

Student Advocacy through State Legislative Page Activity

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Background

Caroline has two older sisters and has learned the value of employment and college participation. She dreams of this and more for her own future. At the beginning her ninth grade year, however, Caroline was told that she is unemployable and would be unable to attend college. With her mother's guidance, Caroline increased her volunteer efforts in her community, but she still had difficulty finding supports that she needed for meaningful employment. Caroline continues to make plans to attend college, and her teachers are learning how to support her goals. A Georgia House member invited Caroline to be a Page and to learn about the work at the Capitol while sharing her story with other legislators. The day of her assignment, Caroline arrived early, worked hard, and told many legislators that she wants to attend college and to be employed and have a career.

*Photo – Image description - three people standing left to right – a small woman, Georgia Representative Katie Dempsey, dressed on a red jacket; a female teenage student, Caroline Dempsey, wearing a tan sweater dress; and a tall man, Speaker of the House, David Ralston, dressed in a suit. The student is holding the gavel used by the Speaker and the three are standing in front of the US flag and the Georgia state flag.

*TEXT BEGINS AGAIN - Her presence made a difference. Many legislators asked questions and learned about opportunities for people with disabilities. Other legislators indicated that they would remember her story, and they would consider having other constituent youth with intellectual and development disabilities work for them as a Page.

OBJECTIVES

Graph – *Visual description

Students with disabilities drop out percentages three year trend

2013 – 2014 5.9%, 3,579 students

2014 – 2015 5.6%, 3,456 students

2015 – 2016 6.6%, 3,339 students

*TEXT BEGINS AGAIN - Supporting the self-determined transition of youth to adulthood and community life begins at an early age. One way this can be effective is to begin developing advocacy skills by having students as young as twelve years old to serve as a Legislative Page in the State Capitol. Starting early, advocates can become very effective in telling their story.

Increasing the number of students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities who serve as State Legislative Page will develop leadership and advocacy skills among students.

Increasing the number of students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities who serve as State Legislative Page will educate Lawmakers regarding the gifts and strengths as well as the goals of their constituent students.

Our hope is that helping to develop advocacy skills at an early age will lead to a more robust transition planning by students and will foster an increase of civic engagement and that might lead to lower high school drop out rates.

Graph – * Image description

FY16 State Exit data (SWD)

GHS - 8,695 - 67.7%

Dropout - 3,339 – 25.99%

Special Ed diploma – 810 – 6.3%

Total Exiters – 12,844

RESULTS

Georgia House Study Committee was formed (HR642, 2015) TO study Inclusive Post-secondary Education options for students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The Committee issued a report to the Governor on their findings December 2015.

More than 200 students, teachers, family members have heard Caroline's story and invitation to develop advocacy skills by participating in the state Legislative Page process.

PHOTO *Image description – scene shows people seated along benches. In foreground, a woman is looking toward the right, seemingly listening to a speaker. To her right, a teenage girl is looking above curiously. (This was taken of Caroline and her mother at the first meeting of the House Study committee on Inclusive Post-secondary Education and Employment First.)

We would like to acknowledge the following:

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