

Impact

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Ryan Benson is a former participant in and current Ambassador for the DO-IT Scholars program, which supports the successful transition from secondary to postsecondary education and employment for students facing significant challenges due to their disabilities. See story on page 18.

Assumptions in Transition Planning: Are They Culturally Sensitive?

by David W. Leake, Rhonda S. Black, and Kelly Roberts

Transition policies and practices typically assume that youth with disabilities and their families value such individual-oriented outcomes as self-determination, self-reliance, and independent living. However, these values are not shared by *all* youth and families, especially among those who are *culturally and linguistically diverse* (CLD). In this article, we identify common assumptions that may hinder efforts to support CLD youth with disabilities and their families through the transition process and discuss how to make such efforts more culturally sensitive.

The major ethnic/racial categories of the U.S. Census Bureau include White, Hispanic, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaskan Native. Within each of these groups there are numerous subgroups, and among individuals within subgroups there is much variability in terms of identification with their traditional culture, facility with standard English, and so on. Despite this variability, it is possible to identify an area of contrast particularly relevant to the transition to adulthood, namely, the contrast between the *individualistic* orientation of mainstream U.S. culture and the *collectivistic* orientation of most non-Western cultures.

[Leake, continued on page 28]

From the Editors

Today's educational systems are being called upon to re-examine how they prepare students with disabilities for adult life. For instance, the shift toward greater participation by students with disabilities in the general education curriculum is requiring exploration of new strategies for attending to the needs of diverse learners in the same classroom. Standards-based education is pushing schools to figure out how to meaningfully include students with disabilities in assessment and accountability systems. The need for early involvement by and continuity between school-based services and community services for individuals with disabilities is moving districts and schools to engage in integrated service planning and to link systems that may not have collaborated in the past. And increased involvement of families and students in individual planning, as well as in shaping educational policy and practice, is continuing to shift the locus of decision-making about education. In this *Impact* are descriptions of these and other issues related to the education of students with disabilities during their transition years. Along with these articles are profiles of strategies that are proving successful across the country in addressing these issues. It is hoped that the ideas and models in these pages will present readers with resources for use in their own work to achieve the best possible outcomes for students with disabilities.

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Challenges of Secondary Education and Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities

by David R. Johnson

Since the mid-1980s, the efficacy of public education programs overall has been challenged by policymakers, business leaders, professionals, and the general public. While these challenges initially focused on improving general education, there are now efforts to closely align special education programs with emerging general education reforms (e.g., *Testing, Teaching and Learning*, Elmore & Rothman, 1999; *Educating One and All*, McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997).

Several recent federal laws, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997, School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 have all promoted comprehensive strategies for improving public school programs for all students, including those from diverse, multicultural backgrounds and situations of poverty. These laws uniformly stress high academic and occupational standards; promote the use of state and local standards-based accountability systems; point to the need to improve teaching through comprehensive professional development programs; and call for broad-based partnerships between schools, employers, postsecondary institutions, parents, and others.

Students with disabilities have been directly affected by this legislation. With the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997, significant new requirements were put into place to ensure students greater access to the general education curriculum and assessment systems. These requirements have been reinforced strongly by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which requires that students with disabilities participate not only in assessments, but also in accountability systems. The pur-

pose of these requirements is to ensure schools are held accountable for these students' access to the general curriculum, higher expectations, and improved learning. Requirements for students with disabilities to be included in state accountability systems and for measuring whether schools have achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP) have heightened the importance of access to the general curriculum for all students with disabilities.

The AYP requirements of NCLB are having and will continue to have a significant impact on public schools. Under the Title I requirements of NCLB, schools will be held accountable for student progress using indicators of AYP. These indicators include measures of academic performance and rates of school completion. Schools will be identified as needing improvement if their overall performance does not increase yearly, or if any of a number of sub-groups does not meet specified criteria. Students with disabilities are identified as one of the sub-groups whose performance will count towards assessment of AYP. If these students do not perform well, questions must be raised as to what incentives schools have to focus effort and resources on these youth.

The current reauthorization of IDEA is expected to retain the focus on high academic achievement and the inclusion of students with disabilities in state and local standards-based accountability systems. Further, discussions will continue to focus on effective strategies and interventions that help students develop other essential adult life skills through vocational education, training, community participation, and other means. Federal policy, research and demonstration, state and local initiatives, and other developments since 1975 have focused considerable effort on improving school and postschool results for youth

with disabilities. This results-based policy ideology will no doubt continue as a major influence on both special education and general education throughout the current decade.

All of these influences have brought many challenges to state and local education and community service agencies nationwide. Several of these major challenges are identified and briefly discussed below, along with recommendation for educators, policymakers, and families.

Challenge 1: Promote Students' Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy

Self-determination is a concept reflecting the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives. Students who have self-determination skills are more likely to be successful in making the transition to adulthood, including employment and community independence (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Starting with the 1990 IDEA legislation, transition services must be based on students' needs and take into account students' interests and preferences. To accomplish this, students must be prepared to participate in planning for their future.

Several recommendations in relation to this challenge include:

- Provide opportunities for decision-making starting in early childhood, and encourage children to express their preferences and make informed choices throughout life.
- Begin self-determination instruction early in the elementary grades.
- Intensify teaching of specific self-determination skills in high school.
- Support students' development and use of self-advocacy skills, and teach students to develop an internal locus of control.

- Make work-based learning, self-directed learning, and career exploration opportunities available to all students.
- Incorporate self-determination and career development skills in the general education curriculum.
- Promote and support student-centered and student-run Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings.

Challenge 2: Ensure Access to the General Education Curriculum

To prosper and gain the knowledge and skills needed for success in a variety of settings, students with disabilities must have more than mere access to school buildings and placement in the least restrictive environment; they must have access to educational curricula and instruction designed to prepare them for life in the 21st century. This assumption was the basis, in part, for the requirements in IDEA '97 stipulating that states must provide students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum, including the identification of performance goals and indicators for these students, definition of how access to the general curriculum is provided, participation in general or alternate assessments, and public reporting of assessment results. Providing meaningful access to the general curriculum requires a multifaceted approach. Appropriate instructional accommodations constitute one piece of this picture (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000). Other elements include the specification of curriculum domains, time allocation, and decisions about what to include or exclude (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000).

Strategies and recommendations related to this include:

- Use universal design to make classrooms, curricula, and assessments usable by the largest number of students possible, minimizing the need for additional accommodations or modifications.
- Provide appropriate instructional accommodations for students.
- Provide instructional modifications only when necessary.
- Clearly specify the subject matter domain (facts, concepts, principles, and procedures) and scope of the curriculum.
- Set priorities for outcomes, and allocate instructional time based on these priorities.
- Use instructional approaches shown to promote positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

Challenge 3: Increase the School Completion Rates of Students with Disabilities

School completion is one of the most significant issues facing special education programs nationally. The National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) found that approximately 36% of students with disabilities exited school by dropping out (Wagner et al., 1991). The NLTS data also revealed that risk factors such as ethnicity and family income are related to dropout rates, and that some groups of special education students are more apt to drop out than others. Of youth with disabilities who do not complete school, the highest proportions are students with learning disabilities (32%), and students with emotional/behavioral disabilities (50%) (Wagner, et al., 1991).

Several strategies to address this challenge are:

- Develop methods and procedures to identify, document, and widely disseminate research-based information on best practices in dropout prevention and intervention.
- Determine the incentives and methods needed to fully implement evidence-based models, practices, and strategies within state and local school district programs.
- Conduct research to demonstrate and validate new dropout prevention and intervention strategies that work with high-risk groups of students, such as students with emotional/

behavioral disabilities, minority students, and students living in poverty.

- Investigate and share information about the impact of new accountability forces (e.g., high-stakes testing, more stringent graduation requirements, and varied diploma options) on the exit status and school completion of youth with disabilities.

Challenge 4: Base Graduation Decisions on Meaningful Indicators, and Clarify Diploma Options

Requirements that states set for graduation can include completing Carnegie Unit requirements (a certain number of class credits earned in specific areas), successfully passing a competency test, passing high school exit exams, and/or passing a series of benchmark exams (Guy, Shin, Lee, & Thurlow, 1999; Johnson & Thurlow, 2003; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Anderson, 1995). Twenty-seven states have opted to require that students pass state and/or local exit exams to receive a standard high school diploma (Johnson & Thurlow, 2003). This practice has been increasing since the mid-1990s (Guy, et al., 1999; Thurlow, et al., 1995). States may also require any combination of these. Diversity in graduation requirements is complicated further by an increasingly diverse set of possible diploma options. In addition to the standard high school diploma, options now include special education diplomas, certificates of completion, occupational diplomas, and others.

The implications of state graduation requirements must be thoroughly understood, considering the potential negative outcomes students experience when they fail to meet state standards for graduation. The availability of alternative diploma options can have a considerable impact on graduation rates. However, the ramifications of receiving different types of diplomas need to be considered. Students who receive non-standard diplomas may find their access to postsecondary education or jobs is limited. However, it is important for

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Universal Design in Secondary and Postsecondary Education

by Christine D. Bremer

Despite advances in accessibility to school buildings and classrooms, students with disabilities still face barriers to learning in both secondary and postsecondary settings. At the secondary level, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as amended in 1997, promises students with disabilities both participation and progress in the general education curriculum. At the postsecondary level, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 dictate that colleges and universities must provide appropriate academic adjustments as needed to ensure that the school is not discriminating on the basis of disability. These requirements challenge educational institutions to provide access to learning as well as classrooms.

Many techniques are available to help teachers adapt curricula and assessment to individual students. However, these solutions are often time-consuming, tend to separate students with disabilities from their classmates, and vary widely in effectiveness. As a result, there is growing interest in universal design, an approach that seeks to maximize access and usability for everyone.

What is Universal Design?

With universal design, the focus is on considering all users from the very beginning of the design process, and achieving accessibility by meeting the needs and desires of the widest possible range of users. The concept of universal design originated in the field of architecture as a response to concerns about the inefficiency of individualized retrofitted solutions in buildings, and the inappropriateness of placing the burden of adaptation on individuals. Ramped entrances and automatic doors are architectural examples of universal design. The universal design movement

was founded by architect Ron Mace, a wheelchair user who had personal experience with the failings of traditional design practices. In the 1970s, he developed the first code for building accessibility in the nation. He was a lifelong advocate for people with disabilities, and promoted the idea that products and built environments should be designed from the outset to be aesthetically pleasing and usable by everyone to the greatest extent possible.

The principles of universal design in relation to environments, products, and communications (Connell et al., 1997) have been articulated in this way:

- Equitable use: Usable by people with diverse abilities.
- Flexibility in use: Individual preferences and abilities are accommodated.
- Simple and intuitive: Easy to understand.
- Perceptible information: Information can be perceived in a range of environmental conditions and by people with differing sensory abilities.
- Tolerance for error: Difficulties resulting from accidental or unintended actions are minimized.
- Low physical effort: The design minimizes fatigue.
- Size and space for approach and use: Space and equipment can be used by people with a wide range of physical characteristics and abilities.

For students with disabilities to have meaningful access to the general curriculum, diverse learning needs and styles must be accommodated. In the past, providing access has meant enabling physical access to the classroom and, for some students, providing adaptive equipment to facilitate sensory and motor access to the curriculum. More re-

cently, however, there has been a growing interest in using the principles of universal design to create curricula, instruction, and assessments that increase access and reduce the need for individualized adaptation and accommodation.

Universal Design of Secondary Curricula and Texts

The following five strategies are general approaches that can be used to implement universal design in the classroom (Orkwis & McLane, 1998):

1. Providing all text in digital format.
2. Providing captions for all audio.
3. Providing educationally relevant descriptions for images and graphical layouts.
4. Providing captions and educationally relevant descriptions for video.
5. Providing cognitive supports for content and activities, including:
 - Summarizing big ideas;
 - Providing scaffolding (supports that are diminished or removed as students gain competence) for learning and generalization;
 - Building fluency through practice;
 - Providing assessments for background knowledge; and
 - Including explicit strategies to make clear the goals and methods of instruction.

The Center for Accessing Special Technology (CAST) pursues a program of work to develop specific methods and materials applying the concept of universal design to curriculum and instruction, describing their work as *Universal Design for Learning* (CAST, 2003). This approach is based on the view that traditional curriculum materials (usually texts) and methods may present barriers

to diverse learners. Universal Design for Learning promotes the development of a flexible curriculum that can support all learners more effectively and make learning more accessible. In this view, the key to more accessible learning is to provide students with a range of options to support learning, including multiple approaches to presentation of materials, expression of student work, and engagement in the learning process. Teachers begin the instructional decision-making process with a set of goals. They then select a range of materials and methods to most effectively and efficiently teach each goal. CAST has been promoting the development of universally designed texts and assessments, and is conducting research to assess the impact of Universal Design for Learning on students with disabilities. One approach developed by CAST is the use of embedded reading strategy supports, which help students develop literacy skills as they read assignments for classes.

Universal Design of Assessments

Universally-designed assessments are intended to be both accessible and valid for the widest possible range of students. In order to develop a universally-designed assessment, the entire test development process must incorporate aspects of universal design. Using universally-designed assessments has the obvious benefit of enabling all students to take the same test, thus simplifying interpretation of results. In addition, such assessments can reduce paperwork needed to comply with IDEA '97 legislation provision §300.532(c)(2) that states:

If an assessment is not conducted under standard conditions, a description of the extent to which it varied from standard conditions (e.g., the qualifications of the person administering the test or the method of test administration) must be included in the evaluation report.

If only ordinary accommodations are needed, this documentation task is simplified.

In order to apply universal design principles to an assessment instrument, the purpose of the assessment must be clear, and the assessment should be designed specifically for that purpose. Test items should be designed to be usable with accommodations; for example, those designing assessments should avoid using graphics that cannot be made available in Braille. Increasingly, computers are being used to conduct assessments. Computerized assessment can offer many advantages, but also presents some challenges. Most students prefer computerized assessment, and it is relatively easy to provide many accommodations on a computer such as large print and consistent audio presentations of an item. However, some students may encounter difficulties with scrolling and other tasks requiring fine motor control, or may be unaccustomed to writing on a computer. In most cases, these concerns can be addressed through the use of adaptive technology or by allowing the student more time to complete the assessment.

A more detailed discussion of universal design for large-scale assessments is available in *Universal Design Applied to Large Scale Assessments* (Thompson, Johnstone, & Thurlow, 2002).

Universal Design of Postsecondary Instruction

Curriculum Transformation and Disability, a federally-funded project housed at the University of Minnesota, adapted principles of universal design developed by Connell et al. (1997), along with Chickering and Gamson's *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* (1987), to create Principles for Universal Instructional Design in Higher Education (Fox & Johnson, 2000). These principles were utilized and tested by more than 200 faculty at six colleges and universities in the Midwest. They are:

- Create a welcoming classroom climate. Setting a welcoming tone up front allows students an opportunity to tell you what their needs are. Ex-

amples include developing an inclusive syllabus statement regarding disability accommodations, attending to all students' physical needs, and establishing ground rules for class discussion.

- Determine the essential components of the course. If you identify the essential outcomes you can expect all students in your course to demonstrate, you can fairly evaluate all students and not have to worry about "watering down" the course.
- Provide clear expectations and feedback. Having expectations clearly laid out in the syllabus and providing students with regular feedback on their performance are just two examples of ways to provide clear expectations and feedback.
- Explore ways to incorporate natural supports for learning. Natural supports are nonaccommodation-based strategies that are built into a course. They benefit all students. For example, study guides, discussion groups, and practice tests may benefit all students, not just students with disabilities.
- Provide varied instructional methods. Providing students with different ways to access material creates an accessible environment for all students. Some students thrive in lectures; others obtain information effectively from text, while still others learn best through visual media such as diagrams, illustrations, charts, or video.
- Provide a variety of ways for students to demonstrate knowledge. Just as no single mode of presentation suits all learners, neither does one single mode for demonstrating knowledge. Providing students with choices in demonstration of knowledge, such as allowing students to choose between writing a paper, presenting a speech, or conducting a multimedia project, allows students to show what they know in a manner that works for them. However, you must always

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Improving Graduation Results: Strategies for Addressing Today's Needs

by Camilla A. Lehr

Students dropping out of school is one of the most critical problems facing education in this country. Approximately one in eight children in the United States never graduates from high school (Children's Defense Fund, 2001). Many students who leave school without a diploma are students with disabilities. Statistics reported by the U.S. Department of Education show that in 1998-99, the graduation rate among students with disabilities age 14 and older was only 57.4%. Nearly 29% of students with disabilities dropped out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Of the students who dropped out, nearly 28% were students with learning disabilities and 51% were students with emotional/behavioral disturbance. Additionally, the highest rate of dropout by race/ethnicity was 41% for students with disabilities of American Indian/Alaska Native descent.

A variety of national and state-level studies have documented the problem of dropout for students with disabilities for well over a decade. It is clear that far too many youth with disabilities fail to successfully complete school – a situation that significantly limits their future opportunities in accessing postsecondary education and securing meaningful employment. Educators, administrators and policymakers need access to information and evidence-based practices and interventions that can assist them in improving rates of school completion.

An extensive body of research exists in relation to dropout, providing information about theoretical conceptualizations, predictors, and factors associated with dropout. Unfortunately, there are relatively few studies that incorporate strong research or evaluation methodology documenting the effectiveness of interventions on enrollment status (Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair & Christenson, 2003). Although we do not yet have a solid

foundation of research on dropout intervention and prevention from which to make conclusive statements, we do have preliminary information that educators, administrators, and policy-makers can use to make informed decisions about how to address the problem of dropout and raise graduation rates for students with disabilities. Several key strategies are highlighted below.

Establish Procedures to Accurately Measure Rates of School Completion

Accurate comparisons of dropout or school completion rates over time are essential in order to determine the effectiveness of interventions that are implemented at the school, district or state levels. Historically, comparisons across student subgroups and between districts or states have been difficult because of variation in the definition of dropping out and the calculation of dropout rates (commonly referred to as *event*, *status* and *cohort rates*). When dropout rates are not calculated in similar ways, comparisons may result in faulty interpretations that can influence policy and practice and have serious implications for students with and without disabilities. Additionally, the impact of mobility on the quality of data collected must be considered. The use of misleading codes, as well as inadequate, nonsystematic tracking and accounting procedures for students as they transfer in and out of programs add significantly to the problem of obtaining an accurate picture of the dropout rates. For students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, who are particularly mobile, accurate documentation of exit and entrance into schools over time is especially important.

Target Interventions Based on Multiple Indicators of Risk

Many variables and predictors associated with dropout have been identified in the literature (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, & Hurley, 2000). These variables have been categorized according to the extent to which they can be influenced to change the trajectory leading to dropout. *Status* variables are difficult and unlikely to change and include socioeconomic standing, disability or ability level, and family structure. Status variables associated with greater likelihood of dropout for students with disabilities include coming from a low socioeconomic background, non-English speaking, or Hispanic background. *Alterable* variables are more amenable to change and can be influenced by students, parents, educators and community members. Alterable variables associated with increased risk of dropout for students with disabilities include high rates of absenteeism and tardiness, low grades and a history of course failure, limited parental support, low participation in extracurricular activities, alcohol or drug problems, negative attitudes towards school, and failure to move on to the next grade level.

Despite the extensive list of variables and predictors associated with dropout, the presence of one or more of these factors does not mean that a student will leave school early. However, evidence of multiple factors does increase the risk of dropout. The challenge lies in using this information to identify students who are in need of intervention based on efficient and accurate predictors. *Selected* or *indicated* interventions can be targeted for students who are placed at risk as noted by the presence of multiple variables.

Implement Interventions Designed to Address Alterable Variables

An understanding of alterable variables associated with dropout can also be used to guide the development of intervention practices and policies that prevent dropout. For example, school policies that push students out of school and are associated with dropout include a) raising standards without provision of supports, b) tracking, c) frequent use of suspension, and d) policies that promote a negative school climate. School-related factors positively associated with school performance and completion rates for students with disabilities include a) providing direct, individualized tutoring and support to complete homework assignments, attend class, and stay focused on school; b) participation in vocational education classes; and c) participation in community work experience programs (Wagner, Blackorby, & Hebbeler, 1993). Interventions that focus on facilitating the variables that have been linked with student engagement (e.g., quality of the student-teacher relationship, effective instructional practices, reciprocal exchange of information between home and school) may in turn raise graduation rates.

Ground Interventions in a Sound Conceptual Understanding of the Process of Dropout

Over the years, we have increased our understanding of the process of dropout. We know that the decision to leave school is typically not an instantaneous event and many students who drop out of school are expressing an extreme form of disengagement from school that is preceded by indicators of withdrawal (e.g., poor attendance) and unsuccessful school experiences (e.g. academic or behavioral difficulties). Furthermore, we know that for many students, the path leading toward school withdrawal begins early, and retrospective studies have shown that dropouts can be identified with reasonable accuracy through review of records from the elementary years. Effective instructional techniques,

positive behavioral supports, and other strategies designed to promote positive behavioral and academic outcomes for students in the elementary grades hold promise for decreasing the number of students who later drop out of school. Implementing longitudinal studies to measure the impact of these early interventions on subsequent school completion is critical.

We know that student engagement in school and learning is a key ingredient of school completion. Interventions that promote school completion are characterized by a strength-based orientation, a comprehensive interface of systems (home, school, community), implementation over time, and meeting individual needs through the creation of a person-environment fit (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, & Hurley, 2000). Interventions to enhance school completion address the core issues associated with student alienation and disengagement from school.

Identify Interventions That Have Evidence of Effectiveness

In some cases, educators, administrators and policymakers may search for an existing intervention program to implement in a local school or system. However, exact adoption may be challenging, and educational researcher James McPartland cautions, “It is unlikely that a program developed elsewhere can be duplicated exactly in another site, because local talents and priorities for school reform, the particular needs and interests of the students to be served, and the conditions of the school to be changed will differ” (McPartland, 1994, p.256). In addition, many existing programs and practices lack research or evaluation data documenting effectiveness. Policies directed at implementing large scale programming that have significant associated costs ought to be based on research that is conceptually and methodologically sound. Sometimes, programs are promoted despite a lack of supporting data. It is the responsibility of educators, administrators and policymakers to require that claims be

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School Completion Principles

Helping youth to stay in school until they graduate is, simply put, the most important part of our job as special educators. This challenge – and it proves to be a challenge for many of our students – can best be met by appreciating underlying features of school completion. Our research conducted by the Language, Reading, and Exceptionalities Department at Appalachian State University draws upon the results of over 600 interviews and 4,000 surveys with high school youth to offer a foundation for the following four principles of school completion.

First, students must have a reason to want to complete high school. For instance, the most influential reason for wanting to complete school is the idea that a high school education will prepare them for their next role in life, be it as an employee or college student.

Second, students need (and, to the surprise of many, want) access to an adult who will encourage them to stay in school and help them to succeed. For many, parents fill this role, but a number of our students lack access to adults who can suitably fill this role in their lives.

Third, success in high school requires that students have the skills necessary for succeeding in today's high-stakes environment, including knowledge of how to learn, access to technological tools that help them access important information, and strategies that promote success on today's measures of performance.

Fourth, students who stay in school often have found a way to become engaged in the non-academic side of school. Be it sport, club, or group, these activities provide an avenue for youth to find a sense of competency in who they are.

Contributed by Larry Korterling, Professor, Department of Language, Reading and Exceptionalities, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina. For additional information about or findings of the research he may be contacted at 828/262-6060.

Improving Postsecondary Education Access and Results for Youth with Disabilities

by Megan A. Conway

A postsecondary degree is increasingly becoming an equalizer for individuals with disabilities seeking to enter and advance in the workforce. For the general population, level of education is correlated closely with employment rate and earnings. This correlation is even higher for people with disabilities. Fortunately, the number of postsecondary students who identify themselves as having a disability is on the rise, from 2.6% in 1978 to 10%-20% in 2002, with individuals who identify themselves as having a learning disability representing over half of these students (National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports, 2002). This increase is likely due to the passage of federal special education and disability rights legislation resulting in increased identification and educational supports, as well as changes in awareness and attitudes about disability.

Despite these gains in postsecondary participation, individuals with disabilities are still half as likely to be employed and significantly less likely to initiate and complete a postsecondary degree as are individuals without disabilities (National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports, 2002). There is an urgent need to further explore ways to improve access to and participation within postsecondary education for youth with disabilities.

Issues of Preparation

Barriers to preparation for postsecondary education is one area that needs to be addressed in increasing access and participation. The following four barriers are among the most significant:

- **Meeting entrance requirements.** Dropout rates and the receipt of an alternative diploma are both exceptionally high for youth with disabilities. One problem is that as an alter-

native to supporting youth with disabilities in a regular content class, they are often placed in special content classes that do not meet the entry requirements of many postsecondary institutions. Additional barriers are assessments that are not geared towards evaluating the actual abilities and performance of all students, and issues of economic status and cultural and linguistic diversity.

- **Exercising self-determination and self-advocacy skills.** Many youth with disabilities are not given the opportunity in secondary school to be self-determined (i.e. make choices, develop self-understanding) or to practice self-advocacy skills that they will need after they graduate from high school. Few attend their own Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, and teachers, support personnel, administrators, and parents usually makes most of the decisions about student goals and needed supports. This means that students with disabilities are often left without an understanding of their disability and its impact upon their learning. Unlike secondary school students with disabilities, postsecondary students are expected to identify themselves as having a disability, provide documentation of their disability (an IEP usually does not suffice), and advocate for their own accommodations.
- **Getting needed supports.** The kinds of supports that are offered to students generally differ between secondary and postsecondary school. Postsecondary supports tend to focus on what is “reasonable” rather than what is “least restrictive” or “free and appropriate.” As a result, supports are geared around providing basic access to content rather than promot-

ing student achievement. For example a postsecondary institution is more likely to provide a notetaker than a tutor.

- **Accessing technology.** Despite the significant benefits that technology can provide, such as access to communication, peer support, help with job readiness, and tools that support academic achievement, youth with disabilities in secondary school often do not have access to technology nor can they utilize it even if it is available. This impedes their ability to use technology in postsecondary environments. Even when students with disabilities do have access to technology in secondary school, it is more than likely that they will not be able to take that technology with them when they graduate.

Issues of Participation

Once in a postsecondary environment, students with disabilities often encounter barriers to participation, including:

- **Variations in supports.** While most postsecondary institutions do provide some level of support, the type and scope of support may vary widely across institutions (two-year, public and larger institutions tend to provide more comprehensive supports than do four-year, private and smaller institutions). Some schools may have a variety of programs and supports for students, with a number of staff who are responsible for providing them, while other schools may have a single individual who has this responsibility in conjunction with other responsibilities.
- **Focus on “reasonableness.”** Postsecondary institutions are generally not required by law to meet the same standards in supporting youth with

disabilities as are secondary schools. As a consequence, many focus on matching students with accommodations from a fixed menu of supports based on disability category rather than focusing on students' individual needs or preferences. Thus, while a student may be receiving some form of supports or accommodations, those supports and accommodations may not be the most appropriate for a specific learning context, or at the level of intensity that the student needs in order to succeed.

- **Service coordination.** Postsecondary students with disabilities are often required to juggle, with little or no assistance, supports and services related to their housing, medical, financial, social, transportation, and academic needs. Managing these supports and services can be time-consuming and frustrating. Government programs that provide these supports and services often have conflicting qualifying and participation criteria; students may actually have to appear “disabled” and “able” at the same time to qualify.

Strategies for Improving Results

Six strategies that may be used in secondary and postsecondary schools to address the barriers identified here are the following:

- **Move away from a separate content model.** Secondary educators should examine the impact that placement in separate content classes may have on the opportunities that will be available to students in the future. While placing a youth in a separate content class may be the easiest way of addressing some immediate learning needs, providing adequate supports and accommodations in a regular classroom could equally meet these learning needs. The same principle applies to alternative assessments and diplomas – students with disabilities must be given the opportunity to achieve the same standards
- **Address cultural and economic barriers.** Educators need to explore and address problems associated with cultural and economic barriers to high school graduation. Teachers and paraprofessionals must be culturally competent. Schools should also work closely with students with disabilities and their families to examine and respond to cultural values and economic circumstances that may affect student education.
- **Provide youth and families with information and experiences.** Strategies for informing youth and families about secondary and postsecondary support provision processes include holding direct parent and youth training sessions, integrating information into IEP meetings, and providing youth and parents with resources for exploring postsecondary options. Schools can provide students with the opportunity to practice self-determination and self-advocacy skills by implementing student-directed IEP meetings, providing students with support to participate in mentoring and work development programs, and encouraging teachers to implement self-determination and self-advocacy curricula.
- **Improve access to technology.** Schools must take steps to (a) direct resources towards assessing student technology needs (both in and out of school); (b) ensure that technology or learning methods used by students are accessible to all students; (c) purchase adaptive technology as needed; and (d) educate all stakeholders (parents, students, teachers) about how to identify, use, and maintain equipment. It is also important for secondary schools and other stakeholders to work together so that student use of technology across secondary and postsecondary school is as seamless as possible.
- **Focus on outcomes.** Postsecondary institutions should move beyond focusing on restrictive interpretations of civil rights laws to focusing on the needs and goals of their students. Postsecondary institutions invest time and money in order to support and retain a wide variety of students, and institutions and society at large benefit from extending these support and retention efforts to students with all types of disabilities.
- **Improve efforts to streamline services.** Postsecondary students with disabilities should be able to pursue their postsecondary education without being bogged down by a complex web of service management. State government, schools, and community organizations must work together to streamline support provision and eligibility criteria as students transition between secondary and postsecondary school. They must also work closely with postsecondary institutions to build outside services into the postsecondary education structure and to assist students to manage these services.

Conclusion

Youth with disabilities must be given every opportunity to access and participate in postsecondary education. A postsecondary degree is a critical component of career success for all youth, and it is even more so for youth with disabilities. In order for equal postsecondary participation to become a reality for students with disabilities, schools must address issues in preparation and participation that impede student success.

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Megan Conway is Assistant Professor and Coordinator with the Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Honolulu. She may be reached at 808/956-6166 or mconway@hawaii.edu.

Students with Disabilities Attending Alternative Schools: What Do We Know?

by Camilla A. Lehr

Students with disabilities are among those most at risk of dropping out of school. Many observers contend that traditional schools are failing to engage a significant number of such students and meet their multiple needs. Alternative schools and programs have emerged as one educational option for students with and without disabilities who do not succeed in traditional public schools.

Alternative schools fall under the auspices of educational alternatives that also include charter schools, magnet programs, distance learning programs, and private schools. Although these options have much in common, each has distinct features, as well. Findings from research conducted by the Alternative Schools Research Project at the University of Minnesota (www.ici.umn.edu/alternativeschools/) provide current information describing alternative schools across the United States. In brief, alternative schools:

- Are designed to meet a variety of needs including preventing students from dropping out of school, providing another educational option, serving as a disciplinary consequence, or providing academic/behavioral remediation.
- Are generally described as having small enrollments (i.e., 25-75 students).
- Are primarily designed for high school age students, although many states have schools that are serving younger students.
- Are accessed by students in a variety of ways ranging from student choice (usually with some specified parameters) to mandatory placement.
- Often have criteria for enrollment (e.g., students may be admitted as a result of suspension or expulsion, or they must meet some form of at-risk criteria).

- Serve students for varying amounts of time (e.g., short-term placement with transition back to traditional school, long-term placement through graduation).
- Offer educational programs that typically include individual instruction, a focus on basic academic skills, social services or counseling, and/or community- or work-based learning.

Alternative schools are increasingly defined in state legislation by the population of students that they serve. A review of legislation on alternative schools in 48 states indicated they were most frequently defined as non-traditional settings that serve students at risk of school failure.

Increased Numbers of Alternative Schools and Programs

Interest in alternative schools has increased dramatically during recent years and the numbers of alternative schools and programs are rising in many states. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported 3,850 public alternative schools in the United States during the 1997-1998 academic year; current estimates suggest that number has grown to over 10,000 public alternative schools and programs for at-risk students (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002). National statistics indicated that about 12% of all students in alternative schools and programs for at-risk students were special education students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and the percentage of special education students varied widely between districts – ranging from 3% to 20% (typically students with learning or emotional/behavioral disabilities) (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002).

Students with Disabilities Attending Alternative Schools and Programs

Although literature on students with disabilities and alternative schools is limited, some state-level data have been collected. One study of Minnesota alternative programs found that 19% of enrolled students were identified as having a disability and over 50% of those students were identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder (Gorney & Ysseldyke, 1993). In Vermont, results from a study indicated 60% of the students attending alternative programs were students with disabilities, and the majority were served in settings that provided therapeutic and clinical interventions, as well as academic support (Hasazi, et al., 2001). In North Carolina, an alternative learning program is defined as “a school or program that serves students at any level, serves suspended or expelled students, serves students whose learning styles are better served in an alternative program, or provides individualized programs outside of a standard classroom setting in a caring atmosphere in which students learn the skills necessary to redirect their lives” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2002, p. 1). A 2000-2001 evaluation report indicated a higher percentage of students received special education services in alternative schools as compared to the overall student population in North Carolina (26% vs. 14% for middle school and 19% vs. 9% for high school) (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2002). Additionally, a larger percentage of students were served under the learning and emotional/behavioral disability categories.

Reasons for Enrolling

Students with and without disabilities enroll in alternative schools in a variety of ways ranging from voluntary to invol-

untary. Some alternative schools appear to be a desirable option for students at risk of school failure, whereas others are mandatory placements for students as a last resort. For example, in Minnesota, students can choose to attend an alternative program if they meet one or more criteria for at-risk status described in the High School Graduation Incentive Law established in 1987 (e.g. pregnant or parent, chemically dependent, behind in credits, suspended). These schools foster a long-term commitment and students' given reasons for continued attendance focus on the support, attention, and respect they received at the alternative schools. Interviews with students attending alternative schools in Minnesota indicated they continued attending alternative programs because responsibility was placed on students, they received help for personal problems, and there was flexibility in programming (Lehr, 1999). Comments included:

- "There are teachers here you can talk to, they give personal advice and support."
- "[Name of teacher] gives us work and gives us more details, [material] is broken down and is easier to understand."
- "Teachers [handle conflict in a different way]. If I get in an argument, they say to take a break, go downstairs, get some air and a teacher comes down and talks to me."

The numbers of students with disabilities attending alternative schools by choice in Minnesota suggests that these settings may offer a desirable option for many who are trying to successfully complete school. The characteristics of some alternative schools that facilitate successful school completion for those at risk of dropout such as extra support/counseling for students, smaller and more personal settings, positive relationships with adults, meaningful educational and transition goals, flexibility in structure and scheduling, and emphasis on living and vocational skills may also help to engage students with disabilities.

At the other extreme, many students with and without disabilities are placed in alternative schools. For example, some states have alternative programs that are designed for disruptive students. These programs provide academic remediation and counseling to address behavior and oftentimes the goal of these programs is to return the students to a regular school curriculum as soon as possible. Students typically attend these kinds of alternative programs for a short period of time and periodic reviews may be used to determine whether or not the student is ready to return to their original school.

The enrollment of students with disabilities in alternative schools may also be affected by protections specified in amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997. For example, students with disabilities who are expelled or suspended for more than 10 days must continue to receive services in an Interim Alternative Education Setting (IAES), which could be an alternative school. These settings must allow students to continue to progress in the general curriculum, receive service and modifications as described in the Individualized Education Program (IEP), and address the behavior that led to the IAES placement in order to prevent the behavior from reoccurring. Results from a national survey suggest alternative schools are *sometimes* or *often* used as IAES in a small number of states, but more information is needed about the extent to which they are being used as IAESs across the nation (Lehr, 2003).

Outcomes for Students in Alternative Schools

While there is a need for more research related to the effectiveness of alternative schools, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests some promising trends in outcomes for students attending these schools. Research has shown that alternative education programs (typically schools of choice) can have positive effects on school performance,

attitudes toward school, and self-esteem. Anecdotal reports of the effectiveness of alternative schools for individual students are abundant. Alternative school staff and written reports describe students who have had poor school experiences or dropped out, enroll in an alternative school, attend regularly, complete school, and gain the self-confidence and skills necessary to obtain employment or attend postsecondary schools.

As the number of public alternative schools and programs continues to grow, there are increased calls for accountability. Many individuals and organizations believe alternative schools are desirable and effective, yet in many cases, the data documenting their effectiveness are not readily available or have not been collected. To complicate matters, measuring academic progress alone may not capture the settings' impacts on youth who attend these schools and programs. Educators in alternative schools must identify characteristics that foster effectiveness and relevant indicators of success in order to document the extent to which outcomes are achieved for the students they serve. Alternative schools are one educational option that holds promise for engaging some of our most disenfranchised youth in school and facilitating positive student outcomes.

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Camilla A. Lehr is Research Associate with the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. She may be reached at 612/624-0722 or lehrx001@umn.edu.

Providing Seamless Connections Between High School and Adult Services in Seattle

by Shepherd Siegel

In our efforts to prepare all students to pass standardized tests and demonstrate evidence of academic achievement, we run the risk of forgetting that it is also our job to teach students how to be fully participating citizens in a democracy. The task of preparing students for a test pales in comparison to the larger responsibility of preparing them for life. The Career Ladders program in Seattle Public Schools continues to work with students with and without disabilities* who are approaching high school graduation. The program's primary purpose is to help students with mild to moderate disabilities find appropriate placements in college and work that will put them on the first rungs of success in adult life. The Career Ladders Postsecondary Project, funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, supports contracts with two adult service providers, The Job Connection and Mainstay, who provide a "warm linkage" to students from the school-based programs such that there are seamless connections between school and adult services that prepare them for adult life.

Adult transition services, for those students who need them, work best when graduating students have already had the experience of taking their first few steps into adult life. The school-based Career Ladders program provides this with its Community Classroom and its Employment Skills Workshop. Thus, there are three essential and interdependent components that must be in place in order to effect successful school-to-adult life transitions for students in need of these services.

The Community Classroom is the first component, a supervised internship in which the student has more supervision – daily in fact – than a typical work experience placement, but less intensity than a supported employment placement (i.e., for a student with a significant disability). By working with large organizations, the instructional team is able to integrate and disperse interns among the regular employees without losing the efficiency of never being more than 10 minutes away from any given intern. Instructors simulate the competitive interview and hiring process, and once students have been "hired" (they obtain credit, but not pay), they receive

accommodating instruction in performing ever-more-challenging job duties, and in learning adult social behaviors that will enhance success in the workplace. This on-the-job support anticipates and quickly addresses skill deficits, and maximizes student learning by using frequent, data-based instructional techniques. Previous and current incarnations of the program have placed students with Chevron Oil, the California State Automobile Association, the University of California Medical Center and other hospitals, Associated Grocers Corporate Center, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle Symphony, the Westin and other hotels, and King County Airport.



Domonique's Story

Hi. My name is Domonique Eastland. I'm going to be a senior at Garfield High School in Seattle, Washington. Last spring I was a Career Ladders intern where we had seminars every Monday. In the seminars, we learned something new every week, for example, writing a resumé and practicing interviewing, which happened at the beginning of the semester. Me and

my friends were the hard-headed ones in the class; we sometimes did not want to go – we would have preferred to stay at school with all our friends. But after awhile I just said to myself that it is time for me to grow up and be a part of a program that is going to benefit me in the future. To do Career Ladders you have to be loyal to the program.

Later on in the program I was assigned to work at the Seattle Art Museum. I was a school tour guide as well as did things like data entry, helping kids in the art studio, and just running errands. My supervisor taught me a lot about work habits and how to work with people. Later down the line I met up with a company named WorkSource [the One Stop Center that hosts The Job Connection]. At WorkSource they help me find work; we went out and got applications, and they helped me write cover letters and prepare for job interviews. During this time, I had two interviews: one was at Target and the other at Nordstrom. The interview at Nordstrom was successful and I got a job stocking clothes. When I was not involved with the programs I never got a job. This whole experience with the programs has been great, making all the hard work I went through and will go through in the future worth it.

Contributed by Domonique Eastland, Seattle, Washington.

* Note: This article focuses on the "warm linkage" between Career Ladders and The Job Connection, who together serve students without disabilities and with mild to moderate disabilities. Students with more significant disabilities are also served by the Career Ladders Postsecondary Project through a linkage between Seattle Public Schools' Transition Success program and Mainstay, who together provide supported employment and more specialized services for students with disabilities.

Table 1: Summary of Career Ladders Transition Services

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- **Pre-graduation Contact.** Providing any transition services to interns before they have graduated from Career Ladders.
 - **Transition Planning.** Working with school-based teachers, counselors, adult agency personnel, parents, interns, and others to start developing or implementing Individualized Transition Plans for pre-graduates and recent graduates.
 - **Follow-up Contact.** Routine quarterly follow-up to see how former interns (graduates) are doing (this contact may be more or less frequent depending on individual circumstances), what their employment status is, if they are in school or are planning to be, and if they feel they could benefit from Career Ladders transition services.
 - **Adult Agency Casework.** Facilitating referrals; case openings and closures; re-openings; rehabilitation services; post-employment services; case management and program planning with adult service agencies; and consultation, coordination, and communication with the counselors about all Career Ladders clients with active or inactive cases.
 - **Postsecondary Education or Training.** Counseling, referral, liaison, and tutoring services for Career Ladders graduates who would like to go to college or participate in an occupational training program, youth employment program, or similar activity.
 - **On-the-job Training.** Job training and coaching, task analysis, accommodations, and mediations for Career Ladders graduates to aid in the development of specific job skills. Also coaching in job retention skills such as attendance and appearance.
 - **Counseling.** Counseling and problem-solving with graduates on personal, employment, and education or training issues as they affect and pertain to their career concerns.
 - **Independent Living Skills.** Counseling in basic skills that are not necessarily directly related to job retention, but to enhancing quality of life. For example, issues regarding fiscal matters (like income taxes), finding an apartment, or getting a driver's license.
 - **Resource Referral.** When appropriate, referring graduates to other service providers and community agencies that could potentially enhance their transition capabilities.
 - **Social Skills Training.** Problem-solving, role-playing, behavioral modeling, self-monitoring, and other techniques to help graduates work through on-the-job and/or interpersonal problems and to help them better acclimate to the particular social environment at work or in other situations.
 - **Ecosystematic Intervention.** A more global intervention technique where a number of key players in the graduate's social network (such as co-workers, supervisors, relatives, counselors, teachers, and friends) are enlisted in some way to assist in the manipulation of parameters that have been collectively identified as areas in need of remediation, and to provide support and bolster the intern's capability to maneuver in a difficult or crisis situation toward an ultimately positive result.
 - **Job Search.** Counseling, support, supported job search, help with applications or exams, maintaining resumés, interview skills, job leads, job development, and placement.
-

Secondly, the students attend a seminar-format Employment Skills Workshop once a week instead of going to their internship placement. This critical classroom component provides an environment where interns can safely share questions, concerns, anxieties and fears about being in the workplace, and celebrate their successes as well. There is no overestimating the value and power of peers as interns encourage each other through times of tedium or struggle. As the various realities of the work world, such as being on time or accepting criticism, are learned by one intern, that intern becomes the most powerful teacher of his or her peers. The weekly class teaches six essential curriculum strands: Job Skills, Job-Keeping Skills, Job Search Skills, Personal Growth, Interpersonal Growth, and Timely Topics (a lecture series on realities of the work world).

When they are well-implemented, these first two components of the pro-

gram prepare a very high percentage of participants to enter post-high school life with a strong resumé, social skills, and a crafted and owned postsecondary career plan, which frequently includes college. But without the ongoing availability of transition services, the third critical component of the Career Ladders program, many of these students are likely to flounder and more frequently find themselves unemployed, institutionalized, or facing more serious barriers to competitive employment and college. In over 25 replications of the Career Ladders model, the first two components were established in new communities easily enough. But repeatedly, when it came to the more intensive and difficult implementation of effective interagency collaboration between a school district and an adult service provider, and the more innovative approach of making services continuously available to graduates, replication faltered.

The Career Ladders Postsecondary Project demonstrates OSEP's commitment to finding ways that school/adult service linkages can be developed and, as best practices emerge, replicated. Key to this long-term success will be using the results of the Career Ladders style of postsecondary services to convince one-stop centers, vocational rehabilitation offices, and nonprofit adult service providers that the ongoing availability of transition services, along with a cohort approach that allows and encourages long-term relationships to develop, is both effective and cost-effective.

There are three distinguishing features to the Career Ladders adult service approach: breaking open the job description, ongoing availability, and serving adults in cohorts. In its first incarnation, Career Ladders transition specialists kept careful logs and descriptions of how they served students (Siegel, Robert, Avoke, Paul & Gaylord-

[Siegel, continued on page 33]

A Comprehensive Approach to Promoting School Completion in Minneapolis

by Colleen Kaibel

In June 2001, the Minneapolis School Board approved a plan to transform the high school experience for Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) through the creation of small learning communities that would allow more individualized attention to students and more instruction directed specifically toward reaching district goals. The district goals included significantly increasing graduation rates, improving academic achievement, and better preparing students for work, citizenship, and lifelong learning. In conjunction with this, a grant was received from the Bush Foundation to support a targeted effort to reach youth at highest risk for dropping out of school, which includes youth with disabilities.

Minneapolis Public Schools is the largest school district in Minnesota, serving almost 48,000 students in grades K-12. Nearly 67% are eligible for free or reduced lunch, nearly 25% speak English as a second language, and about 14% of the student population receives special education services. In 2002, expectations were established to achieve an 80% graduation rate by 2010, and students are required to attend school 95% of the time. Achieving these goals is even more challenging given the high mobility rates of students transferring into or out of district as well as between schools. Estimates suggest the rate of mobility is about 46% compared to 18% statewide. Current statistics point to the need for effective strategies to prevent dropout and promote school completion. The four-year graduation rate for the 1998 freshman class was 44%, and ranged from 13% for Native American students to 63% for White students.

Scaling Up for Success

To increase successful graduation from school and reduce the high school dropout rate, MPS began implementing Scal-

ing Up for Success: A Dropout Prevention Project. The two-year pilot program in two high schools provides extra resources to ninth graders whose attendance record or other factors put them at high risk for dropping out. The program is specifically designed to assist students in ninth grade during the transition from middle to high school. Scaling Up for Success is based on research on resiliency that points to the positive impact an adult can have on fueling student academic motivation and the development of skills needed to overcome obstacles and meet daily challenges. Priority is given to developing trust-based relationships and fostering a long-term commitment to following students and families, even if they move from school to school. In addition, efforts are directed to providing access to various school and community resources.

The initiative integrates three dropout prevention strategies into a continuum of support and intervention for students at the two high schools. First, the Attendance Liaison Program (ALP) directs resources toward contacting families and following up as a frontline intervention when students first start missing school. Secondly, the School Attendance Review Board (SARB) brings community, school, and enforcement support persons together to remove barriers and uncover options that will help prevent absences from escalating. Third, Check & Connect (C&C), provides intensive support to students, families, and teachers through regular contacts with individual monitors whose role can be characterized as a cross between a mentor, advocate, and service coordinator.

Initially, incoming ninth graders are screened for referral based on multiple alterable indicators of risk including attendance data, suspensions, performance on the Minnesota Basic Standards Test, and a teacher rating of

likelihood of completing school (based on additional indicators of engagement including family support for learning, sibling history of school completion, learning or behavior challenges, mobility and others). The referral procedure is continuous and begins with online attendance data programmed to automatically convert raw attendance into attendance groups weekly. Students attending 90-94% of the time generally receive ALP interventions, which include a letter sent to the parents regarding district attendance policy and a phone call from a C&C monitor or other staff member. The students attending 89% of the time or less are reviewed by the project coordinator and assigned to C&C monitors, if appropriate. Students are also referred based on teacher input.

Check & Connect

The most intensive level of service that a student receives is through Check & Connect, a comprehensive model intended to promote students' engagement with school. Check & Connect was originally developed as part of an initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to address dropout prevention and intervention for middle school students with learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities (Evelo, Sinclair, Hurley, Christenson, & Thurlow, 1995). Twelve years of research across multiple settings (urban and suburban school districts) as well as with various groups (students in grades K-12, students with and without disabilities) has demonstrated positive impacts. Evidence of effectiveness has included reduced truancy rates, decreased rates of suspension and course failure, increased rates of attendance, more credits earned, and more students on track

to graduate (see <http://ici.umn.edu/checkandconnect/>).

Check & Connect is a highly targeted and individualized approach that is data-driven and designed to maximize personal contact and opportunities to build trusting relationships. The person responsible for facilitating a student's connection with school and learning is referred to as the *monitor*. Student levels of engagement (such as attendance, grades, suspensions) are checked regularly and used to guide the monitor's efforts to increase and maintain student's connection with school.

The MPS currently has eight C&C monitors, four at each school. Each is responsible for 50 students. The monitors use individualized intervention strategies to facilitate student engagement in school. They have a persistent belief in the student's ability to be successful, and develop trust over time through continuous and regular outreach to the student and family. Efforts include regularly checking on student attendance and academic performance, providing ongoing feedback about student progress, modeling the use of problem-solving skills, frequently communicating with families about good and bad news, and being available to the youth to listen to personal concerns. Activities may include placing wake-up calls to students, making a home visit to discuss student progress, assisting with a referral to obtain services from a community agency, helping a student organize homework, attending an IEP meeting with the student, or arranging tutoring services. A reciprocal exchange of information as well as facilitating collaboration between home and school are also key characteristics of the program.

The goal of C&C is to help students attend school regularly, actively participate in school, and get a good start on the path towards graduation. Key features of the model include:

- **Relationship building.** Fostering mutual trust and open communication through a long-term commitment focused on student educational success.
- **Routine monitoring of alterable indicators.** Systematically checking for warning signs of withdrawal (attendance, academic performance, behavior) observable by school personnel and alterable through intervention.
- **Individualized and timely intervention.** Providing support tailored to individual student needs, based on level of engagement with school, associated influences of home and school, and leveraging of local resources.
- **Long-term commitment.** Committing to stay with students and families for at least two years, including the ability to follow students during transitions across school levels and follow highly mobile youth from school to school and program to program.
- **Persistence plus.** Maintaining a persistent source of academic motivation, a continuity of familiarity with the youth and family, and a consistency in the message that "education is important for your future."
- **Problem-solving.** Promoting the acquisition of skills to resolve conflict constructively and to look for solutions rather than placing blame.
- **Affiliation with school and learning.** Facilitating student access to and active participation in school-related activities and events.

Promising Responses

During its first year of implementation, Scaling Up for Success has served 288 students. Among them is Sam, a young man who began high school at high risk for school failure, struggling academically and in trouble in the community. At the start of his ninth grade school year he transferred to a new school, where the administrator handling his transfer referred him to a Check & Connect monitor. When Rich, the monitor, first met with him, Sam was cooperative yet did not want anyone watching him too closely. As they started to build a

relationship, Sam began to appreciate someone checking on him throughout the day and consulting with his parents and teachers. He came to realize passing his classes was critical if he was to achieve his goal of graduating. Still pulled in many directions by negative influences in his life, Sam's grades and attendance started to improve as Rich continued to mentor and monitor him. Today, Sam describes Check & Connect as "a blessing to me" and feels it has given him the desire to "rise to expectations."



The Scaling Up for Success pilot program is currently in its second year and evaluation efforts will be completed in July 2004. Thus far, however, anecdotal evidence from teachers and students about the difference it is making in school engagement suggests this approach holds significant promise of achieving higher rates of school completion for students with and without disabilities.

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Colleen Kaibel is Project Coordinator, Check & Connect, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis, Minnesota. She may be reached at 612/668-3884 or at Colleen.M.Kaibel-1@tc.umn.edu. Pictured above are Rich, Check & Connect monitor, and Sam, a student in Scaling Up for Success.

Skills for Success: A Three-Tiered Approach to Positive Behavior Supports

by Jeffrey Sprague and Vicki Nishioka

Many students who are at-risk leave school without diplomas and ill-prepared to function as productive adults (Kasen, Cohen, & Brooks, 1998). In addition to the problem of school dropout, students who experience academic difficulties are at-risk for becoming involved in juvenile crime (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1985) and for behavior problems at school. Students who are at-risk often come to school with emotional and behavioral difficulties that interfere with their attempts to focus on academic instruction. Others may experience interpersonal issues with other students or school staff that make concentrating on learning difficult. Best practice for these students begins with early identification of emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal needs, followed by interventions to reduce obstacles to successful school adjustment. If appropriate educational and behavioral supports were more widely provided, the long-term benefits would greatly exceed the costs (Alternbaugh, Engel, & Martin, 1995).

In response to this need, the University of Oregon Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior created a pilot program called Skills for Success (SFS) that combined school-wide positive behavior supports with specialized supports for students who are at-risk in the school. Two middle schools (grades 6-8) from the same urban school district located in the northwest region of the United States participated in a treatment and comparison school study for two years. Both middle schools had high rates of student mobility, use of free/reduced lunch, and academic failure. Both middle schools adopted *Best Behavior* (Sprague & Golly, in press) and the *Second Steps* violence prevention curriculum (Committee for Children, 1997) as universal violence prevention procedures. In addition to these school-wide programs, the treatment school implemented Skills for Suc-

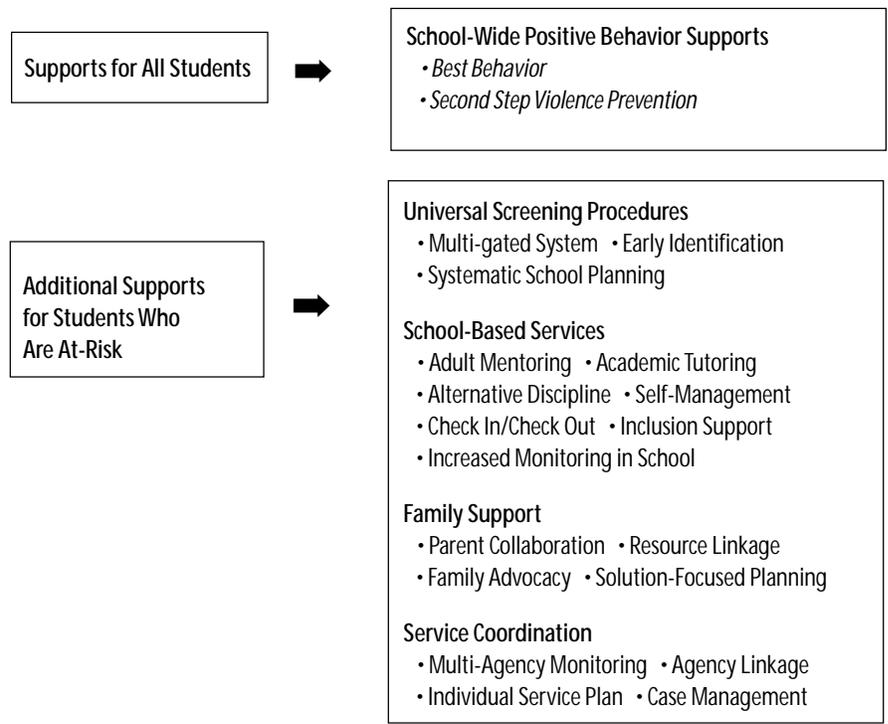
cess, which provided further supports for those students identified as at-risk for school failure and academic problems (see Figure 1). These additional supports were in the form of specialized school-based services, family support services, and service coordination. At the end of the two years the rates of overt aggression, covert behavior, juvenile arrests, and authority conflicts were measured and changes assessed by drawing upon data from office discipline referrals (type, frequency), self-reported perpetration of and victimization by aggressive or violent behavior, and juvenile department records. In the remainder of this article, the three categories of specialized services will be described, as well as the pilot program's outcomes.

School-Based Supports

Although we tailored services to meet the needs of individual students, we employed a general framework of evidence-based interventions in the schools. These school-based supports included adult mentoring, individualized social skills instruction, increased academic support, alternative discipline, and school-based case management:

- **Adult mentorship.** A critical goal of the SFS program was to build a connection between the student and the school. To accomplish this, SFS program staff and other adults in the school served as mentors. The SFS mentors met daily with their assigned students to foster a positive mentoring relationship. The mentors

Figure 1: Skills for Success Alternative Education Program Services



coached the students to make positive behavior changes in school, monitored their behavior and academic performance in school, and, most importantly, provided the presence of a trusted adult at school. We used a daily check-in system adapted from Check & Connect (Evelo et al., 1996), increased monitoring of students during the school day, a high ratio of positive to negative interactions with students placed at risk, and non-judgmental solution-focused responses to student problems.

- **Academic services.** The school-based SFS program services included specialized academic, social skills, and life skills instruction using multiple strategies to meet individual student needs. An important feature of the SFS program was a part-time classroom structured to provide positive behavior intervention, low student-to-teacher ratios, and research-based teaching strategies providing individual and small group instruction for the students who were at-risk. Curriculum areas addressed within the alternative classroom setting included functional life skills necessary for successful transition to responsible adult living (e.g. vocational, self-management, leisure, and independent living skills). Furthermore, SFS staff conducted intensive social skills training to include interpersonal communication, problem solving, coping with feelings, and making friends. Staff conducted social skills training in small group settings that included selected typical peers to enhance skill building and reduce stigmatization.

Program staff provided students with individualized academic support in regular classroom settings, tutorial help with regular classroom assignments, basic skill instruction, and study skills training. Inclusion services in the regular classroom allowed SFS program staff to identify specific skills and strategies that each student could use to promote positive

relationships with the teacher and other students. Likewise, assisting in the regular classroom provided the SFS program staff with opportunities to dialog and consult with regular classroom teachers.

- **Alternative discipline.** Alternative discipline services included a level system (i.e., a system specifying changing levels of supervision and independence in the school based on individual student behavior), frequent positive rewards, and individualized behavioral interventions that supported practice of positive social skills in regular school settings. If necessary, SFS staff conducted a functional behavioral assessment to develop individualized behavior support plans. Consequently, student behavior support plans considered the function of – or reason why – the student used the problem behavior, taught appropriate replacement skills for socially unacceptable behavior, and taught self-management skills (O'Neill, Horner, Albin, Story, Sprague, & Newton, 1997).
- **School-based case management.** School-based case management services helped students obtain education and training that increased success in school, vocational, and community settings. Educational goals included increased social skills training, functional life skills training, vocational instruction, community training, and academic support. Each SFS program staff member was a case manager for five or six students, with whom they met daily.

Family Support

Many students placed in the SFS program required more comprehensive services to support their success in school and the community. The families of these students often had difficulty providing the supervision and stability required to adequately support their child in school. Moreover, the chronic patterns of adverse life events they

[Sprague, continued on page 35]

Frank's Story

Frank has many friends at school and strong leadership skills. However, he frequently uses these skills to disrupt classes, creates conflict between students, and is defiant to teachers. He committed his first crime at age 12 and was on probation for drug violations, theft, arson, and stealing a car. It is common knowledge that Frank and his family are involved in shoplifting, drug use, and other petty crimes.*

It would be misleading to say that Frank stopped all antisocial behavior when he enrolled in the SFS program. This did not happen. However, his problem behavior did decrease in both frequency and intensity. This success was due in large part to the adult mentorship Frank received from the SFS teacher. She gave him constant encouragement and helped him resolve problems with his family, teachers, and other students. She worked closely with the vice principal to replace ineffective school sanctions with effective alternative discipline. For example, the school typically suspended Frank for fighting, truancy, and insubordination. Because his mother worked, Frank watched TV and hung out with truant students when suspended. Knowing this, his teacher arranged for Frank to receive in-school detention in the alternative program in lieu of suspension.

Frank's teacher talked regularly with his mother to address chronic attendance issues. If Frank was absent, his mother was notified immediately. If the absence was unexcused, they developed a plan to get Frank to school. Finally, his teacher helped Frank's mother advocate for important social services for Frank such as drug and alcohol treatment, skill-building, and community service opportunities. As a result, Frank did not drop out of middle school and, at last report, attends regular high school and is off probation.

* Pseudonym

Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology: Seattle's DO-IT Program

by Weol Soon Kim-Rupnow and Sheryl Burgstahler

Since the inception of the Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology (DO-IT) Scholars program in 1992, more than 200 students with a variety of disabilities have successfully transitioned from secondary schools to postsecondary education and employment settings. DO-IT Scholars are high school students who want to pursue postsecondary studies and careers but face significant challenges due to their disabilities. While participating in the program they develop self-determination skills, along with social, academic, and career skills that are necessary preparation for postsecondary studies and careers. The program has three key components: a) a two-week residential Summer Study, b) year-round computer and Internet activities, and c) career preparation. A key strategy employed in all of these components is significant use of technology designed primarily to support students with disabilities.

Residential Summer Study

DO-IT Scholars are accepted into the program when they are sophomores in high school, and attend the first Summer Study session for two weeks while residing in a dormitory at the University of Washington in Seattle. They meet other participating young people with disabilities and adult mentors while becoming involved in a wide variety of activities to prepare for college, careers, and other aspects of adult life. Activities include participation in academic lectures, group discussions, science labs, resumé writing, mock interviews with professors and employers, academic and career exploration on the Internet, electronic communication with mentors, and disability services presentations. In much of the Summer Study, Scholars are trained in Internet and computer use in a computer lab equipped with adap-

tive technology identical to the systems DO-IT provides for their homes. Ongoing technology support allows DO-IT Scholars to communicate online with each other and their adult mentors year-round after their first Summer Study. Scholars return for a second Summer Study session the following year and then have the option of returning for a third-year Summer Study internship.

Computer and Internet Activities

DO-IT Scholars have opportunities to develop computer and Internet skills and build and sustain peer and mentor support relationships over many years through both face-to-face and online interaction. DO-IT Scholars' ability to access information and human resources on the Internet with a home computer and adaptive technology is assessed upon initial acceptance into the program. If necessary, DO-IT loans the participant the appropriate technology at no cost. Adaptive technology used by Scholars includes speech output systems for those who are blind or have disabilities that affect their reading ability, and speech input and alternative keyboards for those who do not have full use of their hands. Scholars practice self-advocacy and technical skills as they work with a DO-IT technology specialist to configure the systems they think will work best for them.

Ongoing online support includes e-mail messages that provide academic, career, and technical information, and lively discussions between peers and mentors about issues that impact college and career success. Mentoring in DO-IT is primarily done in an online group context rather than one-to-one. Scholars send questions to be answered by mentors and others through the DO-IT chatroom, where everyone benefits from reading the questions and answers. In

addition, there are online special-topic mentoring groups. For example, one such group includes all mentors and scholars who have visual impairments or expertise in that disability area. Mentors are drawn from the ranks of DO-IT Scholars who have graduated from high school and successfully entered postsecondary campus life. Although proximity is important to developing peer and mentor networks in most settings, such as in Summer Study activities, online communication has proven to be invaluable in building and sustaining relationships for many years over great distances (Burgstahler & Cronheim, 2001).

Career Preparation

The career preparation component of the DO-IT Scholars program helps students with disabilities prepare for careers in competitive fields. Summer and year-round activities provide Scholars with opportunities to explore their own interests and to develop and apply academic, vocational, and computer skills to work situations. Some choose to return for a third summer as interns to learn about program operations and how to work effectively with supervisors and co-workers. Scholars also practice disclosing their disabilities as well as negotiating and testing the effectiveness of adaptive computer technology and specific accommodations in job settings.

Opportunities to participate in work-based learning experiences are critical to the career success of people with disabilities, while the lack of such experiences has been found to be a barrier to employment for people with disabilities (Benz, Yovanoff, & Doren, 1997; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997; Unger, Wehman, Yasuda, Campbell, & Green, 2001). In a follow-up study, DO-IT Scholars reported that their work-based

learning experiences through the program proved valuable in preparing them for careers, especially in the areas of clarifying career goals, developing accommodation strategies, gaining work skills, and learning to work as part of a team (Burgstahler, 2001).

Program Success

In a study undertaken to assess former Scholars' reflections on the value of DO-IT participation (Kim-Rupnow & Burgstahler, in press), computer and Internet support were perceived as the most valuable activities, benefiting them through improving academic, social, and career skills. Former Scholars reported growth in the following specific areas as a result of their participation in DO-IT, listed here in descending order:

- Preparation for college
- Internet skills
- Preparation for employment
- Self-advocacy skills
- Computer skills
- Independence
- Perceived career options
- Social skills
- Self-esteem
- Perseverance

The DO-IT Scholars program has won several prestigious awards, including the President's Award of Excellence for Mentoring in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics; an outstanding program award from the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD); and the National Information Infrastructure Award for exemplary use of the Internet to further education. It has sustained operations for more than a decade. It was initially funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) as an experimental program to increase participation by students with disabilities in higher education programs and careers in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. After the initial six years the State of Washington con-

tinued to fund ongoing efforts with Washington residents and increased the scope of the program to include other challenging academic and career fields, such as business. With subsequent increased funding from government, corporations, and private sources, it has continued its proven exemplary practices and added features to the program.

Conclusion

Similar programs throughout the country can benefit from DO-IT's success by employing practices that provide access to technology for young people with disabilities to support the development of their academic and career skills, peer and mentor interaction, and smooth transitions between academic and employment levels of involvement. Support strategies employed by the DO-IT Scholars program have the potential to improve postsecondary academic and career outcomes for all students with disabilities.

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Weol Soon Kim-Rupnow is Assistant Professor with the Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Honolulu. She may be reached at 808/956-5712 or kimrupno@hawaii.edu. Sheryl Burgstahler is Director of DO-IT, University of Washington, Seattle. She may be reached at 206/543-0622 or sherylb@u.washington.edu. For more information about DO-IT consult www.washington.edu and select "Programs."

Ryan's Story

My name is Ryan Benson. I graduated from high school in June 2002, and I am currently in my sophomore year at the University of Washington in Seattle. I am planning to major in computer science with a focus on architecture and a minor in mathematics. After graduation I plan to work in the information technology field, such as positions at Microsoft. The disability that I have is cerebral palsy. I use an electric wheelchair for mobility. In college I use a laptop for all my work. Along with the word-prediction and the reading software that both help speed me up, I plug-in an external mouse that is like the control on my wheelchair.

I became a DO-IT Scholar in the summer of 2000 when I was in high school. Along with going through both phases of the Summer Study programs of DO-IT, I came back for the third year as a DO-IT intern for Summer Study. After my first Summer Study, I was asked by a DO-IT staff member to go to a local elementary school and talk to third graders about my disability. I also attended the U.W. Engineering Open House and other events, was given a chance to do a job shadow for a day at Microsoft, and through the DO-IT online e-mail mentoring received a lot of information about various topics such as finding a job, preparing for college life, and getting the accommodations that I needed when I entered college.

DO-IT has helped me connect with other programs that gave me opportunities such as internships, and possible future employers who are willing to hire me after I graduate with my degree. It helped empower me with a sense of independence and accomplishment! Now they call me a DO-IT Ambassador, and I share my knowledge/experiences with people who are where I was a few years ago.

Contributed by Ryan Benson, Seattle.

Alternative Education Accountability: Kentucky's Approach

by Leon Swarts

The number of alternative education programs in Kentucky has dramatically increased over the past five years in conjunction with safe schools legislation passed in 1998 (Kentucky Department of Education, 2001). There are now more than 150 alternative education programs that provide nontraditional curriculum, instruction, and assessment strategies for students having difficulty succeeding in traditional education settings (Swarts, 2002). Programs are structured at elementary and secondary levels (middle and high schools) either as schools-within-schools or in separate facilities on-site or off-site, and often provide therapeutic behavioral intervention. Kentucky defines an alternative school as "a district-operated and district-controlled facility with no definable attendance boundaries that is designed to provide services to at-risk populations with unique needs. Its population composition and characteristics change frequently and are controlled by the school district student assignment practices and policies" (703 KAR 4:080). Intervention services include "any preventive, developmental, corrective, supportive services or treatment provided to a student who is at risk of school failure, is at risk of participation in violent behavior or juvenile crime, or has been expelled from the school district" (KRS 158.44, (2), (1)).

Many of Kentucky's alternative programs serve students with disabilities as well as students without disabilities. As in other states, the primary disability category of students with disabilities enrolled in alternative schools in Kentucky is most often a learning or emotional-behavioral disability. Although it is clear that alternative schools in Kentucky serve students with disabilities, the percentage of students with disabilities attending these schools is not known because the state does not currently collect this information. Critical concerns re-

lated to alternative education in Kentucky and students with disabilities include availability and quality of special education staff, provision of appropriate services and supports for these students, and maintaining high, yet attainable, academic expectations and standards for learning.

The Importance of Accountability Measures for Alternative Education

The importance of clearly documenting measures of effectiveness and student success in alternative schools is gaining increased attention. Since the implementation of education-based reforms such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and zero tolerance policies, there is an increased need and demand for alternative schools to be held accountable for student progress and improved outcomes. Because funding is increasingly tied to student progress, documenting and measuring these outcomes is of utmost importance.

A preliminary comparison of academic and non-academic outcomes for traditional schools and alternative education programs in Kentucky at the elementary, middle, and high school levels was conducted using data from 1999-2001. The data showed that for students in alternative schools, academic performance was nearly 30% lower, attendance was 20% lower, the rate of dropout was 23% higher, the number of students retained at grade level was 9% higher, and transition to adult life (as measured by transition to postsecondary education, work, or military service) was 4% lower (Swarts, 2002). To gather further information about these results, to document the performance of alternative schools at a systems level, and to foster self-study, an evaluation tool for use with alternative programs was developed by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE),

called the Alternative Education Program Evaluation Instrument.

The Alternative Education Program Evaluation Instrument was developed based on a comprehensive review of national, state, and alternative education literature on standards and indicators. The Kentucky Department of Education Standards and Indicators for School Improvement was the primary resource used to develop the instrument to evaluate alternative education programs in Kentucky. These standards and indicators are part of Kentucky's movement toward academic proficiency for all schools and students by 2014. In addition, indicators from the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) were used as a secondary resource for development of the instrument. After incorporating the information from the national and state level standards, it became clear that additional standards specific to alternative education programs (i.e., highly structured classrooms, mentoring, and behavior management plans) were needed to capture the complexity of these settings and address their goals (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). A review of alternative education literature was conducted to identify specific alternative education research-based systems and strategies. These strategies were then aligned with the national and KDE indicators to yield a comprehensive set of standards and indicators that could be used to evaluate alternative education programs in Kentucky. The intent was to gather information that can provide clear direction for staff and school/program changes that may influence student outcomes.

Description of Alternative Education Program Evaluation Instrument

The evaluation instrument includes standards that are organized into three domains. Each domain includes three

standards (a total of nine) with 58 indicators. Descriptions of the standards for each domain are included along with a sample indicator that is relevant to alternative education programs in Kentucky (see Table 1).

An alternative education specialist who has been trained to understand and score the standards and indicators evaluates each alternative school. Evaluators are typically assigned to evaluate programs by region. A one-day site review includes visiting classrooms; observing teachers; interviewing students and staff; and reviewing assessment data, program plans, lesson plans and curriculum. Each indicator is rated using a rubric that specifies the degree to which it has been met (i.e., no, partial, yes). These ratings are converted to a numeric rating scale that can then be averaged to yield a score for each indicator across schools. Similarly, each standard is rated on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = no evidence of development, 5 = exemplary level of development and implementation), and can yield an average score for each standard across schools. These scores can be used by individual schools, grouped across schools with similar philosophies, or grouped statewide to determine areas of strength and need. Program improvement and progress across indicators can be measured over time by reviewing the annual evaluation data.

Results and Next Steps

Thus far, evaluation data have been gathered for two years, 2001-2002 and 2002-2003. During the first year, 66 programs were evaluated, and during the second year 42 programs were evaluated (for a total of 108 programs). These program reviews are part of an annual review process conducted by the Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky Center for School Safety. Preliminary results show that alternative education programs in Kentucky received the highest overall ratings on the standards representing Culture (Learning Environment Domain), Leadership, and Comprehensive and Effective Plan-

[Swarts, continued on page 34]

Table 1: Alternative Education Program Evaluation Instrument

Standard (including description)	Sample Alternative Education Indicator
Academic Performance Domain	
Curriculum – Rigorous, intentional, and aligned curriculum is used and meets state and local standards.	High quality academic instruction includes control for difficulty of instruction, small interactive groups, and direct response/questioning of students.
Assessment – Multiple evaluation and assessment strategies are used to continuously monitor and modify instruction to meet student needs and support proficient student work.	Individualized behavioral interventions are based on functional behavioral assessments to identify causes of behavior, why they persist, replacement behaviors, student interview/involvement, and use of multi-component interventions that influence student learning.
Instruction – All students are engaged by using effective, varied and research-based practices.	High-quality diagnostic instruction that has value, meaning and relevance for students.
Learning Environment Domain	
Culture – An effective learning community supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.	Low ratio of students to teachers offers more personal time for students, better behavioral gains, and higher quality instruction.
Student, Family, and Community Support - Families and community groups work together to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career, and developmental needs of all students.	Counseling, social services, and health assistance are available for all students on a regular basis (i.e., career preparation, behavioral assessment, management, and guidance services).
Professional Development, Professional Growth and Evaluation – Research-based and results driven professional development opportunities for staff and performance evaluation procedures are used to improve teaching and learning.	Professional development includes training in behavior management strategies/assessment, mentorship use, social skills instruction, and academic performance (i.e., curriculum instruction and assessment).
Efficiency Domain	
Leadership – Instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creating a learning culture, and developing leadership capacity.	Leadership reinforces the program mission, beliefs, goals, rules, and routines.
Organizational Structure and Resources – Maximum use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.	Emphasis on high-quality academic instruction to measure student academic gains, behavioral gains, and student outcomes (i.e., attendance, grades, credits).
Comprehensive and Effective Planning – Includes the development, implementation, and evaluation plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction, and focus on teaching and learning.	Safety, crisis management plans, and strategies exist (i.e., documents procedures established).

Supporting Students with Disabilities at California's El Camino Community College

by Teresa Whelley and Lucinda Aborn

El Camino Community College in El Camino, California, is one of 108 colleges in the California Community College System and offers nearly 2,500 classes in 850 programs including online and televised courses. El Camino Community College established a special program to assist students with disabilities in their pursuit of a postsecondary education in 1972 called the Special Resource Center. The purpose of the program was to assist students with disabilities to perform on an equal basis with non-disabled students in an integrated campus setting. Over 1,200 students are currently receiving services. El Camino has exemplary supports and services for the students with disabilities because of the range of supports, the flexibility of the delivery of these supports, the collaboration within the college and with the community, and accountability measures that are an integral part of the delivery of supports.

The Program

The SRC provides an instructional component as well as support services. Because of the strength of those two programs working in concert, the program then provides the leadership and a higher level of service to students with disabilities. And that helps us with our ancillary projects with career development, community partnerships, and then increased service provision through the interpreter training. The main elements are instruction, support services, and cooperative partnerships. Current and long-term goals are reflected in the vision statement: "The mission of El Camino College is to meet the educational needs of our diverse community and ensure student success by offering quality, comprehensive educational opportunities" (SRC Handbook, cover).

The SRC team is made up of the di-

rector, who oversees support services including all certified instructors, and counselors and administrative support. The support service supervisor oversees 25 hourly hire interpreters and captionists, and the visual and hearing impaired student advisor. The alternate media supervisor oversees the adaptive computer specialist and the advisor for students with physical disabilities. The program coordinator for the tutorial project oversees and monitors the tutors who provide assistance to the students who require tutoring. Under the certificated instructors and counselors domain there is a Deaf specialist, physical disabilities technology specialist, two learning disabilities specialists, a counselor, two sign language interpreters, and a teacher aide who oversees the sign language lab.

Collaboration

Collaborative efforts are essential. Successful student integration on campus begins with the partnerships students build as they integrate into whatever academic major and activity they want to pursue. The SRC is like an invisible support in many cases, behind-the-scenes services that are offered to all students with disabilities at El Camino College. As an example, the director of the High Tech Center was able to integrate assistive technology into all of the computer labs across campus. Other partnerships, such as those with the learning assistance classes and educational development courses in subjects like English and math, also exist. Another collaboration is between the dean of the school of natural sciences and the SRC resulting in a co-taught course with a biology instructor and an SRC instructor. Collaborative efforts happen at all levels. The Learning Resource Center collaborated on the purchase of assistive software and the library was the first in the state

to designate space called the "Access Room" with scanners, online card catalogs, and assistive devices that allow students to access material in alternate formats. Eight years ago, the El Camino library was remodeled with that access space included.

Collaboration efforts outside of El Camino come in the form of support from industry and job placement. Industry has contributed significantly. The SRC receives funding every year that goes to the High Tech Center, and through the efforts of the physical disabilities specialist at the High Tech Center, the program received most of the equipment in its vision center through company donations. The SRC also has strong connections with the Workforce Investment and One Stop programs, which help students with some of their job search strategies.

Supports

The primary objective of the SRC is to assist students with disabilities to succeed to the best of their abilities in their academic programs. This is accomplished through a combination of supports and the promotion of individual goal-setting, personal assertiveness, and progressive independence.

There are a variety of supports, services, and specialized technological devices to facilitate the process of reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities at El Camino Community College. Supports at a minimum include advanced orientation, liaison, and testing assistance; counseling services; disability-specific registration and advisement assistance; and instructional aide support. Services offered to students with disabilities include learning disability assessments, transcription service, textbooks recorded on tape, readers, real-time captioning, and Braille reading

material. Technological devices include Kurzweil reading machines, a large print typewriter, a Perkins Braille, a large-print copier, talking calculators, illuminated magnifiers, and videotape recorders. The evaluators are essential at El Camino because their assessments provide the information necessary to appropriate and needed supports and services for individual students. Equally important is the certificated faculty member who identifies the functional limitations of the student and the student's academic program so the classified professional can then carry out the implementation of the support services that are needed. And that ebbs and flows: while El Camino College provides a majority of the services on campus, it also has students in employment settings. There are students who take classes at One Stops and are provided support there. One of the school's Deaf students is on the football team, so a SRC staff member goes to the away games. The SRC provides the necessary supports wherever the student is so the student develops their compensatory strategies and remedial skills. Ultimately, student success is the program's mission as it advocates, coordinates, and serves in a way intended to bring the most benefit to the student.

Accountability

Accountability is a major factor in the success of the SRC and the students at El Camino College. There's accountability across the board from the hourly casual worker who goes out to the classroom to interpret, and, if the student doesn't show up, will come back and mark "no show" in the records, all the way up to their supervisors or coordinators and the director. Several forms of tracking are used at the SRC, including accountability procedures and tracking forms. Occasionally the state provides the guidelines. For example, state guidelines for distance education and alternative media offerings influence SRC policy development, forms, and procedures. Some accountability processes are

driven by mandates and some of them are just to help the SRC organize itself and work smarter.

Shortcomings

There are four shortcomings with the program that have been identified by staff. First, there is a need to serve students with psychiatric disabilities better. The SRC needs to spend more time recruiting and being proactive in assisting these students to manage their educational process; the students are often caught between hospitals and treatment programs and need help to engage educationally. Second, another group, students with developmental disabilities, appears to be caught between two mandates. The Community College System of California has declared itself an open system, meaning entry to all, yet students need to meet minimal levels of academic rigor to stay. There is a need for the school to offer the supports that enable students with developmental disabilities to succeed in higher education. The third cited shortcoming is alternative media. The state has developed standards with which El Camino is only just beginning to comply. It is now the entire college's responsibility to comply, not just the SRC's. And finally, incipient though begun, relationships with the community need to be strengthened to yield better job placements for the graduates of El Camino Community College.

Teresa Whelley is Assistant Professor and Research Coordinator with the National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports, Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu. She may be reached at 808/956-9142 or teresa.whelley@cds.hawaii.edu. Lucinda Aborn is Director of the Special Resource Center, El Camino Community College, El Camino, California. She may be reached at 310/660-3296 or Laborn@elcamino.edu.



Brian's Story

Hi, my name is Brian and I have a learning disability. Growing up in school I always thought I was stupid and never thought I would go to college. I barely passed high school and went to work. I heard about learning disabilities on television and thought that I should be tested. At the age of 25, I was assessed for learning disabilities at the Special Resource Center and found out I had a learning disability. I knew then I wasn't stupid and I decided I would go to college. I came to the SRC often for counseling and to develop my plan. I took all the educational development courses offered by the SRC. The educational development courses helped me to improve in all subjects and to become a good student. The support service I used the most was testing accommodation. I received extra time on my tests in a quiet place free of distraction. I also learned to use a computer to help me study and Computer Information Systems became my major. I couldn't have done it without the support and encouragement from the staff and teachers at the SRC.

After six years I graduated with an A.S. degree in Computer Information Systems. I am working in my profession as a Technology Program Coordinator providing technical support for users. It took me six years to graduate but I did it. I now have no doubt that I can do whatever I want to!

Contributed by Brian Krause, Torrance, California.

Providing Intensive Educational Supports at Virginia Commonwealth University

by Shannon McManus, Elizabeth Evans Getzel, and Lori W. Briel

The Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (VCU-RRTC) supported education program is designed to provide intensive educational supports to students with learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders within existing service delivery structures on campus. The VCU program uses the principles of supported education, which is a consumer-driven, individualized support system utilizing community and university resources (Pettella, Tarnoczy, & Geller, 1996; Unger, 1998). The program is implemented through the VCU Disability Support Services (DSS) Office on both the academic and medical campuses as part of the range of services offered by these offices.

Utilization of Technology

A key component of the VCU-RRTC supported education program is the exploration and utilization of technology to assist students with their academic coursework. Very few students with disabilities who enter our program have knowledge of or exposure to the variety of technology available. Such technology includes text-to-speech software for reading, writing, and test taking; speech recognition software for writing; electronic organizers for time management and organization; and electronic graphic organizers for reading comprehension, writing, and studying. These types of technology are used in a myriad of ways depending on each student's needs, strengths, weaknesses, and familiarity with technology.

During the development of an individualized academic support plan, students meet with an academic specialist (VCU-RRTC staff) to determine the most appropriate and effective methods for meeting their needs. If the academic specialist and student decide that tech-

nology use is the option that would be most suitable and effective, technology options are explored. Background information on the technology is given, such as the purpose, possible uses within their academic area, and how the technology works. The academic specialist demonstrates the technology and customizes the demonstration to meet the student's unique needs. Following the demonstration, the student then tries the technology with the assistance of the academic specialist. This enables a student to learn how to correctly use the technology and to determine if the technology is suitable to meet his or her needs. This is an important step in the process to ensure that the student continues to use the technology and does not abandon it because of incorrect use.

If students decide that they would like to continue to explore the technology independently, and in relation to their academic coursework, they receive a demo disk or sample of the technology, if available. Additionally, students receive information about the location of technology on campus as well as what financial assistance is available for purchase. If students find the technology beneficial, the program can loan it to students on a temporary basis. Students are able to use the technology throughout their participation in the VCU supported education program and receive technical assistance on an ongoing basis. Once a student leaves the program, the technology is returned in order to make it available for other students to use.

Success Story

The Disability Support Services Office referred Tim (a student with a learning disability) to the VCU supported education program after he failed a take-home exam. Following an assessment of Tim's situation and the challenges he faced, it

was determined that he was experiencing difficulty with reading comprehension and fully completing essay questions with multiple parts. A type of text-to-speech software with study skill features was explored to determine if it would enable Tim to compensate for his reading disability. The academic specialist demonstrated the software and modeled how to use it. Tim then tried the software to determine "adequacy of fit" and to be able to ask the academic specialist any questions pertaining to the software. Additionally, Tim and the academic specialist explored how to individualize the software to meet his needs such as slowing down the speech, enlarging the text, highlighting the print, using the electronic dictionary, and separating multiple part essay questions. Tim also used the software to read his typed answers, helping him to proof-read his test answers for content mistakes as well as grammatical and spelling errors. This multi-modal approach to completing his take home exams significantly improved Tim's grade, enabling him to pass the course.

Conclusion

VCU students with disabilities have reported that the supported education program enabled them to gain a better understanding about themselves and how they learn. Increased exposure to technology and software coupled with training and follow-up were also extremely beneficial in assisting students to progress in their programs of study. It is critical for students with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary education to be knowledgeable about technology and how it can be incorporated into their academic studies. All too often students with disabilities enter postsecondary education with a limited understanding of technology devices and

software, and their benefits. We have seen tremendous academic progress made by students with disabilities who entered our program either on academic probation, failing in one or two courses, or falling behind in their coursework.

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Shannon McManus is the Academic Specialist with the Academic Strategies for Achievement Program, Elizabeth Evans Getzel is the Program Director, and Lori Briel is the Career Specialist, all at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia. For further information about the VCU-RRTC supported education program, contact Shannon McManus at 804/827-0745 or at msmcmanu@vcu.edu.

Resources for Additional Information

- **National Disability Policy: A Progress Report.** A July 2003 report from the National Council on Disability offering a number of recommendations for action at the local, state, and national levels on policies affecting youth with disabilities. Available at www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/progressreport_final.html
- **Federal Actions Can Assist States in Improving Postsecondary Outcomes for Youth.** A July 2003 report from the General Accounting Office, issued in response to a Congressional request to provide information on IDEA students. Available at <http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d03773high.pdf>
- **A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and their Families.** A report issue in July 2002 by the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, specifically addressing school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspecaleducation/reports/index.html>.
- **New Freedom Initiative.** The Bush administration's New Freedom Initiative's goals are to increase access to assistive and universally designed technologies, expand educational opportunities, promote home ownership, integrate Americans with disabilities into the workforce, expand transportation options, and promote full access to community life. This initiative specifically promotes full access to community life through the implementation of the Olmstead Supreme Court decision and Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999. For more information see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/newfreedom>.
- **Independent Living Research Utilization/Olmstead Decision Implementation Resources.** In July 1999, the Supreme Court issued the Olmstead v. L.C. decision. The court's decision in that case clearly challenged federal, state, and local governments to develop more opportunities for individuals with disabilities through more accessible systems of cost-effective community-based services. The Olmstead decision ensures that youth with disabilities who transition from school to adult life have increased opportunities for independent living by providing for noninstitutional options in care and services. For more information and resources regarding implementation see the Independent Living Research Utilization Web site at <http://www.ilru.org/olmstead>.
- **National Study on Graduation Requirements and Diploma Options for Youth with Disabilities.** A report published by the National Center on Educational Outcomes and National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, examining states' policies and perspectives on graduation requirements, diploma options, and intended and unintended consequences of various graduation policies. It is based on a survey of states. Available at <http://education.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/Technical36.htm>.
- **Curriculum Transformation and Disability (CTAD) Workshop Facilitator's Guide.** A guide published by CTAD at the University of Minnesota to help postsecondary faculty make their classes more accessible to all students. Designed for use by postsecondary disability services providers, faculty and others in conducting a faculty development workshop encouraging and assisting faculty to incorporate universal design in their curricula and instruction. Available at www.gen.umn.edu/research/ctad.
- **National Center on Secondary Education and Transition.** The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) at the University of Minnesota coordinates national resources, offers technical assistance, and disseminates information related to secondary education and transition for youth with disabilities in order to create opportunities for youth to achieve successful futures. For more information visit www.ncset.org or call 612/624-2097.

Supporting Youth Development: UCSB's Center for School-Based Youth Development

by Gale M. Morrison, Merith Cosden, Shane Jimerson, and Michael J. Furlong

As public schools strive to raise students' academic performance they encounter numerous challenges. These challenges include the need to address school violence concerns, school discipline, and students who are challenged by social, emotional, behavioral, substance abuse, and mental health problems. These problems are complex, affect students in different ways, and often co-occur; thus, they require effective, creative, flexible responses.

Schools cannot remain neutral on these matters because their responses can either ameliorate or exacerbate the impact that these problems have on students' development and ultimate academic success. It is possible that schools, through practices that are not developmentally or culturally matched to students, may inadvertently commit their own form of "systemic violence." Students who bring academic and behavioral challenges to school may become further disconnected from school through practices that fail to help them develop personal, social, and academic competencies.

The Center for School-Based Youth Development at the University of California, Santa Barbara (CSBYD at UCSB) was founded to address contemporary challenges for youth such as school violence, school discipline, substance abuse, child abuse, and learning disabilities. Its mission is "to enhance school engagement for ALL students through strength-based assessment and targeted interventions designed to promote social and cognitive competence." The mission is carried out through research and development and by increasing the cadre of educators who are knowledgeable about and support a comprehensive and coordinated approach to student support services.

Our mission suggests that student engagement in schools be addressed at

three levels: students who are educationally engaged, students who are at risk, and students whose relationship with school has been fractured. In this article we summarize some of what we have learned through our research about meeting the needs of these three groups of youth.

Students Who Are Educationally Engaged

Many students are appropriately engaged with their schools' academic and social mission; however, educators must continue to "reaffirm" this connection by understanding *all* students' needs and how to effectively address these needs in the context of school so that they may achieve to the maximum extent possible. Schools must not ignore the very students who are already on a positive educational track.

We have developed a model that links key elements of school engagement. *Participation* (behavioral involvement) contributes to the formation of interpersonal *Attachments* (social bonding), which in turn results in a student developing a sense of personal *Commitment* (valuing of education), and ultimately to incorporating school *Membership* (identification as a school community citizen) as part of his or her self identity (P > A > C > M). Such a way of thinking about school engagement is relevant to all students and, if used as the basis for educational practice, it has the potential to organize overall school improvement efforts designed to create a better, more effective school.

Another facet of school engagement has been explored by two of our center's research partners, Tom Hanson and Greg Austin of WestEd, who have examined the relationship between the levels of positive school resilience factors (such as being engaged in meaningful

learning activities and having caring relationships at school). They have found that the gains schools make in promoting student academic learning (their primary mission) are greater when their students report that they have caring relationships and high expectations at school. Thus, establishing school climate conditions that foster the resilience factor of positive school engagement has the potential to benefit all students, not just those at risk.

One additional research interest of our center is to develop a better understanding of how schools create and sustain such climate conditions to enhance the social-emotional and academic competence of all students. We reason that these conditions are more enduring when they are infused into the academic fabric of the school. One initiative that we have been involved with that uses an infusion strategy is the Central Coast Service Learning Project. Schools within our region of California have adapted courses to embrace the principles of the service learning model that include linking course content and instruction to involvement in meaningful community service projects. These programs involve adaptation of course content and instructional approaches to encourage student self-exploration of their place as community citizens and increased awareness of pressing community needs, and to develop positive linkages between the school and the broader community. A primary objective is to link student learning objectives to involvement in meaningful, needed activities. As suggested by our ongoing evaluation of these projects, students report that they feel an increased sense of connection within their school and with the community. Such activities are one way to reaffirm positive student connections to school.

Students Who Are At-Risk

Another group of students is considered “at-risk” for educational failure or social maladjustment. Without additional intervention and attention these students may become alienated from school and devote their time and energy to activities that do not further their future educational adjustment: substance abuse, truancy, and destructive actions in the school and community. The schools’ challenge is to “reconnect” these students to the academic and social mission of the school with more specialized interventions. Schools must reach out to students who are not fully engaged in the schooling process.

Students with learning disabilities provide an example of those who fall into this “at-risk” group. The research of Merith Cosden provides an example of information that will help “reconnect” students. Her research focuses on self-perceptions and self-esteem among children with learning disabilities (LD). One factor identified as related to self-esteem for children with learning disabilities is their “self-understanding” of what it means to have a learning disability. One reason that children with LD may not have an accurate understanding of their own disability is that there is no formal process for providing this information to the child and the child may not receive feedback as part of their IEP. Parents, often themselves anxious about the news, may be reluctant to talk with the child about their disability, or may lack knowledge and provide misinformation to the child. Among common misconceptions are the breadth of the LD problem and the fact that many believe they will outgrow their disability over time.

The process of learning what it means to have a learning disability is a two-edged sword. Learning about one’s weaknesses is a necessary first step toward developing skills for successful adaptation to school, work or social relationships, but the development of self-understanding also means recognizing differences between oneself and others in ways that indicate that one is less capable than his or her peers. Thus,

when first faced with the understanding of what it means to have LD, students may show lower self-esteem, at least temporarily.

Interactions with friends, family, and school personnel can lead to accurate and positive understanding, or confusion and negative perceptions. The development of positive self-understanding is influenced by whether or not family members and close teachers have an accurate understanding of LD, as well as the child’s opportunities to discuss their disability with knowledgeable and caring others. The availability of significant others with whom to discuss their disability is particularly important to high school students. A developmental shift can be expected to occur during adolescence, as the individual is able to grasp a more differentiated view of self (i.e., “I have strengths in some areas and weaknesses in others”), which leads to greater self-acceptance. This ability to identify one’s strengths and weaknesses allows the adolescent to advocate for his or her needs more effectively.

Cosden’s research points to the need for interventions to build self-understanding and to help students with concerns about having LD across their life span.

Students Who Have Disengaged

The third group of students is those for whom the relationship with the school has been significantly fractured. These students may have been “pushed out” through disciplinary procedures, dropped out on their own, or been excluded because of their inability to function in “regular” school settings due to their educational or behavioral needs. For these students, efforts are needed to “reconstruct” their relationship to the school. In addition, community service coordination is likely to be needed.

Two research efforts associated with the Center for School-Based Youth Development have focused on reconstructing fractured relationships between youth and school/family/community entities. Turning Points, a project

awarded to Gale Morrison by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs, focused on elementary and junior high school students who were being “pushed out” of school due to behavior problems. This project revealed the complexity of problems that were being experienced by students who misbehave in school. Reconstructing a positive relationship with these students was done in a variety of ways, which did not necessarily entail changing the skills and abilities of the students (although successful interventions in that regard are helpful) but through altering some fundamental key environments. For example, changing teachers, changing peer groups or changing schools and giving the student a chance to start off with a clean slate improved engagement. Giving students an opportunity to succeed in some aspect of school such as sports was one avenue to reconstruct a reason to “connect” with school. Persistent and caring outreach to families, whose dysfunction was interfering with student performance at school, also made a difference.

The research of Shane Jimerson and Michael Furlong offers additional strategies for reconstructing students’ relationships to school. The family-focused, neighborhood-based emphasis of the four-year, longitudinal NEW VISTAS project employed a transactional-ecological model of youth development that highlighted the dynamic influence of relationships with adults, individual characteristics, and environmental influences in a youth’s social context. The program specifically addressed family-based risk factors (such as parental conflict, child abuse, and family history of problem behavior), but also identified individual assets or strengths that may be valuable in promoting social and cognitive competence and reconstructing relationships with the school context. This program involved a series of careful assessments, interviews, and emphasis on the individual youth and family members. Sensitivity to cultural and gender considerations was emphasized.

[Morrison, continued on page 34]

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Individualism and Collectivism

Individualism is rooted in the view that people are discrete entities who, as they transition to adulthood, should move from dependence to independence and self-reliance. Collectivism is rooted in the contrasting view that people are woven into the fabric of groups (e.g. family, neighborhood, tribe), and as they transition to adulthood they should move from dependence to interdependence (Ewalt & Mokuau, 1995). Individualistic cultures tend to stress individual rights, pursuing personal interests, setting and

Wehman (1996), “Self-determination – control over one’s life and choices – is the critical difference separating people with disabilities from those without disabilities.” This view has become widely accepted in the social service and academic fields concerned with disabilities, resulting in growing commitment to promote self-determination. For the transition process, best practice is likely to include providing students with disabilities with the requisite attitudes and skills for self-determination, along with opportunities for practice. However, such efforts are almost always based on a concept of self-determination rooted in individualism, typically incorporating the ideas of personal control and freedom to choose, which require skills such as decision making, problem solving, goal setting, self-observation, self-evaluation, self-reinforcement, self-awareness, self-knowledge, self-advocacy, and so on. From the interdependent collectivist standpoint, however, the most highly valued skills are likely to be other-oriented rather than self-oriented, such as understanding one’s roles in the group, perceiving and responding appropriately to the emotional status of others, and being able to work as part of a team. Such considerations lead Ewalt and Mokuau (1995) to point out that for most Western-trained social service professionals, “Rarely is contributing to the group’s well-being considered integral to self-determination, and rarely is placing the group’s well-being first seen as signifying maturity” (p. 170).

Listed below are some examples of individualistic values that commonly underlie transition policies and practices, along with possible alternative CLD values that may be encountered:

- Individual competitiveness and personal achievement (individualistic); group competitiveness and group achievement (CLD).
- Self-determination and individual choice (individualistic); group or hierarchical decision-making (CLD).

- Postsecondary education (individualistic); contributing to the family through wages, housework, etc. (CLD).
- Independent living and self-reliance (individualistic); residing with kin, interdependence, and possibly being cared for (CLD).
- Creating a transition plan on paper (individualistic); establishing a close personal relationship between professionals, youth, and family (CLD).

Achieving Cultural Sensitivity in Transition Services

Given the variability among CLD youth with disabilities and their families, there are no hard and fast rules for transition planning aside from one: the principle of individualization must be adhered to. Culturally sensitive strategies need to be used to help CLD students with disabilities and their families to express and develop their own transition goals and appropriate ways to achieve them. As Harry and her co-authors (1999) point out, it is not necessary to have a great deal of culturally specific information. Rather, they recommend “cultural reciprocity” in which professionals develop cultural self-awareness (meaning they recognize and understand the cultural underpinnings of their own views and practice) and take the lead in establishing a two-way process of cultural learning. The process of cultural reciprocity with a particular CLD youth and family involves the following steps:

- Step 1: The professional identifies his or her cultural values underlying interpretations of the youth’s situation. For example, the professional may realize that values like independence and self-reliance lead to recommending that a young adult with developmental disabilities move from the family home to supported living and, eventually, independent living.
- Step 2: The professional finds out the extent to which his or her values and assumptions are recognized and

Because transition systems are typically rooted in individualistic cultural assumptions, they often fall short in accommodating collectivistic values and behaviors.

achieving personal goals, and being true to one’s own values and beliefs. Collectivistic cultures tend to stress obligations that go along with one’s group roles, being an interdependent member of a group, working with others to achieve group success, and adhering to the group’s traditional values (Yamauchi, 1998). In traditional Pacific Island cultures, for example, “The person is not an individual in our Western sense of the term. The person is instead a locus of shared biographies: personal histories of people’s relationships with other people and with other things. The relationship defines the person, not vice-versa” (Lieber, 1990, p. 72). In short, from the individualistic perspective people create their relationships, while from the collectivistic perspective people are defined by their relationships.

The contrast between individualism and collectivism is reflected in the concept of *self-determination*. According to

[Leake, continued on next page]

accepted by the youth and family. If they do not view independent living as a milestone to adulthood, then this may not be an appropriate goal.

- Step 3: The professional acknowledges any cultural differences identified and explains to the youth and family how and why mainstream American society promotes different values. How the value of independent living has benefited other youth

In order to effectively support the transition of CLD youth with disabilities, professionals need to be aware of the contrasts between individualism and collectivism and of the cultural basis of their own values and practice.

and families might be described, helping the youth and family to understand the cultural basis for professional recommendations.

- Step 4: Through discussion and collaboration, the professional, youth, and family collaboratively determine the most effective way of adapting professional interpretations and recommendations to the family value system.

By taking a stance of cultural reciprocity, professionals are well on the way to establishing effective collaborative relationships with CLD youth and families. However, some cultural differences may represent barriers to such relationships that may require skill, time, and patience to address (Boone, 1992). For example, family members may be reluctant to participate in discussions, and if they do participate they may be unwilling to be forthright with strangers as the result of cultural and personal pro-

clivities and/or unpleasant experiences with professionals in the past. The belief that *families should take care of their own* is also common in many CLD families, so accepting assistance from outside agencies may be viewed as evading family responsibilities (Boone, 1992). In addition, generational differences are sometimes aggravated in CLD families as youth strive for acculturation to mainstream (individualistic) culture while their elders focus on maintaining collectivistic cultural traditions (although in some families the youth may be the ones more committed to traditional ways). Professionals who come across situations of family conflict may face delicate decisions about how hard to push for individualistic values versus honoring family desires that emerge from collectivistic values, which professionals may sometimes view as limiting and inequitable for youth with disabilities.

In addition to culturally sensitive individualization, professionals would do well to focus on developing and sustaining *natural supports* when working with CLD youth and their families. The term *natural supports* (also called *informal supports*) refers to people and resources in the community who are outside the professional service system but have the capacity to effectively provide supports. They may be friends, relatives, neighbors, clergy, or service organizations. Potential major advantages of natural supports are that people providing them may share and deeply understand the cultural values of those being supported, may have already established trusting relationships, and may continue providing supports long after professionals leave the scene. Natural supports are sometimes the only way for professionals to effectively work with people who otherwise avoid dealing with professional service systems. An example of a natural support for a CLD youth with disabilities wanting to transition to college would be to recruit and train a mentor from the same CLD group who has achieved college success and already knows the youth. Taken to a higher level, a *circle of support* consisting of key per-

sons in the youth's life would be created to provide formal and natural supports beginning in high school and extending into the college years.

Summary

Because transition systems are typically rooted in individualistic cultural assumptions, they often fall short in accommodating collectivistic values and behaviors. In order to effectively support the transition of CLD youth with disabilities, professionals need to be aware of the contrasts between individualism and collectivism and of the cultural basis of their own values and practice. They also need to master and use strategies for developing collaborative interpersonal relationships with CLD youth and families; eliciting youth and family views of their own values, dreams, strengths, and needs; and individualizing transition planning, services, and supports.

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David W. Leake is Director of Research and Evaluation with the Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu. He may be reached at 808/247-4737 or dwleake@aol.com.

Rhonda S. Black is Associate Professor of Special Education with the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and may be reached at 808/956-2367 or rblack@hawaii.edu.

Kelly Roberts is a Project Coordinator with the Center on Disability Studies, and may be reached at 808/956-3799 or robertsk@hawaii.edu.

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parents and educators to know that if a student graduates from high school with a standard high school diploma, the student is no longer entitled to special education services unless a state or district has a policy about continued services under such circumstances. Most states do not have such policies.

The following recommendations apply in relation to this major challenge:

- Promote the use of alternate assessments, including authentic or performance-based assessments, portfolios, and other documentation to support graduation decisions.
- Clarify the implications of state graduation requirements and the appropriate use of alternative diploma options for students with disabilities. Consider the potential impact of alternative diplomas on a student's future access to postsecondary education and employment opportunities. State and local education agencies should thoroughly discuss the meaning of these alternative diplomas with postsecondary education program representatives and employers.
- Clarify the implications of different diploma options for continued special education services.

Challenge 5: Ensure Access to and Full Participation in Postsecondary Education and Employment

Young adults with disabilities continue to face significant difficulties in securing jobs, accessing postsecondary education, living independently, fully participating in their communities, and accessing necessary community services such as healthcare and transportation. As a result of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and other federal legislation awareness has grown regarding accessibility issues faced by youth with disabilities seeking postsecondary education, life-long learning, and employment (Benz, Doren & Yovanoff, 1998; Stodden, 1998; Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002). The

number of youth in postsecondary schools reporting a disability has increased dramatically, climbing from 2.6% in 1978, to 9.2% in 1994, to nearly 19% in 1996 (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Gajar, 1992, 1998; Wagner & Blackorby, 1996). While this increase is encouraging, and while many colleges have increased their efforts to serve students with disabilities (Pierangelo & Crane, 1997), enrollment of people with disabilities in postsecondary education programs is still 50% lower than it is for the general population.

Gaps seen in postsecondary enrollment persist into adult employment (Benz et al., 1998; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Gilson, 1996), and are greater when comparing those with less educational attainment. Only 15.6% of persons with disabilities who have less than a high school diploma participate in today's labor force; the rate doubles to 30.2% for those who have completed high school, triples to 45.1% for those with some postsecondary education, and climbs to 50.3% for persons with disabilities who have at least four years of college (Yelin & Katz, 1994).

Recommendations to address this challenge include:

- Ensure that prior to each student's graduation from high school, the student's IEP team identifies and engages the responsible agencies, resources, and accommodations required for the student to successfully achieve positive postschool outcomes.
- Promote the value of preparation for and participation in postsecondary education. All agencies must recognize the value of postsecondary education and lifelong learning in securing, maintaining, and advancing in employment.
- Identify the specific types and levels of accommodations and supports a student will need to participate in postschool environments.
- Promote collaborative employer engagement.

Challenge 6: Increase Informed Parent Participation in Planning and Decision-Making

Research has shown that parent participation and leadership in transition planning play an important role in assuring successful transitions for youth with disabilities (DeStefano, Heck, Hasazi, & Furney, 1999; Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997; Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999; Kohler, 1993; Taymans, Corbey, & Dodge, 1995). Much of the discussion in the research literature centers on the role of parents as participants in the development of their child's IEP. IDEA '97 requires that state and local education agencies notify parents and encourage participation when the purpose of a planned meeting is the consideration of transition services. Beyond the IEP process, family training and involvement in program design, planning, and implementation are significant factors leading to positive youth outcomes (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1998).

Recommendations for increasing parent participation include:

- Provide comprehensive parent/family training, including training to help parents and families understand the changing nature of their role and what they can do to foster self-determination and promote informed choice.
- Work to reduce the confusion and frustration experienced by parents and families by coordinating services and streamlining access to information and programs.
- Work with community organizations serving culturally and racially diverse populations to assure that programs and services meet the needs of all parents and families.

Challenge 7: Improve Collaboration and Systems Linkages at All Levels

Effective transition planning and service depend upon functional linkages among schools, rehabilitation services, and other human service and community

agencies. However, a number of factors have stood as barriers to effective collaboration, including (a) lack of shared knowledge and vision by students, parents, and school and agency staff around students' postschool goals and the transition resources necessary to support students' needs and interests; (b) lack of shared information across school and community agencies, and coordinated assessment and planning processes, to support integrated transition planning; (c) lack of meaningful roles for students and parents in the transition decision-making process; and (d) lack of meaningful information on anticipated postschool services needed by students and follow-up data on the actual postschool outcomes and continuing support needs of students that can be used to guide improvement in systems collaboration and linkages. Recommendations to overcome these barriers include:

- Use cross-training and other methods to promote collaboration between general education and special education in student assessment, IEP and transition planning, and instruction.
- Promote collaboration between schools and vocational rehabilitation through the establishment of jointly funded positions.
- Promote access to a wider array of community services by mapping community assets and developing interagency agreements that promote and support the sharing of information and engagement in joint planning. Align organizational missions, policies, actions, and day-to-day management so that young people and families have ready access to the services they need.
- Establish cross-agency evaluation and accountability systems to assess school and postschool employment, independent living, and related outcomes of former special education students.
- Develop innovative interagency financing strategies. Identify ways to

promote cost-sharing and resource-pooling to make available needed transition services.

- Promote collaborative staff development programs. Effective approaches include cross-training; train-the-trainer; team-building; and others involving collaborative relationships between state and local agencies, institutions of higher education, parent centers, and consumer and advocacy organizations.

Conclusion

Addressing the many challenges associated with transition will require that we engage a much larger audience in our discussions on how best to proceed. This process should include young people with disabilities; parents; general education teachers and administrators; community agency staff, including those who serve youth and adults without disabilities; postsecondary education programs; and employers. Achievement of needed improvements in secondary education and transition services will require a broad-based commitment to educating all stakeholders, and to promoting meaningful collaboration at all levels.

Note: This article is based on the publication entitled *Current Challenges Facing the Future of Secondary Education and Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities*, National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota (revised 2003), available at www.ncset.org.

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David R. Johnson is Director of the Institute on Community Integration, and of the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. He may be reached at 612/614-1062 or johns006@umn.edu.

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make sure that providing choices in demonstration of knowledge does not conflict with the course's essential components.

- Use technology to enhance learning opportunities. Technology may be the key to increasing flexibility in your courses. Putting materials online, arranging for course listservs, and selecting software that is compatible with screen readers may assist all students in accessing materials in their own time in a manner that is accessible to them. The key is to not exclude students by using technology that is not accessible.
- Encourage faculty-student contact. Faculty-student contact is one of the strongest indicators for student retention. Strong evidence reported in Astin's study *What Matters in College?* (1993) supports the view that faculty involvement with students and active self-directed learning by students contribute more than anything else to measurable student success (Fox & Johnson, 2000, p. 43).

At the postsecondary level, course content and requirements vary widely. Faculty who are committed to inclusive practices have applied universal design principles in many creative ways. Some examples are listed below (Ivy Access Initiative, 2003):

- A law faculty member developed a website that is "Bobby-approved."*
- A biological sciences faculty member created more accessible lab experiences by developing teams of students that included [students with and without disabilities].
- A math/statistics faculty member began providing handouts of overheads to the entire class so that students could use them for reference and review. He also began to deliver his lectures more carefully, by replacing general terms like "this" or "that" with more specific descriptions, by pausing where appropriate, and by making eye contact with his students.
- A composition faculty member began audio taping his class so students could review class discussion and the professor's instructions about completing assignments.
- A foreign language professor used puppet shows, role plays, velcro cards, and searches of computer web sites in the second language to make the instruction as multi-modal as possible.
- A psychology professor allowed students the choice of writing the final exam as a take-home or a 3-hour in-class final.
- A sociology professor revised her syllabus to specify the objectives more clearly, and added a research project in addition to the midterm and final exam in order to diversify the types of work that affected the final grade in the course.
- A geology professor developed computer animation modules to illustrate some of the key concepts in a course on physical hydrology. These are shown in class and available out of class as well.
- A computer science professor started to begin each class with a forecast of the key concepts to be discussed that day and why they are important in the course material (after students complained that they had no context for his lectures).
- An introductory physics course administers the midterm exams in the evening, allowing all students up to two hours for a one-hour exam.
- A biology professor introduces new topics by asking all students to write a short essay on the topic, in class. Some students are better writers than talkers, and the professor finds that this practice leads to more universal participation in the subsequent class discussions.
- Another biology professor began using two overhead projectors in his lectures so he can leave the old slide on the screen longer.

Summary

Universal design is growing in popularity because it improves learning for everyone, while minimizing the need for individualized accommodations. In addition to being cost-effective and user-friendly, universal design has the added benefit of promoting full inclusion of students with disabilities in the educational environment. Using both technology and creativity, universal design promises to offer full access and participation to an expanding circle of students.

*Note: Bobby is a Web accessibility software tool designed to help find and address barriers to accessibility and encourage compliance with current accessibility guidelines. For more information, visit the Bobby Web site at <http://bobby.watchfire.com>

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Christine D. Bremer is Program Coordinator with the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. She may be reached at 612/625-7595 or breme006@umn.edu.

[Siegel, continued from page 13]

Ross, 1991; Siegel, Robert, Waxman, & Gaylord-Ross, 1992). Through analysis of these data and reviews of research, they distilled 12 transition services that were effective in supporting positive college and employment outcomes for graduates. These services “bled over” the lines that defined social worker, rehabilitation caseworker, tutor, counselor, and the like, and therein lay their success. Only in a system and only with providers who are willing to look at and respond to the full picture of a graduate’s life will high rates of success be attained. The 12 services are further described in Table 1. They are Pre-Graduation Contact, Transition Planning, Follow-up Contact, Adult Agency Casework, Postsecondary Education or Training, On-the-Job Training, Counseling, Independent Living Skills, Resource Referral, Social Skills Training, Eco-systematic Intervention, and Job Search. The current project searched the community for the adult agency that most closely matched this approach; Job Connection and Mainstay “fit the bill,” plus brought years of experience and their own enhancements to the endeavor.

The success of these transition services rests upon the overarching principle of the ongoing availability of services, which liberates the provider/participant relationship. This is key to developing trust with the program participant. If the provider is being rewarded based upon the number of cases closed, that reality contaminates the process and the relationship, and trust between provider and participant is transient at best. Success rates will plateau but never enter the greater than 90% realm, which is what should be expected. There is a beautiful paradox at work here. If the participant knows that their case will never be closed, the reassuring trust that this allows increases the probability that the participant will become free of the need for services sooner. And because everyone’s lives and the national economy have their peaks and valleys, the ongoing availability of transition services effectively buff-

ers the negative impacts of either type of downturn.

Creating the conditions for long-term (greater than two years) relationships between teachers and students is now a common principle of K-12 education reform. Confluently, assigning transition specialists to specific cohorts (i.e., defining a caseload as students who will graduate from high school in 2005, 2006, and 2007) provides the institutional support for ongoing availability and delivery of the full array of transition services. Because they are able to take a long-term interest in each of the persons served, developing trust and an authentic relationship, the transition specialist becomes a weaver of community rather than the dispenser of time-limited and constrained government aid. This prevents burnout among providers, and ultimately delivers a higher and more durable success rate among participants.

The Career Ladders Postsecondary Project builds follow-up into the delivery of transition services, so that every participant is contacted at least once every six months, and questions about employment, college, income, benefits, job satisfaction, and the like are recorded, as well as a self-assessment regarding how much transition service was utilized by the participant. Reliable data are recorded because the “researchers” are the service providers and a high level of trust has already been attained. The success level of the postsecondary service is high because, in all three Career Ladders components, services are shaped by the lives of the participants.

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Shepherd Siegel is Director of the Career Ladders Postsecondary Project and Manager of Career and Technical Education in the Seattle Public Schools, Seattle, Washington. He may be reached at 206/252-0733 or ssiegel@seattleschools.org.



Brian's Story

My name is Brian Marcos. I have been working at a supermarket as a bagger for almost four months now. This, of course, is due to the support that the people from Job Connection and Transition Success gave me while I attend college. In Transition Success, I met with one of their staff members and worked out a routine of having follow-up meetings throughout the school year to check on my progress in college. Other than giving me courage to take my academic life by the horns, Transition Success helped me pay for my tuition and books, after financial aid covered the majority. To describe how this program gave me courage, the staff person talked to me as a human. The day I met this person was the day I said hello to my responsibilities as a student and a human. In the Job Connection program, after completing a job personality quiz, I waited patiently for a person to call me saying there is a job opening for me. I then call them up and schedule a interview. Before I get excited, I have the responsibility of calling the Job Connection back to give them the news and tell them when the interview is. The person from the Job Connection gives me a ride to the place and helps me with any questions the employer gives me that I feel I am unable to answer.

Contributed by Brian Marcos, Seattle.

[Lehr, continued from page 7]

supported by adequate research or evaluation data before adopting a strategy or intervention.

Programs that have been designed to prevent dropout vary widely and it is clear that there is no one right way to intervene. Recent efforts are beginning to focus on identifying key components of programs that facilitate the effectiveness of interventions designed to promote school completion. Additional studies must be conducted to determine if there are critical components unique to fostering school completion for students with disabilities. Identification of these key components will provide additional information to guide the development of interventions, improve the likelihood of successful implementation, and yield increased rates of school completion.

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Camilla A. Lehr is Research Associate with the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. She may be reached at 612/624-0722 or lehrx001@umn.edu.

[Swarts, continued from page 21]

ning (Efficiency Domain). The standards of Assessment, Curriculum, and Instruction (Academic Performance Domain) received the lowest overall average ratings. These ratings remained relatively stable over time and across samples from two different years. These results suggest that the validity of the evaluation instrument is possible, the reliability of the data is developing, and the possibility of generalization exists.

Findings from this effort show that a standards-based instrument can be developed and used to evaluate individual and/or collective alternative education programs. The tool can gather valuable information and be used for multiple purposes, including designing and developing alternative education programs; pinpointing professional development needs; and reporting information to boards of education, community groups, and parents. This instrument can also be used to target specific standards and/or indicators to make program improvement recommendations that can influence student outcomes. Over time, as baseline data accumulate, trends in high and low performing standards will become evident. Examining high performing schools will assist in understanding essential characteristics that foster student success. This information can then be used to implement changes in lower performing schools, provide valuable data to increase the effectiveness of alternative education programs, and improve outcomes for students with and without disabilities.

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Leon Swarts is Training and Data Analyst for At-Risk Programs, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond. He may be reached at 859/622-8539 or Leon.Swarts@eku.edu.

[Morrison, continued from page 27]

Important also was the inclusion of an array of professionals (e.g., educational, mental health, drug and alcohol, social services, juvenile justice). Results examining the efficacy of these multidisciplinary comprehensive intervention services have revealed positive changes in behavior problems, social-emotional functioning, mental health, family relationships, and school related indicators (e.g., participation, grades). The research of Jimerson and Furlong further reveals the importance of understanding the unique characteristics (both assets and risks) of high-risk youths and families and providing coordinated interagency collaborative services to promote the social and cognitive competence of high-risk adolescents.

Conclusion

Schools must attend to the needs of *all* students through programs designed to reaffirm, reconnect, and reconstruct relationships with students who have these three types of responses to school. The challenge of assisting schools toward success requires a two-pronged approach: (a) designing and implementing evidence-based interventions to develop the social and cognitive competence of all students, and (b) helping to incorporate these practices into the mainstream as part of the overall context of school reform.

Gale M. Morrison, Merith Cosden, Shane Jimerson, and Michael J. Furlong are Center Faculty for the Center for School-Based Youth Development at the University of California, Santa Barbara. They may be reached at 805/893-5419 or by e-mail at gale@education.ucsb.edu. Additional information about their research and resulting strategies can be found on the Web at <http://www.education.ucsb.edu/netshare/c4sbyd/index.html>.

[Sprague, continued from page 17]

experienced on a daily basis often made school attendance and academic success a low priority. Given this, a primary goal of SFS family support services was to build collaborative partnerships between the student's family and the school to increase parental involvement in school. The SFS program staff coordinated all school contact to minimize parent confusion and provided parents with daily reports regarding their child's school progress. Additionally, the SFS staff worked collaboratively with parents to build school/home interventions that increased positive relationships, limit setting, monitoring, praise, and constructive problem-solving – factors that reduce the likelihood of school and community failure for students who are at-risk. In essence, the SFS case manager became an ally to the parent in managing the many needs of their child.

This pilot program provides promising results that support the combined use of school-wide interventions with individual student interventions for students who are at-risk.

Service Coordination

For some students, the SFS staff matched community services to individual student and family needs. Staff developed a program service plan with the student, their parents, and involved community agency representatives. The purpose of this service plan was to organize systematic and integrated services across school, home, and community settings that would assist students in reducing anti-social behavior and increase

positive school engagement. The purpose of service coordination was to build linkages to community agencies that ensured students had stable adult mentoring relationships, shelter, food, safety, and medical care. Moreover, SFS program staff worked collaboratively with community agencies to increase after-school supervision, encourage activities with non-delinquent peers, and build mental health support for students in managing the many stressful events of their day-to-day life.

Effectiveness of Skills for Success

Both the treatment and comparison schools showed a reduction in the relative percentage of total overt aggression and covert behavior over the course of the two-year study. The treatment school showed a higher reduction (35%) in overt aggression than the comparison school (26%), a reduction that was statistically significant ($p < .01$).

Moreover, the frequency and severity of juvenile arrests for students served by the SFS alternative program was much lower than an equivalent control group in the comparison school. Prior to placement, the SFS group had over twice as many students with juvenile arrest histories and, as a whole, committed more crime than the comparison group. However, post-placement arrest data indicated only a 10% increase in frequency and severity of arrests for the SFS group (two arrests during intervention) as compared to a substantial increase for the comparison group (264% or 40 arrests).

Both schools showed an increase in the relative percentage of authority conflict behaviors (i.e., defiance, disruption, and school attendance), with the treatment school showing an increase of 9% as opposed to one of 20% for the comparison school. An increase in authority conflict behaviors in both schools may be attributed to normal adolescent adjustment and attempts at independence. The lower increase in the treatment school can be attributed to the additional supports provided to the students who were at-risk.

This pilot program provides promising results that support the combined use of school-wide interventions with individual student interventions for students who are at-risk. Further, the application of universal screening to middle school programs may assist in early identification and, in turn, increased school services for students at-risk for school failure and antisocial behavior.

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Jeffrey Sprague is Co-Director and Vicki Nishioka is Research Associate, with the University of Oregon Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior, Eugene. They may be reached at 541/346-3592, or at jsprague56@aol.com or vnishioka@aol.com.

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