



Pennsylvania
Department of Labor & Industry

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First Lady Shapiro and L&I Secretary Walker Celebrate Collaboration with School District of Philadelphia Connecting Pennsylvanians with Disabilities to Fulfilling, Integrated Employment

The School District of Philadelphia is one of seven major Pennsylvania employers – and counting – committed to the InVEST program, which helps Pennsylvanians with disabilities transition into competitive integrated employment.

Governor Josh Shapiro's [2026-27 budget plan](#) calls for increasing state funding by \$1 million for OVR to expand services and support more Pennsylvanians with disabilities.

Philadelphia, PA – First Lady Lori Shapiro and Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) Secretary Nancy A. Walker today celebrated the continued expansion and success of L&I's **Integrated Vocational Engagement & Support Team** (InVEST) program, housed in the department's **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation** (OVR). InVEST builds upon the Commonwealth's commitment to uphold and advance [Employment First](#), and helps transition individuals with disabilities away from subminimum wage positions to competitive, fulfilling careers.

During today's event at **Drexel University**, the First Lady and Secretary Walker highlighted the **School District of Philadelphia** (SDP) – the third of seven Pennsylvania employers to commit to InVEST since its [launch](#). Since September 2025, SDP has hired 14 of its former students through InVEST for a variety of roles, including Facility Management, Special Education Assistant, Food Service Utility Worker, Food Service Assistant, and Support Service Assistant.

“Josh and I believe every Pennsylvanian deserves the freedom to chart their own course and the opportunity to succeed; programs like InVEST help make that possible,” said **First Lady Shapiro**. “Thanks to the School District of Philadelphia's commitment to InVEST, we're seeing these workers build confidence, develop skills, and bring their talents back to the district that helped shape them. Their success shows that when we remove barriers and create real pathways to good jobs, workers, employers, and communities all benefit.”

“Through OVR and InVEST, the Shapiro Administration continues to connect Pennsylvanians with disabilities to jobs that recognize their skills and support their

independence,” said **Secretary Walker**. “The results here in Philadelphia show the power of strong collaborations and I applaud SDP for paving the way for other major employers to see the impact they can make in their communities by tapping into an underutilized but incredibly valuable talent pool. Programs like InVEST are how we keep building an inclusive workforce that reflects all of Pennsylvania.”

The District partnered with **KenCrest, Community Integrated Services (CIS), and Drexel University** to implement InVEST.

As part of InVEST, SDP receives 100 percent wage reimbursement for the first year of employment through an on-the-job training agreement with OVR. The program also provides embedded employment supports funded through the grant.

The District partnered with **KenCrest, Community Integrated Services (CIS), and Drexel University** to implement InVEST.

“InVEST embodies the kind of collaborative partnership that creates real impact—aligning schools, employers, community providers, and other strategic stakeholders to support individuals with disabilities in securing competitive, integrated employment,” said **CIS Executive Director Susan Schonfeld**. “We are proud to collaborate with the School District of Philadelphia, OVR, and our partners to empower individuals to build sustainable careers and greater independence.”

“This isn’t just about job placements – it’s about changing lives, systems, and expectations,” said **Dianne Malley, Director of Community Impact at Transition Pathways, Drexel University**. “The partnership between Transition Pathways, CIS and the School District of Philadelphia offers unique transition programs for young people with disabilities and connects them to quality jobs with the District after graduation.”

OVR assists people with disabilities in obtaining and retaining employment while maintaining their independence. Since 2023, OVR has supported 76,000 Pennsylvanians and strengthened partnerships with employers across the Commonwealth to expand job placement services, pre-employment transition services, and on-the-job training opportunities. **Governor Josh Shapiro’s [proposed 2026-27 budget](#)** calls for an additional \$1 million investment in OVR to expand access to key services including assistive technology, transition supports for students, and expanded services for Pennsylvanians who are DeafBlind and have other disabilities.

To date, Sheetz, Cintas, Giant Eagle, VF Corporation, Grandpa Joe’s Candy Company, and Charley Family Shop ‘n’ Save Grocery Stores have committed to InVEST, with more partnerships in the works. Employers and individuals interested in learning more about the project are encouraged to [visit the L&I website](#).

Pennsylvania is among 14 states to receive grant awards from the federal Department of Education for the [Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment \(SWTCIE\)](#) demonstration project.

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