to practice learned workplace readiness skills. Volunteer activities can be offered to individuals or small groups; volunteer commitments and expectations should be outlined in advance of each session. Students will then be prompted to reflect on their volunteer experience(s), noting how volunteerism can help prepare students for paid work opportunities. Students will be prompted to add volunteer opportunities to active resumes, as well.



6. **Workplace Challenge Competition** - Students will be engaged in solving a real-world problem or a challenge issued by a potential employer. Students will work as a team, as able, to identify possible solutions, will then create and deliver a presentation on their solutions to the “employer”. This activity is well paired with DECA, Inc. or other High School Entrepreneurship Competitions in your area.
7. **Student-Led Enterprise – Build Your Own Business (BYOB)** Students may develop and execute school-based enterprises that produce goods or services for sale or to be used by people other than the participating student(s). Students will create and present a business model for approval then will initiate the enterprise as deemed most appropriate. Students will participate in regularly scheduled review meetings to assess success and opportunities for improvement.
8. **Pre-ETS Office Hours** - Office Hours will give students the ability to log on and ask us questions either via video chat, email or Google Classroom. Additional personalized sessions can be scheduled outside these office hours, as needed. Students should advocate for this level of support, when needed



Post-Secondary Counseling

Work is just one of many options available to Program participants as they transition out of public education. The Best Buddies Post-Secondary Counseling curriculum currently includes ten workshops or experiential learning opportunities. During these sessions, Program participants will learn more about educational opportunities in post-secondary institutions, career-based learning centers and/or apprenticeship/mentoring opportunities to help guide their path to a successful adulthood. School guidance counselors and college admissions advisors will be invited to take part in sessions, as able.

Skills to be Acquired:

- Awareness of post-secondary options available to students with disabilities
- Awareness of post-secondary pathways to acquire skills-based training, certification(s), credentials needed for desired career
- Understanding of the college application and admissions processes
- Understanding of accommodations for college entrance exams and in course curricula (through support from Disability Services)
- Understanding of the difference between special education services in K-12 education and post-secondary education disability services

Workshops are developed to last an hour - 90 minutes each to ensure peak student engagement; some sessions, as noted in each lesson plan, offer extended learning opportunities, as well. Students will enroll in Post Secondary Counseling workshops based upon their current level of understanding, personal and career goals as discussed during individualized intake meetings. Individualized sessions may be offered to accommodate individual student needs, when appropriate.

1. **So Many Options! An Introduction to Your Post-Secondary Options** Program participants will research educational opportunities post-secondary institutions, career-based learning centers and/or apprenticeship/mentoring opportunities including certification workshops (i.e. ServSafe, First Aid & CPR, etc.), and mini classes through community centers, etc. (photography, culinary, etc) in their area. This lesson serves as an introduction to all post-secondary options available to students.
2. **Knowing Your Options – Exploring Higher Education** Students will use VirtualJobShadow.com to explore certificate and degree programs in the local area and/or across the US which match their career interests. Students will be able to compare prerequisites for programs, campus life, access to disability services, plus opportunities for both in-state and out-of-state continued education. Students will be encouraged to continue conversations about options with their parents/ guardians, teachers, and/or guidance counselors as potential options arise.
3. **Knowing Your Options - Exploring Community-Based Learning Options** Students will explore community-based learning opportunities in their area to support continued personal and professional development. Students will access local library or community center learning boards, adult education centers, and/or community-based marketing (newspapers, e-newsletters, social media community pages, etc) to find workshops/ learning opportunities to support hobbies and/or occupational interests.
4. **Knowing Your Options – Vocational Education Programs and Apprenticeship Opportunities to Enhance Your Employment Skills** Students will explore Vocational Education Programs and/or Apprenticeship Opportunities which provide work-based learning opportunities in the community based on individual interests. Training opportunities may provide students with certificate / training credentials to be added to resumes which enhance employability in a competitive market.
5. **Apply Yourself! Tackling College Applications –** Students will review common college application requirements including demographic questions, financial information, essay prompts, teacher recommendations requirements, and deadlines. This workshop will help prepare students to navigate the college application process.
6. **Apply Yourself! Tackling the Common App Essay Prompts –** Program participants will draft responses to many common college application essay prompts, reflecting on the importance of applying appropriate voice, following proper spelling and grammar rules, and using concise language in responses.
7. **Tell Me More About Yourself - Preparing for College Interviews** No two interviews are the same; students will learn how to prepare for a college interview, will practice answering relevant questions about post-secondary goals, and will draft possible questions they should ask during college visits.
8. **Exploring Financial Aid Options for Post-Secondary Programs** Explore the resources available through College Board, Vocational Rehabilitation and other sources to find scholarships and financial aid options to support post-secondary program goals.



9. **Advocating for Accommodations – Working with Disability Resource Offices on Campus** Students will review the concept of disability disclosure and the importance of being an academic self-advocate at college. Students will be encouraged to attend Panel Discussions or Virtual Campus Tours with Disability Resource Offices at the college/ university of their choice.
10. **Finding Your Balance – Strategies for Maintaining a Healthy School X Life Balance** Students will review healthy habits, time management, and stress management strategies when planning ahead for campus life. Emphasis will be made on adjusting to new routines, self-determination skills, and coping strategies.
11. **Peer to Peer Connect –How to Prepare for College** Actively enrolled college students will meet 1:1 or in small groups with Transition-aged students to share their successes, challenges, and best tips on how to best prepare for college.
12. **Finding Your Voice – Preparing to be Your Own Advocate on Campus** Students will practice self-advocacy skills including conflict resolution, scenarios advocating with faculty and encouraging active involvement in the college community. Students will be encouraged to identify natural supports on campus available for ongoing supports when faced with advocacy challenges.
13. **Post-Secondary Site Tours** – Giving priority to locations already in partnership with Best Buddies Friendship Programs at the college level, Program participants will tour post-secondary education facilities and/or occupational training centers within their local area. Site tours may be conducted in-person or virtually, as best meets individual students' need