

ASSEMBLY, No. 6230

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED DECEMBER 13, 2021

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman DANIEL R. BENSON

District 14 (Mercer and Middlesex)

Assemblyman PEDRO MEJIA

District 32 (Bergen and Hudson)

Assemblyman ANDREW ZWICKER

District 16 (Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex and Somerset)

Co-Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman Vainieri Huttle

SYNOPSIS

Establishes Direct Support Professional Career Development Center; makes appropriation of \$450,000.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 1/6/2022)

1 AN ACT concerning the establishment of a center for direct support
2 professionals by the New Jersey Community College Consortium
3 for Workforce and Economic Development, supplementing
4 chapter 64A of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes, and making
5 an appropriation.

6

7 **BE IT ENACTED** by the Senate and General Assembly of the State
8 of New Jersey:

9

10 1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

11 a. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities strive
12 to live active, engaged lives within the community.

13 b. Community inclusion is shown to promote the best outcomes
14 and quality of life for people with intellectual and developmental
15 disabilities.

16 c. Direct support professionals (DSPs) provide critical services
17 and supports for people with intellectual and developmental
18 disabilities and without these services community inclusion for
19 many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities would
20 not be possible.

21 d. However, the system of services and supports that people
22 with intellectual and developmental disabilities rely on for
23 becoming contributing citizens in their communities is facing an
24 ongoing workforce crisis; harming the ability of people with
25 intellectual and developmental disabilities to access services. This
26 strain is further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

27 e. The DSP workforce crisis, that is evident across the nation, is
28 characterized in several ways, including high turnover, difficulty
29 recruiting, and no discernable career path, all of which threatens the
30 number and quality of available services and supports for people
31 with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

32 f. This crisis calls for the establishment of a career path aligned
33 with ongoing professional development in order to instill
34 competence, confidence, and investment in the workforce that
35 contributes to the well-being and quality of life of people with
36 intellectual and developmental disabilities by providing an
37 opportunity for career development, advancement, and learning new
38 skills.

39 g. The Direct Support Professional Career Development Center
40 shall have two objectives. First, the Center shall conduct a pilot
41 that focuses on DSP recruitment and retention for students “at-risk”
42 of not completing a traditional high school program and, as such,
43 not only will benefit people with intellectual and developmental
44 disabilities but also “at-risk” students who otherwise may not have
45 access to a career opportunity.

46 h. The Direct Support Professional Career Development Center
47 shall provide support to existing and new DSPs with incentives to
48 remain in the field and further their education.

1 2. The Direct Support Professional Career Development Center
2 shall be established at the New Jersey Community College
3 Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development in
4 partnership with a trade association serving organizations that
5 employ direct support professionals. It shall be the purpose of the
6 center to provide a potential career path to high school students at-
7 risk of failing to graduate in addition to existing direct support
8 professionals, thereby assisting with recruitment and retention of
9 this critical workforce.

10 The center, through partnerships with local school districts, shall
11 identify and recruit high school students “at risk” of not graduating
12 from high school who have not pursued vocational education or any
13 other alternative education program, and who are interested in
14 learning about and serving people with intellectual and
15 developmental disabilities. The center shall provide participating
16 students with a two-year program that offers mentorship and
17 training regarding the responsibilities of direct support
18 professionals and a potential job opportunity upon graduation. The
19 program shall provide online training in addition to on-site training
20 and mentorship with experienced direct support professionals
21 employed by participating agencies that serve individuals with
22 intellectual and developmental disabilities.

23 Upon completion of the program, a participating student shall
24 receive academic credits and the school district at which the student
25 is enrolled shall apply the credits towards the district requirements
26 for high school graduation. The student shall be offered an
27 opportunity to interview for employment as a direct support
28 professional at the agency where the student received on-site
29 training. The agency shall interview the student for a position with
30 compensation that reflects the experience and training received
31 through the program.

32 In addition to “at risk” students, the Direct Support Professional
33 Career Development Center shall work with existing and future
34 direct support professionals to identify their educational goals
35 including credentialing, an associate’s degree, and a bachelor’s
36 degree.

37
38 3. The Direct Support Professional Career Development Center
39 established pursuant to section 2 of this act shall employ a career
40 counselor.

41 a. The career counselor shall provide ongoing support to
42 participating high school students as well as direct support
43 professionals, including providing the student with assistance in
44 finding appropriate postsecondary programs or in connecting the
45 student with a provider agency that serves people with intellectual
46 and developmental disabilities.

47 b. The career counselor shall assist in the establishment of a
48 Career Development Program pursuant to section 4 of this act.

1 and who are interested in learning about and serving people with
2 intellectual and developmental disabilities. The center will provide
3 participating students with a two year program that offers
4 mentorship and training regarding the responsibilities of DSPs and a
5 potential job opportunity upon graduation. The program will
6 provide online training in addition to on-site training and
7 mentorship with experienced DSPs employed by participating
8 agencies that serve individuals with intellectual and developmental
9 disabilities.

10 The bill provides that, upon completion of the program, a
11 participating student will receive academic credits and the school
12 district at which the student is enrolled shall apply the credits
13 towards the district requirements for high school graduation. The
14 student will also be offered an opportunity to interview for
15 employment as a DSP at the agency where the student received on-
16 site training. The agency will interview the student for a position
17 with compensation that reflects the experience and training received
18 through the program.

19 In addition to “at risk” students, the Direct Support Professional
20 Career Development Center will work with existing and future
21 DSPs to identify their educational goals including credentialing, an
22 associate’s Degree and a bachelor’s Degree.

23 The bill requires the Direct Support Professional Career
24 Development Center to employ a career counselor, who will
25 provide ongoing support to participating high school students as
26 well as DSPs and assist in the establishment of a Career
27 Development Program.

28 The bill provides for the establishment, in collaboration with the
29 New Jersey Council of County Colleges, of a Career Development
30 Program for new and existing DSPs at the Direct Support
31 Professional Career Development Center. The center will assist
32 individuals employed as a DSP with the pursuit of a college degree.
33 It will be the purpose of the Career Development Program to create
34 a career path for the recruitment and retention of DSPs.

35 Under the bill, the New Jersey Council of County Colleges will,
36 as part of New Jersey’s Workforce Development initiative, develop
37 curriculum specific to the field of intellectual and developmental
38 disabilities including an associates’ degree and bachelors’ degree.

39 Finally, the bill provides for the appropriation of \$450,000 from
40 the General Fund to the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education
41 for the purposes of fulfilling the bill’s provisions. The Office of the
42 Secretary of Higher Education will distribute a grant to the New
43 Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and
44 Economic Development in partnership with a trade association
45 serving organizations that employ DSPs to establish the Direct
46 Support Professional Career Development Center by such criteria as
47 are determined by the Secretary of Higher Education.