

# MPS Seeks Employers for Students with Disabilities

*The Business Journal of Milwaukee* - by Corrinne Hess

The Milwaukee Public Schools system is looking for businesses to join a new program that finds students with disabilities jobs while saving business owners money.

The Affirmative Recruiting Initiative, started in November 2008, pairs the students with area employers while the students are still in school. The goal is that, upon graduation, the students will be hired in part-time or full-time jobs.

So far, the only company to participate in the program is **Independent Care Health Plan**, also known as *iCare*, an HMO in Milwaukee that contracts with the state Medicaid program. However, organizers hope to have all 25 special needs students currently enrolled in the district's School-to-Work Transition Program working before they graduate in May.

Keory Hawthorne, an 18-year-old student from Milwaukee School of Languages, has been doing part-time clerical work at *iCare* since November.

Hawthorne was born with spina bifida, a disease that makes it impossible for her to walk without the assistance of crutches. This is her first job.

"I am still planning to go to MATC (Milwaukee Area Technical College) to become a certified nursing assistant, but I think what I'm doing here (at *iCare*) will help me out," she said.

Bill Jensen, Vice President of Marketing and Sales at *iCare*, said he has been pleased with Hawthorne's work.

"As an employer, you feel good knowing MPS has carefully chosen a person for the company," Jensen said. "And at the same time, the economic value for the employer cannot be underestimated. These are youth who are full of energy and a willingness to try new things. And who will work for competitive wages."

## Student-to-job match

MPS is working with the Metro Milwaukee Society for Human Resource Management and Adecco, a Switzerland-based staffing services company with offices in West Allis, to match students with employers.



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The MPS School-to-Work Transition Program teaches students with disabilities interpersonal skills so they know how to handle themselves on the job, said Jane Ahl, an employment training specialist with the program.

“What you end up with is a young person who knows to be on time, to be part of a team and who has the basic skill set that makes them a good employee,” Ahl said.

Nationwide, about 70 percent of students with disabilities are unemployed and stay unemployed when they graduate from high school, said Diane Howard, director of the MPS transition program.

“Disabled people are not a population employers think about first when hiring,” Howard said. “This is a way to continue what we start in MPS. It’s like passing the baton from school to employer, rather than just throwing a football and hoping someone catches it.”

Nichole Mittelstaedt, area vice president for Adecco, said the program makes good business sense.

“They come in trained, they come in on time and they come in ready to work,” Mittelstaedt said about the students in the program. “In these economic times, you really can’t ask for more.”