

# EMPLOYER'S GUIDE TO COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

Cooperative education programs permit the student to be released from the school campus to work part-time or full-time for an employer. The student will report to the assigned job, which is referred to as the student's Training Site. The student/employee always represents the school district and is expected to demonstrate professional qualities of responsibility, dependability, ethical behavior, and maturity while performing tasks for the employer. The purpose of cooperative education programs is to provide the student with competencies developed through paid, supervised, on-the-job training related to an occupational goal.

## BENEFITS OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATION FOR THE EMPLOYER

- Actively develops your future pipeline of talent.
- Provides a supplemental workforce.
- Generates a workforce with in-demand employability skills.
- Reduces employer training costs.
- Increases your company's visibility in the community.
- Increases workplace satisfaction among mentoring employees.
- Acts to improve the community through a successful economy.

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### When can the student work?

The employer and cooperative education coordinator will set the student schedule according to their school/class schedule and according to employer needs. Students will be assigned to a school Cooperative Education Program for elective/core credit(s). Each school district may use different strategies in scheduling students for cooperative education experiences.

### What are the responsibilities of the employer?

Employers are requested to evaluate the students once per month in conjunction with the Cooperative Education Coordinator. In addition, clearances are required by Cooperative Education Coordinators, and their governing districts to protect students as well as employers.

Most districts require a minimum of a volunteer state criminal background check and a child abuse history clearance. Most districts also require an FBI background check or a signed affidavit. Check with your coordinator for the requirements. Many coordinators can help you to obtain these clearances without much time and effort!

### What about transportation of the student to and from the job?

Many cooperative education programs and school districts have students and parents sign an agreement or contract stating that they are responsible for their own transportation and are permitted to travel to and from the Training Site. The employer is not responsible for the student traveling to and from work. The student is expected to abide by all school rules related to driving and parking.

## Who is responsible for safety?

Safety is the responsibility of everyone. Cooperative Education Coordinators, CTC instructors, and employers should work together to ensure that students are safe in their work environments. Please refer to any labor laws for students and employees and safety laws that pertain to your specific industry to be sure that students are safe.

## Does the student have to be paid?

Students must be compensated for the work that they do. The purpose of cooperative education programs is to provide the student with competencies developed through supervised, on-the-job training. The employer is required to follow all state and federal laws that apply to payroll, Social Security, and federal income tax rules and procedures. General information about Pennsylvania Child Labor Laws can be found by accessing this hyperlink.

## PA Child Labor Laws

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Pages/Codes%20and%20Regulations/Child-Labor-Law.aspx>

## How does the student keep a record of work hours for the school?

The student will complete a timecard document for the school, listing the hours, days, and weekly/monthly totals for their training site. U.S. Department of Labor laws must be followed. The timecard is the official audit record for the school and is an important document needed for attendance. This timecard must be completed each month by the student. It must be signed by the employer or current supervisor at the training location. The teacher/coordinator must make On the Job (OTJ) records available for audit based on the school timetable and audit requirements. Students in a Cooperative Education Program should not be part of a Free Independent Contractor Agreement (1099 Employee). This releases the employer from liability coverage.



What documents does the teacher/coordinator need to have on file for each cooperative education program student?

- Copy of their PA driver's license or picture identification
- Copy of job description/ duties, job title, name of supervisor(s), training site address/location, skills to be learned (Student Training Plan, Clearance, Workman's Compensation documentation)
- Timecard (a timecard document must be completed by the student for attendance and school audit reports)
- Training Agreement document signed by the student, parent, employer, school and teacher/coordinator. Some schools may require an individual school contract that denotes specific school district policies
- Working Papers
- Pay stubs (Confirms hours worked, at least minimum wage being paid and taxes being withheld)

## **Why is the school's record of attendance for the student so important?**

The student attendance for an On the Job (OJT) experience is counted as enrollment for Pennsylvania school attendance payments. Attendance is a particularly important record for every school, and cooperative education job experience attendance must be kept accurately and meticulously by the teacher/coordinator. Audits may occur yearly for these records, and all student time cards must be kept by the school district for three years. Even though the student is not in the formal classroom, the student is reporting to his/her Training Site, which is the classroom for on-the-job training and cooperative education program purposes. Some school districts may require that a copy of the student's pay voucher be attached to each time card to verify actual employment of the student. This could include the student's employee number, Social Security number, earnings record, and federal tax records for school attendance and official audit reports. Records must be stored in accordance with district policy on student privacy.

## **What is a Training Agreement?**

A Training Agreement is a standard form/document used for cooperative education program purposes. It must be signed by the student, parent/guardian, employer, and teacher/coordinator. A copy is filed with the school, a copy is kept by the employer at the training site, and the parent may receive a copy. This contract designates the general expectations of the student/employee, and the responsibilities of the school, the cooperative education teacher/coordinator, and the employer. However, it does not confer any rights, expressed or implied, to remain as an employee. Employment is at will and is not for any specific time. Employment may be terminated at will, with or without prior notice by the employer. The student/

employee may resign for any reason at any time. Some school districts may also require that the worker's compensation insurance carrier's name and telephone number be listed on this training agreement. A new training agreement must be completed each time a student/employee is hired. Supervised on-the-job training, with a training agreement and an individualized training plan signed by the student, teacher/coordinator, employer, and parent/guardian, is required for a cooperative education program student.

## **What rights does the student have in a cooperative education program?**

The employer may place a student/employee in a particular job description that is within the scope of their technical and academic training. The Training Plan is the document that will outline the student's duties, skills to be learned, and the expected timeline to be completed. This training plan is completed by the cooperative education teacher/coordinator in collaboration with the employer for each student. The student will be asked to review it and to sign the training plan. The student is an employee for the company and is covered by all state and federal laws and all policies regarding hiring, firing, and termination. The student/employee's Training Plan is to include instructional objectives and a list of on-the-job and in-school learning experience.



## How does the student receive a grade?

The teacher/coordinator should visit each Training Site at least once every thirty calendar days. This visit will be to evaluate the student's progress and to discuss with the supervisor whether the student is meeting the goals listed in the Training Plan. The student is evaluated on overall job performance, employability skills, mastery, and competency of job skills and duties. The class size and district/school policies will affect the teacher/coordinator's ability to visit each training site multiple times during each grading period. School districts may place varying numbers of cooperative education program students in cooperative education classes, so the actual class sizes of students may be greater for some teachers/coordinators.

## Resources

### Federal Labor Hazardous occupations for 16 and 17 year olds

<https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=48d6ee3b99d3b3a97b1bf189e1757786&rgn=div5&view=text&node=29:3.1.1.1.31&idno=29#sp29.3.570.e>

### Pennsylvania Child Labor Law

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Pages/Codes%20and%20Regulations/Child-Labor-Law.aspx>

### Pennsylvania Cooperative Education Association

<https://pacea.org>

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