

Youth Opportunity Program (YOP)

Economically disadvantaged youth ages 16-21 at-risk of dropping out of high school



A drop-out prevention and work-study program for at-risk youth:

- *Students are provided training, counseling, and paid work experience to encourage high school completion.*
- *The program focuses on improving basic skills, employability skills, and self-esteem.*

Results



- *A follow-up study of program participants over a five year period revealed an 86% retention rate. Additionally, 64% of the respondents indicated that the program was very or moderately important in their decisions to stay in school.*

The Program

YOP is drop-out prevention and part-time work program providing career-oriented training to high school students and young adults who demonstrate a need for financial assistance. Its primary purpose is to prevent school drop-out while also providing training, counseling, referrals, and experience in the world of work. Student trainees work up to 20 hours weekly during the school year and 30 hours weekly during vacation periods, for which they are paid minimum wage. Cooperating schools at six sites grant academic credit for the work-study experience.

The YOP was enacted by the NYS Office of Mental Hygiene in 1967. The program is operated by the NYS Office of Mental Retardation and Development Disabilities (OMRDD) and NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH). The program has received specific legislative funding. The goal of the program is to expose students to direct care career opportunities serving the developmentally disabled and mentally ill. There are 15 statewide sites and each site has a Program Supervisor and Program Manager. However, for replication purposes, school districts need not have access to an OMRDD Center. The program may be organized within a school district contingent upon the development of community resources providing training sites.

The program's goals are to 1) serve economically disadvantaged youth at high risk of school drop-out; 2) encourage high school completion; 3) encourage post high school education; 4) initiate interest in serving the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled and mentally ill; 5) assist in the transition to regular full-time employment; and 6) promote personal growth. The planned program covering the areas of career exploration, employability skills, basic skills, and self-esteem building is coordinated by the Program Supervisor and delivered through Student Association Meetings. Activities include video presentations, small group discussion, field visits and presentations by the YOP Supervisor, and guest speakers from the community who serve as a resource network for the students.

Professional Development

YOP staff will conduct a two day training session for the Program Supervisor and will provide one day of technical assistance six months after training.

Costs & Funding Options

A contractual salary must be budgeted for the staff member designated as the Program Supervisor, a part-time position for a caseload of up to 25 students. Students must receive federal minimum wages (\$5.15 hr), therefore, funds for 25 students working 20 hours/week for forty weeks and 30 hours/week for twelve weeks (school vacations) must be budgeted. Districts may want to consider a combination of funds or funding sources. Districts may also wish to join with another district to establish a YOP program. Funding sources available include Youth-At-Risk grant monies.

Learning Standards

Career Development/ Occupational Studies:

1) be knowledgeable about the world of work, explore career options, and relate personal skills, aptitudes, and abilities to future career decisions; 3b) choose a career major and acquire career-specific technical knowledge/skills necessary to progress toward gainful employment, career advancement, and success in post-secondary programs.

Contact

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