

Issues affecting the transition of high school students



Individuals experience changes that impact the various stages of and experiences in their lives. Transition from high school to post school activities is one such change experienced by students with disabilities, including higher education and/or employment. The author of this literature presents an overview of the issues affecting the transition of students with disabilities. Specifically, it brings to attention the impact of cultural and linguistic diversity on the transition process, as well as the positive effect of self determination, collaboration with service providers, and family intervention have on the transition process. Overall, findings support that when correctly administered with proper planning, the transition process is beneficial to students with disabilities.

Issues Affecting the Transition of High School Students with Disabilities: A Review of the Literature

Introduction

Transition is the movement from one place, status, or situation to the next. Transition is dynamic and is a constant aspect of life, requiring the necessary fine-tuning to address life changes (Wehman, 1992). As life progresses, individuals encounter various sets of transitions (Harrington, 1982). For transition to be considered successful, the individual must experience improved confidence and competence in skills (Wehman, 1992). For individuals with disabilities, the period of transition from the school system to post school activities represents a pivotal junction in their lives and will require careful planning and specialized services.

Students with disabilities are provided educational rights by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), with its main focus being to “ ensure that all children with disabilities are presented with free appropriate education that emphasizes special education and related services that is intended to meet their special needs and to prepare them for further education, employment and independent living” (US Department of Education, 2010). When appropriately implemented, IDEA propels the education and subsequent transition process of students with disabilities into functional post school outcomes (McDonnell, McDonnell & Hardman, 2003).

The successful post school, independent functioning of students with disabilities is heavily dependent on the transition process. Built into the transition process is the actual planning for transition. In assisting the students to achieve the full benefits of the transition process and to be able to use the skills learned in school to be successful at independent living, the goals, needs, preferences and aptitude of the student with disabilities must form the foundation of the student’s transition planning process. Families, school districts, and communities collectively bear the responsibilities to successfully guide a student through the transition process (Wehman, 1992). The successful execution of the plan is squarely placed on school districts as theirs are the responsibilities of educating the students (Wehman, 1992).

Transition Planning

Transition planning is an important aspect of the education of the student with disabilities, and should be treated accordingly. A transition plan that will have lasting effect on the student takes into consideration post school

educational prospects, such as training that will result in eligibility of entry to community college, universities, or employment at the completion of high school. There are also other significant factors such as post-adult living, independent living skills, and community experiences. Transition planning is done as a team effort.

For students to realize the full benefits of what IDEA offers, and to successfully transition to post school activities, their course of study requires specific planning and programming. Transition services specifically deal with maximizing the academic and functional abilities of the student. Transition services are those “ coordinated set of activities for a student with disabilities that will result in the desired educational objectives (Flexor, Baer, Luft & Simmons, 2008). An important role of the transition process is to increase success, self-worth, and confidence in an individual while taking the student’s needs, strengths and preferences in mind (Flexor et al, 2008).

The members of the transition team should include the students, teachers, members of the family, school administration, and members of the local education agency. These are considered to be the core members of the team. Vocational rehabilitation counselors, related service providers, adult service providers, post school education program representatives, and other professionals with expertise in a specific disability or disabilities are also influential members of the team. The selection of the entire team is to be collaborative in nature, with all members being fully mindful of the student and the specific disability that the student is experiencing. At best, all individuals who interact with the students as far as transition planning is

concerned must be well-informed and conversant with the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Students with Disabilities as a High Risk Group for Successful Transition to Post High School Activities

Osgood, Foster and Courtney (2010) point out that the manner in which an adolescent transition to adulthood has significant implications over the long haul. For example, whereas gaining a college degree makes it possible to achieve a higher-paying and more respectable job; early parenthood, failed marriage for a young person or becoming involved in criminal conduct or substance abuse can have negative outcomes in the areas of finances, family relationships and other important areas of life. It has been found, for example, that high school graduates or dropouts who do not attend college have significantly lower prospects of achieving a successful and satisfying life during adulthood than those youths who are college-bound (Bloom, 2010; Osgood, et al, 2010).

Bloom (2010) observes that a recent study done in New York City identified young people with disabilities, including young people with learning disabilities or emotional and behavioral problems, as one of five significant groups of young people who are at significantly high risk of " leaving school, not returning, and then ending up unemployed or out of the labor force" (p. 94). Cortiella (2009) reports that the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education reported in 2004 that unemployment for adult individuals with disabilities have stayed at around 70% for the prior 12 years. Young people with disabilities transitioning from high school were found to

be at relatively the same risk for failure in pursuing post school activities as immigrant youths, young people involved in the justice system, youth aging out of foster care and young mothers (Bloom, 2010). According to Osgood, Foster and Courtney (2010), given the fact that the years from high school into the early twenties represent a difficult period of transition for the general population in the U. S. and other developed nations, this time is particularly “ arduous” for vulnerable youths, including those emerging from the special education system. In addition problems affecting the general population that require many young adults to depend on their parents for much longer, individuals with disabilities tend to face

. . . exceptional challenges finding employment, attending college, and marrying and starting a family. Many struggle with emotional or behavioral problems; many of histories of problems in school and in the community. Often their families are unable or unwilling to provide the support that most families provide to their children during this transition-funding for college, child care that permits work or schooling for young parents, a place to live when times are hard. Some of these young adults are hampered by limited capacities and difficulty acquiring skills. The day-to-day tasks of achieving financial and residential independence can be daunting because of physical disabilities, chronic illness, or mental illness. (Osgood, Foster & Courtney, 2010, p. 211)

At the same time, vulnerable populations experience greater challenges to transition into adulthood than other youths often because they have to deal with tasks that youths their age do not have to face. For example, a youth who has physical disability has to engage in the arrangement of medical

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services or assistive devices and it may require extra burden to achieve a college degree or have a successful romantic relationship that blossoms into marriage. Furthermore, youths with disabilities leaving high school may have limited ability to accomplish everyday tasks. Physical disabilities, for example, may result in reduced strength and range of motion whereas impaired learning and cognitive abilities can make it more challenge to earn a college degree and the kinds of professions that would lead to independent living without the need for special assistance. In addition, adolescents with mental illness and behavioral problems can experience problems meeting the expectations of employers, friends and romantic partners. Because children with disabilities can require considerable parental time and resources and have behavioral problems that negatively affect the parent-child relationship, parents and families sometimes lack the energy and desire to assist these youths, making it more difficult and longer for youths with disabilities to succeed in the post high school world (Osgood, Foster & Courtney, 2010).

Consequently, the literature supports the need for effective transition services for post high school activities among youths with disabilities (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007). It is found for example, that vulnerable groups do poorly at completing high school and obtaining postsecondary education which is of vital importance to succeeding occupationally and financially in today's economy. It has been reported that youths with more than one disabilities have a one in twelve chance of successfully completing a higher education. Compared with 69 percent of other youths who attain full-time employment with three to five years of completing high school, only 57

percent of youth from special education gain full-time employment in this time period. Compared with 72 percent of individuals with mild disabilities and 79 percent of the general population, only 39 percent of youths aged 18 to 30 with serious disabilities are in the workforce. Only about 32% of all persons with disability between the work-age of 18-64 years are employed, compared to 81% of people without disabilities. Limited education and employment among youths with disabilities have daunting consequences for their living circumstances. Problems include strong likelihood of living below the poverty line, difficulty paying bills and meeting the experiences of daily living, strong dependence on public assistance and high rates of early parenthood. For example, about 50% of young women with learning disabilities or emotional problems become mothers with three to five years of finishing high school compared with only about one-third for the general population. Compared to national unemployment rate of about 6%, unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities is around 40-70%. In the area of independent living, 65-75% of persons with disabilities have not achieved independent living status. About 25% of young women with health issues have unplanned pregnancies when compared with under 10 percent of the general population (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007; Osgood, Foster & Courtney, 2010).

Systemic Failures in Transition Planning as an Underlying Issue Affecting Successful Post School Outcomes

In 2004, the IDEA was amended particularly to improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. The revisions were based on the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education's finding that <https://assignbuster.com/issues-affecting-the-transition-of-high-school-students/>

problems affecting high school graduates with disabilities such as significant unemployment and significant amounts of students leaving school without a diploma compared to the general population, are the result of “ failures in the present systems’ structures” (Cortiella, 2009, p. 1). Particularly, the Commission felt that high school graduates face barriers to smooth transition to adult living because of failures in transition planning (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007; Cortiella, 2009).

Four areas of improvement were highlighted: better definition, clear starting point, improved planning and a new performance summary. The term “ Transition Services” were redefined as activities aimed specifically “ on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child to facilitate movement from post-school activities” (Florida Department of Education, 2005). Continued education and transition services were mandated to be provided for young people with disabilities for four years beyond the traditional time of graduation from high school. Furthermore, the definition was extended to require that services are based on the strengths, preferences and interests of the child with a “ result-oriented” focus (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007).

The IDEA (2004) also provides a clearer starting point in terms of the age where transition planning should begin, identifying 14-16 as an effecting age range. Improved planning involves the addition of measurable postsecondary goals regarding training, education, employment and independent living skills where necessary; as well as a development of a statement in the IEP about transition services necessary to help the student achieve these goals.

The new performance measures include a requirement by schools to
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evaluate special education services before terminating them when the child graduates as well as a summary of performance including the child's academic achievement and functional performance upon leaving high school (Rutkowski, Daston, Kuiken & Riehle, 2006; Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007; Corteilla, 2009).

Factors Contributing to Successful Transition

Resilience or the ability to quickly recover from stressful events and problems determine how successful high school students with disabilities are able to transition to post high school activities. " The resources that contribute to resilience come in many forms, from individuals' skills and personality, to supportive relationships with other people, the involvement in groups like churches and clubs" (Osgood, Foster & Courtney, 2010, p. 218). However, the most important factors identified by research as keys to promoting successful transition to adulthood among high school graduates with disabilities are success at school, support from family and friends, and healthy interpersonal relationships (Osgood et al, 2010)

The good news is that special education services as with foster care, have programs in place to ensure the successful transition of individuals with disabilities to adulthood. In addition to providing support for individuals with disabilities, health and special education systems specifically address the needs of individuals with disabilities by providing access to specialized services that target particular needs of young people. However, to ensure that the transition from high school to adult life is successful for individuals

with disabilities, it is important to begin early transition planning (Florida Department of Education, 2005).

Florida Department of Education Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (2005) defines transition planning as the process of focusing on the plans and dreams parents and their children with disabilities have for the future. The function of transition planning is to provide youths with disabilities “ with the services and supports he or she needs to make a successful move into adult life” (p. 5). The school plays a fundamental role in transition planning, which typically begins at age 14 through to time of graduation from high school, but may occur earlier to hedge problems such as dropping out of school or to get an early start for children with significant disabilities. In general, transition planning should occur for all students with disabilities who have an IEP. In addition to being part of the IEP process, transition planning should involve all individuals and agencies identified by the transition IEP team, including the student, the family, and school staff.

Students and Parents

In order to be successful, transition planning must involve the full participation and contribution of each transition team member. Each student must actively participate in the transition planning process, particularly in helping to decide what he or she wants to do after leaving school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 stresses the importance of students being involved in the transition process. For example, it added a new requirement that transition services designed to coordinate various activities that are provided to students with disabilities by the

schools and other agencies to help them successfully transition from high school to postsecondary education, employment and independent living; to consider the student's interests, preferences and strengths. Identification of the student's strengths enables the transition team to identify goals that highlight and build on the student's abilities rather than on what the child cannot do (Cortiella, 2005).

Students have various responsibilities in ensuring the success of the transition planning process. These include taking an active role in the development of the Transition IEP, becoming knowledgeable about the transition process, thinking about the kinds of services that would help him/her in their adult life in order to help the transition team invite the appropriate agencies to attend the Transition IEP meeting, working with guidance counselors and career counselors to identify courses and school experiences that will promote their desired post high school activities, becoming knowledgeable about their disabilities and how to gain access to services and supports to enhance his/her long term goals, attending class, acquiring self-determination and self-advocacy skills, learning how to use assistive technology and how to save money for post school activities (Florida Department of Education, 2005).

Parents play an invaluable role in the transition process. In fact, parental involvement is considered one of the most important factors in how successful the youth's transition will be from high school to post high school life. Parental responsibilities in the transition process include playing an active role by asking questions and making suggestions, reviewing their child's Transition IEP goals, reviewing graduation requirements, providing <https://assignbuster.com/issues-affecting-the-transition-of-high-school-students/>

opportunities for their child to explore post high school options such as employment, career centers, community colleges, community service, recreation and leisure, etc.; helping their child with their post school outcome statement, and helping their child develop a portfolio of personal informational medical and psychological testing, learning style, class rank, grade point average (GPA), honors, awards, work experiences, etc. (Florida Department of Education, 2005).

Dunlap (2009) indicates that it is important for parents and professionals to work together to meet their children's needs because it serves as a reinforcement of the program goals and objectives. " Parents can contribute valuable information about their child and about the family unit. They know many things about their child that others initially are unlikely to know, including the child's strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes and medical history" (p. 92). This is a valid assessment. Children with special needs present many challenges for educators. Therefore, it is important for teachers to be aware of their global functioning in order to best meet their needs. The best way to achieve this goal is through parent-teacher collaboration. Furthermore, when parents stay in contact with professionals they also learn strategies and techniques that they can implement at home to enhance their children's success. In addition, parents and their children can provide important information about the student's goals for adult life, the strengths and resources of the family, extended family and the community, the services needed by the family and the services and providers that have helped the family in the past (Florida Department of Education, 2005). Sabbatino and Macrine (2007) indicate that the process of

including students and their parents in the transition planning process provides students and their parents opportunities to look to the future, voice preferences, express concerns and desires, and share in decision making that directly affects each student's future" (p. 34).

Olsen and Fuller (2008) point out that " parent involvement may take a variety of forms and levels of involvement, both in and out of school. It includes activities that are provided and encouraged by the school and that empower parents in working on behalf of their children's learning and development" (p. 128). Olsen and Fuller (2008) identify six types of parental involvement, including (1) basic responsibilities of families, which involves providing health, security, shelter and other basic necessities for their children; (2) communication, or the sharing of information and ongoing two-way interaction between parents and children; (3) volunteering or providing advocacy help to educators and administrators for programs aimed at helping children with homework or other needs; (4) Learning at home, which involves managing children's time with television and homework and ensuring that they build positive attitudes about education; (5) Decision making, which involves partnering with the school to solve problems and shape goals and policies affecting the lives of their children; and (6) Collaborating with the community (i. e., small businesses, religious communities, cultural groups, government agencies, etc.) to identify resources to enhance children's ability to learn and develop (Olsen & Fuller, 2008).

According to the research, parent involvement in the lives of their children with special needs is beneficial not only for the children and the parents <https://assignbuster.com/issues-affecting-the-transition-of-high-school-students/>

themselves, but for educators and the school. In sum, research shows that when parents and schools support and encourage the development of children it benefits the children in numerous ways, including helping children to achieve more regardless of the racial/ethnic, socioeconomic status or educational level of the parents; help children to get better attendance, test scores and grades; result in greater consistency with children completing their homework. Other benefits for children include better self-esteem, less discipline problems, and higher motivation for school. Benefits for parents include greater responsiveness and sensitivity to the social, emotional and intellectual needs of their children; more confidence in their parenting and decision making skills, greater affection for their children, and greater awareness of policies affecting the education and future development of their children (Olsen & Fuller, 2008).

Transition Services: Getting Students Ready for Productive Work

Work experience during high school has been identified in the literature as a strong predictor of successful employment outcomes for young people with disabilities (Carter et al, 2010). Furthermore, it has been reported that people with disabilities are offered jobs at a lower rate than the general population. The reality is that “ many students with social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, or developmental disabilities find that their educational experience in today’s schools did not equip them with the skills necessary to leading self-determined, independent lives” (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007, p. 33). In fact, a central goal of education for students in general is to ensure the successful transition from school to work. Without a well-defined transition program, students with disabilities leave high school

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unprepared to become productive workers and, as a result, become unemployed

Transition services represent an important part of transition planning. The overarching goal of transition services is to help the student successfully move from school to post school activities or to successfully transition to adult life. Before the child turns 16, the transition team (also called the Transition IEP team) involves parents, the young person and teachers. After age sixteen, the team may involve representatives of agencies who provide or pay for the services given to the young person. Post school activities coordinated by transition services to help the youth move into adult life include access to college or university programs, continuing and adult education, vocational training, employment, independent living, community participation and the coordination of adult services from different agencies. The IDEA requires the transition services to development include a statement in the IEP about the transitional service needs of the student, with a focus on the courses of study the student will engage in to achieve his or her post school goals; and a statement in the IEP about the student's transitional service needs when the student turns 16. The transition services must also be based on the individual needs of the young person, their likes and interests as well as necessary activities regarding instruction related services, community experiences, employment, post-school adult living skills, daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (Florida Department of Education, 2005; Rutkowski, Daston, Kuiken & Riehle, 2006).

Rutkowski, Daston, Kuiken and Riehle (2006) identify four commonly used special education models for transition services: traditional classroom model, <https://assignbuster.com/issues-affecting-the-transition-of-high-school-students/>

work-study model, transition-to-community model and the adapted career and technical model. In the traditional classroom model, students in segregated special education classrooms are taught employability skills. In the work-study model, classroom instruction is combined with actual work experience, with the students participating mainly in food or custodial service related jobs for a few hours a day. In the transition-to-community model, students are prepared for independent living, which includes developing social skills and participating in job-shadowing experiences and workplace observation. In the adapted career and technical model students are taught work skills and ethics in a simulated work site.

School-to-Work Transitions

According to Carter et al (2010), “ preparation for the world of work has long been a central focus of transition education” (p. 194). Estrada-Hernandez et al (2008) observe that when counseling professions measure the career outcomes of persons with disabilities, they do so by assessing their employment outcomes in the competitive labor market. The assumption is that positive independent living outcomes for individuals with disabilities are positively correlated to successful community employment and the empowerment it provides the individual. “ The successful movement from education to employment is crucial for establishing independence among young adults with disabilities” (Shandra & Hogan, 2008, p. 117). Baugher and Nichols (2008) point out, however, that “ preparing special education students to leave high school and enter the world of work or post-secondary education can be a difficult task” (p. 216). This may explain the reality that while coordinated transition services combined with community work

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experience plays a vital role in ensuring successful school-to-work transitions for young people with disabilities, and despite of the fact that federal law requires transition assistance, these services are inconsistently available (Rutkowski, Daston, Kuiken & Riehle, 2006; Shandra & Hogan, 2008). The consequence of this is that young people with disabilities leaving high school are not given the opportunity to learn proper work ethics, communication skills or the kinds of attitudes that make them hireable. The IDEA requires schools to develop transition plans by working with students and parents and to provide transition services that prepare students for employment after graduation. The increased emphasis by the IDEA on students with disabilities being prepared for employment has been driven by the pervasive and persistent rate of post school employment outcome for young people with disabilities, the well established finding in the literature that gaining work experiences during high school is the most trustworthy predictor of favorable post school employment outcomes, and the finding that working during high school contributes to independent living post high school by promoting the young person's autonomy, vocational identity, career awareness and ambitions, workplace skills, values and ethics. However, it is reported that having a transition plan in place does not necessarily mean that students will be successfully employed (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007; Shandra & Hogan, 2008; Carter et al, 2010).

Carter et al (2010) investigated the summer employment and community participation experiences and outcomes of 136 high school students with severe disabilities. Predictor measures included employment skill (understand requirements for preferred employment, make informed

occupational choices, know how to obtain a job, demonstrate general job skills and attitude for getting and maintaining a job, and having specific knowledge and skills to perform a particular job), community activities (non-work activities), self-determination (ability to perform specific self-determination behaviors, perceptions of efficacy of self-determined behaviors, knowledge about self-determination and associated behaviors), social skills and problem behaviors, spring work activities, career preparation activities (career interest assessments, goal setting and planning, workplace visits, occupation specific training, vocational education classes, social skills training, and person-centered planning), and teacher expectations for employment. They found that 61. 7% of these students were not working and 11. 1% reported sheltered employment. Those who work in competitive jobs mainly engaged in tasks related to cleaning, food services, stocking and assembly-related work. Those who worked completed about 10. 3 hours a week for competitive jobs, 12. 0 hours for unpaid jobs and 17. 8 hours for sheltered jobs. Only three of the participants worked full time (more than 35 hours a week). Most of the respondents reported that they receive supports from school staff (63. 6%), parents (63. 6%) and employment agencies (13. 6%). They obtained jobs through the help of school staff (58. 6%) or parents (23. 5%). For the students (47. 7%) who did not work, two reasons were offered: parents did not want them to work (36. 9%) and specific barriers to finding and maintaining employment (30. 8%), including limited transportation and supports. The most important factor associated with getting and maintaining a paid job was employment skill, which were related to spring work experiences and teacher expectation. Working in the spring

increases the odd of gaining a summer job by 5.28 times or a 36% better chance of getting a paid job (Carter et al, 2010).

Estrada-Hernandez et al (2008) investigated the experience of individuals with disabilities in transition from school to work. In particular, the researchers examined the “mediating effects” of the severity of disability among 115 high school students with disability on their employment outcomes in an intensive school-to-work transition program. The authors concluded that employment outcomes were significantly affected by the severity of disability despite the fact that their interests were appropriated matched to the jobs they performed. As a result, while participants had positive employment outcomes in the area of job entry, such outcomes may not necessarily result in higher earn