Transition A to Z
Special Monograph Edition

THE UTAH SPECIAL EDUCATOR
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The Transition Wheel:
A Transition Tool for Students, Preschool through 21

LEAs should
- Encourage student participation in community recreational and leisure activities.
- Apply specialized literacy and numeracy skills to employment and living.
- Provide specific job and life skill training.
- Foster community-based transition instruction.
- Coordinate with other agencies.
- Foster student management of services.
- Assist student to identify health care supports.
- Connect employability skills with postsecondary goals.

Road Map to Success
Transition is Lifespan...not just 15–21

Universal Beliefs
All children should receive an education that is rigorous, relevant, and fosters positive relationships.

Universal Goals
- All youth will have the skills to find, attain, and retain meaningful, gainful, and prosperous employment related to

Connie Nink, 619 Preschool Coordinator & Susan Loving, Transition Specialist, Utah State Office of Education
Have you heard of a transition tool called the Transition Wheel? The transition wheel is a road map to success for all children, preschool through 21. The Transition Wheel was developed in 2007 by special educators from Utah, Kansas, New Mexico and Colorado for local education agency special education directors, special education teachers, parents, related service providers, administrators, and students. The team, in developing the Transition Wheel, always worked with the vision of “Begin with the End in Mind.” Utah special educators who participated in the project were Peggy Milligan (USOE), Connie Nink (USOE), and Teresa Okada (Granite School District).

The team, operating under the universal belief that all children should receive an education that is rigorous, relevant, and fosters positive relationships, developed the following universal goals:

- All youth will have the skills to find, attain, and retain meaningful, gainful, and prosperous employment related to their skills, aptitudes, and interests.
- All youth will have the skills to successfully seek and complete postsecondary education and/or training related to their interests, aptitudes, and skills.
- All youth will be as personally independent as possible, learning to live and thrive in their communities as both independent contributors and interdependent members.

As the team felt that it was important to look at the whole child, it developed the following domains:

- Learning Skills
- Career/Employment
- Independence Skills/ Civic Responsibilities
- Postsecondary Education/Training
- Social/Emotional
- Recreation/Leisure
- Communication/Self-determination
- Health/Wellness

To operationalize the beliefs and goals, the team developed recommendations for activities that should be considered in each domain at each of seven school stages: Preschool; Kindergarten – 3rd grade; Grades 4 – 6; Grades 7- 8; Grades 9-10; Grades 11-12; and age 18 – 21 continuing education.

The wheel includes the transition stages and provides bulleted ideas for activities in each of the above domains. The user rotates the outside wheel to the selected school stage, keeping in mind the vision of “Begin with the End in Mind.” A window opens that indicates the recommended activities. For example, an activity listed for Grades 4 – 6 is “Teach self-determination related to the unique needs of the student.” Knowing that all too often materials end up on shelves or in drawers, the team designed the Transition Wheel with a riveted hole at the top so that it can be hung on a wall for easy visibility and access.

The team developed one bulleted activity for each domain for each school stage. However, it was important for each activity to be expanded to describe that activity as it might appear in a classroom or at home. So another tool, called Sample Activities, was developed to accompany the Transition Wheel. Activities are also aligned with key transition points, such as preparing for kindergarten or preparing for high school.

The following are examples of sample activities aligned with school stage, key transition point, and selected domain:

**Preschool Domain: Learning Skills**

**Key Transition Points:** Skill

**Acquisition and preparation for Kindergarten**

**The LEA should:** Teach emergent literacy and numeracy skills.

**Sample Activities:**

Refer to USOE Pre-Kindergarten Guidelines. Use photographs of familiar icons (e.g., the word McDonald’s and a picture of their arches) to connect symbol to meaning and print awareness.

Students participate and lead in songs, finger plays and rhyming activities.

**Grades 7-8 Domain: Career/Employment**

**Key Transition Points:** Preparation for high school.

**The LEA should:** Conduct career/employment exploration.

**Sample Activities:**

Refer to USOE Core Curriculum and Life Skills document.

Expand on TLC experiences by having students write about preferred/nonpreferred activities.

Once the sample activities are accessed it will be easy for the educators and parents to implement and expand them. The Sample Activities document is not an exhaustive list. Additional activities developed and implemented by educators and parents should be sent to the authors for possible inclusion in the document.

The Sample Activities document may be found at: http://www.schools.utah.gov/sars/DOCS/transition/satwheel.aspx

Additional Transition Wheels may be ordered at http://www.usu.edu/TAESE for $1.00 plus shipping and handling.
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Transition: A to Z
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Transition: A through Z
Susan Loving, Transition Specialist, Utah State Office of Education

I was fortunate to travel between Midwestern snowstorms and spend the holidays with my grandchildren in St. Louis. While I was there, Libby (age six) frequently donned roller skates and skated around the house. When I asked her why she was doing that, she replied “I need to practice.” Of course, I had to ask the follow-up question, “Practice for what?” Her response was “For when I grow up and get a job at Sonics (restaurant).” This proud Nana’s expectations for her granddaughter’s achievements plummeted. Where had she ever come up with this idea? As her brother William (who just turned eight years old) said “She’s never even been to Sonics!” Fortunately for Nana’s pride, William’s desired occupation is to be an archaeologist.

As I returned to work after the holidays, I started thinking about my reaction to Libby’s stated post-secondary employment goal as compared to William’s. As a transition specialist, I remind parents and educators that the transition plan must include post-secondary goals that are developed around the student’s preferences and interests; yet, here I was devastated because Libby had chosen a goal that I didn’t feel was right for her! It took much thought and many conversations with myself (and my ego!) to realize that, right now, at this moment, the goal of becoming a Sonics car hop may be reasonable and appropriate for her—it just wasn’t right for me!

Will William and Libby change their minds as they go through school? Probably. Will they achieve their post-secondary employment goals, whatever goals they set? Hopefully. William might end up fulfilling his desires to dig in the dirt by being a farmer or his fascination with bones by becoming a technician in a natural history museum; Libby might end up owning the whole Sonics Corporation. It doesn’t matter; what matters is that these two kids set goals based on their interests. We as their family guide them in setting, reviewing, and revising their goals; and the school helps them learn the skills they need to achieve their goals.

Our responsibility to the students with whom we work is similar—we need to guide them as they move to the next levels in school and life and we need to help them learn the skills they need to be successful at those levels. We need to discuss individual students’ and their families’ hopes, dreams and expectations and use those discussions as a basis for planning and refining programs to teach individual student skills needed for the next level. We need to do this as professionals without judging goals as good or bad based on our personal values. I hope that this Special Educator Monograph “Transition from A to Z” will serve as a useful resource as you work with students, young adults, and families who are making the journey from A to Z. ■
The power of confidence. The power of being respected as valuable, knowledgeable human beings who are aware of complex issues. The power of learning by experiences, both positive and negative. The power of taking charge. Power is what “People First” gives students at South Valley School.

My name is Eric Stoker. I was the first Chair of the South Valley School Chapter of People First, and now I am the Chair of an alumni chapter in the southern part of Salt Lake County. People First is an international self-advocacy organization. “People First” means that we are people first. We put our disabilities second, and we teach other people to do the same. People First has been a part of the Utah Developmental Disabilities Council (U.D.D.C.) since 2000. Prior to that time, it was part of the Division of Services for People with Disabilities. The South Valley School People First chapter started in the Fall of 2007 with five students. An Advisor from the U.D.D.C. and a member of an existing People First chapter met with us to introduce us to People First and the Council. What does People First do? Most importantly, we learn about becoming better advocates for ourselves. Self-advocacy is learning what you need, who can help, and how to speak up to get what you, as an individual may need. We give presentations at conferences in Utah, and participate with Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (S.A.B.E.) on a national level. We also do volunteer work to give back to our community. In 2009 we gathered donations, and put together 47 hygiene kits, that were given to homeless people.

People First members learn how to speak with, and write to their State Legislators. We prepare our members to talk about bills they would like to see passed, or issues like transportation, community support, employment, and other topics. Each year the Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities organizes a reception with the legislators. We practice prior to the reception so we are able to introduce ourselves, and talk about issues that are important. We check transportation schedules, and ride TRAX and UTA buses to the Capitol. In 2008 over ten members from South Valley School attended the reception. We believe that being out in our community, and making our voices heard increases awareness about people with disabilities. It also helps us to advocate for ourselves successfully in the future.

We learn from People First to be community leaders, to help other people become self-advocates, and to stay connected with each other once we leave school. People First helped me become a Citizen Member of the U.D.D.C. I filled out the application and sent it to the Council. I waited, and got the letter for an interview. I was interviewed, and still not sure if I made it in to the Council. I finally got the letter that I was waiting for, and I was accepted to join the Council. People First has taught me so much, and has had a big affect on me since I left South Valley School. I have started an “Alumni Chapter” of People First, for people who have finished school. It has been a struggle because it is hard for people to get transportation to the meetings. I am determined to get this group on its feet!

“How could I ever prepare Eric to transition to a world that one day would not include his parents?” Karla Stoker, Eric’s mother

The transition to adult life for my child with a disability was a transition I was reluctant to face. People First answers many of my concerns. It provides a format for individuals with disabilities to stay connected beyond the school years, to help each other with problems, and to discuss, as a group, potential solutions to issues they are facing.
“People First” is Power

Eric Stoker, Chair of South Valley School Alumni People First; Karla Stoker, Parent; and Becky Rambo, Special Educator, South Valley School People First Sponsor, Jordan School District

Eric’s growth in skills has been remarkable since his involvement with People First. Now he plans much further “down the road.” Eric has learned to incorporate how his decisions might impact his future. When problems arise, he can verbalize them, and write down a dialogue to guide him in obtaining help. He can identify who he should speak to in order to resolve issues and problems. He is also much more creative in identifying multiple solutions to problems. He has a much better understanding of appropriate behavior, and a passionate desire to lead others by setting a positive example. Most importantly, he has gained tremendous self-confidence to advocate on his own behalf. I wish we could have participated in People First earlier in Eric’s education. While we continue the journey toward more independence for Eric, I am confident in his ability to deal with life’s challenges, and obtain the help he needs from his community. His ongoing association with People First continues to build confidence, life skills, and sound leadership qualities.

“Self-advocacy is Transition.”
Becky Rambo, School Sponsor of People First

It would be difficult to find another school experience that has had such positive response from everyone involved. Since 2007 the South Valley School chapter has had as many as 35 members, and now has 25 members—more students than in many classrooms. Students of all ability types are members. They meet as a group once a month, but they do a lot of work between meetings. They elect officers. They plan agendas and hold meetings according to Roberts Rules of Order. They organize events and group activities. They discuss ideas and concerns related to their lives. They validate each other’s opinions, and negotiate disagreements. They express themselves using words, writing and technology. They conduct professional multimedia presentations at state conferences, Boards of Education, university classes, chambers of commerce, and Legislative committees. They learn to use combinations of public and private transportation. They rely on each other. They have high expectations of each other. They are committed to the group.

Parents, legislators, teachers, job coaches, service agency directors all listen to them. Some former members now serve on Advisory Boards for community organizations. Post-school surveys find that students who can self-advocate earn significantly higher wages, have jobs with better benefits, are more likely to live independently, and report being happier with their lives than students who do not self-advocate.

Not everything goes smoothly. They have had to remove a few members (their classmates) for disrupting the group’s goals. Keeping a large group focused and involved is difficult. Buses are late. Parents forget scheduled events. Meetings run short (or long).

There are last minute changes. They need instruction and guidance about community issues, planning processes, logistics, professionalism, and budgets. Students soak up these experiences; then apply them to other parts of their lives.

“I learned about my disability and not to be scared about it.”
Member of People First

Students in the South Valley chapter unanimously agree that they wish they had learned self-advocacy in high school or younger. Students need to learn self-advocacy before expectations are set too low, before parents are nearing retirement from their own jobs, or struggling with the fearful change of their child finishing school. When a student who has Down Syndrome can explain in her own way what it is, how it affects her life, and how it doesn’t affect her life, she has the respect of the students, teachers, and neighbors in her life. She is a person, first. She has power. Imagine what Transition will look like for her!
2011 CEC
Yes I Can Award Winner
Teen educates others about his Tourette’s syndrome

In many ways, Christopher Maus is a typical teenager. The 15-year-old sophomore at Walker High School plays trombone in the band, enjoys basketball and Guitar Hero with friends, and studies tang soo do, a Korean martial art.

But, Maus, 15, has Tourette’s syndrome, a genetic, neurobiological disorder involving tics—movements or sounds that the body cannot control. Over the years, Maus said, he has been ridiculed by classmates and misunderstood by teachers.

In an effort to promote understanding about his condition, Maus has been giving presentations about Tourette’s syndrome to his classes since he was in the seventh grade. He’s also spoken to his church youth group and to an elementary school.

Last year, Maus became Louisiana’s first Tourette Syndrome Association Youth Ambassador, according to a news release from the association. He attended a three-day training program in Washington, D.C. While there, he met with local members of Congress to advocate on behalf of other children with the disorder. He is still the only youth ambassador in the state, his mother, Becky Maus, said.

Maus will be recognized in April by the Council for Exceptional Children with the national Yes I Can! Award. The award is given annually to 27 recipients from across the country who have demonstrated notable accomplishments despite their disabilities.

Maus was nominated in the category of self-advocacy. He was chosen as one of three recipients in the category, his mother said. He will return to Washington in April for the ceremony and hopes to meet with members of Congress again.

“The biggest word you can describe it with is random,” Maus said of having Tourette’s syndrome. His tics include nose wiggling and eye twitching.

During his school presentations, Maus said, he relates having Tourette’s syndrome to other medical conditions his classmates may be more familiar with as diabetes or attention deficit disorder. He also stresses that it is an inherited condition. People inherit Tourette’s syndrome in the same way they inherit eye or hair color, Maus said. Both Maus’ father and older brother have Tourette’s syndrome. They all take medication to help control their tics, but the medicine doesn’t eliminate them completely, Maus said.

In his presentations, Maus also reiterates that people shouldn’t make fun of someone else for being different.

Becky Maus said she wants people to know that her son is available as a peer educator and Tourette’s syndrome spokesperson. The mother-son team is also working with the national TSA to create a local nonprofit support group for the greater Baton Rouge area.

“It’s amazing still how little the public knows or understands about it,” Becky Maus said. “By the time you get your family and your best friends to understand your condition, then you have to move on to your peers and even teachers.”

The support group would be available to provide educational materials to schools and workplaces, dispel common misperceptions, raise awareness in the community, and most importantly, provide emotional support to families affected by Tourette’s syndrome, Becky Maus said.

“It’s been quite a journey for the whole family,” she said. “I’m glad Christopher has decided to speak up.”

The Maus family can be reached at maustsa@cox.net or through the Tourette Syndrome Association website at http://www.tsa-usa.org.
Operating on the premise that the child with a disability—who is the focus of all this discussion and planning—may have something vital to contribute to planning his or her educational program and future, IDEA clearly provides for the child’s inclusion in, and participation on, the IEP team whenever appropriate.

**Specifically, IDEA:**

- provides that the public agency must include the child with a disability at the IEP meeting whenever appropriate, and

- requires that the child be invited to attend the meeting “if the purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of the postsecondary goals for the child and the transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals” [§300.320(b)].

As you can see, then, if transition goals and services are going to be discussed, the student with a disability must be invited to attend the meeting.

**Who Decides if the Student Attends the Meeting?**

Other than the requirement that the child must be invited to attend the IEP meeting if transition planning is going to be considered at the meeting—who decides when and how a child may participate in an IEP meeting? This issue was addressed in the Analysis of Comments and Changes in the preamble to the final Part B regulations. The Department of Education explained:

Until the child reaches the age of majority under State law, unless the rights of the parent to act for the child are extinguished or otherwise limited, only the parent has the authority to make educational decisions for the child under Part B of the Act, including whether the child should attend an IEP meeting. (71 Fed. Reg. at 46671)

In reality, parents and children often make this decision together. It’s not uncommon for parents and even teachers to encourage children to take part in developing their own IEPs. Some children in elementary school come to the meeting just to learn a little about the process or to share information about themselves.

As children get older, it may be a good idea to encourage them to take a more active role. This allows them to have a strong voice in their own education and can teach them a great deal about self-advocacy and self-determination. Older children may even lead the IEP meeting, and specific materials exist to help them get ready for such a role. To learn more about how to involve children with disabilities in their own IEP meetings and find materials that will help you do so, visit:

**Transition Resources for Students:**

http://www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/transition_adult-thood/Pages/students.aspx
Student with a Disability on the IEP Team

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)
Teaching Self Advocacy in the Special Education Classroom
The students are amazed at how they are not alone with the problems and how similar these are among their classmates.

Many times I had students enter my classroom that had no idea what their disability was or what it meant. They felt that it meant they were stupid and couldn’t do anything. In order for my students to be self advocates for themselves, I felt this was so important for them to know so at the beginning of each year, I would explain the different disabilities. I would never single out a person and explain that person’s specific disability in class. I would name the disabilities and explain the legal definitions and I also talk about how this influences funding for the school and then tell the students they are not labels.

From there we brainstorm about how a disability could affect their academic work. The students are amazed at how they are not alone with the problems and how similar these are among their classmates. Many of the students don’t like to verbalize the problems because they feel like they are the only one who has this but when we brainstorm about what problems could a student have, this takes the focus off of them personally and they are willing to participate. One time I filled up a whole whiteboard with the difficulties they faced in mainstreamed classes and even other special education classes. After looking at these, I have the students see that sometimes we accommodate for these difficulties in different ways for different students. Just like we go to the grocery store and buy different foods because we have different needs, a teacher teaches some students by giving them different assignments. This doesn’t mean one student is better than another.

Once they understand their differences, we begin to brainstorm appropriate ways to compensate and overcome the difficulties. Again I make the list impersonal so students are more willing to offer suggestions. Students suggest ways that have worked for them which helps others who had not thought of these solutions. I usually make a copy of these suggestions and post them in my room so students can review them when needed.

But just knowing ways does not mean the students and teachers act upon this so we discuss how to ask for these accommodations in the mainstream class. Many students don’t feel comfortable asking the general education teacher for this, so again we brainstorm ways to do this. They usually mention the IEP meeting, asking parents to contact the teacher, having the special education teacher contact the general education teacher but my main goal is to teach the students to advocate for themselves.

We begin by listing what the student could say to the general education teacher and then really work on how to say it. This is very important because my students don’t perceive their tone of voice or body language as a possible problem. I usually have my students role play this and we videotape it so we can review and analyze. This really shows the students how they look which usually involves a strained or aggressive voice, hunched shoulders, no eye contact, and folded arms, which the teacher could perceive as indifference or defiance. So we work on these behaviors and retape the scene. It is amazing what a difference it makes to change the tone of voice and body language.

Here is a big step: I ask the students to list one teacher they would like to try this with the next day and what accommodation they may ask for. They are usually reluctant to try and I explain to them that there is a possibility they won’t be successful but it is important not to get angry and to act appropriate. If they are not successful, we will rethink this and try another strategy. After I get the names of teachers, I usually try to give them a heads up and ask them to please listen to the student and give me feedback about how the conversation went. This helps me when I review the situation with the student on how the teacher perceived the conversation. By talking to the teacher ahead of time, they don’t feel threatened that I am teaming up with the student against them and helps smooth the way especially when I explain that I’m teaching the student to be a self advocate.

I love the spring annual IEP meetings that we have because I have my high school students conduct the meetings. We start preparing for this about two months in advance and talk about each section of the IEP and what it means. Then I have the students come up with a script so they can talk about the sections that are most important to them such as present levels of performance, transition plan, goals and objectives and the behavior plan if there is one. Then we come up with a PowerPoint presentation to help them when they can’t remember what to say and they include pictures from some of the job sites that they were at. Since the students do this for every year they have me, after the first year of stage fright, they usually enjoy this time also. After they introduce all the members of the IEP team and begin the PowerPoint, they usually get over their fears because they know I’m right there to help them.

These lessons have been very successful and helped the students throughout the year. I can see a big difference in their confidence level and self esteem by the end of the year because they feel like they have some control over their lives.

Blog at: successfulteaching.blogspot.com
High School Dropouts in America

Nationwide, about seven thousand students drop out every school day. This statistic may not have been noticed fifty years ago, but the era during which a high school dropout could earn a living wage has ended in the United States. By dropping out, these individuals significantly diminish their chances to secure a good job and a promising future. Moreover, each class of dropouts is responsible for substantial financial and social costs to their communities, states, and country in which they live. Although graduation rates are a fundamental indicator of how schools are ultimately performing, only recently have those rates been rigorously scrutinized, revealing the extent of the crisis in America’s high schools. For decades, schools and districts published misleading or inaccurate graduation rates, and as a result, the American public knew little of the scope and gravity of the problems faced by far too many of the nation’s high schools. Reputable, independent research has exposed alarmingly low graduation rates that were previously hidden behind inaccurate calculations and inadequate data.
Who Is Dropping Out?

Overall, far too many students are not graduating on time with a regular diploma; low-income and students of color fare the worst in the dropout epidemic. Each year, approximately 1.3 million students fail to graduate from high school; more than half are students of color. The graduation rate among students of color is as much as twenty-five percentage points below their white peers. A student within the age range of sixteen to twenty-four years old who comes from the lowest quartile of family income is about seven times more likely to have dropped out of high school than his/her counterpart who comes from the highest quartile.

![National Graduation Rate for Class of 2007](image)

National Graduation Rate for Class of 2007

Where Are Students Dropping Out?

A relatively small number of chronically underperforming high schools are responsible for more than half of the nation’s dropouts. Approximately two thousand high schools (about 12 percent), known as the nation’s lowest performing high schools, produce nearly half of the nation’s dropouts.

In these schools, the number of seniors enrolled is routinely 60 percent or less than the number of freshmen three years earlier. The nation’s lowest-performing high schools produce 58 percent of all African American dropouts and 50 percent of all Hispanic dropouts, compared to 22 percent of all white dropouts.

Why Do Students Drop Out?

While there is no single reason for why students drop out, research indicates that difficult transitions to high school, deficient basic skills, and a lack of engagement all serve as prominent barriers to graduation. Low attendance or a failing grade can identify future dropouts, and in some cases as early as sixth grade. Most dropouts are already on the path to failure in the middle grades and engage in behaviors that strongly correlate to dropping out in high school. Various researchers have identified low atten-

dance or a failing grade as specific risk factors. Up to 40 percent of ninth-grade students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeat ninth grade; only 10 to 15 percent of those repeaters go on to graduate. Ninth grade serves as a bottleneck for many students who begin their first year only to find that their academic skills are insufficient for high school-level work. Over one third of all dropouts are lost in ninth grade. Academic success in ninth-grade coursework is highly predictive of eventual graduation; this is even more so than demographic characteristics or prior academic achievement. Unfortunately, many students are not given the extra support they need to make a successful transition to high school and are lost in ninth grade.

The six million secondary students who comprise the lowest 25 percent of achievement are twenty times more likely to drop out of high school than students in the top-performing quartile. Among high school students whose test scores were in the top quartile of their senior class, less than one percent dropped out. Among the high school students whose test scores were in the bottom quartile of their senior class, twenty percent dropped out. Research shows that a lack of student engagement is predictive of dropping out even after controlling for academic achievement and student background. Both academic and social engagement are integral components of successfully navigating the education pipeline.

What Are the Costs of Dropping Out of High School?

Dropouts suffer from reduced earnings and lost opportunities; there are also significant social and economic costs to the rest of the nation. Over the course of his or her lifetime, a high school dropout earns, on average, about $260,000 less than a high school graduate. Dropouts from the Class of 2010 alone will cost the nation more than $337 billion in lost wages over the course of their lifetimes. If the United States’ likely dropouts from the Class of 2006 had graduated, the nation could have saved more than $17 billion in Medicaid and expenditures for uninsured health care over the course of those young people’s lifetimes. If U.S. high schools and colleges were to raise the graduation rates of Hispanic, African American, and Native American students to the levels of white students by 2020, the potential increase in personal income would add more than $310 billion to the U.S. economy. Increasing the graduation rate and college matriculation of male students in the United States by just 5 percent could lead to combined savings and revenue of almost $8 billion each year by reducing crime-related costs.

We all know which students are high school completers—these are the students who earn credits, participate in school classes and other activities, and walk across the stage in cap and gown to receive a high school diploma. As educators, we justifiably celebrate the high number of graduates each year in Utah, but what about those students who don’t complete school? Who are these students? Are they in urban or rural schools? What are they doing as young adults? What can we, as educators, do to help them remain in school?

The Utah State Office of Education (USOE) Data Clearinghouse defines a dropout as a student who “(1) was enrolled in school at some time during a school year, and (2) was not enrolled on October 1 of the following school year, and (3) has not graduated from high school or completed a State or district approved educational program, and (4) does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: (a) transfer to another public school district, private school or State or district approved educational program (including correctional or health facility programs), (b) temporary absence due to suspension or school-excused illness, or (c) death.”

The USOE calculates and reports dropout rates in two ways: cohort rate; and single-year or event rate. The cohort dropout rates track the classes (cohorts) of 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 beginning with the tenth grade. Individual students are tracked using a Statewide Student Identifier (SSID); the class of 2007 is the first high school cohort to participate in this longitudinal data system. The cohort dropout rate is roughly the inverse of the cohort graduation rate. For example, if the cohort graduation rate is 80%, the cohort dropout rate is roughly 20%. The single-year or event dropout rate calculates the percentage of secondary students who dropped out of school in a single year, regardless of their cohort. Students who drop-out multiple times in a school year are reported only once for a single school year at the state level. However, students who drop out in more than one year are reported as

**Effective strategies implemented at the administrative and instructional levels can effectively impact the school completion rate for students with disabilities.**
dropouts for every year in which they drop out, therefore a student may be counted as a dropout out in 2008-09, an enrollee in 2009-10 by October 1, and a dropout by the end of 2009-10.

The event dropout rate for all students in 2010 was 2.6%; this is a substantial improvement from 2007, when the dropout rate was 4.5%. While more students are remaining in school, a rate of 2.6% means that 4,133 students dropped out of school in the 2009-10 school year. Who are these students?

For the 2009-10 school year, American Indian students had the highest single-year dropout rate (5.7%) and Caucasian students had the lowest single-year dropout rate (2.3%). Students with disabilities dropped out at the rate of 4.2% in 2010; this rate has been steadily improving since 2007, when the rate was 6.8%. The national dropout rate for students with disabilities in 2007-08, the latest year national data are available, ranged across all states from 0% to 38.6%; caution must be taken when comparing rates as calculation methods and definitions are not consistent across states.

When do students drop out of school? The single-year dropout rate by grade approximately doubles from each grade from seventh grade through the twelfth grade. For example, 0.19% of all seventh graders dropped out in 2009-10 whereas 6.27% of all twelfth graders dropped out. The majority of seventh through twelfth grade dropouts in any given year are twelfth graders. In 2009-10, 56% of all dropouts were twelfth graders.

Where are these students? The data indicate that all but two charter schools with students in the grade range and 32 districts reported a lower dropout rate for students with disabilities than the state average of 4.2%; the range was from 0% to 4%. Ten districts and two charter schools reported rates higher than the state average; the range was from 5% to 15%. The location of these Local Education Agencies (LEAs) varied (four were rural and eight were urban), as did size (six were small LEAs, three were medium sized LEAs, and three were large LEAs).

What are these students doing as young adults? In response to OSEP requirements, the USOE conducts an annual survey of students with disabilities to determine how many students are employed, enrolled in a training/education program, or both, within one year of exiting the school system. The survey indicates that 36 or 12% of the sampled students who exited school in 2008-09 by dropping out responded to the telephone survey. At the time of the survey 12 former students had enrolled in higher education or some other kind of post-secondary education, and 14 were employed for a 72.2% engagement rate. Ten students were not engaged in either employment or post-secondary education. Nationally, for students who exited school in 2006-07, the median engagement rate was 78.26%.

What can be done to prevent students from dropping out of school? The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities recommends that, in order to effectively address dropout issues, administrators must view change at the local level within a framework that involves an infrastructure utilizing data-based decision making, effective instruction, and an engaging school climate. At the classroom level, educators must view the classroom within the context of three systems; environmental, including adult interactions and peer relationships; instructional, including both curriculum and instruction; and behavioral, including expectations and rules. Effective strategies implemented at the administrative and instructional levels can effectively impact the school completion rate for students with disabilities. Additionally, students may be identified as being at risk for dropping out as early as 7th grade by tracking attendance rates, core classes passed, and credits earned.

Students who remain in school and earn a high school diploma are significantly less likely to be unemployed, incarcerated, or receiving public assistance (e.g., Medicaid). Identification of students at risk for dropping out and implementing strategies to help these student stay in and complete school is a responsibility that all educators share—and a responsibility that should not be taken lightly.
What Happens To Students When They Leave School?

In Utah during the 2008-09 school year, 3,216 students with disabilities aged 15 and older left school at some time during the school year. Some students left by graduating with a diploma (2,210 students), some received a certificate of completion (157 students), some reached maximum age for eligibility (87 students), and some dropped out of school (702 students). 64% of the exiting students were male; 67% had been eligible for special education services because of a learning disability; and 78% of the students were Caucasian. We know which students left school, but the question remains: What are they doing now?

To answer that question, the USOE Special Education Section conducts an annual survey of students who are no longer in secondary school (known as “exiters”) and had IEPs in effect at the time they left school to determine whether they were engaged in some type of postsecondary education and/or employment during the year since leaving school.

In order to gather information about exiters from each LEA, sampling was done at the LEA level. A sample of exiters was randomly selected from each of the Utah charter schools with
students aged 15 and older and all Utah school districts. The number of exiters chosen was dependent on the number of total exiters from the LEA, (e.g., 1-50 exiters, sample size = all exiters; 501-570 exiters, sample size = 110) with the sample stratified by gender, race/ethnicity, primary disability, and exiting type to ensure representativeness of the sample.

In 2008-09, a representative sample of 1,605 exiters was chosen to be contacted. Each exiter was called up to six times by trained interviewers between June 2010 and September 2010, using contact information submitted to the USOE Data Clearinghouse by LEAs. Three hundred ten (19.3%) were successfully interviewed. The response rate by LEA varied from 0% to 100%, with a median response rate of 21%. Response rate analysis indicated no difference by gender; however, Caucasian students were more likely to be interviewed (18% interviewed) than non-Caucasian students (11%); students with an Intellectual Disability were more likely to be interviewed (25% interviewed) than students with an Emotional Disturbance (12%) and students with a Specific Learning Disability (16%); students who graduated with a regular diploma were more likely to be interviewed (21%) than students who dropped out (10%). The differences in response rate by LEAs were addressed through statistical weighting and the differences in the response rate by demographic category were not significant.

The unduplicated count of weighted responses indicated that:

- 27.56% of the respondents were enrolled in higher education (full- or part-time in a 2- or 4-year college for at least one term),
- 82.74% were competitively employed (paid at or above minimum wage with nondisabled for 20 hours a week for at least 90 days),
- 30.34% were enrolled in other postsecondary education or training (full- or part-time for at least one term in a less-than-two-year program),
- 24.20% were engaged in some other kind of employment (worked for pay or self-employed for at least 90 days; this includes working in a family business), and
- 87.28% were not included in any of the above categories.

Answers to open-ended questions indicated that exiters were not employed because of lack of jobs locally, attendance at a school or training program, were recently laid off or dismissed, or didn’t want to work. Exiters reported not being engaged in post-secondary education because of working full-time, financial reasons, health or disability-related reasons, or lack of academic skills.

Analysis of the results indicated that there are no significant differences in outcomes by disability category. Males (76%) were more likely to be engaged than females (65%), Caucasian students (71%) were more likely to be engaged than Hispanic students (64%); and graduates (76%) were more likely to be engaged than dropouts (66%).

The next step in data analysis is at the LEA level. Data by LEA are available on the secure website: www.utahposthighsurvey.org. These data may then be entered into the National Post-School Outcome’s Data Use Toolkit, along with graduation and dropout rates and IEP transition plan compliance rates, to enable the LEA to develop plans and programs to improve student post-school outcomes.

Data analysis also must include analysis of the LEA response rate. The state-wide response rate was 19.3%; the low response rate does not mean that the information gathered is not accurate, but may mean that there is not enough information to make generalizations about the post-school engagement of student with disabilities. The response rate at the LEA level presented challenges, also. The response rate by LEA varied from 0% to 100%, with a median response rate of 21%. For the eleven LEAs that had a 0% response rate, nine of these LEAs had only one or two exiters; the other two had between 7-10 exiters. Without more information about how young adults who have exited their system are engaged, LEAs may be challenged to assess how well their transition programs are preparing students with disabilities for adult life.

A first step in increasing response rate is updating contact information; 507 exiters, 33% of the state sample, could not be contacted because of incorrect contact information (telephone numbers). A simple update could be accomplished during an IEP or exit meeting with the student; the contact information could be that of a parent or other family member who would know how the exited student could be contacted. Exiters may be located through social networks such as Facebook. Information about the content and purpose of the post-school survey could be distributed to families during IEP meetings or posted in the school/LEA newsletter or local newspaper. A free You-YouTube presentation is available at http://www.pscenter.org/superstar.html; this close-captioned presentation is about two minutes long. The presentation may be downloaded and is available in both English and Spanish.

Our responsibility under IDEA, is to prepare students with disabilities for further education, employment, and independent living. The Utah Post-High School Survey is one way of measuring the effectiveness of our programs.
In School or NOT In School...
That is the Question

...What is the Answer?

In my world this question in its many variations comes up on average three to four times per week.

- “My student does not have enough credits to graduate and I am thinking of taking him/her out of school.
- What is available for my student?
- The school is telling my student that he should transition to an adult education program to continue his education but I am not sure that is in my student’s best interest.
- What should I do for my child?
- Or my favorite; The ‘district’ is just going to place my kid in the adult education program regardless of what I have to say. What should I do?”

The question should really be: “What am I, as a special educator, doing to ensure that all students are receiving an equitable education, meeting their individual learning needs that lead to high school completion and transition to post-secondary or training opportunities?”

Across the United States, approximately 7,000 high school students dropout each day (National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research). Annually, Utah Adult Education programs provide instruction to 4,700 youth between the ages of 16-18. Of these youth 73% are academically performing less than a 9.0 grade level (Utah Adult Education Program data 2009-10). From another perspective; looking at Utah GED® Tests data July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2010, 1,807 youth ages 16-18 took all five of the GED Tests. Of these 86% (1,545) passed the GED Tests. The GED passing standard is rigorous. The GED candidate’s performance must be better than the performance of the top 60% of traditional graduating high school seniors (2009 GED Testing Program Statistical Report). In looking at both sets of data should these kids be receiving education instruction in adult education versus a K-12 program of instruction? That is difficult to answer. The decision should be on a case-by-case basis. School districts and local schools should be utilizing a team, including special education staff and central office staff, in the development and implementation of a plan to routinely look at and evaluate student data as early as second grade to determine and remediate the risk factors that affect youth remaining in school. The best tool to do so is the Early Warning System Tool v.2.0, http://www.betterhighschools.org/ews.asp. This resource is free. Another great resource is Approaches to Dropout Prevention: Heeding Early Warning Signs with Appropriate Interventions, http://www.betterhighschools.org/pubs/usergd_dr.asp.

Schools should be looking at their graduation and dropout data, http://schools.utah.gov/main/DATA-STATISTICS/Educational-Data/Graduation-Dropout-Rates.aspx, to determine what the local data say. Are there issues in how student records are coded upon exit? Are exited codes changed to completer codes? Are there students leaving school that should be receiving special education services but have not been evaluated? Have we as a school really looked at the curriculum presented to students. Is the curriculum rigorous but yet kid friendly and relevant to their future education and career needs? Are we as a school staff truly committed to the success of all students or are we really only focused on students completing course work for the sake of a test score? Special educators should be using the skills they have to assist the general education staff and administrators in mining all school/student level data (academic and behavioral) to ensure school success for all students.
Marty Kelly, Adult Education & GED Coordinator, Utah State Office of Education

For the school year just completed districts had the opportunity to claim 4,157 out-of-school youth (ages 16-19) as graduates, youth who between July 1, 2009 and September 30, 2010 either earned an Adult Education Secondary Diploma or passed the GED Tests resulting in a Utah High School Completion Diploma. However, only 359 student exit codes were changed to graduation completers. What happened to the other 3,798 student completers?!

How can adult education benefit the special education student? The real question should be: “What makes students successful in an adult education program?” Students who meet with success in adult education must be self-starters and able to work independently. Seniors or post-high school-aged students working towards a Carnegie-unit diploma needing additional time to complete diploma requirements can partner with the adult education program to provide instruction at both locations while the student is still in K-12. This may assure the student’s successful transition and attendance in an adult education program when traditional services are terminated. Another option, which may be in the student’s best interest, is offering the GED preparation curriculum for the K-12 student who is still enrolled but who will not be able to complete a Carnegie-unit diploma by the time his class is graduating and is academically performing at least at the 9.0 grade level in reading and math. Academic decisions must be made with the best interest of the student in mind. Adult education programs are not a catch all for all students but can be a great option when appropriate.

There are multiple ways to slice and dice education to meet the needs of all learners. Taking the time to think outside-of-the-box to meet the needs of all learners is time consuming and difficult. However, it must be done if we are to be able to say we, as educators, meet the needs of all learners.

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Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth in Foster and Out-of-Home Care

For the over 800,000 children and youth served in foster care each year in the United States, educational success is a potential positive counterweight to abuse, neglect, separation, and impermanence. Positive school experiences enhance their well-being, help them make more successful transitions to adulthood, and increase their chances for personal fulfillment and economic self-sufficiency, as well as their ability to contribute to society. Unfortunately, the educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care are dismal. As this current research summary reveals, young people in foster care are in educational crises. However, the paucity of research on this subject (particularly data from national sources) is problematic in leading efforts for change. And change leading to their educational success is imperative—as well as the responsibility of us all.

School Mobility Rates

Children and youth have an average of one to two placement changes per year while in out-of-home care. A 2001 study of more than 4,500 children and youth in foster care in Washington State found that at both the elementary and secondary levels, twice as many youth in foster care as youth not in care had changed schools during the year. In a New York study of 70 children and youth in foster care, more than 75% did not remain in their school once placed in foster care, and almost 65% had been transferred in the middle of the school year. A three-state study of youth aging out of care (the Midwest Study) by Chapin Hall revealed substantial levels of school mobility associated with placement in out-of-home care. Over a third of young adults reported having had five or more school changes. School mobility rates are highest for those entering care for the first time. According to another Chapin Hall study of almost 16,000 children and youth in the Chicago Public School system, over two-thirds switched schools shortly after their initial placement.

Effect of Mobility

- A 1996 study in Chicago Public Schools found that students who had changed schools four or more times had lost approximately one year of educational growth by their sixth year.
- A 1999 study found that California high school students who changed schools even once were less than half as likely to graduate as those who did not change schools, even when controlling for other variables that affect high school completion.
- In a national study of 1,087 foster care alumni, youth who had had one fewer placement change per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school before leaving care.
- In the New York study, 42% of the children and youth did not begin school immediately upon entering foster care. Nearly half of these young people said that they were kept out of school because of lost or misplaced school records.

Suspensions/Expulsions

- 66.8% of youth in out-of-home care in the Midwest Study had been suspended at least once from school (compared to a national sample of 27.8%). About one sixth (16.5%) had been expelled compared with 4.6% of the national sample.

ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Test Scores

- The 2001 Washington State study found that children and youth in foster care attending public schools scored 16 to 20 percentile points below non-foster youth in statewide standardized tests at grades three, six and nine.
- Youth in foster care in the Midwest Study, interviewed primarily after completing 10th or 11th grade, on average read at only a seventh grade level. Approximately 44% read at high school level or higher. Few excelled in academic subjects, especially relative to a comparable national sample. Less than one in five received an “A” in English, math, history, or science.
- Chapin Hall’s research on Chicago Public School children and youth in out-of-home care indicates they lag at least half a school year behind demographically similar students in the same schools. (There is an overall achievement gap of upwards of one year. However, some of this is attributed to the low-performing schools that many of them attend). Almost 50% of third to eighth grade students in out-of-home care scored in the bottom quartile on the reading section of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) test.
National Working Group on Foster Care and Education

**Grade Retention/Old for Grade**
- In the Washington State study, twice as many youth in foster care at both the elementary and secondary levels repeated a grade compared to youth not in care.
- Nearly 45% of youth in care in the New York State study reported being retained at least once in school.
- In the Midwest Study, 37.2% of youth in foster care (compared with 21.5% of a comparable national sample) reported repeating a grade.
- Chicago Public School students in out-of-home care were almost twice as likely as other students to be old for their grade, by at least a year, even after demographic factors were taken into account and comparisons made to other students attending the same schools.

**SPECIAL EDUCATION ISSUES**

**Number of Youth in Special Education**
- Numerous studies indicate anywhere between one-quarter and almost one-half (23%-47%) of children and youth in out-of-home care in the U.S. receive special education services at some point in their schooling.
- At both the elementary and secondary levels, more than twice as many foster youth as non-foster youth in the Washington State study had enrolled in special education programs.
- Nearly half of the youth in foster care in the Midwest Study had been placed in special education at least once during the course of their education.
- Chicago Public School students in out-of-home care between sixth and eighth grades were classified as eligible for special education nearly three times more frequently than other students.

In research done in 2000 by Advocates for Children of New York, Inc.: 
- 90% of biological parents surveyed did not participate in any special education processes concerning their child.
- 60% of caseworkers/social workers surveyed “were not aware of existing laws when referring children to special education” and over 50% said “that their clients did not receive appropriate services very often while in foster care.”
- A 1990 study in Oregon found that children who had multiple placements and who needed special education were less likely to receive those services than children in more stable placements. In that same study, 39% of children in foster care had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and 16% received special education services. A 2001 Bay Area study of over 300 foster parents found that “missing information from prior schools increased the odds of enrollment delays by 6.5 times.”

*Continued on page 30*
Mental Health

- In a recent study of foster care alumni in Oregon and Washington (Northwest Alumni Study), 54.4% of alumni had one or more mental health disorders in the past 12 months, such as depression, social phobia or panic syndrome (compared with 22.1% of general population).
- In the same study, 25.2% had post-traumatic stress disorder within the past 12 months (compared with 4.0% of general population), which is twice the rate of U.S. war veterans.

Social-Behavioral

- Several studies have found that children and youth in foster care are significantly more likely to have school behavior problems and that they have higher rates of suspensions and expulsions from school.
- Recent research in Chicago confirmed previous statewide research findings that children in foster care are significantly more likely than children in the general population to have a special education classification of an emotional or behavioral disturbance.
- In the Midwest Study, by about 19 years of age, almost half of the young women had been pregnant, a significantly higher percentage than the 20% in a comparative national sample.

High School Completion Rates/Drop-Out Rates

- A recent report by the EPE Research Center indicates that the nationwide high school completion rate for all students is 70%. More are lost in ninth grade than in any other grade (9th: 35%; 10th: 28%; 11th: 20%; 12th: 17%).
- In the Washington State study, 59% of youth in foster care enrolled in 11th grade completed high school by the end of 12th grade. The young adults in the Northwest Alumni Study completed high school (via diploma or GED) at 84.8%, which is close to the general population rate of 87.3%.
- Over one-third of the young people the Midwest Study had received neither a high school diploma nor a GED by age 19, compared to fewer than 10% of their same-age peers in a comparable national sample.
- A national study in 1994 of young adults who had been discharged from foster care found that 54% had completed high school.
- In the Chapin Hall study of Chicago Public School youth, fifteen-year-old students in out-of-home care were about half as likely as other students to have graduated 5 years later, with significantly higher percentages of students in care having dropped out (55%) or incarcerated (10%).

Factors Contributing to Dropping Out

- Multiple studies on the issue suggest that retention significantly increases the likelihood of dropping out. For example, one study found that being retained even once between first and eighth grade makes a student four times
more likely to drop out than a classmate who was never held back, even after controlling for multiple factors.

- The recent report by the EPE Research Center indicates that repeating a grade, changing schools, and behavior problems are among the host of signals that a student is likely to leave school without a traditional diploma.
- The book, Drop Outs in America also suggests the following students are at-risk for dropping out: students of color, students who had been held back, students who are older than others in their grade, and English-language learners.

Post-secondary Entrance/Completion Rates

- The Northwest Alumni Study found that of the foster care alumni included in the research, 42.7% completed some education beyond high school.
- 20.6% completed any degree/certificate beyond high school.
- 16.1% completed a vocational degree (21.9% among those age 25 or older).
- 1.8% completed a bachelor’s degree: (2.7% among those age 25 or older) (24% is the completion rate among the general population of same age).
- Recent longitudinal data (from the general population) suggests that 39% of students who enrolled in a public two-year institution received a credential within six years (28%—associate degree or certificate, 11%—baccalaureate).

College Preparation/Aspiration

- The majority of those youth in out-of-home care interviewed in the Midwest Study at age 17-18 hoped and expected to graduate from college eventually.
- Another report states that only 15% of youth in foster care are likely to be enrolled in college preparatory classes versus 32% of students not in foster care.
- Strong academic preparation has been found to be the single most important factor in enrolling and succeeding in a postsecondary program. However, in the United States, studies of the general population have found that: Only 32% of all students leave high school qualified to attend a four-year college.
- Only 20% of all African American and 16% of all Hispanic students leave high school college-ready. Statistics suggest that between 30-60% of students “now require remedial education upon entry to college, depending on the type of institution they attend.”

“While it may seem like a hard sell to get teenagers to give up part of summer vacation, many students who attended the program, held at Seattle University, said they’re glad they did.”

Before this summer, Josh Chase wasn’t sure he was prepared for high school. He wanted to do better than he had in middle school when he went through a rough time personally, but was worried he was too far behind.

So when Chase, 14, received a letter inviting him to attend a 5-½-week summer program to help him prepare for high school, he signed up.

And now, as school starts this week, he’s feeling a lot better about his chances of doing well.

“We reviewed a lot of stuff that I forgot,” he said.

Chase was one of about 100 students—mostly incoming freshmen at Franklin, Chief Sealth and West Seattle high schools—to attend Seattle’s newest summer-bridge program, where they brushed up on academics, made connections with teachers and were introduced to the activities high school can offer.

Many Seattle high schools have such programs in one form or another. But this one, sponsored by the city of Seattle and run by the YMCA in the three high schools, is among the most intensive, with the longer program followed by a week-long program open to all incoming freshmen.

Nationwide, summer-bridge programs are emerging as a popular strategy to help prevent dropouts. Studies suggest such transition programs have also led to improved pass rates for ninth-graders, fewer discipline problems and increased self-esteem.

A district in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, for example, cut its freshman truancy rate in half by implementing programs, including its summer-bridge program. And at Stephenson High School in DeKalb County, Georgia, 80 percent of bridge-program participants passed ninth-grade biology, compared to 61 percent for students who didn’t participate. And the program’s influence seemed to continue beyond freshman year; while most summer-bridge participants took three Advanced Placement classes their junior year, other students typically took just one.

Summer-bridge programs began in the early 1990s in isolated areas, importing a model that colleges and universities have used for decades. But as the research began to show how successful the programs could potentially be, the programs gained in popularity, according to Robert Stonehill, Chief Program Officer at Learning Point Associates.

“Summer is being rethought in general,” said Stonehill. “Whether it’s college-based or high school-based, it’s part of a larger picture in which summer is becoming a better utilized block of time to work with kids.”

Freshman year is recognized by researchers and educators alike as critically important. More students fail ninth grade than any other grade, and once students are held back, the likelihood that they’ll drop out increases dramatically.

Most schools know who the at-risk students are and “know that if they don’t provide special attention to these students, ninth grade is where they’re going to be lost,” said Jay Smink, executive director of the National Dropout Prevention Center based at Clemson University in South Carolina.

The three Seattle schools targeted by the summer-bridge programs serve a large number of students who the city determined are at risk of dropping out, said Kacey Guin, a senior policy analyst in the City of Seattle’s Office of Education.

Middle school teachers and administrators, as well as YMCA staff, identified students last spring who they thought would benefit from the new program, based on a variety of factors such as grades and school attendance. Invitation letters were sent home to their families in the spring.

While it may seem like a hard sell to get teenagers to give up part of summer vacation, many students who attended the program, held at Seattle University, said they’re glad they did.

“My parents made me go, so I went, and it turned out really great,” said Asia Davis, 15, who recently moved to Seattle from North Carolina.
Summer-Bridge Classes Help Kids Kick-Start High School

Linda Shaw, The Seattle Times, Article reprinted, with permission from Hechinger Report: http://hechingerreport.org

She said she was able to make new friends, get the help she needed in math, and take an enrichment class in cooking, which she loved.

Four mornings a week, the students took math and language arts classes, with enrichment classes in the afternoons. Besides cooking, the other offerings included robotics, music and martial arts. All students also spent time learning how to research and write a business plan.

On Fridays, they spent time learning about college and did community service. Nearly all of the 100 students who started the program finished, said Anne Powell of the YMCA.

Many of the students who attended the 5-1/2-week bridge program, including Chase and Davis, also took part in the one-week orientation, open to all incoming freshmen at the three high schools.

Chase’s sister, who is his guardian, urged him to take part in the one at West Seattle High, wanting him to do whatever he could to prepare for high school. He said he also wanted to check out the school building, which he’d never visited before.

In all, about half of the incoming freshmen at West Seattle High attended the weeklong program, spending time with advisers, making friends, and learning more about the school’s clubs and other offerings.

Even for students who only attend that shorter program, the opportunity to learn the lay of the land and meet teachers can make a difference.

“You forget how terrifying it is to be a freshman in high school,” Guin said, calling the program the “foundation of freshman year.”

While the longer program focused heavily on academics, the week-long program simply doesn’t provide the time to work much on academics. It “really focuses on connectedness to school academic rituals,” Blanford said.

For instance, the schools have all crafted a High School 101 class to prepare students for the types of assignments they might encounter. But perhaps the most important part of the week is the chance to begin to get to know teachers and other faculty.

“Research does demonstrate that having a caring adult in your life, feeling that connection is critical and is the sort of thing that helps kids persevere and not drop out,” Guin said. “This week is an opportunity to begin that type of relationship.”

Lisa Coacher, a reading intervention teacher at West Seattle, agreed. “The overarching goal is just building that personal relationship with students before they start school,” she said. “It does help set the tone.”

Mary Kay Bisignano-Vadino, background facing camera, leads incoming ninth graders participating in a “street yoga” class during the Summer Bridge program at West Seattle High School. (Ken Lambert/The Seattle Times)
National High School Center (betterhighschools.org)

Students’ experiences in their first year of high school often determine their success throughout high school and beyond. However, more students fail ninth grade than any other high school grade.

Students who are promoted to tenth grade, but who are off track—as indicated by failed grades, a lack of course credits or a lack of attendance during their ninth-grade gateway year—may have already missed the opportunity to get on a graduation track.

Statistics

The following statistics highlight a noticeable trend in the lack of progress of many students throughout freshman year. Many students are held back in ninth grade—creating what is known as the ninth grade bulge—and drop out by tenth grade—contributing to the tenth grade dip.

- Students in ninth grade comprise the highest percentage of the overall high school population because students in disproportionate numbers are failing to be promoted out of ninth grade. Promotion rates between ninth and tenth grade are much lower than rates between other grades (Wheelock & Miao, 2005).

- The ninth grade bulge is illustrated by the following numbers: enrollment figures show 4.19 million students enrolled in grade nine during the 2003–2004 school year, while figures for the following school year, 2004–2005, show enrollment numbers for tenth grade at around 3.75 million—a loss of 10.5% (NCES, 2005). The dip in the number of students in tenth grade reflects both the large number of students not promoted to tenth grade as well as those students that drop out after ninth grade and before tenth grade.

- In the last 30 years, the bulge of students in grade nine has more than tripled, from approximately 4% to 13% (Haney et al., 2004).

- Researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that up to 40% of ninth grade students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeat the ninth grade, but only 10–15% of those repeaters go on to graduate (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004).

- Ninth grade attrition is far more pronounced in urban, high-poverty schools: 40% of dropouts in low-income high schools left after ninth grade, compared to 27% in low-poverty districts (EPE Research Center, 2006).
High School: A Quick Stats Fact Sheet

Student Enrollment by Grade and Percentage of Total Enrollment, 2004–2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>3,824,670</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>4,281,345</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>3,750,491</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>3,094,349</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18,320,194</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Gray, Sable, & Sietsema, 2006)

- Racial disparities highlight the ninth grade bulge and tenth grade dip—these figures are the most pronounced for African American and Latino students. For example, grade-nine enrollment is 23–27% higher than grade eight, and attrition between grades nine and ten hovers around 20% for African American students; for their white peers, grade nine enrollment is 6–8% higher than grade eight, while attrition between grades nine and ten is stable around 7% (Wheelock & Miao, 2005).

- Twenty-nine of 51 states see their greatest “leakage” in the “education pipeline” occur during the ninth grade (EPE Research Center, 2006). Some states have as high as a 20% decrease in enrollment between ninth and tenth grades (Wheelock and Miao, 2005).

- Most high school dropouts fail at least 25% of their ninth grade courses, while 8% of high school completers experienced the same difficulty (Letgers & Kerr, 2001).

- More than one semester “F” in core subjects and fewer than five full course credits by the end of freshman year are key indicators that a student is not on track to graduate (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Low attendance during the first 30 days of the ninth grade year is a stronger indicator that a student will drop out than any other eighth grade predictor, including test scores, other academic achievement, and age. (Jerald, 2006).

Strategies

Because the research is clear that the first year of high school is pivotal, but the transition into high school is often characterized as a time when students experience a decline in grades and attendance (Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, & Trickett, 1991), school systems must support first-year high school students to improve their chances of success.

- One strategy to address the challenges facing freshmen is the creation of ninth grade academies that are apart from the rest of the high school or the creation of separate stand-alone schools (Reents, 2002). One hundred fifty-four ninth-grade-only schools were operating during the 2004-2005 school year. (NCES, Common Core of Data).

- In schools in which transition programs are fully operational, researchers saw a dropout rate of 8%, while schools without transition programs averaged 24% (Reents, 2002).

- Student self-reports indicate that more transition support that would ease their transition to high school could help. Compared to their perceptions reported the previous year, ninth graders perceive less support and monitoring from teachers and principals and generally like school less than they did in middle school. On average, ninth graders report being less involved in school activities and perceive the need for more school organization. They also indicate lower self-esteem and higher rates of depression than middle school students (Barber & Olsen, 2004).

This statistic reflects the total number of public schools operating in the United States that offered only the ninth grade, but is not necessarily reflective of the total number of ninth grade academies.

Many research-based practices and policies are available to states, districts, and schools committed to supporting and guiding smooth transitions into high school. Resources and strategies include aligned standards and curriculum, team teaching, catch-up coursework in the first semester using the double block schedule, student advisories, at-risk benchmarks, academic benchmarks, and adolescent literacy initiatives. Additional information—including research briefs, a case study, and examples of relevant state initiatives on easing the transition to high school—are forthcoming from the National High School Center at http://www.betterhighschools.org
“Welcome to Utah, paradise for outdoor enthusiasts! From National Parks to golf courses, beautiful Park City to historic Temple Square, sunny St. George to bustling Salt Lake City to tranquil Lake Powell, Utah will surprise you with its variety.” That’s the introduction to Utah on the Utah Travel Industry Website. The Utah State Office of Education, Special Education Services, could be equally enthusiastic in describing the variety of transition programs across the state.

Here’s how the Travel Industry might describe a trip through Utah transition programs:

As we begin our travels, let’s start in the northern part of Utah, in the Cache Valley. Logan City School District and Cache School District have developed a program, in collaboration with Utah State University, to provide employability training to students with significant disabilities, with students working in job sites on campus and in the community with paraprofessional support as needed. Project PEER also works to develop students’ recreational interests and social relationships. These interests and relationships are addressed by a program paraprofessional who recruits peer tutors from the USU student body.

Traveling west and south, Weber School District offers a LIFE Program for students who need additional training in an adapted/independent living curriculum, as determined by the student’s IEP team. As part of the curriculum, students are encouraged to participate in student-directed IEPs.

Farther south, roads lead to Davis School District, home of multiple post-high programs for students with disabilities, all of which are housed at Vista School. The MAPS program supports students who are medically fragile and more cognitively challenged. STAR works with students who are eligible for special education and need either credit toward graduation requirements, transition skills, or both, with a high school diploma awarded to those who meet graduation requirements. STEPS is a post-secondary transition program for students who are 18 or older and who have completed their senior year in high school. STRIDE serves students from 9th grade until age 22 and is designed for students with cognitive delays who need to learn the behavioral and functional academic skills needed to be able to return to their home school.
Salt Lake Valley is home to several school districts and charter schools. City Academy, a college-preparatory public charter school, requires all students to complete a service learning program that includes a minimum of 36 hours spent in a job internship related to the student’s interests. Salt Lake, Jordan, Granite, and Murray School Districts have well-established transition programs, including post-secondary programs for students aged 18-22 in a variety of settings including school-based, community-based, and on a college campus.

Canyons School District has, in the past year, developed and implemented a community-based program for this population. These local education agencies also coordinate a large agency fair each spring to acquaint students and their families with agencies and post-school services and supports. Farther west, Tooele School District has a Work Training Program with multiple job sites and monthly visits by high school students to community businesses.

Let’s jump east to the Uintah School District where an agreement between the K-12 system and Adult Education provides special education services to eligible students in the Adult Education program. Through this collaboration, young adults have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma in a way that doesn’t conflict with job and family responsibilities. Research shows that young adults with a high school diploma have better long-term employment outcomes than those who drop out of school.

Back in the I-15 corridor, Nebo School District is developing customized employment options. The district is carving out jobs at a job site to meet the needs of students with more significant disabilities.

Iron County School District and Southern Utah University collaborate in an event that provides a day on campus for high school students with workshops and activities designed to help students develop post-secondary education/training and employment goals. Iron, Beaver, and Kane School Districts are working to develop a system that would follow up with students who attended an agency fair to measure the post-school effectiveness of that activity.

Grand County School District also holds an agency fair—with a difference. Their fair is held during the school day, with all high school students and educators invited to attend. In addition, special educators have developed a transition guide that is distributed to families and contains information about IDEA transition requirements, assessments, colleges, employment, and community services and supports. Grand’s neighbor to the south, San Juan School District, addresses their special needs through implementation of “Expanding the Circle,” a transition curriculum developed by the University of Minnesota that offers culturally relevant activities that facilitate the successful transition from high school to postsecondary experiences for American Indian students.

Washington County is the last stop on our transition tour. The district has recently completed a new building to house the community based post-high program where functional, independent living skills are taught along with employability skills. This building reflects the importance that the district administration places on transition planning and education for students with disabilities, and on the respect and consideration that the students deserve.

This has been a quick trip around the state, profiling only a few of the many excellent programs in Utah that provide transition services to students with disabilities. For more information about the programs mentioned above, contact the special education director.
Canyons Transition Academy: New Pathway Toward Adulthood

Kathryn U. McCarrie, Special Education Director, Canyons School District

It is quite exciting to work in a new school district that has a vision of making every student college and career-ready, especially when considering the needs of students with severe disabilities. This special group of young adults can progress toward meaningful activities and responsibilities in adulthood when given real-world goals and explicit instruction. It is the philosophy of person-centered planning.

Person-centered planning requires that a program addresses individual needs based on interests, abilities, and desires. In contrast, most programs are based on available system options. As a new school district, it was philosophically easy to move from a system-based program because there was no existing facility, staff, or investment in equipment. The new program needed to be built from ground zero and logically, determined by identified individual needs. Person-centered planning was the perfect fit. It takes into account an individual’s lifestyle and focuses on quality of life. It emphasizes meaningful experiences defined by dreams, desires, and strengths. Programs are organized around meaningful choices based on natural, community supports (McDonald and Hardman, 2010; Mount, 2000).

Canyons School District’s Transition Academy (CTA) adopted the person-centered philosophy. It was built on the premise that students learn best when their experiences are real and in the natural environment. The first challenge was to identify the facility that would cultivate this perspective. Middle schools and high schools were considered but there was concern that it would look more like the same sit-and-learn environment of school-aged students. The Canyons Technical Center had a more congruent purpose but was filled with existing programs. Luckily, a perfect site was available: the lower level of the Canyons Support Services Center (CSSC), one of two Canyons District offices. This adult working environment provides an adult setting with opportunities for job coaching and apprenticeships. It is also on a main UTA route and close to TRAX.

Accessing public transportation is an identified need of students in the Transition Academy. With explicit instruction, students can learn to independently ride familiar routes in their communities. Most students use this natural transportation system from their homes to the program. Paraeducators meet them every morning and teach them how to use their bus passes, board the bus or TRAX, and how and when to exit. As the students become more proficient, adult supports fade and independence is acquired.

Students need to have vocational experiences in the community. As the program is only in its initial year, these work sites are just beginning. Nevertheless, work-based opportunities are offered on-site in the CSSC by helping in the teacher media lab with projects for Canyons School District classrooms. There are also custodial opportunities and office duties. The Canyons Technical Center had an existing horticulture program accessible to the Transition Academy students for instruction in pre-vocational skills and the basic experiences with horticulture. Other experiences include the Humanitarian Center, and student placement with local business is in the works. Naturally, students use their UTA skills to get to and from the work sites. In addition, students are connected with appropriate adult agencies and resources such as Vocational Rehabilitation.

Learning about nutrition and budgeting are important individual needs. Classroom curriculum addresses some basics, which are practiced daily at lunchtime. Students bring their own prepared-at-home lunch with these lessons in mind, or bring their lunch money to access local food establishments. Each student is coached about the nutritional lessons they learned and how to apply them when they pack their lunch or buy their food. When purchasing lunch each young adult carefully assesses the money he or she has and the cost of each item ordered to learn about budgets and the limitations of personal financial resources. Students are not allowed to ask for special considerations if they do not have sufficient money to purchase all they want.

Transition into adulthood also means having the ability to buy goods and materials needed. Learning to purchase food in one’s own neighborhood is very important. Again, this means that students break into small groups and learn to shop at their neighborhood grocery store. Most of us become a bit disoriented when we visit a grocery story at a new location and find the floor plan is
reversed from our familiar store. This is even harder for students with disabilities. Our young adults are more likely to shop independently if they learn in their own supermarket.

Accessing recreational activities is another identified need that leads to personal satisfaction. Teachers Michelle Van Dyken and Rebecca Berrett work hard to identify resources in each student’s community and to establish partnerships. For example, public libraries offer valuable interactions with books and media. Within the Canyons School District boundaries, there are four different libraries, one in Draper, Sandy, Cottonwood Heights, and Midvale. Consequently, students divide into small groups and learn to use the facility closest to their own home. Similarly, recreational facilities are available for a minimal fee within community boundaries. Partnerships with Salt Lake County recreational Centers are developing. It is anticipated that soon students will learn about facilities at the Copperview and Dimple Dell Recreation Centers. Other recreation opportunities require admission fees. Nevertheless, students need to know about availability and costs. Fridays are devoted to recreation with fee-based activities optional, again depending on individual preferences and resources. This provides another real-life opportunity to learn about budgets and finances.

Individual planning is done collaboratively with students, staff, and family. IEP goals are imbedded throughout the day. New skills may be learned in the CTA classrooms. Space and equipment are available for explicit instruction in functional life skills. There is a kitchen area with appliances including a washer and dryer. A computer lab is on hand to teach basic skills including social media and Internet exploration. Exercise space with a Wii helps students learn the basics of individual exercise programs. Students learn communication skills and practice them in each community setting they visit. Appropriate behavior is expected and reinforced. Staff support is readily available but is faded as soon as possible.

As a new program, the CTA is still developing. Nevertheless, students are building a network of friends and are making new acquaintances in the community. They are learning skills to increase their independence and are gaining satisfaction with their accomplishments. Parents are beginning to see meaningful activities become a real part of their child’s daily activities. As these students progress toward meaningful work and activities, they are becoming career ready in every sense.
“T’ a’a’ hwo’ aji’ e’ego” means “It’s up to you”
“T’a’a hwo’ aji’ e’ego”

Ila Starks & Steven Duke, San Juan School District

Meeting Individual Needs and Considering Cultural Values in Planning Transition from Public School to Adult Living

San Juan School District is located in Southeastern Utah and includes a large geographical area, which lies in San Juan County. It includes all the area east of the Colorado River and reaches to the Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona borders and includes portions of both the Navajo and Ute Mountain Ute Reservations. Several of our secondary schools include grades 7 through 12 because of the small numbers of students in some areas, the distance to other schools, and the cost of operating separate schools.

The school population of less than 3000 is diverse and includes the following ethnic heritages: Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, Asian, Black, Pacific Islanders, and White. American Indian is the largest group with 51.5% of the school population. Whites are second largest with 44.6% of the school population. The remaining 3.9% is made up of Hispanic/Latino, Black, Asian, and Pacific Islanders.

Because of the large number of American Indian students, San Juan School District searched for a transition curriculum which would help prepare American Indian students for adult living while respecting and honoring traditional native values. We selected Expanding the Circle: Respecting the Past, Preparing for the Future (ETC) curriculum because it was research based, designed with American Indian students in mind, and was field tested at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Jean Ness and her colleague, Jennifer Huiskens, co-authored the transition curriculum. Dr. Ness was the Principal Investigator and Project Director at the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Ness and Dennis Olson Jr., a member of the Fond du Lac band of Ojibwe, came to San Juan School District in August of 2008 to provide a two-day training to our special education teachers and paraprofessionals, related service staff, and representatives from various adult service agencies in the area including: Vocational Rehabilitation, DSPD (Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities), DWFS (Division of Work Force Services), and Transitions, a local adult service agency.

The transition mandates of IDEA 2004 (Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Educational Act) regarding employment and independent living are not universally valued by American Indians living on reservations. This population traditionally values cooperation, interdependence of members, and community or family responsibility. The isolated location of the reservations, lack of post-secondary services or training opportunities, and extremely limited economic base present additional challenges in planning for transition. When working with American Indian students living on reservations, transition outcomes and strategies for facilitating transition from public school to adult living must promote self-esteem, community interdependence, and consider inclusion for tribal and community activities. Expanding the Circle curriculum was chosen, in part, because of the collaboration with and mutual respect for cultural traditions and inclusion of activities with elders or tribal leaders.

There have been many challenges to overcome in implementing the transition curriculum with fidelity. One of the major barriers has been the time to implement the activities of the curriculum. Our secondary schools have many other requirements as they participate in the PLC (Professional Learning Community) process and establish power standards for each subject area, provide instruction to students, collect data regarding the effectiveness of instruction and interventions to address student achievement areas of concern, ELL (English Language Learner) instruction, meeting graduation requirements, conducting state assessments (CRTs and others), and meeting IDEA compliance mandates. As a result of these challenges, the ETC curriculum has been modified or adjusted to meet the needs of the students in various locations within the district with different school populations in each area of the school district. The unifying aspect across the district is the portfolio, which each student with disabilities develops before graduation with a diploma or reaching maximum age of 22 by using the Expanding the Circle activities as well as many other sources for portfolio documents.

Continued on page 42
Expanding the Circle (ETC) curriculum consists of the following units:

- The Discovery explores who the students are as part of a family, a community, and as an individual.
- The Framework which provides foundational skills and information for planning for the future including problem-solving, self-advocacy, communication, diversity awareness, goal-setting, and organization.
- The Choice which explores post-high school options including life-planning by participating in the transition process (developing an individual transition plan), exploring education, career, and military options based on understanding of themselves and what they value.
- The Reflection involves sharing with other important people in their lives what they have learned about themselves and the development of “giving back” through a service learning project, a mentoring opportunity, or some other community project.

Through participating in the learning activities, a portfolio of information and documents are developed to show prospective employers, college admissions counselors, or other adult agencies what they have done and can do. The Onaakoon (“Oh NAH ka NON” Ojibwe word meaning he/she plan it) System includes sections for: Accomplishments, Vocational/Work, Education, Medical, Support Circle, References, Recreation and Leisure, Residence, Transportation, Legal, Monthly Expenses, and Financial Records.

The transition curriculum emphasizes nine areas: leadership and advocacy, communication and relationships, emotions, goals and planning, career preparation, college preparation, community and culture, communication, and self-management. The curriculum activities are designed to be a full year course; however, it is possible to use various activities independently. The activities help prepare students for transition from high school to post-secondary experiences; provide clear understanding of mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional selves; assist students in setting goals by teaching them to organize, communicate, self-advocate, problem-solve, and work in teams to face challenges of the future; provide culturally relevant activities to facilitate successful transition to adult living; address specific issues of American Indian youth; include lessons on family, community members, elders, and teachers working together; and consider individual strengths and abilities.

The portfolio is developed during high school years and is designed to put the student’s important documents in an organized and convenient format to use as he or she becomes independent and leaves the public school system to begin adult living and post-secondary experiences. The activities were designed with American Indian students in mind; however, with a little modification the activities are well adapted to any ethnic
background as well as for high school students with various moderate to severe disabilities.

San Juan School District has one of the largest geographic areas in the United States (with the exception of Alaska). The Special Education Itinerant Team serves students from birth to reaching maximum age of 22 and works year round with students having nearly every disability classification, and travels the entire San Juan County to provide services in the home as well as in school settings. The Itinerant Team of related service providers consists of three school psychologists, one occupational therapist, one physical therapist, two speech/language pathologists, two speech/language paraeducators, two school nurses, a secretary, and two administrators. Team members provide direct services and assist special education case managers in schools across the district.

Steven Duke is the Occupational Therapist (OT) for our district. He is working closely with case managers for students with severe disabilities who have been identified to take the Utah Alternative Assessment (UAA). He is helping special education teachers across the district to use the UAA goals as a part of the student’s portfolio as well as including many other sources (such as SEOP items developed with the counselor) for portfolio documents.

In the Western portion of San Juan School District, Navajo Mountain High School has 31 students in grades 9-12 and all are American Indian. In order to reach this school from the district office in Blanding, one has to drive to AZ and then return into Utah for the last five miles of the 365 mile round trip. This requires a day’s drive for the Itinerant Team members. In May of 2010 two students with disabilities graduated with a diploma and a portfolio.

At Monument Valley High School, which is in the Southern part of the school district near the border of Utah and Arizona, Steven works with the teachers of several students with cognitive delays including a seventh grader and a senior. He assists the teacher, Colby Sharpe, with identifying the UAA goals and then providing practice with the students’ goals throughout the school year to gain new skills. MVHS has 251 students (one Hispanic and 250 American Indians) in grades 7 through 12. In May of 2010, two students with disabilities graduated with a diploma and a portfolio.

At Monticello High School, in the Northern part of the school district and near the Colorado border, Nancy Helquist, paraeducator under the direction of Ilene Wallace, guides students with disabilities as they cook, make crafts, sew, and do fund raising events as part of their academic instruction in Life Skills classes. Steven Duke is assisting these students in developing portfolios as well. Monticello High School includes grades 7-12 with only 53 minority students in their school population of 312. In May of 2010, two students with disabilities graduated with a diploma and a portfolio.

In the Southeastern portion of San Juan School District, Whitehorse High School (WHS) has 3 students who are White with the remaining 263 American Indian students in grades 7-12. In May of 2010, three students with disabilities graduated with a diploma and a portfolio.

In the center of the school district, San Juan High School (SJH) is in Blanding. This school’s population is more balanced with 216 White students (54%) and 181 American Indian students (46%). In May of 2010, five students with disabilities graduated with a diploma and a portfolio.

In each of the secondary school locations, special education case managers are adapting the Expanding the Circle curriculum to meet their individual school populations and ethnic heritage backgrounds. In spite of the differences in ethnic heritage, minority population of the school, size of the school, and number of grades in the secondary school, the ultimate goal in each school is that all students with disabilities graduating with a diploma or reaching maximum age of 22 will have a portfolio of documents to take with them in transition from public school education to adult living, advanced education, vocational or career experiences, and/or other adult service agencies. The portfolio will provide documents of student accomplishment and identify needs which will be used by advanced educational or training institutions, employers, and/or adult service agencies and will assist the student in making a smooth transition from public school to adult living experiences.


Transition Timeline For Children and Adolescents with Deafblindness and/or Severe Disabilities

Children and families experience many transitions, large and small, over the years. Three predictable transitions occur:

1. When children reach school age.
2. When they approach adolescence.
3. When children move from adolescence to adulthood.

Other transitions children make include moving into new programs, working with new agencies and care providers, and making new friends. Transition involves changes, adding new expectations, responsibilities, or resources, and letting go of others.

As a parent of a child with deafblindness or other severe disabilities you may be caught up in day-to-day survival. You may ask, “How can I think about tomorrow when I’m just trying to make it through today?” But when those moments come, when you can catch your breath, it may be helpful to be aware of those transitions and allow yourself to think about the future.

The Transition Timeline for Children and Adolescents with Deafblindness and/or Severe Disabilities may help you think about the future. We hope this timeline will give you ideas to help your child achieve independence as you face the transitions ahead of you.

Adapted by Utah’s Deafblind Project, Transition Task Force.

Sources

For more information and additional copies please contact:

Deafblind Division, 742 Harrison Boulevard, Ogden, UT 84404, 801-629-4732, Toll Free 1-800-990-9328, TDD 801-629-4701.

Developed by Utah’s Deafblind Project and funded through the U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, Special Education Programs, Grant Award No. H326C030012. This Timeline can be reproduced for educational purposes only. The Timeline can be found at http://www.usdb.org/db/db/trainingandtechnicalassistance.html

Additional Supports Available/Contact Information:

Access Utah 801-325-5823, www.accessut.state.ut.us
American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB), www.aadb.org
Assistive Technology Lab, USU 435-797-0699
Disability Determination Services (SSI Eligibility) 801-321-6500
Disability Law Center 800.662-9080, www.disabilitylawcenter.org
Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD) 801-264-7620, www.hsdsp.state.ut.us
Division of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired 801-323-4343, www.usor.utah.gov/dsbvi.htm
Forward Motion 801-536-3523
Guardianship Associates of Utah 801-533-0203/888-498-0203
Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youth and Adults (HKNC) 516-944-7302, www.helenkeller.org/national
Planned Parenthood Association of Utah (Maturation programs) 800-627-9558, www.plannedparenthood.org/utah/real-life-real-talk.htm
Retired VIPS (Visually Impaired Persons) 801-585-2213
Salt Lake County Parks and Recreation 801-468-2299, www.parks-recreation.org
Social Security Administration 800-772-1213, www.ssa.gov
State Family Council 877-352-2221
The ARC of Utah 801-364-5060, www.arcutah.org
Ticket To Work 801-524-4145 x 3883/801-538-7590
Utah Assistive Technology Foundation 800524-5152, www.uatf.org
Utah Cares, www.utahcares.utah.gov
Utah Center for Assistive Technology (UCAT) 888-866-5550, http://www.usor.utah.gov/ucat
Utah Collaborative Medical Home Project 801-584-8584, http://medhome.med.utah.edu
Utah Department of Health Baby Watch Early Intervention Program 801-961-4226, www.utahbabywatch.org
Utah Industries for the Blind 801-269-0314
Utah Parent Center 801-272-1051, www.utahparentcenter.org
Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, Deafblind Division 801-629-4732, www.usdb.org/departments/DeafBlind
Utah State University Center for Person’s with Disabilities 435-797-1981, www.cpdu.edu
Utah Transit Authority/Paratransit 801-566-2334, www.rideuta.com/paratransit/

 treatments will be the same for a child with or without special needs. However, if a child is identified with a special need, the caregiver will have to provide treatment and care for the condition. The caregiver will need to follow the specific directions given by the doctor or other health care professionals. If the caregiver is unable to provide the necessary care, a special education program will be established for the child. This program may include special education services, therapy, and other support services. The caregiver will be responsible for ensuring that the child receives the appropriate treatment and care. The caregiver will also need to communicate with the school district to ensure that the child has access to any special education programs or services that are available. If the caregiver is unable to communicate effectively with the school district, they may need to seek assistance from a advocate or other support service. The caregiver will need to be prepared to advocate for the child and to ensure that the child receives the necessary care and support.
From 'No' Where...
A Parent Handbook for the Transition to Adult Life

What is in store for youth with disabilities after they leave school? What will happen to your child when he or she no longer receives the educational services or accommodations which have been mandated by federal law? These questions are important to all parents of youth with special needs, and even though disabilities may vary greatly in their severity or impact, the need to plan for the future is very important.

It is vitally important for families to realize that transition represents the process of moving from school where services are provided to all eligible students under their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to services in adult programs that might or might not be available based on varying eligibility criteria and funding sources. Families who begin planning early will have more time to identify concerns, overcome challenges or barriers that arise, and create opportunities which will help their students achieve their goals. Planning for the future early will alleviate disappointment and anxiety as students approach adulthood.

The Utah Parent Center has created a handbook and a series of fact sheets for parents of individuals with disabilities in Utah that will help parents and their students to plan for a successful transition from school services to adult services. In the handbook, six key areas are addressed. An understanding of the information in these areas will help ensure effective planning and a smooth transition.

Six Key Areas to Ensure a Smooth Transition

1. The first key area is to have an understanding of the laws. Understanding the laws providing rights to adults with disabilities helps parents and young adults advocate more effectively for those rights.

2. The second key area is to have an understanding of the planning process and the role of informed choice. Understanding how the adult system works can help young adults with disabilities access the system with informed and realistic expectations. Understanding the planning process and the role of informed choice in developing programs will help parents encourage young adults to include their own interests and preferences. The term informed choice is used in vocational rehabilitation. Other terms with similar meanings are self-determination and self-advocacy.

3. The third key area relates to information gathering, documentation, and assessments needed to apply for adult services. Helping young adults with disabilities and their parents gather information, documentation, and assessments needed to apply for adult services will streamline the process.

4. The fourth key area is knowing about the wide range of adult services and programs. Knowing about options and possibilities allows the young adult and their parents to investigate more fully and helps make for a successful transition and planning services.

5. The fifth key area is to understand how the adult system works. Understanding how the adult system works can help young adults with disabilities access the system with informed and realistic expectations.

6. The sixth key area is learning about the legal requirements and appeal processes available in various agencies. This will help parents advocate effectively for and with their young adult.

To download the handbook and fact sheets, visit the Utah Parent Center Website at: http://www.utahparentcenter.org/resources_transition.htm.

Please contact the Utah Parent Center for more information on free Utah Parent Center workshops and additional information on topics covered in the handbook.

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To 'Know' Where:
Transition from Early Intervention to Preschool Special Education
Connie Nink, 619 Preschool Special Education Coordinator, Utah State Office of Education & Lynne MacLeod, Data Manager, BabyWatch

Parents are faced with many decisions which affect their children. Many of those decisions relate to the education of their children and more specifically during early childhood, decisions are focused on their transition to different phases as the child ages.

There are many areas where children transition. The most familiar one is the transition a child makes from grade to grade. Many more of us know about the transition when a child turns 16 and starts working toward post-school activities. However, there is another important transition for young children with special needs.

The transition from Part C, which is Early Intervention, to Part B, preschool, is the movement of a young child and his/her family among early childhood special education programs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that governs the education of children with disabilities, including developmental delays. Part C of the IDEA authorizes the federal government and state governments to act on behalf of infants and toddlers (birth to three) (20 U.S.C. Part C). Part B authorizes them to act on behalf of young children (three to five) with disabilities (20 U.S.C. Part B). For many children with special needs who have received early intervention services, there is a process involved which facilitates the transition from Part C to Part B programs.

Under IDEA, there are defined requirements for this early transition from Part C to Part B.

Children participating in early intervention programs assisted under part C, and who will participate in preschool programs assisted under this part, experience a smooth and effective transition to those preschool programs in a manner consistent with section 637(a)(9). By the third birthday of such a child, an individualized education program or, if consistent with sections 614(d)(2)(B) and 636(d), an individualized family service plan, has been developed and is being implemented for the child. The local educational agency will participate in transition planning conferences arranged by the designated lead agency under section 635(a)(10).

Yes this is the law, but how do we make it smooth and effective for the child and his/her family? Researchers in the area of transition in early childhood Rous and Hallam (2006), offer strategies to help make the transition process smooth:

- Developing a partnership between families and the two agencies creates a strong transition team which will enhance the transition process for the families who are now looking at engaging the education system for their three-year-old.

- The transition team should continually work together to serve as a resource and expand options to consistently meet the changing needs of the child and family.
- Share information between program staff and family members concerning transition related to service delivery changes, as it is a major shift from receiving services in the home to getting on the school bus and going to school.
- Look for ways to relieve parent stress by providing information about the transition meeting and process as early as possible.
- Enable families to make informed decisions by:
  - providing an overview of what will take place at the transition meeting,
  - providing the procedures for how information is shared between the two agencies,
  - explaining IDEA parents’ rights,
  - discussing strategies for parent involvement in the referral, evaluation and placement process if a referral is made, and
  - describing different strategies to help prepare their child for the transition.

In order to help parents understand that they are valued and necessary members of the transition team, it is important to provide them with the opportunity to discuss their fears and concerns. Families identify their needs by thinking about questions such as:

- What questions do we have?
- What information do we need?
- What can we do to begin to help our child get ready?
- What concerns do we have related to this change in our child’s schooling?
- After early intervention where do we see our child: Placement in a public preschool program or in a Head Start Program?

If steps are taken in advance to help prepare the parent(s) to be an active team member for the transition meeting, they will feel more equipped and at ease. It is then, during the transition meeting, that the parent is empowered to be an active team member. The parent will be able to make an informed decision regarding a referral to the district for an evaluation or other community programs. It is more likely that the meetings, information and interaction by all concerned will bring about positive outcomes for all involved in the transition process when there is a strong team.

For additional resources, go to: http://www.nectac.org/topics/transition/transition.asp
Transition to Adulthood: Bringing Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation Together to Assist Youth with Disabilities

To a large extent, professionals in special education and vocational rehabilitation (VR) have been on parallel courses for decades yet with curiously similar goals: successful post-school outcomes (particularly employment) for individuals with disabilities. Born out of different forms of federal legislation, the two fields developed largely as separate systems. Because their only connection was transition-age youth with disabilities preparing for employment, perhaps it was easier to remain focused on other concerns (e.g., early childhood and elementary education in inclusive settings for special educators; rehabilitation and employment of adults with psychiatric, drug dependence, and other disabilities for VR counselors). And then, when the systems became overburdened with decreased funding and increased caseload and class sizes, they had every reason to focus on their own survival and not each other. In fact, the overburdening of both systems made it easy to assume the other group would provide transition and employment services for adolescents. Perhaps this is where necessity is the “mother of invention.” For the welfare of youth in transition, it is sheer necessity for special educators who work in transition to gain knowledge and strength by turning to their colleagues in VR. They can perform better as teachers given support by rehabilitation counselors in learning how to prepare youth and their parents for transition. Also, it is sheer necessity for VR counselors to gain knowledge and strength by turning to their colleagues in special education. They can become active and essential participants in transition planning leading to successful employment closures for young adults with disabilities (Oertle & Trach, 2007).

The research literature presents a clear case: interagency collaboration between special educators and VR professionals results in successful outcomes. Morningstar, Kleinhammer-Tramill, and Lattin (1999) reviewed 13 studies identifying best practices in transition planning and concluded that the key ingredient was interagency collaboration, especially between special education and rehabilitation. Hayward and Schmidt-Davis (2000) found that 63% of youth with disabilities who applied (or whose parents applied) for VR services successfully achieved an employment outcome, compared to 49% who obtained employment without VR services. In this study, employment was associated with less need to rely on financial assistance (Social Security Income), higher levels of self-esteem, and more internally-based focus of control (Hayward & Schmidt-Davis, 2000). Wehman and Targett (2002) found that young adults with
disabilities who had received rehabilitation counseling had increased career guidance and higher employment rates compared to young adults without such services.

A collaborative working relationship can ease the workload for both special educators and VR counselors. Collaboration can also produce much-needed outcome data for both special education and VR. The special education teacher produces a young adult with employment or post-secondary educational opportunities and the VR counselor facilitates a successful employment placement. Along the way, special educators learn concepts and procedures from the VR counselor to simplify and facilitate their transition efforts. For example, they learn about Work Opportunity Tax Credits and what it means to employers who hire young adults with disabilities. They learn about benefits planning (e.g., Impairment Related Work Expenses, etc.) and other important information to communicate to parents about future work incentives. They learn about how to approach an employer to promote employment of a young adult with a disability, not from the “right thing to do” perspective but by providing an employee who will fill a critical need of the employer. VR counselors learn about task analysis, on-the-job training, database decision making, prompt fading, and numerous teaching strategies that special educators use to achieve independent performance. They learn behavior intervention strategies, including ways to increase and decrease behavior applicable to counseling sessions. But most important, young adults with disabilities are the beneficiaries; they are more likely to gain employment because of collaborative efforts of special educators and rehabilitation counselors.

Barriers separating the fields have been intransigent, dating back to the 1980s if not earlier (Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985). If the barriers were simple to remove, it would have happened. Therefore, before recommending a collaborative relationship, specific barriers deserve closer inspection. Understanding the nature of the barriers will lead to more targeted solutions. Agran, Cain, and Cavin (2002) described results of separate but “mirror-image” surveys completed by 54 special educators and 62 rehabilitation counselors to identify transition barriers. The sample was drawn largely from Utah teachers and rehabilitation counselors. Almost half of rehabilitation counselors reported they had never been asked to attend a transition services IEP even though they had transition-age youth on their caseloads. For those who had attended IEP meetings, 62% indicated they had not played an integral role. Many respondents indicated they had not received information on the youth in transition prior to the meeting and felt like they had nothing to offer. Because transition legislation is regulated by the Office of Special Education Programs, rehabilitation counselors did not perceive the need for their direct involvement in transition services. About half of special education respondents indicated they rarely invited rehabilitation counselors to IEP meetings for transition-age youth. Note, however, that this study pre-dated the 2004 re-authorization of IDEA. The majority of special educator respondents indicated they did not know how to engage rehabilitation counselors in discussion leading to achieving employment for youth in transition. Further, they acknowledged they did not provide information prior to the meeting to inform VR counselors of individual needs. Information from an individual’s educational file cannot, of course, be distributed without prior signed release from the parent/guardian. Finally, some special educators and rehabilitation counselor respondents felt intimidated because they did not understand terms and the freely used acronyms of the other system.

From these data, barriers begin to take on better definition and scope. Perhaps, potential solutions begin to take form as well. The following list delineates some of the barriers and potential solutions. Obviously, solutions are untested at this time.

**Barrier 1:** Rehabilitation counselors are not being invited to transition services IEP meetings nor are they provided information on an individual’s needs allowing them to prepare as active participants. Potential solution: Not only should rehabilitation counselors be invited, they need information. If acceptable given school district policies, teachers may want to seek parent signature releasing limited information to rehabilitation counselors prior to the meeting, such as current IEP goals, relevant assessment results, interests and preferences, etc. Teachers may want to send a note to the counselor about how the meeting will be conducted (i.e., will the youth direct the meeting or will the teacher and youth work together?), who will serve as team members, and what transition process/outcome may be sought. Please remember that with such large caseloads, it may require setting the appointment a few weeks ahead of time in order to find an open spot in the VR counselor’s schedule. To help with scheduling, it is also helpful to have the IEP meetings at a consistent day and time to the extent possible.

**Barrier 2:** Once at the meeting, rehabilitation counselors are not being actively engaged as participating team members. Potential solution: the teacher may want to provide the rehabilitation counselor with a list of transition questions prior to the meeting. Although these questions may evolve into different ones at the meeting, they will

*Continued on page 52*
provide the rehabilitation counselor with a starting point for active engagement. Teachers or the youth need to introduce all team members and make them feel comfortable and confident that they are necessary contributors to the process.

**Barrier 3:** Research makes frequent reference to team members dispersing after IEP meetings thus placing primary responsibilities on the special education teacher. Potential solution: before the meeting concludes, the team leader should make assignments with “check in dates” and ask all members to be responsible for certain tasks.

**Barrier 4:** Special educators and rehabilitation counselors speak different languages. Potential solution: create a vocabulary list. In IEP meetings and in conversations, avoid acronyms; spell out the term and explain what it means. Respect the listener’s need and desire to understand. A partial list appears on the next page (see figure 1).

**Barrier 5:** Special educators and rehabilitation counselors do not have a single meeting opportunity where they can engage each other in meaningful dialogue. Potential solution: Contact the Utah State Office of Education or Utah State Office of Rehabilitation for a sample of opportunities. One such opportunity is the Utah Effective Practices Conference held annually (June 20-23, 2011) on the campus of Utah State University. Many special educators and rehabilitation counselors have collaborated and developed relationships.

In Utah the designated agency for vocational rehabilitation services is the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (http://www.usor.utah.gov). Most communities have a local office with a VR counselor. If you do not know your VR counselor, give your local USOR office a call and set up a time to meet.

With burgeoning caseloads and diminishing adult services, young adults with disabilities and their families need all the support they can get to achieve successful post-school outcomes. More than ever, achieving employment means that professionals must work together. It is imperative that special educators and rehabilitation counselors create meaningful working relationships (i.e., specifying roles and responsibilities, setting timelines for completion of tasks, reporting on task completion) for the welfare of young adults in transition to employment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IEP (Individualized Educational Plan)</td>
<td>A document outlining the specific special education and related services to be provided a student with disabilities, including present level of performance, goals, objectives, and services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPE (Individual Plan for Employment)</td>
<td>A rehabilitation document that describes one’s employment goal, date for meeting goal, services needed, who will pay for services, and who provides the services. For students with disabilities who are receiving special education services from a public school and also are determined eligible for VR services, the IPE should be completed and signed before the student leaves the school setting (Szymanski &amp; Parker, 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition planning inventories</td>
<td>Instruments to identify strengths and needs of various aspects of adult living, including employment, postsecondary education, independent living, interpersonal relationships, and community living (National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable accommodation</td>
<td>A logical adjustment to a job and/or work environment that enables a qualified person with a disability to perform the duties of that position (West, 1991). Accommodations include modifying the physical layout of a job facility to make it accessible, restructuring a job to enable the person with a disability to perform the essential functions, or establishing a modified work schedule (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job analysis</td>
<td>Gathering objective, and complete data on what the worker does on a particular job, how the work is done, results of the work (e.g., goods produced, services rendered), characteristics of the worker, and context of the work (Materials Development Center, 1982).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task analysis</td>
<td>Breaking down particular job tasks into component parts or sequences (Westling &amp; Fox, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferable skills analysis</td>
<td>An assessment of knowledge and skills used on one job that can be used on another job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ticket to Work/Work Incentives Improvement Act</td>
<td>Legislation designed to remove many of the barriers that previously influenced people’s decisions about going to work because of the concerns over losing health care coverage. The goal of the Ticket Program is to increase opportunities and choices for Social Security disability beneficiaries to obtain employment and VR (<a href="http://www.yourtickettowork.com/program_info">http://www.yourtickettowork.com/program_info</a>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWE)</td>
<td>For eligible individuals, IRWE means that certain impairment-related items and services do not count against one’s gross earnings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Opportunity Tax Credit</td>
<td>A Federal tax credit incentive provided to private-sector businesses for hiring individuals from twelve target groups, including individuals with disabilities. The objective is to enable the employees with disabilities to gradually move from economic dependency into self-sufficiency, while the participating employers are compensated by reducing their federal income tax liability. (<a href="http://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax/">http://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax/</a>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOT (Dictionary of Occupational Titles)</td>
<td>A source of occupational information using a 9-digit classification system to classify occupations (Szymanski &amp; Parker, 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O*NET (Occupational Information Network)</td>
<td>An online database for career exploration and job analysis (<a href="http://online.onetcenter.org/">http://online.onetcenter.org/</a>).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1*
The old adage “It takes a village to raise a child” is very appropriate when discussing the transition of students with disabilities from high school to post-high school training and employment. There is no doubt that the more supports we can put under these young people, the more chance for success they will have. One of the most important and effective collaborations that can take place is between the special education teacher and the vocational rehabilitation counselor.

There is a long established tradition of cooperation between Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). While this collaboration is required by law, it has long been recognized that it is also the right thing to do. Special educators have done and continue to do a remarkable job of teaching students with disabilities much of what they need to know in order to function outside of the structured school environment. To enhance their services, VR counselors are able to work with these students and provide information and services to help them achieve success after they leave school and embark on their early adult adventures. It can be quite a shock for a student to wake up one morning and find there is no school bus coming to pick them up anymore. The entitlement to a Free and Appropriate Public Education has ended and now they have to find their own way in the world. Excellent services, such as those provided by VR, are available but only if the young man or woman is eligible for those services. This is where full collaboration and the supports put in place through a comprehensive transition plan can make the difference. It does not happen by chance, but by the dedicated efforts of caring professionals.

In order for such collaboration to achieve the greatest success, it is crucial that the process be as seamless as possible. Here are a few thoughts on ways to make this happen:
Collaboration is Key
Mark Thompson, Field Service Director, Utah State Office of Rehabilitation

1. The basic foundation for seamless collaboration is that the special education teachers and the VR counselor must know each other and develop a good working rapport. VR has a counselor assigned to every high school in the state. In the more urban areas, there are counselors who carry a caseload that is dedicated to serving transition students. In the more rural areas a VR counselor may cover several high schools while carrying a general caseload not dedicated to transition. Due to turnover and other things, sometimes these relationships can break down over time. It is important that both sides consistently reach out, encourage and foster a cooperative relationship. If you don’t know who the VR counselor assigned to your high school is you can go to http://www.usor.uta h.gov/staff/CurrentRoster.pdf/view and open the PDF file. You can contact the district director over your area and he or she can tell you who your counselor is.

2. Early identification and referral. This should not be postponed until late in the senior year. An optimum time for referral may be sometime in the student’s junior year. The VR counselor should be a part of the IEP process and get to know the student. One of the most frequent concerns raised by special education teachers is that they invite the VR counselor to the IEP and the VR counselor doesn’t come. The concern raised by the VR counselor is that they were invited only a day or two before the IEP and were not able to attend. The best way I found for handling this is for the teacher and counselor to sit down early in the year and identify when IEPs will be taking place. Then block out a week or so for that purpose. If the special education teacher will schedule the IEPs of those identified students during that week, the VR counselor will be able to schedule it and be much more likely to attend.

3. Exchange of important information. The special education teacher has a wealth of knowledge about these students. Not only the written testing, but information concerning how students behave in the classroom or other settings, how they interact with others (both peers and professionals), and information related to their strengths and limitations. All of this is extremely important for VR counselors to know so they can provide the most appropriate services. VR counselors have a lot of information about what is needed for a person to succeed in gaining and maintaining employment. This information can be used by the special education teacher and the IEP team to identify instructional strategies that would help the student prepare for life after high school.

The relationship between special educators and VR counselors is a tremendous help to students with disabilities. Each year hundreds of transition students receive services through vocational rehabilitation. This is, in large part, due to the efforts of caring teachers getting the students the information they need and the supports they require by active collaboration with VR counselors. Thank you for all you do.
Putting the Pieces Together

Carol Ruddell, Work Ability Utah, Utah Department of Health

Moving from the predictable life of high school to the ever-changing adult world of employment and independent living can be worrisome and even downright frightening! As with any new event or change, preparation is critical and information is empowering.

Like pieces of a puzzle, careful planning and consideration is needed to know what can be assembled to create the full picture of what is needed for each student in transition. Let’s consider the puzzle pieces themselves.

**Social Security.** Disability benefits are paid under two programs, Title XVI and Title II. Title XVI includes Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Title II includes Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Child Disability Benefit (CDB). Both programs encourage employment and allow a person to have work earnings. Understanding the rules for each program is the key. See Going to Work: A Guide to Social Security Benefits and Employment of Young People with Disabilities in Utah at http://www.workabilityutah.org/youth/toolkit/toolkit.php. All working aged people receiving SSI or SSDI also receive a “Ticket to Work” which provides them additional job training and supports.

**Health Care.** Affordable health care and insurance is important for everyone. There are many health insurance programs available in Utah. One example is Medicaid. While eligibility for Medicaid may seem limiting, there are two programs that allow people on SSI and SSDI to earn more and/or save more, than traditional Medicaid, and still maintain their benefits. Both the Medicaid Work Incentive and 1619(b) allow people to keep their Medicaid while working. See http://www.workabilityutah.org/healthcare/ for more information.

**Work Ready.** Gain the training and skills needed for a job. Individuals with disabilities may be eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). VR provides job training and education to individuals who want to work and will benefit from the training in order to work. Learn about VR at http://www.usor.utah.gov/. The Department of Workforce Services (DWS) also provides training, workshops and more. See http://jobs.utah.gov/ for more information.

**Find the Job.** When ready to go to work, jobseekers can use the nationally recognized electronic job board of the Utah Department of Workforce Services at http://jobs.utah.gov/. Over 6000 Utah businesses posted their open positions here in 2010. PWDNET businesses have received training in recruiting, hiring and retaining people with disabilities. These businesses want to diversify

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their workforce. Jobseekers can find these PWDNET job postings at www.workabilityutah.gov. When job-ready, VR and DWS clients who have disabilities can also use the specialized services of Choose To Work. A Choose To Work Specialist works with business to develop jobs that match the skills of the job seeker and can be customized for him or her and the business. To learn more, see http://www.usor.utah.gov/choose-to-work.

Supports to Work. Some workers need a job coach or personal assistance in order to work. A job coach may be provided to eligible clients of VR or the Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD). Someone who receives SSI or SSDI may also use a Plan For Achieving Self Sufficiency (PASS) plan or an Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE) and pay for their own coaching services or supports at work with limited impact on their benefits. Employment Personal Assistance Services (EPAS) are available for people who receive Medicaid and need personal assistance to maintain employment. To learn about all of these employment supports, see http://workabilityutah.org/work/.

Transportation. Getting around the community is essential to adult living. Work, the grocery store, libraries, church and more are accessed because people are able to move in the community, and arrive at their destinations. Factors such as weather, cost, convenience and knowing what is available in the community must be considered. TravelWise is one source to discover the options and strategies which are available. See http://travelwise.utah.gov/. To learn more about driver’s license, car ownership, vehicle modification and more, see http://www.workabilityutah.org/community/.

Housing. Finding affordable housing in a location convenient to work, family and friends can be a challenge. Federal programs to assist with housing rental costs are available. Eligibility rules apply. Also home or condo ownership may be appropriate. Eligible applicants may also receive assistance with utility costs. For further information about renting or home ownership as well as supports once in the home, see http://www.workabilityutah.org/community/housing/.

Additional Resources. Finding help for each specific situation can be challenging, but resources are available. Individuals who receive SSI or SSDI can also receive help to understand the benefits, including everything discussed in this article. To apply for assistance with the Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach program, call (801) 887-9530 or download a referral form at http://workabilityutah.org/work/bpaoh.php. You can also find more information at http://workabilityutah.org/. Look for the Master Resource List or check out the “Tool Kit” in the Youth In Transition section of the site.

Leaving high school can be a daunting task. Learning what pieces of the puzzle are available and how to use them will transform the task into something that is more manageable. What pieces do you need to assemble the puzzle of your life?
How to Proactively Prepare Students with Disabilities for Postsecondary Education Programs: Critical Decisions Made During the Individual Transition Plan Regarding University Expectations

In high school, critical decisions made during the individual transition plan regarding reevaluation will affect students who want to attend a technical college, community college, or a university. The number of students with disabilities enrolling in postsecondary education programs and requesting accommodations is steadily increasing. Many of these students will require continued accommodations throughout their postsecondary education. Among college students with identified disabilities, it is estimated that 63% of those in community colleges and 40% of those entering universities will need remedial coursework and continued accommodations throughout their postsecondary education (Joyce & Rossen, 2006). Unfortunately, many students seeking accommodations are enrolling in postsecondary education programs without the necessary documentation to verify their disability.

The IEP team can help prepare students with disabilities for postsecondary education programs years before graduation. Students who receive services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plans need to know that they will not automatically have the same support when they graduate. To be eligible for accommodations in postsecondary education programs, a student with a disability must provide current documentation that meets the university criteria for eligibility. Postsecondary institutions depend on students to initiate and monitor their own educational services. If students do not have current documentation of their disability relating to both cognitive ability and academic achievement, they will be asked by the campus’s Disability Services Office to seek testing for documentation on their own.

According to the Individuals with Education Disability Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004, a reevaluation does not have to occur once every three years if the transition IEP team and parent agree that a reevaluation is unnecessary [614(a)(2)]. Special education services will continue without current cognitive and achievement measures until the termination of child’s eligibility due to graduation from secondary school with a regular diploma or due to exceeding age eligibility [614(c)(5)(B)]. The transition IEP team must provide the child with a summary of his or her academic achievement and functional performance (SOP). The SOP includes recommendations on how to assist students in meeting their postsecondary goals [614(c)(5)(B)]; however, the SOP does not guarantee eligibility for accommodations because the SOP does not have to include the documentation postsecondary education programs require.
Students entering postsecondary education programs do not have to disclose their disability; however, if students desires accommodations, it is their responsibility to notify Disability Support Offices. Disability Support Offices have an exhaustive list of documentation guidelines depending on the type of disability. Therefore, if the student does not provide current comprehensive cognitive and achievement measures, eligibility for accommodations will be delayed. Currently, when students are seeking testing on their own, qualified professionals are booked for months in advance and charge very high fees; thus, the process of gathering documentation could take six months to a year. The assessments administered by these professionals could have been completed during the students’ high school years. The time and expenses involved in finding qualified personnel at the postsecondary level could equal failure in college course(s), frustration, or temptation to quit school.

Since students may not be aware of Disability Support Offices requirements, and the time and expenses involved in seeking accommodations, transition IEP teams need to carefully develop an individual transition plan that prepares students as early as possible. For example, once the student shows interest in attending postsecondary education programs, teachers can help the student research or visit the prospective school’s Disability Services office and ask the following questions:

- Which evaluations (documentation guidelines) are necessary depending on their type of disability?
- What accommodations are available?
- What programs are available that relate to their career choice?

Once the student successfully explores these questions, they can effectively make decisions and collect the necessary paperwork to qualify for accommodations necessary for success.

Proactive individual IEP transition planning as well as student and parent understanding of postsecondary institution expectations has become more important than ever. Current practices in reevaluation procedures do not require high schools to test students once every three years. The IEP team should carefully decide when to reevaluate and when not to reevaluate students especially when they know that the student is interested in attending postsecondary education programs. High schools are not required to meet university eligibility standards for accommodations, but the transition IEP team can help prepare students for university expectations years before graduation. The high school IEP teams’ evaluations, intervention reports, and progress monitoring records can be instrumental in providing students with required documentation that qualifies them for accommodations (Joyce & Rossen, 2006).
Reasonable Accommodations...Or A Lifetime Of Entitlement?

Which of the following best describes the intent and rationale for reasonable accommodations according to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA 97), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1990, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

a. Help the individual to pass classes by lowering expectations/requirements.
b. Remove/reduce barriers, help the individual to achieve independence in life.
c. Help the individual remain on the athletic/cheerleading squad.
d. Help to reduce parent/school conflicts.
e. Help to reduce regular/special education conflicts.
f. Help to reduce regular/special/administration conflicts.
g. All of the above.

Initially (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975) intended to reduce barriers to education access for individuals with physical and/or sensory impairments. There was no implicit expectation that special education would “cure” the handicap, or that services would be permanent; only that it would allow for a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The definition of “handicapped” was extended to individuals with psychological disorders (Specific Learning Disabilities, SLD), and accommodations and compensatory strategies were added to the language and subsequent practice. To the greatest extent possible, the intent for the provision of accommodations and compensatory strategies was to allow immediate access to education. The expected outcome of special education services was (and should continue to be) for individuals to learn self-directed compensations and strategies in order to be self-sufficient throughout their lives.

IDEA defines a specific learning disability (SLD) as “A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to ...(list of eight SLD qualification areas).”

Disorder: “A medical condition involving a disturbance to the normal functioning of the mind...an abnormal physical or mental condition” (Webster).

Psychological Processes: “Relating to the mind or mental processes...affecting or intended to affect the mind or mental processes” (Webster).

Manifest: “To make evident or certain by showing or demonstrating it very clearly” (Webster).

Assumptions:

- Disorders are permanent and not “correctable”; teachers cannot “fix” a student’s disorder; it is the equipment that the child came from the factory with.
- Disorders in “basic psychological processes that manifest itself in...” are identifiable through appropriate and thorough assessment practices.
- Links (cause-effect?) between basic psychological processes and typical school-based learning tasks are known.
- Prescriptive interventions (teaching strategies, accommodations) for specific processing disorders are available to educators.
- Accommodations should be based on the nature and severity of the disorder, not on the symptom of that disorder (reading, mathematics, written or oral expression).
- Aptitude/achievement discrepancy information (Estimator) at best documents underachievement (an exclusionary clause for SLD?), but yields no useful information in terms of prevention, intervention or accommodation strategies.
- Students who are afforded accommodations that are not required may actually become disadvantaged in vocations and higher education.

Accommodations for special education students are justified when: 1) they are designed to allow the student to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE); 2) they help individuals overcome or compensate for a disorder, so that specialized instruction or related services are lessened or no longer required, and; 3) they are required in order for the student to access and make progress in the general curriculum.

Accommodations for special education students were never intended to circumvent or replace data-based prevention or intervention strategies. Accommodations should always be based on appropriate assessment data (standardized and curriculum based), and include only those strategies that are required for that student to compete and progress in the general curriculum. Accommodations should not be based on pressures on the special education team by parents, regular education partners or others. The professional literature is clear; good teachers maintain high expectations for their students, teach compensatory strategies as necessary, monitor student progress, and adjust interventions as necessary.
Reasonable Accommodations: Only as Special as Necessary!

Accommodations Based On The Cognitive Disorder (Cause) Or Academic Failure (Symptom)?

Providing individuals with accommodations based solely on the manifestation (symptom(s)) of disability possibly helps them to pass classes, but it does little to assist them to adjust to the realities of mainstream life after school. Consider designing accommodations based on assessment data that identifies a “disorder in a basic psychological process...” Assessment data (formal and informal) should drive all instructional decisions. Students with disabilities should be afforded ONLY those accommodations or compensations that they actually require in order to access the general curriculum, or to make progress toward their IEP goals. Standardized assessment data, when available must identify a student’s strengths, average abilities, weaknesses and functional limitations. For example, the Woodcock Johnson III (WJ III NU) provides practitioners with this information.

**Strengths:** standard scores 111 or higher that indicate above average to very superior skills compared to same age peers. There is no reasonable rationale for providing accommodations for strengths. Whenever possible, use an individual’s strengths to compensate or overcome weaknesses.

**Average abilities:** standard scores 90-110. Do not provide accommodations for areas of average performance, as the data implies that the student can perform in that task area without any assistance.

**Weaknesses:** Teach learning and compensation strategies, and consider only very mild accommodations as necessary. Do consider mild accommodations as necessary for areas of weakness (SS 80-89), with the understanding that areas of weakness will not qualify an adult for accommodations, and that they will not receive this accommodation after completion of public education or in the workplace.

**Functional Limitations:** Federal protection legislation designed to protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination outside of school-based protections include Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The criteria for identifying accommodations under these protections is different than for IDEA. Under 504 and ADA, only those weaknesses that are so severe that they require reasonable accommodations can be considered. Functional limitations, as identified by the WJ III, would be considered standard scores approximately 79 or lower. The greater the weakness or limitation (the lower the score), the more pronounced the accommodation or compensation to be considered. In some cases, severe limitations may require modifications, not just accommodations.

**Recommendations:**

Collect and analyze all available information on the student and document their learning difficulties, over time. When warranted, conduct a full and complete assessment prior to providing significant compensations or accommodations. Look for patterns of weaknesses and correlations between processing deficits and specific learning difficulties. If administering the WJ III, best practice would be to administer at minimum, Cognitive tests 1-7 and 11-17 (the General Intellectual Ability, Extended Battery), and selected achievement tests in areas of suspected weakness to identify intra-cognitive and achievement concerns. The WJ III provides standardized cluster scores in seven processing areas most closely associated with typical school tasks and skills.

Transfer pertinent assessment data to the Student Performance Summary Form (Figure 1: [http://essentialeducator.org/?p=3374].)

As a team, evaluate available assessment data, and brainstorm compensations or accommodations in cognitive processing areas that are required for accessing the general curriculum.

Design and teach accommodations to address functional limitations, and look for strengths or areas of average performance to use to overcome or mediate limitations.

Teach students (and their parents) about their learning and performance profiles, and the need and rationale for reasonable accommodations that they may qualify for in public school and as an adult under Section 504 and ADA. Advocate that students consider careers that match their innate talents and cognitive strengths, while minimizing cognitive weaknesses and functional limitations. Give parents and students a copy of their cognitive and achievement profiles, and a copy of the Cognitive Factor Implications page (Figure 2: [http://essentialeducator.org/?p=3374]).

Provide to appropriate professionals working with the student the data-based rationale and support for the accommodation required.

Collect data to assess success of accommodations and make ongoing adjustments as necessary.

Ultimately, the true victims (of over-accommodations not required) are the students themselves. By teaching special education students that there are two standards—one for them and one for everyone else—they are being encouraged to rely upon special accommodations rather than being challenged to achieve at high levels. In so doing, we run the risk of failing to integrate those with special needs into the mainstream of American life, as we shun them off into a different room in which different rules apply and standards are forever lowered. As educators, practice the mantra: only as special as necessary.

Figures 1 and 2 along with the article can be found online in the Essential Educator: [http://essentialeducator.org/?p=3374](http://essentialeducator.org/?p=3374).
Placement of Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder into Employment

Robert L. Morgan, Jared C. Schultz, and Joel Johnson, Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation, Utah State University
Many challenges face teachers and families who serve young adults with disabilities. The transition from school to adulthood is a challenge that is formidable and complex. Given diminished availability of adult services, young adults must be even better prepared than in past years to demonstrate independence and self-direction. The challenge is compounded exponentially when teachers and families are serving a young adult with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Individuals with ASD are often characterized by limited social skills and adaptability, deficits in attending to relevant stimuli, and non-responsiveness to instructions delivered by adults in authority roles. If accurate, these characteristics significantly limit young adults with ASD in obtaining and maintaining employment, where social skills, adaptability, alertness, and compliance are competencies expected to occur at high standards.

Even the process of identifying a preferred job can be daunting for a young adult with ASD. Some individuals with ASD have not achieved reading levels necessary to access and process information found in career education and job preference programs, such as www.UtahFutures.org. Reading-free assessments, such as line-drawing instruments (e.g., Reading-Free Vocational Interest Inventory-Revised) and video-based job preference instruments (www.yesjobsearch.com) may help the young adult with ASD to determine preferred employment.

At Utah State University, a new “booster-shot” effort has been developed to successfully place young adults with ASD into employment using research-based procedures (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009; Wehman, Smith, & Schall, 2009). To establish the infrastructure for the effort, a commitment must be established among all relevant stakeholders, including the transition teacher, parents and family, vocational rehabilitation counselor, district related-services specialists, volunteers, and others. The bottom line is that to achieve the most optimal outcome at graduation it may take more than the traditional process; considerably greater effort and coordination will be required of stakeholders and the young adult with ASD. Annual IEP meetings may serve as the minimum requirement, but the team may need to meet more frequently. If the burden seems extreme, the increased probability of success makes it well worth the effort.

The model is similar to the person-centered planning paradigm described by O’Brien (1997). Much like O’Brien’s original conceptualization of person-centered planning as a community of practice, all stakeholders play active roles and check in periodically to show that they have carried out assignments leading to the goal. However, it is distinct from person-centered planning in four ways. First, the focus is on achieving supported, and eventually, competitive employment as the best hedge against an adulthood hoping to rely on social services. When employment planning is well under way, other important adult life pathways, such as postsecondary education, recreation and leisure, and social opportunities, are explored. Second, from the outset, individual preference for employment guides job development, training, and placement activities. Assessment first identifies the individual’s preferences for employment, and second, the preferred job that is best matched to current skills. This may be a challenge as it makes the development of situational assessments and work experiences in the community an individualized process as well. Group or rotating work experiences, while helpful, may not be addressing the preferred job. Employment success increases in proportion to the match between the actual job and preferred job. Third, all activities related to achieving employment must show empirical evidence for efficacy (Wehman et al., 2009). Fourth, all activities are adapted given data collection on their effectiveness. Ineffective practices are scrapped, while effective ones are maintained. As independence on a job grows, supports by an employment specialist (i.e., job coach) are systematically faded as natural supports are developed in the work environment. Implementation and monitoring steps are described below.

1. At least 4 years prior to exit from school (i.e., either high school graduation or at age 22 following in post-high school special education services), prosocial behavior and social skills are targeted. Behavior and social skill targets are identified from assessments, then goals are set, interventions are implemented, and progress is monitored. Given evidence of improved behavior, responsibility is gradually transferred to the young adult.

2. At least 2 years prior to exit from school, job preference and matching assessments are initiated. Preference assessments and information on specific careers are available at www.utahfutures.org and www.yesjobsearch.com.

3. Given identification of strengths and weaknesses from a job matching assessment, two activities commence. First, weaknesses on preferred jobs are targeted for training or accommodation. Second, consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the vocational rehabilitation counselor attends transition team meetings. The rehabilitation counselor can forecast job prospects, identify needed services, and provide advice to the youth and the transition team.

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4. At about 1 year prior to exit from school, the transition teacher, parent, or vocational rehabilitation counselor contact individuals identified from the young adult’s social network (i.e., who you know and who they know) to get ideas about employment sites where the individual’s preferred/best matched job exists along with co-workers who will be available to provide ongoing supports. Given that eligibility is established and a rehabilitation case file is opened, the vocational rehabilitation counselor identifies long-term support services, such as those from a supported employment agency, and/or short-term services, such as vocational rehabilitation.

5. One job that is considered most preferred, best matched, and most supported is then designated for job development. Team members coordinate job development procedures (e.g., contacting employers, scheduling interviews, etc.).

6. Once job placement is secured, the transition team continues to communicate with each other. It is helpful if the employer and interested co-workers become active members of the transition team. The vocational rehabilitation counselor may contact the transition teacher if new skills need to be taught or if problem behaviors arise.

7. If special education services for the young adult are soon to expire, the team explores educational opportunities to support the employment for the individual with ASD (e.g., universal design courses at an applied technology college or community college). Additionally, training should be explored for employers and co-workers of the new employee. Local university faculty or representatives from ASD support groups may be available to support employers and co-workers.

8. If long-term supported employment services are necessary, the transition teacher or vocational rehabilitation counselor make efforts to obtain a well-trained job coach. As the new employee becomes more proficient in carrying out job tasks, coaching supports are systematically faded until the employee performs them independently (Wehman & Moon, 1988).

9. Data are generated on job performance and are reviewed by the team at least once a month to identify adjustments in skill training or services required.

10. Concurrent with job placement, the team develops back-up plans in case the employee or employer becomes dissatisfied or a new direction is required. Back-up plans keep stakeholders positioned in a proactive way ready to implement alternatives.

One case is described here to illustrate how components of the model have been implemented. Grant is a 19-year-old youth with ASD who attends a local post-high school special education program. His teacher, Ms. Markovic, coordinates Grant’s Individualized Education Program with transition services. Grant’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Oldham, are concerned about the future of their son and their family. Like many parents, they have multiple responsibilities and a limited budget. Grant, who was diagnosed with ASD at the age of two years, functions in the moderate range of intellectual disabilities. Strengths include visual and gross and fine-motor skills. Weaknesses include expressive language and social skills. Grant responds to others by verbalizing in one-to-four word phrases but does not initiate with others. Occasionally, he engages in loud outbursts when presented with high-demand tasks (yelling “I hate you!”). When he engages in outbursts, adults redirect him to the task.

The IEP team discussed Grant’s future, particularly his career prospects. The parents expressed concern about whether Grant would ever be responsible for himself. The team decided to focus on social and behavioral intervention, especially outbursts and asking for help when confronted with challenging tasks.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Mr. Ramirez, opened a case file with the Oldhams. Mr. Ramirez worked with Grant on the job preference assessment. Grant’s mother filled out the job matching assessment. Grant’s highest preference and best-matched job was screen process printer. Although this job
The local vocational rehabilitation agency hired a university student as a job coach. The job coach conducted situational assessments at the job site to determine how Grant performed tasks. After two sessions, verbal outbursts began occurring at the site. Ms. Markovic developed a behavior intervention to decrease outbursts and “replace” them with requests for a brief break (e.g., “break please”). Prior to intervention, outbursts occurred at the mean rate of 3.4 occurrences across eight, 2-hour sessions. The intervention called for replacing the outbursts by teaching socially and environmentally appropriate behaviors (e.g., asking for help or for a brief break). Procedures called for one bonus dollar to be awarded at home by the parents for zero outbursts at the end of each 2-hour session. Outbursts decreased to one occurrence in 12 sessions (0.08 occurrences per session).

The manager agreed to hire Grant at minimum wage for 8 hours per week, assuming short-term support from the job coach and continuation of the behavior intervention to decrease outbursts. The job coach collected data on three targets: (a) time (duration) required to wash screens, (b) steps of the cleaning task that were performed independently, and (c) number of verbal outbursts per session. Across 21 work sessions, Grant made progress, decreasing the time to clean a screen from 3 minutes to below the company standard (45 seconds per screen). Independence on cleaning steps was scored only if Grant performed a step without any assistance and within a time limit. Any verbal, gestural, or other prompt from the job coach was scored as not independent. The job coach calculated independent steps divided by total steps times 100. Grant initially performed most steps with prompts (only 12% to 33% independent), but later performed steps independently (100% for five consecutive sessions). Job coach support is now being faded, and soon, the employer will assume full responsibility. Parents indicate they are very pleased. The employer is satisfied because a significant company need has been met and considers Grant “one of our people.”

Grant’s example illustrates how stakeholders can successfully achieve employment for a young adult with significant disabilities. The vocational rehabilitation counselor and post-high school teacher enlisted the active involvement of Grant and others in a goal-directed effort aimed at employment. Although cost and time intensive, the case exemplifies how successful employment can be attained for young adults with ASD through a well-organized and individualized process.
FREE Transition Tool Kit for Autism!

Autism Speaks Launches Transition Tool Kit

In an effort to help families and their adolescents with autism more smoothly navigate the challenging transition into adulthood, Autism Speaks has launched the Autism Speaks Transition Tool Kit, a unique guide and roadmap to help families on the journey from adolescence to adult life. The free Tool Kit, developed in conjunction with both parents and professionals, features a wealth of practical and actionable information, as well as links to valuable resources. Download the free toolkit here: www.autismspeaks.org/community/family_services/transition.php
Minimize Challenging Behaviors During Transitions

Amy Peters, Program Specialist, Utah Personnel Development Center

When transitioning students with disabilities from one activity to another, perhaps we should consider what preschool teachers already know. Too many consecutive, non-preferred activities in a row or activities that last too long can lead to trouble. Getting a student to agree to leave a preferred activity willingly can be just as tough.

Effective preschool educators structure the environment and schedule the daily routine in a way that minimizes the likelihood a student will engage in challenging behavior to escape the instructional setting, commonly known as escape-maintained behavior. Technically, this is known as an antecedent intervention approach. This differs greatly from the more typical consequence-only style of behavior management.

It is common for school-age students to receive more of their rigorous content in the morning. Now consider how this structure impacts a student with a disability. If a student receives instruction in one difficult subject followed by the next, with all of the less academically demanding activities scheduled in the afternoon, it is likely that the student may engage in disruptive behavior long before the afternoon ever comes. When problem behavior occurs because the student is attempting to escape and the difficult task is then removed, it is probable that the student’s challenging behavior will be reinforced and strengthened. Even if the educator requires the student to finish the missed work at a later time, the student has potentially learned that when things are hard, if he acts out the work will be removed, at least for the short-term.

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“Perhaps something as simple as the arrangement of the student’s daily schedule can have a positive impact, allowing the educator to be proactive instead of reactive.”

When an educator pushes the envelope with any student, regardless of grade or age, by attempting to schedule “work first, then play,” the teacher may be setting a student up for failure. Most preschool curricula are structured in a way that minimizes student escape. The daily schedule is typically one of the key components of a curriculum. Activities that are less structured are typically intermixed throughout the day with those that are more structured or teacher directed. By nature of this arrangement, it alleviates the need for the student to engage in challenging behavior in order to escape work.

Academic activities that are too long in duration are another common pitfall when working with students with disabilities. In preschool, you hear phrases like “age appropriate” or “developmentally appropriate.” While these phrases may have many connotations, teachers plan activities while considering the typical attention span of a three or four-year-old child. Are we spending enough time considering the attention span of a student when working with school-age populations?

Often times, the attention span of students with disabilities may not match that of their typically developing peers. This problem may be further compounded by the difficulty of the academic material. Again, this may set the stage for challenging behavior from the student to achieve escape.

The situation in which a student has an incredibly long attention span for a certain activity and a much shorter attention span for another activity can be perplexing. When this happens, the educator should take data according to the individual subject area. It is important to compare apples to apples. If the data show that the average duration of time the student spends working on a math assignment before engaging in challenging behavior is 16 minutes, change activities or offer a break at 12 minutes. The same student may be able to do puzzles for up to an hour without a break. This in no way indicates that the student can engage in a math related task for an hour.

Lastly, consider student activity preferences. When transitioning a student from a high-preference activity to a low-preference activity, it is more likely that challenging behavior will occur. Try using a moderate-preference activity as a transition buffer when going from a highly preferred activity to one of low preference. Conversely, challenging behavior is less likely to occur when transitioning from a low-preference activity to a high-preference activity.

Taking activity preference into consideration, think about a student for whom recess is a highly preferred activity. For this same student, math is a low-preference activity and independent seatwork is of moderate preference. The teacher will likely have fewer transition related problems if the scheduling for this student indicates recess (high-preference activity), then independent seatwork (moderate-preference activity), followed by math (low-preference activity). Using a different approach, the teacher might expect more challenging behavior when the schedule indicates recess (high-preference activity) then math (low-preference activity).

Much instructional time can be lost as a result of challenging behavior. When this happens everyone loses. Not only does the student lose time that could have been spent learning new material, but often has a hard time refocusing for the remainder of the day.

The teacher loses instructional time with that student, as well as with other students in the class. Dealing with challenging behavior on a daily basis can also be mentally and physically draining. When addressing these types of behaviors with reactive consequences, the teacher-student rapport may also be damaged.

So what is the take home message when attempting to prevent escape maintained challenging behavior? Perhaps something as simple as the arrangement of the student’s daily schedule can have a positive impact, allowing the educator to be proactive instead of reactive. Most importantly, less instructional time will be lost to the challenging behavior.

Challenging behavior may commonly occur during transitions with students with disabilities. Using the antecedent intervention of manipulating a student’s schedule is just one of several ways to potentially address this issue. The Responding to Individual Differences in Education (RIDE) program is a valuable resource and training tool for learning about effective behavior interventions.

RIDE is a web-based system that allows you to choose from a bank of research-based interventions for students with social and academic behavior challenges. RIDE also includes video models of interventions and the capacity to progress monitor students to measure their response to the selected interventions. The RIDE system requires a purchased license. RIDE training is free to districts and charter schools in Utah.
Assistive Technology and Transition Planning for Students with Significant Disabilities

I started that summer day at the neighborhood Motel to begin my life as a working person. I was not ready to be accountable to the manager, or to my schedule that called for an arrival by 7:00 a.m. every morning. This was my mother’s way of introducing me to the world of work and responsibility. As I was facing what was ahead and being anxious about it all, I thought at least the money sounded like a good thing. I began with the “bed ripping ceremony” and ripped the sheets and pillow cases off the bed and pillows. Next came the bathroom to gather all the towels, and then to the garbage to put it outside the room in the container. As the bathroom cleaning commenced a realization occurred to me that I could really do this. I remade the beds, tightened the bedspread down over the bed, and restocked the towels. Then came the dusting and the vacuuming and the finishing touch of a spray of room freshener. Closing the door and moving on to the next room I thought, so this is it, my first big job! I was very pleased with myself. Do you ever think about the big day when you had your first job? Remember the feeling of accomplishment you had? These experiences in life give us lifelong skills, and knowledge, and help us form our attitudes about who we are. It is through these early experiences that we learn responsibility and what we must do to follow through on our commitments.

The early work experiences for students with significant disabilities are just as meaningful to them. These jobs add to their high school expectations of having employment like so many of their friends. It can seem a daunting task to help students with significant disabilities obtain a paid job. These students will need help in navigating the system to find and maintain employment. It takes commitment not only from the teacher, but the administration and the
community at large. Improving outcomes in the following areas for students with significant disabilities is an essential element of our state vision for transition. These elements include: 1) Equality of opportunity, 2) Full participation, 3) Independent living, and 4) Economic self-sufficiency. These areas are being encouraged for consideration in goal setting and transition planning. Transition is a time of change or passage from one place to another. Transition planning is the process of learning about a new environment and identifying the steps and supports a student with significant disabilities needs to move successfully from his familiar environment to the new one. Transition planning also gives the opportunity to familiarize students and families about new settings and expectations.

Relationships that come from transition planning can help make connections that ease adjustments and increase the likelihood that families will stay engaged in their student’s transition plan. Looking at what works with students with significant disabilities and transition planning, it becomes evident that many of the students cannot be successful without the accommodations that are specific processes or tools that help access and complete the same school work and activities as their peers. Much of the accommodations come with and through assistive technology. Assistive technology consists of devices and services that may be Low tech (e.g., magnification of text or objects, use of Velcro) or High tech (e.g., screen readers and electronic communication devices). Making a successful transition plan using assistive technology is led by the information that has been used for the decision making process in the Individual Education Program (IEP). What is included in an IEP statement of transition services that may involve assistive technology (AT)?

Having that first experience with a job is an enormous motivator for students with significant disabilities. All over the state students are finding their way to self-sufficiency, self-determination, and that age old “feel good about yourself” feeling that comes with success. The use of assistive technology can enable students to reach their own best outcomes. Then they can say, “I was very pleased with myself.”

**Transition Planning Reminders**

Planned transitions are smooth transitions! Make sure annual goals are measurable. Use assessments to help student determine post-secondary goals. Annual goals should be designed to help the student make progress toward the post-secondary goals. List transition services in the IEP that focus on improving the academic and functional achievement in:

- Instruction
- Related service(s)
- Community experience
- Development of employment/adult living
- Acquisition of daily skills
- If necessary, provision of a functional vocational evaluation

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*Christine Timothy, Education Specialist, Sensory and Significant Disabilities, Utah State Office of Education*
Students With Behavioral Problems: A Long Twisted Road

Helping At-Risk Students Through School and to Transitions

Far too many high school students drop out of school long before graduation day and a formal post secondary transition. Nationwide, only 71 percent of students graduate from high school. Compounding the issue of high school dropout rates is the fact that many also have disabilities. Given that students with disabilities drop out of school at over twice the rate of their same-age peers, states and local education agencies are in need of dropout prevention interventions that yield positive results. Students with emotional and behavioral challenges have extremely poor outcomes. More than half of these students do not complete high school; once out of school this group is typically unemployed or underemployed and live below the poverty line. Many of these youth are disengaged from family and social supports. Many have behavioral and relationship problems and require mental health or substance abuse services. High rates of the students that do not successfully transition into and out of secondary educational settings are incarcerated.

Dropout prevention interventions almost always include multiple components and the effects of specific intervention components on dropping out cannot be causally attributed to one component of an intervention. The purpose of the following recommendations is to provide evidence-based recommendations on preventing these students from dropping out. These recommendations are intended to promote student engagement with school, suggesting practical ways in which administrators can structure efforts aimed at individual students, schoolwide communities, or ideally both.

**Recommendation 1** - Utilize data systems that support a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who drop out and that help identify individual students at high risk of dropping out (diagnostic).

**Recommendation 2** - Assign adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out (targeted intervention).
Recommendation 3 - Provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance (targeted intervention).

Recommendation 4 - Implement programs to improve students’ classroom behavior and social skills (targeted intervention).

Recommendation 5 - Personalize the learning environment and instructional process (schoolwide intervention).

Recommendation 6 - Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills needed to graduate and to serve them after they leave school (schoolwide intervention).

Dropping out is more of a process than an event—a process that, for some students, begins in early elementary school. The success of our nation’s students is up to all of us.

The driving philosophy behind school reform is a commitment to creating student-centered learning environments. This includes offering personal learning plans and alternative pathways to graduation that meet the unique needs of each student and increase the students’ connectedness to their education. Many students find traditional classroom models limiting and students fail to connect education to their own personal goals and ambitions. Unfortunately, when this disconnection persists students lose their motivation to remain in school and drop out. As a result, these youth face a future with limited options.
Deaf children with hearing parents are often raised in homes where an accessible language is not shared with their parents. These children are not able to have an accessible language and the linguistic opportunities needed to acquire a first language. Resultantly, the developmental milestones crucial to the development of the conceptual knowledge that interaction through a language promotes are lost. Academic and social achievement that depends on having a strong language base and conceptual abilities is consequently an uphill battle as the child becomes older.

Research highlights the importance of acquiring, as opposed to learning, a strong first language in the early years of life. It is evident that with the acquisition of any first language, timing is of utmost importance. Studies indicate that minimal initial language experience impacts future ability to process grammatical information in any language, and that the delayed onset of language acquisition in early human development dramatically alters the capacity to learn language throughout life. This dilemma not only impacts the deaf child linguistically and educationally, but also presents dire cultural, emotional, and social ramifications.

Considering that the deaf child’s strength is vision and he/she remains primarily a visual learner even with the latest advances in technology; and if given the opportunity to do so, chooses to affiliate chiefly with the Deaf community for social and cultural identification, there is an evident need for the preparation of quality, well-trained bilingual-bicultural education professionals for 0-5 deaf children and the incorporation of research-based best practices applicable to both the child and his/her parents. This being the case, the following components are suggested for such a program.
The Preparation of Bilingual/Bicultural Education Professionals for the 0-5 Deaf Child: Research-Based Practices

Key components of the 0-5 program

1. Professionals should be able to teach parents how to provide a full and accessible visual language to their child and how to utilize early visual communication interactions such as those used by Deaf parents of Deaf babies and toddlers that most effectively promote early visual communication.

2. Young children exposed to both sign and spoken language are linguistically similar to hearing bilingual children. Deaf children in bilingual-bicultural early intervention programs make greater language gains than matched children in English-only (spoken or signed) early intervention programs.

3. Partnerships with Deaf adults result in improved attitudes about deafness, raising a deaf child, Deaf and hearing cultures, and participation in both Deaf and hearing communities. The human rights issues of providing access to language and providing parents with opportunities for meaningful interactions with adults who are Deaf are also addressed through this partnership.

4. Research indicates a specific correlation between ASL skills and English literacy skills. Specific strategies for reading aloud and interacting with English print via the use of ASL have been identified as successful in facilitating English literacy in children who are deaf.

5. Teachers must be sensitive to the cultural needs of Deaf students in the early childhood classroom during literacy activities. Providing children models of their language and Deaf culture helps children develop self-esteem, self-identity, and respect for members of their community, whether that community is Deaf or hearing.

The best of both the Deaf and the Hearing worlds can be made available to the deaf child. This can be facilitated by the initial provision of educational services by professionals who are well-trained and knowledgeable regarding language access and appropriate educational, social, and cultural implications for 0-5 aged deaf children and their parents.

Research-based support of the key components

1. The parents’ use of effective visual communication strategies is strongly related to the child’s language progress, social interactions, and visual attention skills. Deaf children who acquire American Sign Language fluency in the home environment prior to preschool have age-appropriate language and problem-solving skills, are ready for age-appropriate curricula, and are well adjusted emotionally and socially.

2. Professionals should be able to teach parents how to use effective communication in both American Sign Language (ASL) and, where accessible, spoken language necessary for the child’s successful bilingual skill acquisition.

3. Professionals should be able to teach parents how to partner successfully with early interventionists and Deaf mentors and to participate and feel comfortable in both the Deaf and Hearing worlds.

4. Professionals should be able to teach parents how to use specific strategies with American Sign Language in order to facilitate the development of both ASL and English.

5. Professionals should be able to teach parents how to become fluent users of American Sign Language, studying the literature, poetry, history, and rich folklore associated with the Deaf community. Also, the professional should be able to incorporate bilingual and bicultural strategies in the preschool setting to facilitate the learning of both languages and cultures.