



December 12, 2012

Senator Luther Olsen
Room 123 South
State Capitol
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882

Dear Senator Olsen and the Special Committee on Improving Educational Opportunities in High School:

Opportunities, Inc. is a private non-profit Community Based Rehabilitation Organization. We have been involved in the Youth Apprenticeship program for over 15 years as an employer. We have been involved in transition planning for the students within Jefferson County for over 30 years. When the Jefferson County School to Career Consortium began a program that served at risk and special needs students in 1997, we worked with them to give program support with the special needs population as this is a specialty of our company.

As their program developed we could see a need for an on-site program that served just special needs students whose abilities were lower than that of the other program. Statistics have shown, that special needs students do not fare well within the work situation. They often are unemployed or underemployed. Many times these students do not have the skills for a work situation or the skills for self-advocacy, therefore, leading them to struggle to be productive members of our society.

Opportunities, Inc. along with the Jefferson County School to Career Consortium decided to change that in 2000. We became a full day training and work environment under the Youth Apprenticeship program for these students. This is not a program for all students. We have a referral process that includes a job shadow of our manufacturing facility. We have an application process that includes an interview and a parent meeting. If we feel this would be a good employee for our company and for the program, we then do a home visit for a final determination. Through all of this we work closely with the consortium coordinators and the school district.

We started this program at our Fort Atkinson plant. We coordinate transportation throughout the county for our other employees as well these students thereby eliminating one of the main problems that students in

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a rural community have transportation. Over the years we have had on average 20 students that we have trained over an 18 month time period. With the success at the Fort Atkinson program we expanded services to our Oconomowoc plant and most recently our Madison location. Originally we worked with only one Youth Apprenticeship Consortium. Today we partner with six different consortia and for us as a company we are ever so pleased with how the consortia work together. The coordinators of each consortia are in contact with each other and all are there to support the instructors of our program as well as the students and the company.

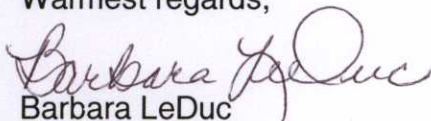
The schools are appreciative of having another option for this often underserved population. Many times school districts want a work experience for their student, but having the staff to supervise with the skills needed for working with the special need population in the workplace is not something that the district can afford or readily have. However, the school district knows that this is the next step for the student. Giving the student the training and support they need to be successful is the goal of Opportunities, Inc. and we work hard to make sure this happens. We will not say that all students are successful. We have had our challenges, but the majority has a career path, advocating for themselves and employed in community jobs.

Beyond our company we partner with other agencies such as: the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the local Workforce Development Board for WIA program to provide both education and employment options. We have had WIA Youth Program students as part of Youth Apprenticeship at our company. We have seen the value of those services and the enhancements this program can provide. Through WIA we have had students attend the MSSC Safety courses at the Fort Atkinson Madison College campus and attain their MSSC Safety Certification. Because of this connection with WIA we have also had students continue on for further training at the technical colleges in related careers. When appropriate a smooth transition to DVR is provided.

I am currently a member of the South Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board. I know the needs of the region for workforce development. Having Youth Apprenticeship and this program is an excellent option to help the special need population flourish. I encourage you to preserve the hour's requirement and standardized state skills lists for the on-the-job training which make Youth Apprenticeship valuable for us as employers to have a skilled workforce. This program is working for our company and the special needs students within our region.

On behalf of students with special needs I would like to thank the Special Commission on Improving Educational Opportunities in High School for your time and consideration. If you have any questions I can be reached at 920-563-2437.

Warmest regards,



Barbara LeDuc
President/CEO
Opportunities, Inc.