

Q&A for VR COOP Work Experience Program

1. Question: When a school district is using a “zero hour” or “ninth hour” to provide instruction for credits for any students and a student with a disability is released for zero or ninth hour to participate in a VR COOP Work Experience, how long is the student’s instructional day?

Answer: While the student will earn credit for the Cooperative Work Experience Program (COOP), if they are participating in the program outside of the instructional day the amount of time will not be included in calculating of amount of instruction, but does count toward the unit of credit.

2. Question: Would students in a VR COOP Work Experience ever be released to work in a sheltered workshop?

Answer: No, students participating in the COOP program must be employed in a job that pays at least minimum wage in an integrated, competitive setting, in accordance with DOL Guidelines and Fair Labor Standards Act.

3. Question: Can students participate in VR COOP Work Experience Program when they do not need additional credits?

Answer: It is up to the IEP team to decide. The IEP team can recommend that the child continue with any educational program after the child has earned the required credits for graduation. Any child, whether disabled or not, is allowed to attend high school for four school years even if they have earned all required credits to graduate. Benefits could include creating agency linkage, motivation to stay in school, and support from school staff and VR, leading to a successful transition to employment.

4. Question: What program exists for students who are not ready to earn a wage which still allow a student to earn VR COOP Work Experience Program credits?

Answer: Youth participating in the COOP program must be earning at least minimum wage in an integrated, competitive employment setting, in accordance with Department of Labor Guidelines and Fair Labor Standards Act; A school district may offer other types of off-campus programs as unpaid internship work experiences without needing Department of Elementary and Secondary Education approval, such as the School Flex Program for students in 11th or 12th grades. Unpaid work experiences are for youth with disabilities who are VR eligible and have the opportunity to participate in an internship program in accordance with Department of Labor (DOL) Guidelines Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) as explained within the Interagency Transition Agreement.

<https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/VR-transition-coopagreement.pdf>.

5. Question: Do the students have to work during the time they are released from school for VR COOP Work Experience Program?

Answer: No, the student does not have to be on the job in the hours that they are released from school for COOP. Many students work evenings and weekends. Students may be approved to participate in the COOP program through one of two options. They may be released from school at least one hour per day as part of their course schedule or through learning and applying job skills in a competitive employment

setting before, after school or during the summer months as identified through the goals and objectives listed in their IEP and IPE.

6. Question: If a student has already earned the core subject area credits that they need for graduation may the IEP team determine to release the child for more than one hour a day for VR COOP Work Experience even though they are only going to earn one elective credit for the work experience?

Answer: Yes, the team can decide to release a student for more than the minimum amount of time indicated in the guidelines for COOP program, which is one hour a day. The team must ensure the student is enrolled in at least one course during the school day where the instruction is related to the work experience and the team should pay attention to credits earned to help the student stay on track towards graduation.

7. Question: If VR COOP Work Experience is specialized instruction how is it also regular education?

Answer: The COOP program is a special education service that is being provided to the child. Placement is based on the setting where the special education service is being provided. VR COOP Work Experience is a special education service that is being delivered in a regular education setting because the workplace is in the community primarily with people without disabilities.

8. Question: Is it possible for a student to earn elective credit for VR Work Experience COOP during the summer?

Answer: Yes, but some conditions apply. The school must offer a summer school program in which students can earn credit. The student must be enrolled in some kind of related instruction in the summer school program.

9. Question: What happens when a student loses their job?

Answer: Typically there is a time limit as to when a student can try to secure other employment in order to continue with COOP. If the student is unable to secure employment within the timeframe specified for that school district, the student will be placed back in class and no longer receive COOP credit. Check with your school district for specific guidance on time frames.