VCU Center on Transition Innovations

Start on Success Replication Guide

Steps for implementing a school-to-work program

Center on transition innovations

VCU

SOS timeline

The following timeline provides an overview of the suggested sequence of events to assist with replicating the SOS model. A more detailed list of tasks can be found on Page 24 of this guide.

Program development

6-9 months prior to implementation

- Build infrastructure of SOS program
- Secure administrative buy-in
- Select lead coordinator
- Establish core planning team and advisory board
- Secure funding source
- Identify CTE course

3-6 months prior to implementation

- Recruit families, students, and businesses
- Select student participants
- Secure business site

Program implementation

Fall semester

- Students participate in CTE course
- Collaborate with business and identify internships
- Begin process for student payment

Spring semester

- Students participate in paid internship
- Business mentor and school staff support students
- Students participate in class workshop twice/mo
- Evaluate student and program performance weekly and give feedback
- Begin recruitment for next cohort
- Hold end-of-year celebration

Program evaluation

1-2 months after internship

- Track student outcomes
- Review program data and set goals for improvement

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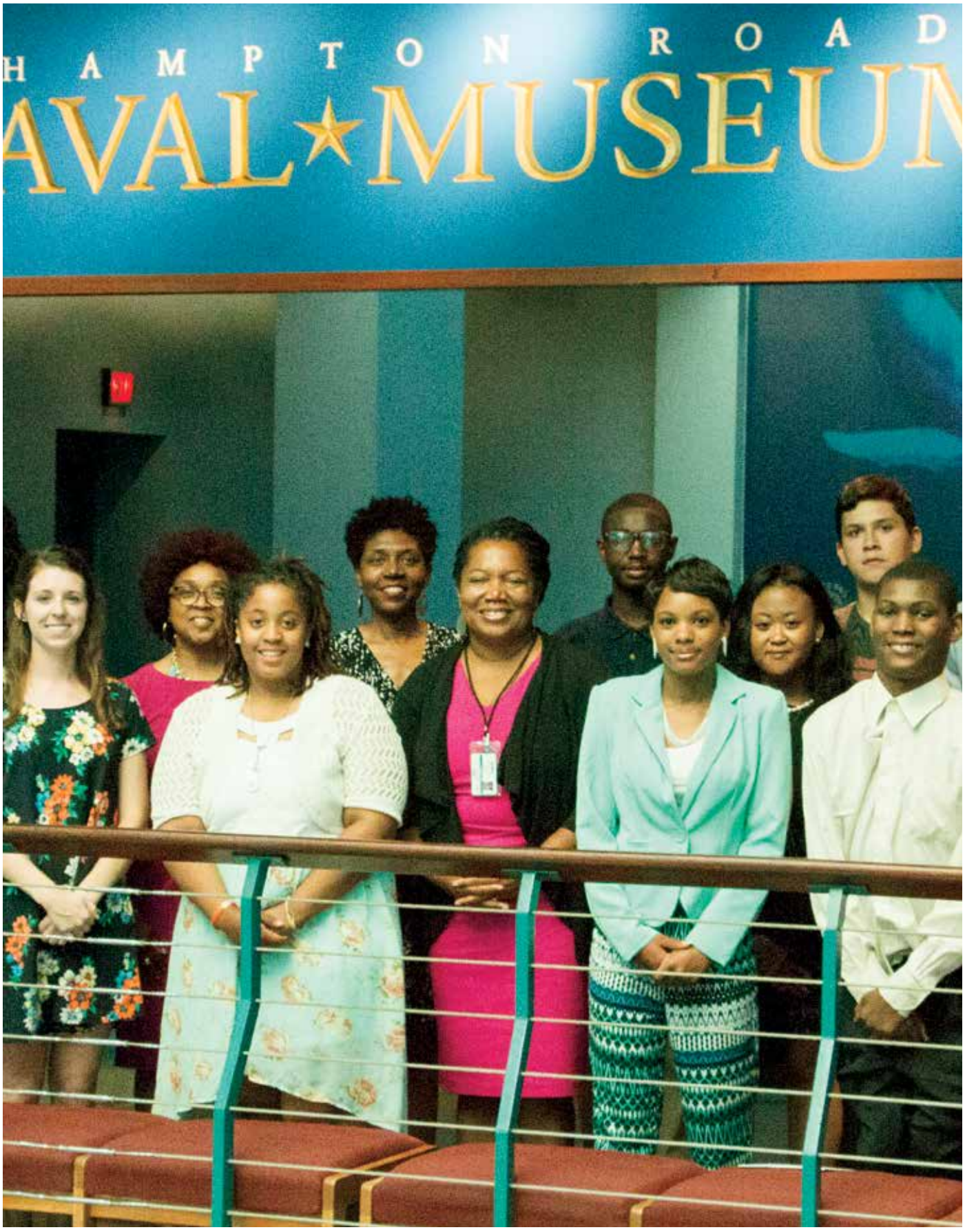
About this guide

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) explored national programs to improve graduation rates of students with disabilities. They found that the Start on Success (SOS) program has been successful in many school divisions across the nation since its inception in 1994. In 2013, a state SOS Advisory Board led by VDOE and Virginia Commonwealth University's Center on Transition Innovations (CTI) received applications from several school divisions across Virginia to become the first SOS pilot site in the state. Norfolk Public Schools was selected and implementation began during the 2014-15 school year. The SOS model has expanded to various school divisions across Virginia.

This guide is designed to provide guidance in replicating the components of this highly successful school-to-work model. The information, strategies, and tips are based on the development and implementation of the SOS model in various rural and urban school divisions in Virginia.

To learn more about the SOS model, visit centerontransition.org/SOS.


HAMPTON ROAD
AVAL★MUSEUM

Overview

According to the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, students with disabilities who participate in work experiences and paid employment during high school have a better chance of success in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. Integrating multiple opportunities, especially paid work experiences in natural environments related to students' interests and education program, is one way of providing students the opportunity to achieve positive post-school outcomes. Start on Success (SOS) is one such program designed to increase the readiness for college and career success among high school students with disabilities.

History of SOS

Start on Success is a highly structured school-to-work program started in 1994 by the National Organization on Disability. Since its inception, the SOS program has been implemented in over a dozen cities around the U.S. and has served more than 4,000 students. Students who participate in SOS continue on to postsecondary employment or education at a rate of 75 to 85 percent, which is three times higher than the overall rate for students with disabilities. SOS has demonstrated how early opportunity, close individual support, and collaboration can successfully prepare at-risk students for competitive employment and independent living.

SOS in Virginia

Virginia piloted SOS in 2014 and has since successfully implemented this model in urban, rural, and suburban communities. Positive program outcomes indicate that approximately 80% of former student participants in Virginia were engaged in either postsecondary employment or education and training following graduation from high school.

SOS model

SOS is coordinated by school divisions to provide instructional coursework along with a paid work experience. This program is intended for at-risk high school seniors with disabilities pursuing a standard or advanced studies diploma. It is a yearlong model in which students enroll in a career pathways course during the first semester and participate in a paid internship at a local business during the second semester of the school year. This program places a strong emphasis on collaboration among schools, businesses, and families.

Program Outcomes:

- Improve graduation rates for students with disabilities
- Increase positive post-school outcomes
- Assist students in discovering abilities and interests
- Support students in practicing self-advocacy and self-determination skills in the workplace
- Build stronger relationships between schools, students, families, service providers, and the business community
- Assist students in developing career pathways skills

Teamwork
Service to others
Accountability/Responsibility
Integrity
Community involvement
Respect for the individual
Fun

Infrastructure

Starting with a strong infrastructure is key to successful implementation of the SOS program. This involves determining a need for the program, getting administrative buy-in, selecting a lead coordinator, assembling a core planning team, convening an advisory board, and adhering to the essential components of the SOS model. When developing and implementing the SOS model, school divisions have flexibility with this process in order to meet the individual needs of the student, school division, and host business.

1. Determine need

The first step to model replication within a division is to determine if a need exists to further expand career pathways instruction and hands-on work experiences to enhance the skills of students with disabilities. A review of your division's data will assist in making this determination.

Review:

- Graduation and dropout rates of students with and without disabilities
- Post-school outcomes for students with disabilities
- School to work programs offered within the division
- Enrollment and completer status of students with IEPs in CTE courses
- IEPs to determine a need for career exploration and readiness instruction of students pursuing a standard or advanced studies diploma

> "I realize how critical it is to provide this opportunity to students with "high-incidence" disabilities. I think for years we have taken for granted that no additional support was needed for this group to gain and maintain employment."
>
> - SOS Lead Coordinator

If the review of data indicates a need to expand employment programming to assist with increasing graduation rates and enhancing positive post-school outcomes for students with disabilities, then presenting the SOS model to administrators is recommended.

2. Get administrative buy-in

Whether you are in an urban, suburban, or rural school division, administrative buy-in is essential when considering replication of a program. When discussing the need and benefits of the SOS program with school and/or division administrators, include the information gleaned from your division's data that was reviewed along with the research on effective practices and predictors for post school success (transitionta.org/effectivepractices). This body of evidence will help to promote understanding of the importance of implementing evidence-based practices and predictors that promote positive post-school outcomes for students with disabilities.

In most SOS sites, the lead coordinator is assisted by a school staff member who manages the day-to-day details of SOS program.

3. Identify lead coordinator

Once administrative buy-in is secured, identifying a lead coordinator to oversee the development and implementation of the SOS model is essential. Appointing a school staff member may be the best option because this position will require a person to have a good understanding of the work-based learning guidelines and special education regulations. It is estimated that the responsibility for overseeing the development and implementation of SOS will require approximately 8 to 10 hours per week for the first year.

Key Responsibilities:

- Supervise the development and implementation of the program
- Identify course instructor and onsite internship support staff
- Monitor regulations pertaining to secondary transition, work-based learning, and special education
- Advocate for resources
- Market SOS to administrators, teachers, and community partners
- Collaborate on selecting course curriculum
- Secure a host business site
- Assist the host business in identifying business mentors and internship opportunities
- Facilitate the payment of student wages
- Assemble the core planning team

Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services staff are employment experts and should be included in the core planning team.

4. Assemble core planning team

An important responsibility of the lead coordinator is to assemble a core planning team to assist in the development, implementation, and sustainability of the SOS program. This team should be comprised of three to four key stakeholders who demonstrate a commitment to increasing career pathways activities within a school or division, are willing to maximize and share resources, and are willing to guide the program to the fidelity of the SOS model. Team members could include school administrators, career and technical education specialists, teachers, community agency representatives, and other interested parties. In most cases, it is beneficial for this team to meet monthly during the development and implementation of SOS.

Key Responsibilities:

- Guide program development and implementation
- Assist in securing a host business site
- Market SOS to teachers, students, families, and community partners
- Participate in the student selection process
- Mentor students in areas of need such as academic and career planning
- Recruit guest speakers to complement classroom curriculum
- Establish an advisory board

5. Convene advisory board

An important responsibility of the core planning team is to convene an advisory board. This board meets throughout the year, usually on a quarterly or semiannually basis depending on the needs of the program. Establishing an advisory board can be a tremendous asset to the development, implementation, and sustainability of the program.

The advisory board's function is to involve the greater community in the implementation of SOS. The role of the advisory board is to offer guidance, resources, and expertise to the core planning team regarding the implementation of the goals and objectives of SOS. Board membership should be comprised of various stakeholders with different experiences who have a genuine interest in increasing positive post-school outcomes for youth. This should include stakeholders from local schools, local government, and community organizations, along with an SOS participant and a family member.

Key Responsibilities:

- Market SOS to businesses and organizations
- Advocate for needed resources
- Assist with identifying a host business site
- Participate in the selection of SOS students
- Collaborate on SOS related events
- Mentor students
- Assist in classroom and workshop activities
- Provide advice and feedback on program components and implementation

6. Follow program components

Specific core components of SOS have contributed to the success of the program across the nation and in Virginia. When preparing for the development of the SOS infrastructure, it is important to note school divisions have flexibility in the implementation of the model to assist with individual needs of the student, school division, and host business. However, in order to keep to the fidelity of the SOS program, specific model components must be adhered to and include the following essential components.

Student

The SOS program is designed for high school seniors with disabilities who are pursuing a standard or advanced studies diploma. If not given an opportunity to increase career pathways skills through work-based training, these students are at a higher risk for dropping out or have less of a chance for reaching desired post-school outcomes.

Many of the SOS programs in Virginia enroll students in the Education for Employment I – Development course during the first semester of the program.

Curriculum

To assist students with learning career-readiness skills, the SOS model requires students to participate in a credit-bearing career and technical education course (CTE). This course should include curriculum that provides exposure to workplace expectations and competencies, self-awareness, and job maintenance skills.

Business

A contributing factor to the success of the SOS model is having a business partner that is fully engaged in and committed to the development, implementation, and evaluation of the program. The business community has employees who can provide valuable resources such as training, mentorship, and support to both the students and the program. In a committed business, students can provide services to meet the needs of the business and increase productivity.

Current SOS sites implement the internship component during the second semester of the student's senior year.

Internship

The SOS model incorporates paid employment at an inclusive business site within the community. It is recommended that students work fifteen hours a week, Monday through Friday, for sixteen weeks. Some divisions schedule the internship during the school day, whereas others extend the internship beyond school hours.

Compensation

One of the benefits to students participating in SOS is the opportunity to experience real work for real pay. In the SOS model, students are paid at or above minimum wage. The responsibility for paying the wages can be negotiated among key stakeholders including schools, community agencies, and the host business. Exploring creative funding solutions is recommended so that funding is not a deterrent to moving forward with planning and implementing this model.

Collaboration

SOS places great emphasis on the importance of collaboration. The program is designed to demonstrate the success of a collaborative partnership with students, families, schools, community agencies, and employers in preparing students for the transition to post-school activities. A valuable community agency that can contribute to the development, implementation, and evaluation of the program is the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). Their mission is to improve the employment outcomes and quality of life for individuals with disabilities by providing supports and services for obtaining and maintaining employment.

Recruitment

Launching a new school-to-work program requires a team effort to recruit students and families, and develop a business partnership. This process involves developing marketing materials, identifying and selecting students, engaging families and networking, and recruiting businesses in the community.

Marketing materials

During the initial stages of project development, creating marketing materials is important to help cultivate awareness, interest, and stakeholder buy-in. Consider developing a brochure or flyer to provide an overview of the program and the roles and responsibilities of the collaborators involved in implementing SOS. Business cards and the SOS video (youtu.be/ArLKg3sSPSI) produced by the VCU Center on Transition Innovations are also effective marketing tools for recruiting students, families, and businesses.

Student recruitment

Once the marketing materials have been developed and approved, begin focusing efforts on recruiting students. Before beginning the recruitment process, it is essential for the core planning team to establish the total students the program will accept. In Virginia, SOS sites aim to select at least 8 seniors for each program. To reach this goal, divisions will need to recruit students who meet certain criteria.

If recruitment numbers are low, consider identifying juniors who meet the criteria.

Recruitment Criteria:

- Have a disability
- At risk for dropping out
- Pursue a standard or advanced studies diploma
- Interest in working and increasing skills
- Have little to no work experience
- Need support in obtaining and maintaining employment

After the student enrollment number has been determined, the planning team will need to select the high school or multiple schools that have the greatest need for improving career pathways for students with disabilities. A review of high school graduation rates, career and technical education completers and certifications, and outcome data for students in special education pursuing a standard or advanced studies diploma will assist in making this determination. After the school(s) has been selected, begin marketing SOS to students who meet the criteria. Engage case managers, school counselors, DARS staff, and families in the recruitment of appropriate candidates.

Case managers should introduce SOS and share marketing materials with students and families during IEP meetings to determine interest and need.

Family engagement in this program is critical to the success of students' SOS experience. Make sure to include family members by communicating, collaborating, and requesting input in all stages of implementation.

Family recruitment

One of the contributing factors to the success of the SOS program is family engagement throughout the recruitment and implementation phases. Families can positively influence student recruitment and program experience. Once a student has been identified as meeting the SOS criteria, call each family and discuss the program, benefits, and positive outcomes of the SOS model. Organize an SOS information session at the school and invite interested students, families, school staff, and community agencies to attend. Distribute marketing materials, show the SOS video, and allow time for questions. This will greatly assist with increasing program awareness, interest, and parental engagement.

Student selection

"Businesses that participate in SOS gain valuable employees who accomplish a myriad of tasks that directly improve business productivity."

- SOS Advisory Board Member

During the student selection process, it is advisable to find out as much information as possible about each candidate to determine interests, strengths, preferences, needs, and future goals. Requiring the students to complete an application and participate in an interview is recommended. This process should begin several months prior to the start of the new school year to allow time for applications, interviews, selection, and, most importantly, student scheduling.

Business recruitment

Recruiting a business partner that can provide individual internship experiences to students within one company will require networking, marketing, and time. For some SOS programs, establishing a business partnership took weeks, for others the search required months. This process should begin at the same time as student and family recruitment. Efforts should focus on businesses that meet the following criteria.

Business Criteria:

- Inclusive setting
- Geographically accessible to the school(s)
- Various departments within business
- Business hours align with program schedule

Several strategies are effective in the recruitment of a business partner. First, consider exploring existing business relationships within the core planning team and advisory board members. Network with family, friends, and community agencies and reach out to business groups such as the Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce for business contacts.

Marketing to a business

Once a list of potential business partners has been identified, it is time to market SOS to each company. There are various strategies to use when approaching a company. The most effective strategy is a face-to-face meeting. The lead coordinator will arrange a meeting with the employee who has the ability to make school partnership decisions within the company. Invite a member of the core planning team or advisory board to attend and be prepared for questions regarding SOS goals, roles and responsibilities, and benefits the program has to offer a business.

When identifying a potential business, meet with the general manager or human resource representative as they are the most familiar with implementing work experiences.

Business Benefits:

- Mentorship opportunities
- Pool of potential employees
- Reduction in training costs
- Increase in productivity
- Providing a service to the school division

Prior to meeting a business representative, have the marketing materials developed, approved, and ready to distribute. Make sure to include school contact information, such as a business card and be prepared for questions that may be asked regarding SOS infrastructure, implementation, and roles and responsibilities of the collaborators. Roles and responsibilities are detailed on Page 14 of this guide.

"If I could talk to the future employers and mentors of the SOS program, I would say be prepared for success. Know that the skills and aptitude of these young folks is immeasurable."

- SOS Business Mentor

Key Talking Points:

- Overview and goals of the SOS program
- Benefits to the business
- Program length, time of day, days of the week
- Business, school, and student roles and responsibilities
- Student compensation
- Types of jobs or tasks within the business
- Essential work duties of the business
- Employment or industry requirements of the business (e.g., background checks, TB tests, etc.)

The business recruitment process will take time and may continue during the first semester of program implementation.

Course component

The SOS program connects school-based instruction with real world experience. During the first semester of the student's senior year, students are expected to participate in a credit-bearing career and technical education (CTE) course. This course should include curriculum that provides exposure to workplace expectations and competencies, self-awareness, and job maintenance skills.

Identifying curriculum

The lead coordinator or other school personnel are responsible for choosing a credit-bearing CTE course for the SOS curriculum. Students will enroll in this course during the first semester of the student's senior year. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the expectations of the workforce and the process of making informed career and continuing education choices. Curriculum should include ethical behaviors and career research, self-awareness, self-advocacy, customer service, and life skills.

> "With the support from the Senior Director of Career and Technical Education, we were able to activate the Education for Employment course code back into the school's master schedule."
>
> - SOS Lead Coordinator

Explore the current CTE offerings within the school, and become familiar with the course curriculum, number of sections offered, and time of day the courses are available. If the current course offerings do not meet the curriculum needs of the SOS model or the scheduling needs of the students, consider adding an additional course to the master schedule. The Virginia Department of Education has approved work-place readiness curriculum, instructional resources, and lesson plans through Virginia's Educational Resources System Online (cteresource.org/verso/categories/career-connections). Review the approved VDOE courses and discuss the possibility of including an additional course option for students with school administrators

In addition to the CTE or VDOE curriculum, the SOS model encourages divisions to supplement the CTE curriculum with additional instruction and activities related to career pathways.

Supplemental Instruction and Activities:

- Self-determination and disability awareness
- Services and supports provided by community agencies
- Training required by the business
- Travel training to the worksite and home
- Personal finance
- Orientation to SOS business site

Student scheduling

Estimating the number of courses and sections needed, coordinating space, determining staff, and creating student schedules can be a challenging task.

Scheduling Tips:

- Enroll SOS students in the same CTE course
- Schedule the course and internship during the same class period(s) for the 1st and 2nd semesters
- Consider completing the year long course in one semester.
- Explore number of credits students can earn for class and internship

The time of day that the three hour internship occurs varies across Virginia SOS sites and depends on transportation needs, coursework demands, availability of school staff, and the needs of the business.

Internship component

"SOS provides the opportunity for teaching and learning outside of the walls of the school. The commitment of the business really made a difference for the students."

- SOS Teacher

Once students have completed the CTE semester course, it is time to apply the information and skills gained. Often students do not get an opportunity to experience a professional work environment until after they exit school. Providing internships while in high school is a safe and supportive way for students to be immersed into the professional world of work.

The SOS model incorporates a paid internship at an inclusive business within the community. Students receive support on the job site from business mentors as well as from the onsite school staff member to assist with problem solving, accommodations, and applying career pathways skills. In addition to the work experience, the internship component includes a business workshop every ten work days. This workshop allows students to receive direct instruction, guided practice, and discussions on work-related topics pertinent to sustaining employment.

Roles and responsibilities

Developing each internship experience to meet the needs of the student and business will require a collaborative effort. To build a united partnership, you must have a good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder involved in the development and implementation of the internship component.

Student

Students have an active role in the internship component. They are in a professional environment, which means they take on a certain level of responsibility.

"In order to be successful you have to believe in yourself, and the people at SOS believe in me, which helps me to believe in me."

- SOS Student

Key Responsibilities:

- Identify strengths, preferences, interests, and needs related to the internship
- Demonstrate professionalism, which includes arriving on time, notifying supervisors if unable to work, dressing appropriately, and maintaining a positive attitude
- Communicate to business mentor and school staff any needs that may affect work performance
- Participate in goal setting and monitoring of progress related to task completion and work expectations
- Follow worksite rules and expectations

Family

Family encouragement and engagement in the SOS internship component are critical for students to meet internship expectations and achieve positive outcomes.

Key Responsibilities:

- Support students in maintaining dress code and following work schedule
- Assist students in arranging for transportation to and from the worksite
- Encourage students to follow worksite rules and expectations
- Maintain high expectations of student behavior and achievement
- Assist students to identify strengths, preferences, interests, and needs related to employment
- Collaborate with students, teachers, and community agencies in planning next steps for reaching postsecondary goals

School staff

A school staff member is required to be onsite during internship implementation. This person should have the skills needed to build a strong relationship with the business, as well as knowledge about supporting students on the job. Depending on the policies of the school divisions, the person who is designated to be onsite could be a teacher, job coach, or paraprofessional.

Make sure to have a contingency plan in place if the school staff person is absent.

Key Responsibilities:

- Assist students in obtaining uniforms
- Provide support and supervision of students
- Communicate with the lead coordinator and business mentors regarding student performance
- Facilitate the paperwork for student compensation
- Problem solve work-related issues
- Share expertise with business mentors about effective strategies for supporting students with disabilities
- Coordinate workshops for students every two weeks

Business liaison

Business liaisons have an important role in the success of the development and implementation of the SOS internship component. They are the point of contact between the business and school division and their role is to make sure the business and the program needs are being met. Business liaisons are responsible for communicating and collaborating on a regular basis with the lead coordinator and/or onsite school staff member to identify issues that may be impacting students, the program, employees, or the business' day to day routine. In many SOS sites, the business appoints an employee from the Human Resources department to fulfill this position.

Consider having the core planning meetings at the business site. This will allow the business liaison an opportunity to provide valuable input into program implementation.

Human resource employees typically have insight into the various jobs and duties within each department, a working relationship with department supervisors, and a knowledge base of business training requirements.

Key Responsibilities:

- Identify and communicate with business mentors on program implementation
- Coordinate employment requirements (interviews, drug tests, background checks, uniforms)
- Collaborate with lead coordinator to identify and select internship opportunities
- Provide feedback to core planning team
- Complete end of year survey

It is recommended that mentors are selected on a voluntary basis and have expressed interest in becoming a role model for the students.

Business mentors

Once the business liaison has been appointed, one of the first responsibilities is to approach each department within the company and seek out employees who have an interest in becoming an SOS business mentor. A mentor is a business employee who volunteers to provide training, support, and encouragement to students in acclimating to the business culture.

Key Responsibilities:

- Assist with the implementation of training
- Create a safe learning environment
- Identify work routine
- Set high expectations and promote independence
- Seek guidance from school staff if additional support is needed
- Assess and provide feedback on student performance
- Communicate needs with business liaison

Internship development

After the lead coordinator has secured the internship location and has a thorough understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each partner, there are several steps to take prior to beginning the internship component. These steps include planning for students' support needs, matching students to internship positions, facilitating the process for student payment, and assisting students in determining transportation to and from the internship.

Workplace supports

It is important to have a good understanding of the students' workplace support needs prior to matching students with an internship experience. What type of assistance will a student need to obtain and maintain a successful internship? Support needs will vary and may include assistance with obtaining transportation to and from work, learning the job sequence, reinforcing specific job tasks, interacting with co-workers and the public, and completing the expectations of the business. Anticipating and planning for the students' workplace support needs is no different than preparing for the support needs of students in a classroom setting. Review existing data and talk to each student, family, and other key stakeholders to determine the types of conditions under which students work best.

> "SOS has done a lot for me and gotten me out of my shy place. It has taught me how to act in the workplace."
>
> - SOS Student

Identifying internships

Once the students' support needs, interests, and preferences have been identified, the lead coordinator and the business liaison work together to seek out internship opportunities. Request a tour of the business and ask questions to learn more about the daily operations, types of duties within each department, and the current unmet business needs. Search for areas where a student can assist with improving business productivity or services. As tasks and opportunities are identified, talk to the department supervisor to determine if an internship position can be developed.

Criteria for Internship:

- Supportive learning environment
- Duties fulfill a three hour shift
- Business mentor is available to train and provide guidance

After the internship positions have been identified, discuss the various opportunities with the students. Take the students on a tour of the business to observe the numerous internship work areas. Each student will rank the top three internship preferences and the business liaison will schedule student interviews with department supervisors. The school staff member, department supervisors, and business liaison will then match students to an internship position and a mentor.

Student compensation

Months prior to the start of the internship, begin the process for student payment. Collaborate with the funding source to identify the required procedure.

Typical Payment Procedure:

1. Confirm students have necessary documentation for employment (photo identification, social security card)
2. Verify funding source's required paperwork
3. Identify the process for receiving a paycheck (direct deposit, check)
4. Inform students and families of payment process requirements

It is important to note, once the internship begins, the lead coordinator will be responsible for monitoring and confirming weekly student work hours with the paycheck processor.

Consider using map apps to assist students in navigating the community by foot, bus, and other modes of transportation.

Transportation

Traveling to and from work is one of the biggest challenges that individuals with disabilities face when obtaining and maintaining employment. The ultimate goal of SOS is for students to arrange transportation to and from the worksite independently. Many rely on family members to get them from place to place; however, learning to use transportation independently will be key to successful employment after high school. Explore public transportation options within the surrounding community that students can use to travel between school and the worksite. If public transportation is to be used, be sure to determine early how students will pay for this service.

Internship implementation

The internship component of the SOS program allows students the opportunity to generalize classroom instruction with a hands-on work experience. The goal is for the students to develop skills, career pathways, problem-solving, and decision-making skills in a structured environment.

> "We don't give enough opportunities for students to be in the workforce. It just makes sense and it's the right thing to do."
>
> - School Superintendent

Orientation

For the work experience to be successful, it is essential to carefully coordinate the students' first day on the job. Work with the business liaison to incorporate an orientation upon arrival. This training should contain the same information and requirements others within the company receive. Providing this information on the first day will set the standards, expectations, policies, procedures, and safety requirements students will need to be successful.

Internship support

Once the internship begins, the onsite school support staff will observe and communicate with the students and designated business mentors in each department on a daily basis. The purpose of the observation is to determine if students are making progress with task completion, work routine, and work expectations. It is important to communicate with each business mentor to assess training and accommodation needs. If additional training, support, or accommodations are required, provide suggestions or strategies to increase student achievement. Collaborate with the business mentor to determine who will provide the additional reinforcement.

Internship workshop

A beneficial aspect of the SOS model is the workshop component. Every two weeks, instead of a work shift, students participate in a group lesson held at a designated area in the business. School staff are responsible for developing lessons to include instruction and activities on issues that may have arisen or affect work performance. These lessons are intended to be specific to the students' needs.

Lesson Topics:

- Understanding paycheck components
- Researching banking services
- Discussing accommodations and support needs
- Problem-solving transportation issues
- Reinforcing career pathways
- Discussing work expectations
- Improving self-advocacy and self-determination

The goal of each workshop is for students to reflect and discuss work performance, problem-solve concerns or issues, and set and monitor goals to increase

Encourage students to journal about their internships either through writing, video, or whatever means they choose to reflect on their work experiences.

achievement. Consider coordinating with the business liaison to address additional employee training during this time. In addition, the school staff member and lead coordinator should schedule guest speakers from the community to introduce resources, services, supports, and opportunities that are available within the community.

Consider utilizing a student self-assessment tool. This can serve as a pre or post-assessment of skills, providing a valuable snap-shot of where students think they are in their development.

Evaluating performance

A key aspect of any school-to-work program is the student evaluation component. The purpose of assessing student internship performance is to identify strengths, preferences, interests, and needs in both workplace readiness and job specific skills.

Workplace readiness skills are the skills necessary to be successful in any work environment, such as positive work ethic, integrity, critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork. Virginia identified 21 workplace readiness skills and has curriculum and assessment resources on the VDOE's Workplace Readiness for the Commonwealth's webpage (doe.virginia.gov/instruction/career_technical/workplace_readiness).

In addition to workplace readiness skills, the onsite school staff must also monitor and evaluate job specific skills. These are the skills needed to complete specific internship duties. Skills like filing alphabetically, answering the phone, and providing good customer service are necessary if a student is to work in an office environment.

Internship performance evaluations should be conducted weekly by the onsite school staff to determine if student progress is taking place, additional training or reinforcement is needed, and if fading of supports is appropriate. Engage students, families, case managers, and business mentors in the evaluation process and collaborate with the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to determine the types of information they will need for future employment supports and services.

End-of-year celebration

"Thank you for working with us. This program has done so much for us. It has reminded us to take pride in what we do. We as a business need to be reminded of that."

- General Manager

Prior to completion of the SOS program, it is recommended that an end-of-the-year recognition ceremony be held. This annual event is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate student accomplishments and recognize the collaborators who contributed to the success of the program. Many SOS programs hold this ceremony at the business site. The lead coordinator and the business liaison should collaborate with the advisory board and core planning team to identify the site, develop invitations, determine roles and responsibilities, and solicit contributions such as snacks, awards, and decorations.

Program outcomes

Measuring program outcomes provides an opportunity for the core planning team to gather information on the effectiveness of SOS implementation. The data gathered should highlight not only where the SOS services are being effective, but also where outcomes are not as expected. Utilizing the information will enable the core planning team, school division, and business to strengthen, adapt, and improve program outcomes.

Monitoring implementation

Ensuring fidelity of implementation and gathering feedback from key stakeholders will assist school staff, community agency partners, and business collaborators to build and maintain a positive working relationship for successful student achievement. Monitoring the progress of program implementation throughout the year and sharing feedback with key stakeholders during the core planning team meetings will assist in determining if program implementation is producing quality program outcomes.

Maintaining an open line of communication on program implementation, student success stories, student progress, and program outcomes will assist with justifying the benefits and funding of the program.

Utilize Program Outcomes to:

- Determine effectiveness of school and business partnership
- Develop program goals
- Strengthen program implementation
- Identify stakeholder needs and resources
- Justify funding
- Target supports and program expansion

Surveys

Program surveys are a good way to gather data on implementation of processes that can make the SOS model more successful. A simple evaluation form can be developed to allow SOS collaborators the opportunity to provide input on the overall strengths, communication strategies, needs, and effectiveness of the model.

Various SOS programs gather and analyze the survey results during the summer and meet with the core planning team, advisory board, and business partners to debrief and set goals for the next SOS cohort.

Gather Feedback from:

- Students
- Families
- School personnel
- Community agencies
- Business liaisons
- Business mentors

Student outcomes

Inform students and their families of the expectation to provide post-school outcome data and gather the necessary contact information prior to graduating.

Student outcomes drive all school-to-work programs. Tracking student participants' postsecondary employment and education outcomes is expected. Each division must assume the responsibility for tracking these outcomes at both the three-month and one year mark following graduation. Develop a tracking system and gather this information by calling the student, families, or DARS counselor. Determine if the student is enrolled in a postsecondary institution or training program and working full or part time. Gather information on where the student is working, job title and hourly wage, and if the student is currently pursuing college or seeking employment.

Share all program outcomes data with the core planning team, advisory board, school administrators, and funding source. This data should drive future decisions regarding program implementation and expansion.

Program sustainability

Having the ability to maintain programming and its benefits over time is the ultimate goal of developing and implementing an effective school-to-work program. Planning for the sustainability of the SOS model should be a strategic process that addresses the long-term needs of the students and the program within the division. What would a sustainable program look like in one year, three years, or five years from now?

Having a clear vision of the program's future will help strengthen and build capacity. When planning for the sustainability of the SOS program, consider the following.

Marketing

Be mindful of the importance of continuous marketing of the program to students, families, teachers, school administrators, and the business community. Convey the goals, successes, and necessity of the model to a variety of audiences to ensure the school administrators are aware of the SOS program, outcomes, and impact.

Funding

In order to maintain funding, it is imperative to look long-term and develop a funding plan with administrators and community agency partners to ensure key infrastructure is maintained.

Staffing

Cultivating and ensuring training and professional development opportunities for staff implementing the SOS model will increase the likelihood of having skilled staff to carry out the essential operations for ensuring long-term program success.

Partnerships

Once you have formed community partnerships for the development and implementation of SOS, it is imperative to maintain and cultivate the relationships. These program partners can be strong advocates and rally the school, families, and community around SOS and its goals.

Summary

The success and sustainability of an SOS program will require a collaborative partnership among various stakeholders in the development, implementation, and monitoring of program components. The purpose of this guide is designed to provide the structure, resources, and practical tips to effectively engage all participants in the replication of this highly successful school-to-work program. We encourage revisiting this guide throughout the first years of implementation to monitor program fidelity, set goals for program improvement, and plan for program expansion. For additional information on the development and implementation of SOS, visit centerontransition.org/SOS.

Action plan

The following provides a suggested outline of action steps to accomplish when developing an SOS program. Divisions have the flexibility to adapt the action plan to meet the needs of the students, division, and business.

Program development

Summer/Spring Semester (6-9 months prior to implementation)

- Review division data to determine need for expanding paid work experiences for students with disabilities.
- Secure administrative buy-in to develop and implement SOS.
- Identify a Lead Coordinator to oversee SOS.
- Meet with the DARS/Pre-ETS Counselor to discuss collaborating on SOS.
- Explore and secure funding source for student compensation.
- Assemble core planning team and schedule monthly meetings.
- Convene advisory board and hold first meeting.
- Visit or speak with a school division that has implemented SOS.
- Explore current CTE offerings within the school.
- Consider adding an additional course to the master schedule if one does not exist.
- Identify the credit-bearing CTE course for the SOS curriculum.

Spring Semester (3-6 months prior to implementation)

- Develop marketing materials for student and business recruitment (student application, SOS flyer, and brochure).
- Determine the number of students the program will accept.
- Determine if student recruitment will occur in one or more high schools.
- Explore and determine mode of transportation for students to and from the worksite (student/family, public, school, etc.).
- Market SOS to students, case managers, families, school counselors, DARS, and administrators for student recruitment.
- Call each family of potential candidate and discuss benefits of SOS program.
- Organize and hold an SOS information session at the school for students and families.

- Distribute SOS application to students who meet the eligibility criteria.
- Collect and screen student applications and schedule interviews.
- Conduct student interviews.
- Select student participants and identify alternates.
- Notify case managers, students, families, and DARS counselors of student selection.
- Reconvene IEP team to determine if SOS services, goals, and DARS linkages are included in the IEP.
- Add semester course and semester work experience to student schedules.
- Explore existing business relationships within the school, core planning team, advisory board, and families to begin identifying a host business.
- Market SOS to local businesses and schedule a meeting to discuss program and benefits.
- Secure business site to provide internship experiences.
- Meet with the business contact and discuss roles and responsibilities.
- Determine the business liaison.

Program implementation

Fall Semester (first semester of program)

- Utilize CTE curriculum and standards for course implementation.
- Supplement CTE curriculum with additional instruction and activities related to career pathways (self-determination, disability disclosure, orientation to business site, etc.).
- Conduct activities to assist students in identifying workplace support needs.
- Conduct activities to assist students to determine the types of conditions in which students work best.
- Collaborate with business to orient students to the company and its workplace expectations.
- Confirm students have the necessary documentation for employment paperwork requirements (photo ID, Social Security card).
- Assist students with completing the required paperwork for employment.
- Collaborate with business liaison to identify internship opportunities.
- Develop internship experiences and identify mentors with business liaison for each student.
- Schedule tour of host business, observe internship work areas, and have students rank top three preferences.
- Schedule student interviews with business.

- Match students to internships and mentor.
- Collaborate with funding source to begin process for student payment.
- Develop calendar of lessons, activities, and guest speakers for the classroom workshop to be held every two weeks during the internship.

Spring Semester (second semester of program)

- Participate in general orientation of the worksite.
- Schedule classroom workshops every two weeks during work shift.
- Communicate daily with student and business mentor on student progress.
- Assess internship training and accommodation needs.
- Conduct weekly evaluations of students' work performance and identify strategies and support to increase achievement.
- Check in on a regular basis with business liaison to assess program implementation.
- Update case manager, DARS, and core planning team on student progress and business partnership.
- Consult with students regularly to review post-school plans, support needs, and goal attainment.
- Support students with the transition to employment or post-school education and/or training.
- Begin recruitment efforts for the next cohort.
- Send out program surveys to parents, students, school, and business staff.
- Plan for and hold end-of-year celebration.

Program evaluation

Summer/Spring Semester (1-2 months after implementation)

- Review feedback from surveys to determine if school and business partnership should continue.
- Report program outcome data to school administrators, advisory board, and funding source.
- Track student outcomes 3 months and one year after graduation.
- Identify program strengths and needs, and develop goals for program improvement.

Meet Anna

This case study provides an example of how the SOS program's curriculum and hands-on work experience can assist at-risk students in identifying a career pathway that matches a student's abilities and interests.

Anna is a shy, well-liked 18 year old in her final semester of high school. She has received special education services since second grade for a learning disability in reading and has been educated in the general education environment with support services in a resource room since initial eligibility. Anna has experienced challenges and frustration with reading, writing tasks, self-esteem, and self-concept for the majority of her elementary and middle school years. The transition to high school was particularly difficult and her motivation to succeed in school began to decrease. By the eleventh grade, Anna was no longer interested in school, missed ten days during the first semester, and wanted to drop out once she obtained part-time employment. Anna applied to various jobs and participated in five interviews. She believed her lack of confidence during the interview process prevented her from securing employment.

SOS recruitment

After several months, Anna obtained a part-time job at a retail store with the help of a friend. Anna liked the hours and job duties, however was fired within three weeks. Her supervisor stated she did not demonstrate the ability to follow workplace expectations regarding customer service. During a meeting with her case manager, Anna was introduced to the SOS program. At first she was not interested due to the requirement of remaining in school. However, Anna liked the paid internship aspect of the program. She decided to apply and was accepted.

First semester of SOS

During the first semester of the SOS program, Anna was enrolled in the SOS career readiness course. This required course prepares students for workplace expectations and demands prior to the second semester internship component. The course also places a strong emphasis on self-determination to assist students with increasing awareness of abilities, support needs, preferences, and interests in finding a good internship and ultimately good career match. During this course, Anna continued to state she wanted to drop out of school; however, she began to see the relevance this course had with obtaining and maintaining employment. She increased an understanding of her academic and functional strengths, support needs, and had the opportunity to explore technology to assist with reading and writing in the

community. Anna also had various opportunities to practice disclosing her disability to teachers and discussing her support needs in preparation for employment. During the course, the human resource representative from the business partner (the local hospital) visited the SOS students to discuss business expectations and internship opportunities. Based on the information provided on internship opportunities and her awareness of work preferences and interests, Anna was able to identify her top three internship choices.

SOS internship

Anna stated she was more prepared to begin this work experience than her previous job due to her understanding of strengths, needs, and expectations. Anna participated in two internship interviews and was selected to complete her internship in patient transport, her first choice. She was thrilled. Anna and her classmates participated in the business orientation the first day on the job.

Anna felt comfortable receiving on the job training and support from her mentor. At the end of the first week, Anna's mentor completed an evaluation and noted Anna's strengths were in following directions, respecting authority and requesting assistance. Her job performance was exceptional on the days Anna indicated she had a good day at school. However, on difficult school days, Anna was agitated and her work quality and pace were negatively affected. Anna received support and various strategies from her mentor and on-site school personnel. She made progress with these behaviors and her work performance. After several weeks on the internship, Anna was meeting business expectations and completing her internship without support.

Anna determined she was comfortable and confident in this type of work environment and wanted to pursue employment after graduation. She was unsure of the opportunities that did not require a college degree. During the SOS workshops, Anna had the opportunity to observe several entry-level positions. She conducted interviews with staff to gain a better understanding of the work expectations and responsibilities. Based on these experiences, Anna identified she wanted to work in a lab as an assistant to the technician.

Prior to the end of the internship, a lab technician assistant position became available. Anna's mentor and teacher offered to be a reference on her application. With support from the SOS teacher and the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) counselor, Anna applied, interviewed, and was offered a full-time position as a lab technician assistant at the same hospital where she completed her internship. At the end-of-the-year SOS celebration, Anna, along with the other SOS participants, were recognized for their performance and accomplishments in the program.

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