

The Special EDge

Autumn 2011

Volume 25

Number 1

Initiatives Redirect the Scope of Transition Services

Transition, Reform, and the Challenges Raised

By Joanne Cashman, IDEA Partnership Director, National Association of State Directors of Special Education

On 1977, when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) was passed, students with disabilities were granted access to education that previously had been denied to them or limited. By the mid-eighties these children were becoming young adults. Their experiences and those of their families and teachers provided new insight about services under the law: simple access was not enough.

In response, a new initiative gained attention and support. This initiative—transition—was grounded in the belief that special education needed to go beyond access to include a planned set of activities that would allow youths with disabilities to capitalize on what they learned in ways that would support their transition into adult life. In essence, in order to ensure practical benefit from

their education, students needed a transition plan that would help them apply their skills to postsecondary education, employment, independence, and community life. The ultimate goal was to give students the ability to build a quality life while connecting them to the supports they would need. With the leadership of Madeline Will—parent, advocate, and Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)—transition became a defining piece of the 1990 reauthorization of PL 94-142, now titled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Initially, transition was a narrowly defined set of processes and skills delivered by special education personnel. Based on assessments of a student's strengths and needs, transition planning meant that school personnel would write a schedule for how a student would move from school into adult living, and then share that plan with the family. Too often these early plans did not include information from other service providers or agencies, nor did they require the active participation of the student or the student's family members. Too frequently, these plans were little more than a list of recommended services from the viewpoint of school staff. Often they did little to make the connections necessary to implement those recommendations.

Over time and with successive

reauthorizations of the law, ideas about transition have evolved. Today we know that individuals in many roles contribute to successful transition. Related service providers, such as psychologists and a variety of therapists, provide information that is critical to helping students succeed in adult life. Community agencies also help by explaining and bridging the differences between school-age and adult services. Most importantly, we realize that families and the youths themselves hold some of the information that is most central to a successful transition planning process. After the school years, they must learn to become their own service coordinators, which makes their active involvement in transition planning all the more important. In short, services that were once delivered almost exclusively by special educators are now seen as part of a "results-oriented process" (IDEA, 2004) outlined in a cohesive plan, which requires the participation of academic teachers, school support personnel, related service providers, community service providers, and especially the student and family.

Educational Reform

For more than two decades, educational reformers have asserted that schools must prepare students to live and work in the world beyond the classroom. While

Reform, continued page 4

Inside This Issue

New Developments in Transition

3

Successful Transition Programs

8

Interview with Alexa Posny, Part 2

10

Program Profile: Student Internships

16

Insert: WorkAbility I

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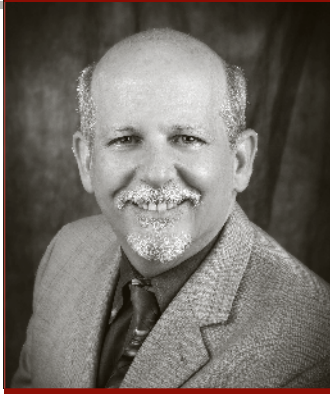
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“Begin with the end in mind.” “Where do you want to be in five years? In ten?” These and other sentiments reflect the theme of this issue of *The Special EDge*—the importance of attending to postschool outcomes early in each student’s educational career.

In the current and foreseeable economy, students with disabilities—already one of the most underemployed segments of the population and the group least likely to seek postsecondary education—are facing increasing competition for their place in college or careers. Their general education peers are entering these environments, as well. And displaced workers with years of experience and specialized skills are also vying for positions in the workforce.

How do parents and educators help students with

disabilities find their footing in this very competitive world?

The individualized education program (IEP) is central to all educational services and supports for students with disabilities. As each IEP is developed, it is critical to keep front and center the discussion of transition to ensure each student’s continual growth and development. Rather than only considering what a student needs in the moment or even in a year, we must envision what lies well beyond school and shape the IEP around that vision.

“Special education has been the forerunner of every good practice in education,” says Alexa Posny (page 10 of this issue). Along with the IEP, another of these leading good practices has been the transition plan for students with disabilities. In fact, the concept of transition planning is a foundation for Career Pathways and Linked Learning programs for all students as they move into college and careers. While helping to develop these plans, special educators must always keep in mind the intended outcome of education, ensure that transition plans are in place and functioning with fidelity as early as possible in a child’s schooling, and secure for students the kinds of rich and varied experiences that support an effective transition plan. Whether a postschool transition plan includes higher education, independent living, direct transition into a career, or something else entirely, we need to keep a student’s ultimate goal in mind and update and adjust movement towards those goals at every IEP meeting.

As part of their transition planning, students need also to participate in Career Pathways and Regional Occupational Programs to develop the kinds of skills necessary for postschool employment. Much of this focus is being incorporated into the common core standards recently adopted by the California State Board of Education. To date, special education has been involved in California’s work to develop these standards, thus ensuring that classroom work and activities are fully accessible and providing input into the development of assessments appropriate to all students. The Special Education Division’s continued involvement is critical as we lend our many years of experience to the process and ensure that all students, regardless of their specific needs, have the opportunity to fully participate in their education and receive, through that education, every best chance to realize a fulfilling adult life.

We believe that all students have the ability and the right to develop their talents during school so they can pursue their dreams afterwards. To help them do this, all educators at every step of the way must work with that end in mind.

The Special EDge is published three times each year by the Napa County Office of Education’s CalSTAT Project (California Services for Technical Assistance and Training). Funding is provided by the California Department of Education, Special Education Division, through contract number CN100006 with Napa County Office of Education (NCOE), and from federal funds, State Grants #H027A080116A. Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the U.S. Department of Education, the California Department of Education, or Napa County Office of Education; nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement.

Circulation: 51,000

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Informing and supporting parents, educators, and other service providers on special education topics, focusing on research-based practices, legislation, technical support, and current resources

New Developments in Transition for Students with Disabilities

The process of becoming an adult challenges most high school students, with or without disabilities. This transition to increased independence often comes with a fairly steep learning curve and often involves trial and error. The California Department of Education has for years provided a written guide for students with disabilities so that their experience of transitioning out of high school into the adult world—of postsecondary education, independent living, and the workforce—involves more learning and less trial and error. This guide—*Transition to Adult Living: An Information and Resource Guide*—has been designed also to help parents and teachers support students while following the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Transition law as set forth in IDEA has not changed since the guide was reissued in 2007; this version of the document remains current. And the three-part foundation of effective transition planning also remains the same: planning, educating, and collaborating. But the world of transition for young adults with disabilities has not stood still during recent years, particularly in two areas of practice and one of policy.

Change in the Field

New conclusions are being drawn about evidence-based practices for transition, and the field is becoming increasingly more sophisticated in its knowledge about the importance of professional development for teachers who work with students in transition. In addition, Indicator 13 of California's State Performance Plan—mandated by IDEA as a vehicle for reporting on the state's efforts to improve all educational services for students with disabilities—has placed new requirements on schools and districts to develop and execute transition plans and services within the larger individualized

education program (IEP) for each student. In response to these developments and others like them, a California Community of Practice (CoP) on Secondary Transition is working to establish regional and local CoPs to continue to ensure the widespread use of evidence-based practices, improve teacher preparation and professional development, and generally strengthen transition efforts throughout the state—as well as to guide the creation of a supplement to *Transition to Adult Living*.

Evidence-based Practices

Effective plans for the future depend upon a set of factors that are as complex and unique as each individual student: talents, interests, abilities, hopes, dreams, financial and geographic realities . . . the list goes on. Thus, every single transition plan, if well designed, looks like no other. How exactly do educators support

students in this process? The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) offers help. NSTTAC has reviewed thousands of studies of transition strategies and selected those proven to be effective. The center has organized these chosen practices by instructional approach (e.g., using backwards chaining, check and connect, response prompting, visual displays, community-based instruction, etc.) and by category (i.e., student-focused planning, student development, family involvement, and program structure). From this work, NSTTAC has created a compendium of 33 evidence-based transition practices. The description of each practice includes extensive lesson plans, along with an explanation of how the practice relates to common core standards and to Indicator 13.

Since there are many possible approaches to providing effective transition services for students, NSTTAC also offers two rating scales to help teachers identify their own evidence-based tools and curricula and to guide them in their instructional decision making.

Professional Development

Committed, effective teachers are critical to the educational success of all students but perhaps even more critical for students with disabilities. Their dropout rates are higher, their challenges often greater, and their opportunities generally more limited than those of their peers without disabilities. And their sense of success or failure is frequently more tentative and fragile. Having even one knowledgeable, committed teacher who believes in, advocates for, and supports them can make a significance difference for these students, especially as they transition into adulthood.

Professional development that concentrates on improving the focus and use of assessment can promote teacher effectiveness and improve student outcomes.

Developments, continued page 6

Featured Resources

Transition to Adult Living: An Information and Resource Guide

Available at
www.calstat.org/publications/pdfs/Transition_final_08.pdf.

Evidence-based Practices

The 33 evidence-based transition practices identified by NSTTAC are available at
www.nsttac.org/content/evidence-based-practices.

Rating Scales

NSTTAC's two rating scales for identifying evidence-based tools and curricula are available at
www.nsttac.org/content/guide-determining-level-evidence-practices-and-curricula.

specific details have varied over time, the recommendations of these reformers have consistently included an emphasis on actively engaging all students in developing the skills they need for their next environment: college, career, independent living, and often some combination of all three.

Through a series of legal challenges and administrative decisions, special education law now places the responsibility for the transition of individuals with disabilities—once assumed almost exclusively by special education divisions—squarely on the shoulders of school districts. This evolution serves to position special education as a critical partner—not sole provider—in developing effective transition services for students with disabilities. But there is another twist to the evolution of transition services. Several current general education reform efforts, designed to improve the entire system of education, are embracing transition as critically important for all students. These broader systems of reform have the potential to advance transition under IDEA and create new value for the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that special educators and transition specialists have honed over the years. Active engagement in these reform agendas is critical for special educators who hope to improve transition outcomes for youths with disabilities.

Cradle to College and Career

One of the recent national reform efforts in general education that have opened the way for transition planning to be more widely understood and embraced is the Obama administration's Cradle to College and Career agenda. Also known as P-16/P-20 (preschool through college), this initiative focuses on an intentional, year-to-year development of student capacities that leads to successful transitions across all age spans. P-16/P-20 has had many

supporters and many iterations. Common among every version, however, is an underlying belief that the potential for success in adult life begins before kindergarten. When students are given the opportunity to advance successfully through an educational system that is aligned across grades, with carefully designed instruction and integrated transition supports at every step of the way, they are better equipped for college and career.

By grounding themselves in the emerging ideas of reform, special educators may find new allies and new opportunities.

For transition personnel, this concept brings new questions. To what extent are we aware of the early and elementary education provided to the students we meet as adolescents? Do we hold conversations with our colleagues to learn about the instructional and behavioral/social supports available throughout a child's school years? From the student's perspective, is the system coherent and designed to provide the right instruction and the right supports at the right time? These questions may serve not only to guide individual practice but to direct program change and system improvement at all levels.

Breaking Ranks

The overarching view of transition set forth by Cradle to College and Career is reinforced by the reform initiative of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). In its ongoing work to examine ways to change school culture and create sustainable systems that

support all students, NASSP in 1996 challenged education leaders. *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* outlined three "touchstones" for reforming high schools: collaborative leadership, personalization, and a focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment to improve student performance. These touchstones align with IDEA's transition focus on shared responsibility, the role of youths, and academic and functional skills. In 2011, spurred by the understanding that secondary school reform must begin long before the secondary years, NASSP re-released *Breaking Ranks* as a school reform framework, reaffirming the value of the three touchstones and paying particular attention to transition points for all students.

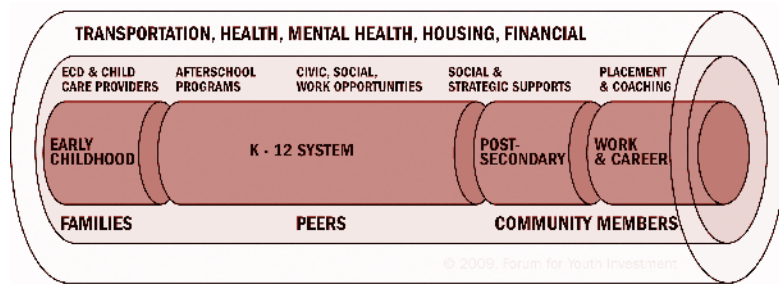
These touchstones offer new opportunities for dialogue within special education communities. The emphasis on personalization in particular provides new ways to explain and garner support for self-determination and self-advocacy in the curriculum, giving the individualized education program (IEP) new meaning as a personalized plan of services. Special education efforts must focus on ensuring that youths can perform the skills they need in their next environment: how to be their own advocates, service coordinators and providers, and even their own teachers as part of a habit of continuous learning. If school and transition efforts are compliant but do not help students—and their family members, when appropriate—develop these skills, the efforts are pointless.

Ready by 21

Another framework—Ready by 21—is also garnering wide-ranging support, particularly among school superintendents. A collaborative project of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and several other high-profile groups, Ready by 21 is designed to reframe the school's role in readying students for successful adulthood. Using an analogy of pipes and insulation, this initiative describes an educational pipeline based on academic rigor and community involvement that

Involved Youths: The belief that youths with disabilities are leaders in their own lives underlies important and constructive changes in transition practice, in education reform, and in social service policy. These changes require schools, agencies, and sometimes even family members to envision a new way to have relationships with their young adults.

The Ready by 21 Insulated Education Pipeline



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helps students reach achievement levels that prepare them for life after high school. Ready by 21 suggests that such a pipeline is “insulated” by incorporating academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and career supports to ensure success for all students throughout the P–16 system. This framework also addresses what, for special educators, has been described as a forced choice between academics and the social-emotional-practical skills important in transition. By focusing on both, Ready by 21 provides a way to think about how services can be integrated and configured to support each other—and to best support all students.

Common Core Standards

The “pipeline” image is widely used today as a metaphor for education’s critical role in equipping students to become citizens and workers. Increasingly, policymakers link indicators along this pipeline to the future of the U.S. economy and our democratic way of life, asking important questions: Will all students—including students with disabilities—have the academic preparation they need to engage in the challenging careers of the twenty-first century? Will enough students be prepared for well-paying careers in the U.S.? Will students have the critical thinking skills they need to become responsible citizens? The Common Core State Standards have been developed in response to these questions. Designed to establish continuity across state education standards and to align student goals with international benchmarks, these standards are being adopted by the majority of states. They offer new ways to conceptualize subject

matter content by linking specific content knowledge with thinking skills and practical application.

Implications

Special education and transition service providers will feel the impact of these initiatives. Some specialized services that are now provided only to students with disabilities may one day be provided to all students as part of general education. If effective transition becomes an expectation for all students, special educators will become important partners. For example, transition research has supported work-based learning, but general educators have often found it difficult to find the time to incorporate this approach into their practice. Special educators have been involved in work-based learning for 30 years. Within these new visions of reform, students could learn beyond the classroom and beyond the school day. Learning “any time and anywhere” is an idea that is being implemented in several states and will be discussed in every state very soon. By grounding themselves in the emerging ideas of reform, special educators may find new allies and new opportunities.

Reform Resources

Common Core State Standards

www.corestandards.org/

Ready by 21

<http://forumfyi.org/ready-21>

Breaking Ranks

www.nassp.org/Content/158/BRFrameworkExecSummary.pdf

Changing Special Education

The unique needs of some students with disabilities will always demand knowledgeable practitioners who represent the particular interests of these students in both policy and practice. However, new trends may require special educators to rethink some currently accepted ideas about transition under IDEA. To date, transition services are mandated at age 16. This service level may soon be eclipsed by national reform agendas that stress the importance of transition across the age span. If the model for all students in Cradle to College and Career includes the development of appropriate degrees of independence and career awareness from the early grades onward, can transition services for students with disabilities begin at 16? All special educators know that a comprehensive and coherent plan for transition that begins in preschool and advances intentionally each year is critical to transition success. Current reform agendas help to make that case.

New Relationships

Special educators are part of a long history of developing transition practices, and their experience gives them some unique insights. They have had the debates about academic and practical skills; they know how critical good teaching is to students’ academic success; they understand the connections between behavior and achievement; they are expert at personalizing instruction; and they are practiced in developing the youth voice as a critical component of effective service. If transition becomes a concerted goal for all of secondary general education—in collaboration with special education—it will require a blending of efforts that too often operate on parallel tracks. But are the relationships in place that will bring the expertise of special educators to the table?

Communities of Practice (CoP) offer an opportunity to build these relationships. A CoP is a group of people who care deeply about an issue and agree to interact regularly to learn and improve their practice. California is one of nine

Reform, continued page 7

According to the National Council on Disability, “statewide assessments currently in use measure only academic skills (as required by the No Child Left Behind Act), but it is clear that the public, especially parents, would like assessments that measure more than just academic skills. For students with disabilities who might also be able to express themselves in ways other than academic knowledge, this [focus on measuring other kinds of skills] could be very helpful.” This broader range of skills includes workplace knowledge “that will help all students be more successful in careers and engaged as civic members of our society.” As well, “assessments need to be used by teachers and school staff on a more regular basis to provide feedback on instruction. Teaching and professional development programs should help teachers learn how to do this.” The council calls for a “new generation of assessments” that are appropriate for the largest number of diverse students, measure more than academic skills, can be used more effectively as an instructional management tool, and result in a reduction in the number of students who take alternative assessments.

In general, the influence that teachers have on the lives of all students makes quality professional development profoundly important. A number of topics have long been recognized as the core of effective transition programs: student development, student-focused planning, program structure, family involvement, and interagency collaboration. Schools and districts cannot go wrong by devot-

ing professional development opportunities to any of these quality indicators of effective transition planning. But while the content of professional development is important, the mode of delivery may be equally critical to its success. For many schools, teacher inservice training often consists of “some of this on one day; some of that on another.” Yet research has proven the nearly complete ineffectiveness of this kind of approach (in some circles called “spray and pray”). This finding comes as no surprise. Change is difficult—even when adults want to break out of habitual but less-effective ways of doing things—and it requires a concerted effort over time.

But research also points to a solution. Relatively new and evidence-based theories of adult learning demonstrate that professional development can be effective, according to the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, if school administrators and teachers are committed to working for extended periods of time (at least one year) to change practices in ways that reflect specific principles. These principles require professional development to do the following:

1. Align with school goals, state and district standards and assessments, and other professional learning activities, including formative teacher evaluation.
2. Include opportunities for the active learning of new teaching strategies.
3. Provide opportunities for collaboration among teachers.
4. Incorporate embedded follow-up and continuous feedback.

Researchers also recommend that teachers be directly involved in planning professional development activities. Finally, any professional development should be “deep and lasting.” This translates into learning less but learning it better.

Indicator 13

Given the importance of effective transition services, the federal government has written Indicator 13 into California’s State Performance Plan. This indicator places specific requirements on transition services for students with disabilities. When these students turn 16—earlier

Featured Resource
Indicator 13 Checklists

To help schools, districts, and the state collect data to meet the requirements of Indicator 13, NSTTAC has developed two checklists, approved by the Office of Special Education Programs and available at

<http://nstattac.appstate.edu/content/nstattac-i-13-checklist>.

if appropriate—they should have IEPs that contain and involve the following research-based elements in order to ensure positive, postschool outcomes:

1. An appropriate, measurable post-secondary goal or goals that cover education or training, employment, and, as needed, independent living.
2. Annual updating of these goals.
3. Measurable goals that are based on age-appropriate transition assessments.
4. Transition services that enable the student to meet his or her goals.
5. Transition services that include courses of study that will reasonably enable the student to meet his or her goals.
6. Annual IEP goals that relate to the student’s needs for transition services.

In addition, schools need to be able to show evidence that the student was invited to the IEP team meeting where transition services were discussed and, if appropriate, that a representative of any participating agency (such as the Department of Rehabilitation, the Department of Developmental Services/Regional Centers, the Social Security Administration, Mental Health Services, or Independent Living Centers) also was invited to the IEP team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or the student, if he or she has reached the age of majority [20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B)].

Indicator 13 requires schools and districts to collect data that shows they are complying with these requirements. In addition to ensuring the implementation of a thorough and effective transition process, the data will help to identify

Featured Resource

High-quality Professional Development for All: Effectively Allocating Resources

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. 2011. Available at www.tqsource.org/publications/HighQualityProfessionalDevelopment.pdf.

Additional Resources

Improving Educational Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

The National Council on Disability. 2004. Available at www.educationalpolicy.org/pdf/NCD.pdf.

Examples of Evidence-based Models of Interagency Transition Teams

The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition. 2004. Available at www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/teams/example_PA.asp.

effective practices and thus contribute to the continuous improvement of transition services in the state.

Communities of Practice

California's Community of Practice (CoP) on Secondary Transition is currently working to support improved transition efforts throughout the state in areas of evidence-based practices, professional development, and the requirements of Indicator 13. Co-facilitated by the California Department of Rehabilitation and the California Department of Education, the group formed a leadership team in May 2011 and developed a state action plan that includes the following goals:

1. Develop and sustain a leadership team that identifies priorities, develops policy, and creates a statewide structure for disseminating information, training, and technical assistance at the state, regional, and local levels.
2. Collect and disseminate evidence-based resources to all stakeholders.
3. Create a data map that shows data and resources across the 11 county superintendent regions of the state.
4. Design and conduct a needs-assessment survey that identifies what schools and programs need to ensure effective transition and that identifies model programs in the state that are successful in their transition efforts.

5. From key topics that surface in the survey, identify training modules that will improve outcomes for youth.
6. Align policy and legislation with evidenced-based transition practices and predictors.

7. Increase family involvement and shared leadership in the implementation of evidence-based practices. The state leadership team is also working to identify individuals who are interested in developing regional CoPs. The state team will then work with these regional teams to promote the goals listed above through training and technical assistance. The regional teams will in turn develop local leadership teams that will ensure that students in their area schools are receiving the quality services that will prepare them for adult life.

Anyone interested in becoming involved in communities of practice that focus on transition should contact Jill Larson, California Department of Education, at 916-327-0866 or at jl Larson@cde.ca.gov; or John Kimura, Department of Rehabilitation, at 916-558-5425 or at jskimura@dor.ca.gov. ♦

Reform

continued from page 5

states involved in the National Community of Practice on Transition, facilitated by the IDEA Partnership at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. This CoP includes interagency teams from the nine states; twelve national organizations representing general

View an interactive version of *The Special EDge* online at www.calstat.org/infoPublications.html.

educators, special educators, families, and youths; and seven federally supported technical assistance centers. Collectively, the CoP is focused on transition across the age span, from birth to adulthood, and provides opportunities to articulate common interests and pursue shared goals in the evolving landscape of transition. Together, the CoP members explore transition from multiple perspectives and help each other see new opportunities for improving services at every level. California is also developing its own community of practice for transition that will give educators an opportunity to connect with others and learn at the state level.

People listen to and learn from those with whom they have a relationship. Change is difficult, and when it is all around, these relationships become more important than ever. As transition moves forward in the national agenda, relationships with committed colleagues at every level become critical to efforts to improve transition services for students with disabilities—and for all students. These services support the essential goal of public education: to prepare children for citizenship, advanced learning, and the workforce. In California and across the nation, special educators can be important catalysts in this work. ♦

The California Community of Practice on Transition consists of agencies, organizations, and stakeholder groups that communicate regularly, share information, and work together to improve practice around transition. Many partners join the CoP to work on specific issues. The following are regular members:

WorkAbility
Fiesta Educativa
Tarjan Center/UCLA
California Youth Leadership Forum
California Teachers' Association (CTA)
California Department of Rehabilitation
Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAS)
California Health Investment Improvement Program
California Services for Technical Assistance and Training
California Department of Education-Special Education Division



Models and Resources for Transition Services

Numerous programs in California are successful in their efforts to support students' transition into adult life. Many of these programs share their resources with other educators, and many welcome visitors who aspire to develop their own successful transition services. The programs described below represent some of these quality efforts, and they all share a number of characteristics. They all help students develop skills in decision making, self-advocacy, money management, and independent living. Their students all learn about jobs and careers. Most of these programs provide some type of supported employment through such initiatives as WorkAbility I (see insert) and the Transition Partnership Program (TPP). They all involve parents and community businesses and organizations in transition activities; and they all work to ensure a smooth transition for students from school to employment, higher education, and independent living. Their ultimate goal is the same: to empower individuals with disabilities to reach their highest potential in all aspects of adult life.

Transition to Adult Living: Washington USD

Transition to Adult Living, an award-winning program in the Washington Unified School District in West Sacramento, serves students 18–22 years old with intellectual/developmental disabilities. As the program's designers interpreted the legal mandate to educate students in an appropriate and least restrictive environment, they envisioned a community setting where other young adults without disabilities live and work. As a result, Transition to Adult Living operates out of a small house in Sacramento that “replicates a real-world living experience,” says program director Diana Blackmon. “While students don't actually sleep there, they take care of the yard, shop, and cook. They learn how to manage a home and be good neighbors.” The program also places students in a variety of work settings where they learn employment skills. And since they commute to work and run errands exclusively on public transportation, students also learn how to travel independently.

Through carefully coordinated work-based activities and community-based instruction, students are taught how to make decisions about where they ultimately want to live, work, and play. Each

student leaves the program at age 22 with a plan in place for living, working, and participating in community life—while maintaining a seamless connection to adult services.

Even though the program is not on a school campus, it “continues intensive functional community and workplace literacy and mathematics training,” says Blackmon. While students are working on their reading and math skills in the program, they have opportunities to apply those skills when they are out shopping, working, and commuting.

Transition to Adult Living welcomes visitors. To read more about the program, go to www.calstat.org/leadershipSites/washingtonUSD/about.html. To arrange for a site visit, contact Diana Blackmon; phone 916 375-7600, ext.1351; e-mail dblackmon@wusd.k12.ca.us.

TRACE: Transition Resources for Adult Community Education

Another award-winning transition site, TRACE in the San Diego Unified School District, is unique in its service to all students with disabilities, including students with learning and emotional

disabilities. Any student with a disability 18–22 years of age who has not earned a high school diploma is eligible for TRACE. And a high school diploma is what many of the program's students want. TRACE has two teachers hired specifically to support young adults in this effort—and to great effect. Out of 120 students last year, 70 earned their diplomas, and many who have not yet “aged out” of TRACE (at 22) are still working to earn one.

The program bases its efforts around person-centered planning, which directs all transition activities and supports around the students' goals, talents, and needs. “It is our goal to give students experiences and opportunities so they can learn and make decisions about how they want to live their lives,” says TRACE resource teacher Colleen Harmon. Person-centered planning extends beyond the individual student. TRACE staff also work with the adults in a student's life: parents, co-workers, and supervisors. The teachers and aides help students learn how to use these individuals as supports and how to advocate for themselves on the job and in their communities.

TRACE is not located on a high school campus. Students and staff meet at neighborhood recreation centers, area libraries, and portable classrooms on three community college campuses. As a result, most of the overhead costs of maintaining a building and employing support staff are eliminated, allowing the program to use more of its financial resources to provide student services, such as subsidized

Models, continued page 9

Paula Kohler: Transition to Adult Living was inspired by Paula Kohler's research, which highlights the importance of student-focused planning, student development, school- and work-based learning, interagency collaboration, and family involvement. Kohler's highly regarded *Taxonomy for Transition Programming: A Model for Planning, Organizing, and Evaluating Transition Education, Services, and Programs* is available at <http://homepages.wmich.edu/~koblerpl/pdf/Taxonomy.pdf>.

salaries for employment.

Teachers and students at TRACE use technology to further their goals, and they are seeing “amazing results with iPads, especially for students with disabilities like autism,” says Harmon. The program also uses technology to support young adults with disabilities who are in jail. While “teachers go up to the jail once a week” to visit these students, says Harmon, the teachers are also Skyping students in jail several times a week “so they can get to know the teachers well, develop relationships, and get connected to the program. This helps to give them a sense of what’s possible when they get out—something other than a gang.”

The program has four rehabilitation specialists who work with students with mental and physical health care needs. TRACE has seen a “huge increase in the need for mental health supports,” says Harmon. “Our rehab specialists work with these students to get them to their appointments. We provide one-on-one counseling; we do what we can to help them get stable so they can begin to focus on getting jobs and being independent and successful in their communities.”

TRACE welcomes visitors. To read more about the program, go to www.calstat.org/leadershipSites/tracelabout.html. To arrange a site visit, contact Colleen Harmon at TRACE; phone 619-574-1073, ext 2118; or e-mail charmon@sandi.net.

Whittier Unified School District

Multiple-award-winning Career Connections in the Whittier Union High School District also works with all students with IEPs within the Whittier Area Cooperative Special Education Program. As with TRACE, person-centered planning is the keystone of Career Connections’ transition efforts. Program director Richard Rosenberg and his staff focus on discovering “where a person is coming from, where this person is going, and what he or she wants for a life plan.” The program is

committed to integrating transition efforts into all aspects of schooling for students with disabilities. “Another of our unique strengths,” adds Rosenberg, “is in having SSA [Social Security Administration] benefits planners on the transition team. Their knowledge allows us to help students and families understand that it is always better to work and earn money, even when on Social Security.”

Formal transition at Career Connections begins in middle school—earlier than the mandate in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires a transition plan to be in place when a student turns 16—and continues through adulthood. “I loved when IDEA said transition starts at 14,” admits Rosenberg. But he is not allowing the revised mandate to change how he does business. In fact, he believes that “transition starts neonatal; that’s when parents often discover they will have a child with a disability, and the expectations start to kick in. Unfortunately, people are often tempted to have lower expectations for individuals with disabilities. We work hard to remove the ‘they can only do this’ mentality. We run our program with an attitude of possibility and risk taking. There are so many great opportunities for these students.”

Career Connections welcomes visitors. To read more about the program, go to www.calstat.org/leadershipSites/wbittierHighSchoolDistrict/about.html. To arrange for a site visit, contact Richard Rosenberg; phone 562-698-8121, ext.1250; or e-mail Richard.rosenberg@wuhd.org.

San Juan Unified School District: Transition from School to Adult Life

San Juan Unified School District’s (SJUSD) transition program also starts with students in middle school, extending through high school and until students graduate or turn 22. The program focuses as much on students with mild-to-moderate disabilities as it does on students with moderate-to-severe disabilities. Program director Julia Arreguin

believes that “while students’ needs are different” across the various disability categories, “the need for intensity in service is consistent.”

SJUSD is the first district in the Sacramento area to implement Project Search (www.projectsearch.us), a one-year internship program that works to secure competitive employment for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. SJUSD just started Project Search last year and currently supports ten students who will spend one year rotating through a variety of internships in a hospital setting.

Throughout its transition services, SJUSD places particular emphasis on workplace standards. When students find employment, they receive regular written performance evaluations that are tied to the career-technical standards in the SCANS, work-ready criteria developed by the U.S. Department of Labor. If a student experiences difficulty on the job, a job coach helps the student address the problem and improve job performance.

SJUSD is looking ahead. Anticipating a reduction in the transition services provided by regional centers for students younger than 22 with developmental disabilities, SJUSD is building capacity to provide all of its 18-to-22-year-olds with a quality community transition program. To accomplish this, San Juan Unified is redesigning one of its schools to house a secondary program that focuses on transition for students with developmental disabilities age 16 to 22. Students will spend most of their time in the community, concurrently enrolled in courses at the local community college, for example, and engaged in job development activities, with the goal of securing

Models, continued page 12

The Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS)

defines the skills that young people need to meet the demands of the workplace. The SCANS report is available at <http://wdr.doleta.gov/SCANS/wbatwork/wbatwork.pdf>.

OSER's Alexa Posny Hopeful for Educational Progress

The interview that follows is the second half of a conversation between Alexa Posny, Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, and educational consultant Geri West. The first half of this interview, which took place in April 2011 and is exclusive to The Special EDge, appeared in the summer 2011 issue. The overall focus was on how special education is positioned within the context of general education. Here Dr. Posny discusses approaches for greater collaboration among all educators, IDEA and ESEA reauthorizations, common core standards, and teacher quality.

West: How do you see universal design for learning and response to intervention as support for collaboration between general education and special education?

Posny: In Kansas* we embraced response to intervention, early intervening services, universal design for learning, and positive behavior interventions and supports. This is our alphabet soup—RtI, EIS, UDL, PBIS. We put these into a multi-tiered system of supports. All of them help us meet the needs of any child who is struggling, whenever that child is struggling. We do not have to wait to put a label on him or her, whether it be a label of disability or disadvantage or disengagement—that doesn't make any difference. We provide whatever a child needs whenever he or she needs it.

We designed UDL right from the get-go so that [in the classroom] we first offer the information in multiple formats, so we allow the kids to respond [to the material] in multiple ways. We're not only honoring their learning differences but using those differences to help everyone learn. EIS allows us to

* Before her current appointment, Posny was Kansas Commissioner of Education, and prior to that she was the Kansas State Director of Special Education.

intervene as early as possible. RtI allows us to provide those intensive interventions that are needed, and the positive behavioral interventions and supports allow us to get at the social and affective side. This is the complete package. I can't see how we can do one without the other.

West: It's all great in theory. But collaboration between early childhood programs and special education can be complicated because we have infants and toddlers and preschoolers who aren't seen as school kids yet. What are some of your ideas about what could be done differently to support early intervention and prevention, especially the multi-tiered system you were discussing, particularly for children with mild-to-moderate disabilities?

Posny: It does create complications. We have an at-risk program [in Kansas] for the three-, four-, and five-year olds, [which] allowed us at least to be able to expand so that we had general ed peers and models [for children with disabilities] as well. That helps because then the schools are at least set up to provide some of those supports and have a program [established]. We also work very hard with all the other early programs that exist—Head Start, Even Start—to see if we could begin to blend them together. The problem was that the state funding formula gets in the way because it disallows you from paying one person if they are working with kids who are not identified in the particular program. So I would just tell districts, "Don't tell me what you're doing. Just do what's right for kids."

In terms of the budget, a fifth assurance was added to the four covered by **Race to the Top**: early learning, so there will be money for the first time from the federal level to provide early learning opportunities. Our advisory commission—which in addition to myself includes people from OESE

[Office of Elementary and Secondary Education], Title I, HHS [Department of Health and Human Services], OMB [Office of Management and Budget]—meets every other month to talk about what we want to do for early learning. We're trying to set the example to say we need to work together to meet the needs of all of our kids, regardless of what the funding stream may or may not be. It's especially to the advantage of our kids with mild-to-moderate disabilities. When kids with disabilities are with their peers, they learn to a much higher level because the expectations are so much higher. These kids blossom. And we need to catch them long before they even start school.

The most important piece of research that I cite over and over compares kids from professional families with kids who live in poverty. In the course of an hour, a child in a professional family hears over 2,100 words; a child who lives in poverty hears a little over 600. One-third the number of words. Big difference. What I always tell people is that kids cannot learn to read words they have never heard. Language is so critically important, and it's important for absolutely everyone. We can't wait until they're five or six when they first enter the kindergarten door. They have lost the most important years of their lives.

The other piece is the infant-toddler program. Because it had crossed the threshold with the ARRA [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act] money, Maryland for the first time had additional dollars that were given to allow the state to continue its 0–3 programs for the three-, four-, and five-year-olds. The results that Maryland has seen for the children of parents who opted to stay in the infant-toddler program through the age of 5 have been nothing short of phenomenal. And there are other models that allow us to continue to work with the families within the

Going Deeper

Social and affective side:

For more about the importance of the social and emotional foundations of learning, go to <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>.

Complications: Public schools by law provide educational services to typically developing children ages 5–18. Public schools by law provide special education services to children with disabilities ages 0–22. Thus, at each end of the age spectrum, there are children for whom the public schools have no “general education” services or placements. This requires public schools to collaborate with agencies that serve typically developing 0–5 year olds and 18–22 year olds.

Race to the Top: Current information about this source of funding can be found at www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html.

Natural environment: This term refers to settings that are natural or normal for children without disabilities, such as home or preschool. Information about the importance of education in natural environments for children with disabilities can be found

at www.coachinginearlychildhood.org/nlepractices.php

natural environment. There are some great ideas out there. I hope we can continue to see more of this in the future.

West: What are your hopes for the next reauthorization of IDEA?

Posny: A lot of that reauthorization is going to be based on the reauthorization of ESEA [Elementary and Secondary Education Act]. Students with disabilities are absolutely a part of ESEA, and

in ESEA, I would like to see RtI, EIS, UDL, and PBIS because they’re good for all kids. Those things that become aligned under ESEA—the accountability provisions, what it means to be “highly effective”—will determine what’s in IDEA.

So when I look at the next reauthorization of IDEA—well, I’ll be honest with you—I think that special education is the forerunner of every good practice that occurs in education. So I look to us in terms of “where can we turn next” to find out what really works and how we can be more effective in working with kids. I also look to us to really concentrate efforts on kids with significant disabilities because that is where we are so different from everyone else. People in general ed don’t have an idea of what we deal with and the complexity of trying to help people with significant disabilities. Some people, once upon a time, thought this group of students couldn’t learn anything. The more we work with these kids to figure out what can be done, the more we’ll only strengthen our [supports for] mild-to-moderate kids and our kids who just seem to struggle. So I’m hoping to see more effective practices that way. And I’m hoping we can see more and more collaboration—see ourselves as a system of education rather than in silos.

West: What value do you place on the movement among states to adopt common core standards?

Posny: When I was the Kansas Commissioner of Education, I was in on the discussions from the beginning about whether we are ready to talk about common core standards. Personally, I say that it’s the right place to go. As separate states we spend a lot of time developing our own standards, our own assessments. I think we could be smarter in knowing there is a common set of standards so that any child coming out of Kansas and moving to Massachusetts, for instance, would be learning to the same level. It doesn’t mean that there isn’t a local curriculum; how it’s taught and what the content is will be locally defined. But the standards we want to reach should be common. The same thing with assess-

ments. We spend a lot of time, money, and resources developing assessments. And every time the standards change you have to redo it all. It’s never ending. Now the time, effort, and some of the resources can be put into the formative benchmark assessments, which are the instructional tools that will lead to that summative measure. I think that all the way around we can now concentrate on the inputs, the instructional part—what we need to be doing to help kids—rather than putting so much into the design.

West: Is there anything else that comes to mind when you think about special ed within the context of general ed?

Posny: One of the pieces that I’ve thrown out, especially to the deans of the schools of special ed, is how do we define a “highly effective special educator”? Because that definition can’t necessarily be tied to the assessment results of the kids, especially when we’re talking about our kids with more significant disabilities. And then how do we define—and how do we help school systems understand the great value of—our related services personnel? The social workers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language pathologists, and everyone else—they add so much value to what a child is learning. How does that become part of the performance evaluation of all staff?

I also don’t want assessments of student performance to become a disincentive for general educators so that they do not want kids with disabilities in their class; these kids are learning and they are doing well. That’s where I tend to get into the student growth model where, especially for kids with disabilities, we could look at their individual growth and establish a challenging trajectory that is real and possible for the student.

Those are some of the questions that I don’t have answers for. I’m looking to the system and asking, “How are you having these discussions? What kinds of things are you thinking about? What are you coming up with?” Somehow we’ve got to work through some of these issues. And it’s not going to be easy. ♦

who had the background and knew our needs; we could provide her with the opportunity to do more work,” says WorkAbility Administrator Ana Marsh.

And that’s how Jahaira found her way to the sixth floor and to her own cubicle this past summer. She was supervised by Stephanie Papas, School Health Education Consultant, in a unit headed by Administrator Tom Herman.

“We were told her skill level,” says Linda Davis-Alldritt, the school nurse consultant who set up Jahaira’s work schedule. “And we asked staff what tasks they needed done. This was our first opportunity to have a WorkAbility student. I believe in WorkAbility as a model, and this was an opportunity we didn’t want to pass up.”

“We thought that we would be helping someone,” says Herman. “We ended up with much more than we gave. We were very impressed by [Jahaira’s] willingness, her desire to work with us. Our interactions with each other were positively affected by her presence. She has an infectious good humor and a subtle playfulness combined with earnestness. And once she knew what needed to be done, she had a system that was very organized.”

Papas worked with Jahaira on basic office skills —“checking in with me, signing out, always letting someone know when you are leaving. But we tried to make the job fun, too.” That included trips to Starbucks and a nearby farmers’ market.

Jahaira was learning more than office skills and routine, though. She traveled alone from her South Sacramento home to her job by light rail and walked the four blocks from the train to CDE. Her communication skills were improving, too. “She understands completely,” says

Herman. “The job didn’t require verbal skills, and her default is a one-word answer, but we worked on basic conversation skills.” “With comfort comes conversation,” says Hoffman.

Perhaps no one has seen the changes Jahaira has experienced in the transition programs more clearly than her family. “She can do a lot of things we didn’t know she could do,” says Ada Martinez, Jahaira’s mother. “She learned to go by herself on the train; I was afraid of her going by herself, but she did a good job. Her communication definitely has improved, and before she used to be very nervous when there were a lot of people around or a lot of noise. Now she can shop by herself or with a friend.”

Jahaira has come a long way as a result of her participation in the internship and in WorkAbility. But so has the internship program, which is now called the Transitional Work Experience Program. Given the positive responses to the effort’s first year, Hoffman is aiming for a class of 30 students this year. “We’ll place a couple at a time in different departments at CDE,” she says.

And what does the future hold for Jahaira Martinez? Now in her last year of school, she is working two days a week at the Department of Developmental Services and taking a yoga class at Sacramento City College. Hoffman says Jahaira is “work eligible,” and the two of them are talking about what will come next when she ages-out of the program at 22. Jahaira is clear about one thing: she’d like to have a job. And there are a fair number of people who now know she deserves one. ♦

Models

continued from page 9

supported or competitive employment after they turn 22.

SJUSD welcomes visitors. To read more about the program, go to www.calstat.org/leadership/Sites/sanjuanUSD/about.html.

To arrange a site visit, contact Julia Arreguin; phone 916-331-4523, or e-mail jarreguin@sanjuan.edu.

New Transition Strand

Educational innovators featured in this article—Diana Blackmon, Richard Rosenberg, and Christine Suh—will be giving presentations on transition at the CARS+ convention in February. See page 15 for details.

Green Dot Schools

All Green Dot Public Schools, a group of 19 urban charter schools in the greater Los Angeles area, focus on preparing students for college. When first hired as resource specialist/special education coordinator for Green Dot, Christine Suh was immediately absorbed by “the challenge of meeting the needs of all students with disabilities within a college prep environment, especially in the area of transition.” Green Dot placed Suh on a two-year special assignment to develop a structure for helping these students access the general education curriculum while providing transition services to prepare them for postsecondary life.

Suh researched what other states were doing in the area of IDEA-directed transition services, and she uncovered a wealth of information and resources. Together with a transition committee made up of teachers, program specialists, and psychologists, she designed grade-level transition benchmarks for education/training, employment, independent living, and self-advocacy, addressing the needs of both students with mild/moderate disabilities and students with moderate/severe disabilities. The resulting monthly, grade-level lesson plans offer a realistic workload for teachers serving students with disabilities who are primarily educated in general education environments. In all, Suh and her transition committee have developed a community resource guide, a model transition portfolio, a transition assessment manual, and monthly grade-level lessons. ♦

Green Dot makes all of its transition materials available at www.animopd.org/Transition_Resources.html.

Looking for Parent Support Centers?

For a directory, go to www.calstat.org/parentcenters.html

Why buy...

Are They Really Ready to Work?

The Conference Board. 2006. This document provides the employer's perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century U.S. workforce. It includes a Workforce Readiness Report Card that offers a snapshot of those areas in which new workers are either "deficient" or "excellent" in the areas that employers rate "very important." The book is also available in its entirety online at www.p21.org/documents/FINAL_REPORT_PDF09-29-06.pdf. 62 pages. Call #23938.

Engaging and Empowering Families in Secondary Transition: A Practitioner's Guide

Donna Wandry and Amy Pleet. 2009. This guide includes tools for assessing the effectiveness of practices that promote positive postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities. It provides schools and agencies with planning tools and strategies to foster family participation in the transition process as collaborators in the IEP, instructors in students' emergent independence, peer mentors, evaluators, decision makers, and systems-change agents. 160 pages. Call #24209.

Essentials of Transition Planning

Paul Wehman. 2011. This book features the essentials of effective transition planning for educators and service providers who support students with disabilities in the transition process. The book addresses the process at both individual and community levels, with a focus on developing individualized curricula to strengthen students' academic and functional skills while improving access to the general curriculum, writing and implementing effective transition plans within the individualized education program, overcoming barriers to service coordination,

The RiSE Library

(Resources in Special Education) lends materials to California residents, who pay only for return postage. The items on this page represent a sample of the library's holdings. Go to www.php.com/services/libraries to search complete listings. To order materials, phone or e-mail RiSE librarian Judy Bower: 408-727-5775; judy@php.com.

engaging students who have more significant support needs, making the most of community agencies and resources, determining eligibility for vocational services and funding, and more. It also provides guidelines, examples, and ready-to-use checklists and tools. 200 pages. Call #24210.

New Multimedia

My Future My Plan: A Transition Planning Resource for Life After High School—For Students with Disabilities and Their Families

Dana Sheets and Ed Gold. 2004. This DVD tells the stories of three students who overcame barriers to achieving their goals in life after high school through transition planning, positive attitudes, and self-advocacy. Developed by the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, this DVD may be used in home, school, and community settings. More information and sample materials from this resource are available at www.ncset.org/publications/mfmp.asp. 30-minute video and 300-page discussion guide. Call #24213 or 24214.

The Road Ahead: Transition to Adult Life for Persons with Disabilities

Keith Storey, Paul Bates, and Dawn Hunter. 2008. A compendium of guidance from 21 nationally recognized transition experts, this book offers strategies and ideas for improving the transition from school to work and adult life for youths with disabilities. It offers guidance on assessment and instructional strategies, career development, supported living, and postsecondary education. 271 pages. Call #24013.

Life Skill Lessons: 650 Ready-to-Use Transition Activities

Ellen McPeck Glisan. 2008. This well-organized, easy-to-implement, life skills program is designed for transition students with mild to moderate disabilities. The goal of each of the lessons provided is to instill in students a general awareness of an important life skill. Five categories of lessons align with the general curriculum: math, social studies, science/health, expressive literacy, and receptive literacy. Contents and sample pages can be seen at www.attainmentcompany.com/pdfs/bookSamples/LSL_Sample.pdf. 230 pages. Call #24211.

Think College! Postsecondary Education Options for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Meg Grigal and Debra Hart. 2003. This comprehensive resource examines today's postsecondary options for students with intellectual disabilities and suggests strategies for supporting them before, during, and after they decide to transition to college. The book addresses three current models for postsecondary education: inclusive individual supports; substantially separate, non-inclusive classes; and hybrid approaches. It includes a self-advocacy checklist, a program evaluation tool, sample student schedules, and more. 344 pages. Call #24212.

Internet Resources on Transition

For Educators

www.ncwd-youth.info/career-planning-begins-with-assessment

Career Planning Begins with Assessment: A Guide for Professionals Serving Youth with Educational and Career Development Challenges is a resource for individuals working within the workforce development system. It provides information on selecting career-related assessments and determining when to refer youth for additional assessment. It also addresses such issues as accommodations, ethics, the development of practical and effective policies, collaboration among programs, and navigating interagency assessment systems.

www.ncwd-youth.info/ld-guide
Charting the Course: Supporting the Career Development of Youth with Learning Disabilities was developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, which was charged with helping educators and other youth service professionals better understand issues related to learning disabilities so they can help young people with these disabilities develop individual strategies that will enable them to succeed in the workplace.

www.ndpc-sd.org/documents/Practice_Guides/CBI_Practice_Brief.pdf

Cognitive Behavioral Interventions: An Effective Approach to Help Students with Disabilities Stay in School

Questions or Concerns About Special Education?

Call Procedural Safeguards Referral Service: toll-free at 800-926-0648; video-phone (for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing) at 916-374-7182.

is a practice brief written to provide educators with information and practical approaches for implementing cognitive-behavioral interventions that reduce aggressive behaviors and dropout rates for students with disabilities.

www.ivrs.iowa.gov/Transition/BuildPartnershipsforCareerExploration.pdf

How to Build Partnerships for Career Exploration: Using Job Shadows to Explore the World of Work is a document that describes strategies for developing and implementing effective job-shadowing experiences for students with disabilities. The guide is written for high school personnel who want to plan and carry out a job-shadow day; and it describes the preparation involved, the job-shadow day itself, and follow-up activities, with a suggested task timeline that may be helpful as a planning tool.

www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transitionguide.html
Transition of Students with Disabilities to Postsecondary Education: A Guide for High School Educators is a document developed by the U.S. Department of Education that provides information for helping students navigate the application process for postsecondary education and prepare for the challenges and rewards of college life.

For Students and Families

www.ncwd-youth.info

PAS-Toolkit

Making the Move to Managing Your Own Personal Assistance Services (PAS): A Toolkit for Youth with Disabilities Transitioning to Adulthood is a document designed for young people with disabilities who are interested in learning how to manage their own personal assistance services. The document focuses on effective communication, time management, working with others, and professional relationships.

www.tknlyouth.info

Youth Transition Toolkit: A Guide for Young People with Disabilities Transitioning to Adulthood features a wealth of information and resources for youths involved in making decisions about their futures while transitioning into adulthood. Topics include finances, education, employment, independent living, and more, along with a section of tips for parents. The site is particularly geared to California residents.

For Everyone

www.ncset.org

The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) is a Web site dedicated to supporting transition opportunities for youth with disabilities. The site features information on transition planning, self-determination, academic standards, postsecondary support and accommodations, and more, all with the intent of helping students realize their dreams of a successful future and adult life.

<http://talentknowsnolimits.info/>

Talent Knows No Limits: A Public Education Resource for the Employment of People with Disabilities spreads awareness of the wealth of services and resources available to job-seekers with disabilities and to employers and service providers who can support these job-seekers in their efforts. The site strives to address misconceptions about the employability of people with disabilities.

www.youthhood.org/

Youthhood.org—Where Childhood Meets Adulthood—is a Web site designed to support the transition efforts of youths with disabilities and the adults who advocate for them. The entire site is designed to be used as a curriculum in a classroom, community program, or other setting where adults are working with youths to help them set goals, support health and self-advocacy, and plan for the future.

Calendar 2012

January 18–20, 2012

DADD Conference on Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, and Other Developmental Disabilities

Sponsored by the Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD), this event is both research and practitioner-focused and is designed to support professionals working with children with individuals with the above-mentioned disabilities. Miami Beach, FL. For more information, contact Cindy Perras, at cindy.perras@cogeco.ca; or go to www.daddcec.org/.

February 16–18, 2012

California Association for Behavior Analysis Western Regional Conference

This CalABA conference is designed for administrators, educators, other professionals in the behavioral and health sciences, and family members of individuals with special needs. The conference will feature information and resources related to behavior analysis and offer professional development opportunities for special educators and others. Garden Grove, CA. For more information, e-mail conference@calaba.org or go to www.calaba.org.

February 24–25, 2012

Uniting and Empowering Special Educators: CARS+

The annual convention of the California Association of Resource Specialists and Special Educators (CARS+) will feature speakers, workshops, and networking opportunities for special educators. The event includes a new learning strand devoted specifically to transition, with presentations by such notables in the field as Diana Blackmon and Richard Rosenberg. Riverside, CA. For more information or to register, go to <http://carsplus.org/>.

February 27–March 1, 2012

SEECAP Symposium

This Special Education Early Childhood Administrators Project (SEECAP) event is designed for administrators and leaders serving young children with disabilities and their families. Sessions will examine legislation, research-based practices, and staff training to support quality services and the uses of technology. Newport Beach, CA. For more information, contact Kathleen Finn at 760-761-5526 or kfynn@sdcoe.net, or visit the SEECAP Web site at www.sdcoe.net/student/eeps/seecap/.

April 11–14, 2012

CEC 2012 Convention and Expo

Designed for special educators, early interventionists, administrators, parents, and others interested in special education, this Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) convention will address innovative instruction, assistive technology, the alignment of work with state standards, and more. Denver, CO. For more information or to register, phone 888-232-7733, e-mail service@cec.sped.org, or go to www.cec.sped.org/convention.

Mark the Months!

Middle school and high school educators may be eligible for the 2012–13 Leadership Site Award for successful programs in collaboration, transition to adult life, reading/literacy, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and family-school-community partnerships. Winners receive substantial monetary and technical resources for continuing their success and sharing their work with others. For more information, go to www.calstat.org/lsmaterials.html; application materials will be available at this Web page in January 2012.

The 2012–13 Regional Institute Host competition is designed to support schools and districts interested in delivering high-quality professional development and training in their areas. Visit www.calstat.org/rimaterials.html for more information; application materials will be available at this Web page in January 2012.

Both awards are sponsored by California Services for Technical Assistance and Training—CalSTAT—a special project of the California Department of Education, Special Education Division.

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The sixth floor of the California Department of Education's headquarters building is a maze of hallways, doors, aisles, and identical cubicles. Anyone could lose her way. But Jahaira Martinez is confidently navigating the maze—opening doors, turning right at the clock, and making her way to the very cubicle where she worked this past summer. This is where she checked in and where the morning's tasks were waiting for her.

Jahaira, a 21-year-old with Down's syndrome, spent the month of July as an employee in CDE's Coordinated School Health and Safety Office. The job was part of her transition from school to the adult world of employment and independence, and everyone from her teacher to her supervisors at CDE to her mother agrees that she proved she could do the work—and that she developed the personal skills and confidence to be described by one supervisor as “a young woman who has the potential to be a great employee.”

But the story begins the preceding year, in October 2010, when Jahaira became one of the first students from the Fremont Adult School to participate in a unique transition program created by her teacher, Stacey Hoffman.

Hoffman, who has taught special education—“everything from preschool to high school”—for 29 years, wanted her students in the Sacramento City Unified School District to have real-time work experience. And what better place to start than the Special Education Division at CDE? With a persuasive advocate in Special Education Division Consultant Therese Tiab and the support of Division Director Fred Balcom, Hoffman initially was able to place two students in a voluntary internship program two days a week. Jahaira was one of these students.

At first the interns worked by themselves in a separate room, and people brought tasks to them. But the goal for these students was to station them out on the main floor among CDE employees. Once that happened and word of their efforts spread, “people brought us more

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work,” says Hoffman “The more work we got, the more kids we could bring in.” By year's end the 2010–2011 cohort of interns numbered nine.

The students, aged 18 to 22, were trained in a number of basic office skills and initially supervised by a job coach. Ask Jahaira what tasks she has performed, and she ticks them off:

shredding, filing, recycling, labeling, and scanning among them. “We give the kids exposure to different jobs; we try to find out what they like and steer them in that direction,” says Hoffman. Ask Jahaira her favorite: “Shredding,” she answers without hesitation.

In addition to office skills, the interns were coached in “soft skills,” such as arriving on time, checking in, dressing appropriately, and taking the proper amount of time for breaks. As Tiab noted with a laugh, “The students have a work ethic that everyone should emulate.”

At the end of the school year, everyone in the division contributed to a potluck celebration. Each student received a certificate and was acknowledged for a job well done.

Jahaira, however, had performed so well during her internship that Hoffman recommended her for WorkAbility, a program of supported employment (see insert). “Here was someone



*Jahaira at a CDE
appreciation luncheon for interns*

Jahaira, continued page 12