

Connections Course Catalog

Connections is a community-based transition program. The students' day at Connections is from 8:30am-2:30pm and includes up to 1-45 minute class, 2-90 minute classes, 1-45 minute lunch, and 1-45 minute self-directed leisure/activity time. Transportation is provided to and from Connections and within reasonable community distances during the school day. Eligible students are encouraged to sign up and use para-transit services, including Ride DuPage and Dial-A-Ride, to build independent transportation skills to navigate to and from the work site.

All Connections students completed their high school graduation requirements yet have not accepted their diploma. Students are eligible to receive transition services and no longer need to accumulate credits. Therefore, grades are not assigned yet formative assessment is constant. Progress is continually monitored across settings through observation, consistent data collection, and use of current best practices. Data is used to measure progress toward IEP and personal student goals.

All Connections students participate in vocational training. The amount and mode of vocational training is based upon individual IEP team decisions. All students participate in a range of vocational experiences within microConnections and volunteer and paid employment sites within the community.

The Connections course catalog provides brief descriptions of our curricular content. Individual activities within courses may change as student needs and interests change. Within each course, Connections strives to provide the following:

- Increased independence, self-determination, social skills, and the generalization of skills across settings;
- Suggested and specific activities based upon each student's Post- Secondary Outcomes as included in each student's Transition Plan of the IEP;
- Consideration of individual skills, preferences, strengths, and needs when designing learning experiences;
- Experiential, age-appropriate opportunities within the local community;
- Access to available community resources and services whenever possible; and
- Modified, adapted, and individualized courses as needed to provide a guide for creating individualized experiences and practice.

EDUCATION:

Math Skills

Functional math skill development, strengthening and maintenance is addressed in this course. Topics include fundamental numerical operations of addition and subtraction, rounding, estimating, comparing, converting, computing, money management (making purchases with a range of currency), banking, time management, calendar, and grocery shopping. Students in this course are additionally responsible for budgeting and purchasing food and drinks for The Snack Shack.

Reading and Writing

This course focuses on the development and maintenance of reading skills and strategies using a variety of texts and functional materials. A range of skills are addressed, including: types of literature, story elements (character, plot, setting, conflict, and resolution), fluency, literary analysis, functional reading within the community (signs, directions, schedules, instructionals, emails, menus, and maps), and writing across domains (free write, writing to express information, composing emails and letters, professional writing, blogging, and writing about events). Speaking and listening skills are also emphasized. Students in Reading and Writing additionally create content for our Reflections from Connections blog.

EMPLOYMENT:

Connections Cares

Connections Cares is the philanthropic arm of microConnections. 10% of microConnections profits are given back to the community in the form of student-made fleece blankets donated to the Edward Hospital Child Care Center, Ronald McDonald Family Room at Edward Hospital, and Hines Veterans' Hospital Project; and dog toys that are donated to the Naperville Area Humane Society. Connections Cares activities that students engage in include making fleece blankets, fleece blanket delivery, making cards for Operation Support Our Troops through Naper Nuts and Sweets, our annual Veteran's Day collection, and maintaining our ongoing collection and donation for Operation Support Our Troops.

microConnections

microConnections is the Connections microbusiness and includes the Eco Connections Teaching Garden, The Bloom Room, The Snack Shack, and Connections Cares. microConnections provides our students the opportunity to empower their lives through working in an environment that supports continued job skill development and citizenship. microConnections offers creative work opportunities that uphold individual dignity while furthering transferrable job skill acquisition. microConnections is committed to inspiring environmental literacy and fellowship for our young adult learners across our work experiences. Through microConnections, our students make blank notecard sets out of recycled NCUSD203 paper waste, bookmarks, dog and cat toys, and dog treats. Our students additionally make specialty or seasonal items from community donations. The following skills are integrated into microConnections: paper-making, bookmark creation, drying flower petals, dehydrating vegetables for dog treats, packaging, maintaining a clean workspace, sorting, processing items, inventory, and ordering. Ancillary skills that are addressed include: task initiation and completion, time-on-task, completing multi-step tasks, problem solving, and work independence. Students will additionally be create content for, support, and maintain our YouTube channel.

Vocational Skills

Students will work on building their skills for finding and maintaining employment in this course. Content addressed includes: job exploration including options and skills required, interview skills and practice, creating a resume/portfolio/binder, develop and practice work related phone skills

(answering the phone, calling in to work), engage in skill and interest assessments, developing employment-related soft skills (getting along, understanding expectations), social skills, and attending employment related workshops.

Workplace Communication

This is a seminar course where students discuss and problem-solve workplace communication related to seeking and maintaining employment. Topics and themes include guided work related discussions, problem-solving workplace issues, work readiness topics, and interviewing techniques.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS:

Domestic Family Life

This course addresses the care and maintenance of a variety of home settings including the home, apartment, supported and residential facilities, and Community Integrated Living Arrangements. Activities include laundry skills (reading clothing labels, understanding symbols, and completing the laundry process), ironing, household and general cleaning, kitchen skills (loading and operating dishwasher, hand washing dishes, and organizing cabinets), and home projects and repair (working with tools including hammers and screwdrivers). Students in this class additionally learn about and maintain our Eco Connections Garden, our Tower Garden, and tend our indoor plants. Students also learn about the importance of composting and work in conjunction with our Foods classes to make our compost for our garden.

Foods

This course is a combination of classroom and community experiences that introduces students to food preparation and nutrition. Students will begin to develop culinary skills and will plan and prepare a variety of recipes. Skills addressed include: meal planning, recipe reading, culinary math, budgeting for weekly groceries, shopping for food, kitchen safety, food preparation (including use of small and large appliances and knife skills), proper sanitation, and nutrition awareness (recommended calorie intake, reading nutrition labels, and calorie and nutrition awareness).

Housing Management

This course provides opportunities for students to discuss and create a realistic plan for living on their own. Adult living opportunities are explored including living with family, apartment or Community Living Facility living, living in a Community Integrated Living Arrangement, and living in a group home or residential setting. Responsibilities specific to each of these living arrangements are addressed. Common questions about residential and supported living arrangements are explored. Course content includes: identifying reasons for living on your own, expectations inherent with living on your own, community awareness and participation, expenses and budgeting, how income impacts choices, navigating roommates and roommate relationships, and housing maintenance.

Independence in the Community

This course focuses on building skills for independently planning and navigating the community through exposure to community places and settings. Community trips include: Naperville Public Library, restaurants, the post office, banks, malls, stores, movie theatres, bowling alleys, volunteer and service organizations, and walking paths. The skills addressed include: practice with functional reading and math skills, budgeting for community spending, safety in the community, appropriate behavior and social skills across a variety of settings, communicating, self-advocacy, time management, and grocery shopping.

Independent Living

This course supports students in gaining experience and independence towards a variety of independent living skills. Topics addressed in this course include: practice with functional reading and math skills, personal accountability, community and household budgeting, community safety and awareness, appropriate social skills across a variety of settings, social planning, cell phone skills, time management, attending to medical needs, and transportation.

Life After Connections

Life After Connections is a capstone course that is the synthesis and application of skills learned for independently planning and participating in adult life across a variety of community settings. In addition, students discuss issues and explore their thoughts and feelings surrounding the transition to adult services. Students additionally discuss and problem solve real-world situations relevant to successful life experiences. Students in this course plan three social activities for Connections students taking place throughout the school year. Topics include and are not limited to: navigating the community independently, navigating the college campus independently, communicating with college professors, understanding and explaining accommodations, working in cooperative groups, and time management skills.

Personal Fitness

This course targets maintaining a healthy lifestyle coupled with increasing cardiorespiratory fitness and muscular endurance with the overall goal being maximizing physical activity, optimizing physical functioning, exploring sustainable sensory management, and enhancing overall well-being. The team makes informed decisions regarding each student's depth and breadth of participation, taking the following into consideration: overall health status, individual activity preferences, safety precautions, and equipment availability. Community trips to local fitness centers are included based upon individual family memberships. Each student will exit this course with an individualized fitness plan that can be completed independently or with family or Personal Support Worker support. Personal Fitness activities include: warm-ups, stretching, developing workout routines for the gym, using free weights and exercise bands, exercises utilizing natural body resistance, yoga and pilates, HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training) workouts, ball and step activities, community walking, exercise games, workout and exercise videos for the home, and ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Students in this course will additionally create exercise videos for our YouTube channel to assist other adults with

disabilities in maintaining a healthy lifestyle and for reference when our students age-out of services.

Personal Management

This course addresses the foundation for independently attending to personal needs in adult life. Topics and themes that are explored in this class include:

- Healthcare - Awareness and maintenance of health conditions, awareness of current doctors, finding a doctor, prescription awareness and management, general first aid, and scheduling and maintenance of doctor appointments.
- Banking - Awareness and management of accounts, completing deposit and withdrawal slips, budgeting.
- Making Appointments - Doctor, dentist, hairstylist/barber, and eye doctor; appropriate phone and social skills when making and during the appointment.
- Social Awareness - Maintaining appropriate personal space, social skills, using manners.
- Personal Support Workers (PSWs) - Finding, interviewing, hiring, and firing PSWs.

Each student will create and exit this course with their Personal Life Journal which will include medical and banking information and emergency contact information.

Self-Advocacy

This course focuses on the development and practice of appropriate social skills. The Social Thinking framework is emphasized and speaking and listening skills are targeted. Social Work and Speech/Language services are integrated into this course. Concepts that are addressed include: knowledge of disabilities, accommodations, and self-advocating for needs; goal setting and future planning; community safety advocacy; advocating on the work site; personal, work, and community rights; problem-solving; rights and responsibilities; decision-making; and awareness and successful maintenance of self-regulation skills.

Technology Essentials

This course is designed to give students the skills required for basic computer use. Students are given a brief overview of basic computer concepts while learning and applying technology skills. Basic computer attributes, personal and professional uses for technology, safe technology use, and internet safety are addressed. Students will work with Google Docs Applications, Powerpoint, simple graphic design, creating spreadsheets, data entry, research skills, and writing and sending email in this course.

Transportation

This course includes the development and practice of skills necessary to access appropriate public transportation. The necessary staff support is provided within the class to assist students when using public transportation. Topics include: safety in the community; logistics; following directions; reading schedules; public transportation options (train, taxi, Uber, Ride DuPage/PACE); transportation research incorporating Google Maps; problem-solving situations that may occur when using public transportation; and social appropriateness.

LUNCH/ACTIVITY:

Lunch/Activity

Each student has 1-45 minute Lunch and 1-45 minute Activity period per day. Activity is a self-directed opportunity for students to try-out and participate in multiple leisure options to help identify social and leisure interests and preferences. We also offer a quiet-zone for students who choose not to participate in Activity.

CONNECTIONS SOCIAL MEDIA:

At Connections, we are committed to providing our students with real-world experiences to build transferrable job skills that are aligned with their interests. Thus, our students co-manage our Connections website including co-creating our Reflections from Connections blog content, Twitter handle, and co-create and manage our YouTube channel. We are additionally committed to supporting our students in providing you with ongoing updates through these social media forms. We encourage you to:

- Bookmark our website - www.connections203.com
 - We post frequent updates on our homepage
 - We post our Connecting Parents topics and schedule of events
 - We maintain frequent updates regarding the Eco Connections Garden
 - We co-create content for our blog with students
- Follow us on Twitter - [@connections203.com](https://twitter.com/connections203)
 - We strive to post daily updates
- Subscribe to our YouTube channel - Connections203tube
 - Our students co-create and post content through several sections
 - We are hoping to live stream Connecting Parents events

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Q: Are work training sites available if my student is found eligible for Extended School Year services?

A: Yes. However, due to the limited time constraints during ESY, work training is limited regarding the number of accessible work sites and time spent on the site.

Q: What is DHS/DRS and how does it support my young adult?

A: DHS stands for the Department of Human Services and DRS stands for the Division of Rehabilitation Services. DHS's Division of Rehabilitation Services is the state's lead agency serving individuals with disabilities. DRS works in partnership with people with disabilities and their families to assist in making informed choices to achieve full community participation through employment, education, and independent living opportunities.

Q: Should my young adult be a DHS/DRS client?

A: Generally speaking, if your young adult is interested in working beyond their time in transition, yes. DRS has the power to decide whether your young adult is appropriate for

becoming a client or continuing to be a client beyond their tenure in transition. That decision is based upon consideration for whether they believe the individual is able to become independently employed. Many different branches and divisions exist within DHS. In most instances, although a young adult may not be eligible for vocational support services, they may be eligible for other services such as home based supports, CILA supports, etc.

Q: How can my young adult become a DRS client?

A: Becoming a DRS client is most importantly a family decision. The Connections team is unable to sign-up young adults to become clients without family participation. We can work to arrange a time with a DRS counselor which will include completing paperwork and answering questions. Families may contact DRS independently to ask questions about how to become a client at any time.

Q: What are adult services?

A: Services for adults with developmental disabilities are accessed through Independent Service Coordination (ISC) agencies. These are known as Pre-Admission Screening (PAS) agencies. Independent Service Coordinators or Pre-Admission Screening agents determine eligibility for services for adults with developmental disabilities.

Q: How do I access services through the Division of Developmental Disabilities for my young adult?

A: The first steps is to contact the ISC and ask to complete a PUNS (Prioritization of Urgency of Need for Services) form. This form is completed by interview and is the document that enters an individual into the system of services for prioritization and eligibility. Once the individual is selected from the PUNS database, eligibility is determined, and if that person is found eligible, referrals are made to the appropriate service providers.

Q: What is my PAS Agency?

A: DayOne Pact is your PAS Agency if you live in DuPage County. Service, Inc. is your PAS Agency if you live in Will County.

*Q: What questions should I/we consider when considering **adult services**?*

- Do we currently receive state aid/funding for support my young adult's needs?
- Does the adult service agency accept state aid funding, private funding, or both?
- What supports does the agency provide?
- Where is the agency located?
- Does the agency provide transportation?
- Does the agency support my young adult's health, communication, vocational, sensory, social, behavior, motor needs, etc?
- What is the cost?
- Is there a wait list?
- What is the criterion for accepting clients?
- What is the staff-to-participant ratio?

- How many staff are employed at the agency?
- How many participants, full and part-time, attend the agency?
- Are participants accepted annually or are they automatically qualified to continue?
- Are there participant age limits and restrictions? If so, what are they?
- What does a typical day look like?

Q: *What questions should I/we consider when considering **vocational services**?*

- How are the services paid for? Do I have to pay?
- How long do your services last?
- Are job coaching services provided? If so, what is the duration?
- What is the process to apply for services? Is there a waiting list? How long can we expect to wait before services are provided?
- What kinds of transportation services are available? How are they paid for?
- What public transportation options can we access if transportation services are not available?
- Do you provide services other than employment?
- How are parents involved?
- What happens if a job change is necessary?
- What kind of support do you provide in finding and keeping a job?
- Where can we learn about sheltered workshop and development training programs?

Q: *What questions should I/we consider when considering **recreational services**?*

- What does my young adult like to do?
- Why am I looking for recreational services? For what purpose will they serve?
- What is the targeted age group for activities? What is the targeted adult population (specifically, disability level)?
- Do you offer transportation services? If so, is there a fee? What is the fee?
- Do you offer integrated programs?
- What are your fees? What do they include? Do you offer financial assistance?
- How much supervision is provided? What is the staff-to-participant ratio?
- How many participants attend events?
- What times of day and year do you offer programming?
- Are there residential boundaries for participants in your programs? If so, what are they?
- Do you have a newsletter or bulletin from your organization regarding upcoming events that you can share with me?

Q: *What questions should I/we consider when considering **supported and residential housing options**?*

- How many people are in the home/apartment/CILA? How many people share a bedroom?
- Is there a maximum stay? Is the stay permanent or strictly temporary or for respite?
- What is the wait list to get in?
- What is the staff-to-resident ratio?

- When are staff available, what is the staffing pattern? Is staffing based upon individual needs?
- Will the resident have to maintain employment? If so, what are the expectations?
- What bills are the residents responsible for?
- Does the resident receive a weekly allowance? If so, are there restrictions for what it can be used for?
- Is transportation available for residents during the day for community access and/or for getting to/from employment?
- Do the residents have responsibilities to attend to? If so, can you provide me with some examples of what the responsibilities might include?

Q: *What questions should I/we consider when considering **transportation services**?*

- What kinds of transportation services do we need on a regular basis?
- How far do we need to travel?
- Do we need special accommodations to travel?
- What kind of advance notices does a transportation provider need before we travel?
- What does the reservation process include? How much notice do we have to give for the reservation?
- What are your fees? Do you offer special rates?
- What accommodations do you offer for individuals with disabilities? How do we communicate our special needs?
- What times and days are transportation services available?
- Are there residential boundaries and/or mileage restrictions for your services?
- What does the qualifying process to receive services entail?
- How do I report a concern if I experience a concern when using your service?

Q: *What questions should I/we consider when considering enrolling in **college courses**?*

- Do I want to take college classes?
- What are the admission requirements for students with a disability?
- Is tutoring available? How do I find a tutor? Is there a charge for tutoring?
- Are Personal Support Workers allowed to attend class?
- Are there special seminars for students with disabilities? What do they cover? How will they help me? How do I register for them?
- Are there classes designed for students with disabilities that I can take for credit? What are they? Are they available every term?
- Is there someone who can help me obtain accommodations if I encounter a problem?
- Is there someone who can help me explain my rights and responsibilities?
- Are there student advocacy groups or organizations?
- Is counseling available from someone who has experience with various disabilities?
- What areas do personal and career counseling cover?
- How do students with disabilities get to know other students?
- Is there a support group available? If so, what kinds of topics are covered? When and where do the support groups meet?

- Is there an extra tuition charge for the services you provide to students with disabilities?
- Are students allowed to make special arrangements for exams? If so, what are the expectations with making special testing arrangements?