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Transition services and their effectiveness

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TRANSITION SERVICES AND
THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

JOHN E. McCARTY

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
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of Rowan College
May 1996

Approved by: _____
Professor

Date Approved: May 6, 1996

Abstract

John E. McCarty

Transition Services and
Their Effectiveness
Thesis Advisor
Dr. Stanley Urban

The purpose of this study was to determine if transition services as they are currently performed in a large suburban regional high school district are effective in helping classified students make the transition to the world beyond high school.

A review of current literature on transition shows that services vary in scope and effectiveness from state to state and from district to district. Interviews with district personnel reveal no follow-up once a student has left the district through graduation or "aging out".

A survey instrument was compiled and mailed to 200 former students who were classified while attending school in the district. The survey sought information on the transition conference, help from local, state and private agencies and their feelings regarding the help they received from district personnel.

The results of the survey were mixed with the district doing a good job overall and the state needing to improve its help of these young people.

Mini-Abstract

John E. McCarty

Transition Services and
Their Effectiveness
Thesis Advisor
Dr. Stanley Urban

This study was undertaken in order to ascertain the effectiveness of transition planning in a large suburban regional high school district. Former students were surveyed and their answers compiled to measure the effectiveness of the transition planning currently being done in the district.

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Mini-Abstract

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Chapter 1

BACKGROUND: The New Jersey Special Education Code on transition (NJAC 6:28) states that the school districts must provide transition services to students with educational disabilities who are over the age of fourteen.

The following statement from NJAC 6:28 describes the scope of transition services:

" Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a pupil with educational disabilities, designed with an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation."

These services vary from one district to another. In some cases transition planning could consist of a single meeting between a student and their case manager in which options such as the military or vocational training may be discussed. With other districts transition planning is continuous all through high school. Transition planning needs to be more uniform throughout the state with all districts following the same procedures.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to determine if a selected sample of students, eligible for special education, are receiving an adequate transition program upon graduating from high school to assist their assimilation into the job market and/or community at large.

RESEARCH QUESTION: Does the transition process currently being used in the district meet the needs of classified students in the school district as they graduate and move into the world of employment and higher education and become members of the community in which they live.

NEED FOR THE STUDY: All students eligible for special education who are leaving high school should have transition services in order to prepare them for life in the community, further education (college or vocational training) and the employment market.

This study focuses on a large suburban regional high school district that currently does not conduct a follow-up on the special education

students who had either graduated or turned 21 and therefore were terminated from the education system. To assess the value of the programs and the effects of the transition services that they received while in high school a follow-up study of former students would be of great value to the local Child Study Team and the district as a whole.

VALUE OF THIS STUDY: The responses of former students or members of their families to a survey that is mailed to them and the honesty of their answers, could provide a large amount of information which would be useful in improving existing transition planning. Areas of weakness could be identified and revisions in the current transition planning process could be implemented. Responses that were favorable toward the process would reinforce current practices and assure teachers and administrators that the program is effective. However the responses read when they are returned, the information can only benefit the members of the CST in their transition planning. Also this information will aid in determining if

financial resources dedicated to transition planning are appropriate.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY: The sample surveyed in this study is considered to be representative of all classified students graduating between 1993 and 1995. The success of the study therefore is dependent on obtaining a high response rate. There is evidence to suggest that respondents have different characteristics than non respondents. (Rosenthal and Rosnow, 1975) Non response rates as low as 20% can decrease the precision of sample estimates. (Cochran, 1977)

Any response to the survey would hopefully give us some indication of the successes and problems that the students have met with since leaving high school and enable the CST to improve the transition procedures that are currently being used.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

From a review of available literature on transition from high school to adult life it is clear that there must be an improvement in transition planning in order for special education students to move on to productive lives.

In an article entitled " Predicting Employment for Students Who Leave Special Education high School Programs ", (1) Laird W. Heal and Frank R. Rusch surveyed 3,357 students, their parents and former teachers. These former students had left high school between 1982 and 1987. They found that individual competencies and family characteristics were salient predictors of post-school employment. Vocational training didn't significantly increase the likelihood of employment but, on the job training enhanced the employment rate.

Heal and Rusch didn't differentiate between severely or mildly disabled students when the results were reported. The students were classified by gender, 68.5% male and 31.5% female, ethnicity, black 24.2%, white 65%, Hispanic 8.1% and

"other" 2.1%, type of school, with 1/3 of the students coming from each of the three types of district, urban, suburban and rural; also the subjects of the study were distributed by age, 33% were between 15 and 16 years of age, 38.1% were between 17 and 18, 22.9% were between 19 and 20 and 5.9% were over 20.

The authors findings regarding employment are shown in the following table.

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS EMPLOYED FIVE YEARS AFTER
HIGH SCHOOL

	Disabled	In General
Male	53.4%	64.5%
Female	29.6%	47.7%

The authors concluded that the employment rate of the disabled students wasn't that far behind the students who were in regular education classes. When they separated the severely disabled students from the mildly disabled they found that 70.8% of the mildly disabled students were employed vs. 68.9% of the general population. Further

examination of the data revealed that personal characteristics such as family support, gender, race, living and academic skills dominated the prediction of post school employment.

A study by Greenbaum, Graham and Scales (2) surveyed 49 adults with learning disabilities who had attended college. The subjects of the study were chosen at random and it was found that 90% graduated in 5.5 years. They attended more than one college and pursued a variety of majors. This survey was not based on a representative cross section of LD students.

The U.S. Department of Education estimates that 3% of all college students are learning disabled and in some institutions it is 11%. According to their figures an average of 30% of LD students who start college, graduate. This compares with 50% for the rest of the population. At Borat college, located in the mid-west, 37% of the LD students graduate. The college provided highly coordinated support services and special academic advisors. The LD students at the college took fewer courses per semester and received higher grades

while taking one year longer to graduate.

Further examination of the data revealed that these students had good oral language skills, were more motivated and had a positive attitude toward learning. While in high school they took more challenging, were less likely to be in self contained classrooms and received more extensive tutoring. The results at this school indicate that the success rate in college for the LD students may be mediated by the severity of the disability, prior educational experience and motivation.

At the University of Maryland there were 84 LD students attending classes between 1988 and 1992. Of these students 90% graduated and 20% of those were attending or had completed graduate school. On average, again, it took them 5.5 years to complete college and 76% of them attended more than one school. The results of these studies and others led Greenbaum, Graham and Scales to the following conclusions.

Keys To Success

1. The disability is mild to moderate and coupled with a high IQ.

2. The students should be knowledgeable about their disability.
3. Determination and perseverance are key factors.
4. Success is related to family support and financial assistance.
5. Good faculty advisors.

Barrier To Success

1. A lack of understanding and cooperation from faculty and administrators including discrimination committed due to the disability.

Recommendations

1. Disability related services need to be advertised in college brochures.
2. Support groups for LD students should be developed.
3. Improve the existing services.
4. When making the transition from high school to college families need to visit and carefully investigate the school and speak with LD students attending there.
5. Self understanding and self determination are important to the success of students with learning disabilities.

Most states report problems in transition planning from high school to college for students with both mild and severe disabilities. A study by Benz and Halpern (3) examined the transition services in the public schools of the state of Oregon. The study found that (a) few of the districts were using written interagency agreements or promoting other incentives to secure the involvement of community agencies; (b) there were considerable discrepancies between teachers and administrators over who was responsible for transition planning; (c) teachers wanted more and better parent involvement at all levels of the school program; and (d) follow up of former students was rare.

The authors interviewed administrators and special education teachers. All administrators and special education teachers in the state were surveyed, with 91% and 89% respectively responding. A 45% response rate was received from the parents. In this study over 90% of the school districts in Oregon were represented. The results indicated that the mechanism most frequently used by the districts

involved informal agreements with other agencies.

In the transition process it was found that:

1. 46% have an informal agreement with vocational education to provide instruction.
2. 42% have an informal agreement with community agencies to provide post-school services.
3. 36% have an informal agreement with the state vocational rehabilitation agency to provide services.
4. 19% of the districts provided placement assistance.
5. Formal written agreements were used by only 6% of the districts.
6. 15% of the districts had no coordination of services after high school.

When interviewing the teachers the authors found that only 13% were satisfied with the support received from the parents of the students and 36% were dissatisfied. 44% of the teachers wanted more direct and frequent communication with the parents and more parental involvement in their classrooms. Contact occurring only once per term or less was reported by 57% of the teachers.

Follow up of graduates was reported by 38% of the districts however this was done on an informal basis such as conversations between parents, teachers and community members. Only 15% of the districts formalized the process by use of a follow up questionnaire. In the entire state it was found that there was no follow up employment information on 56% of the students and no information on the current living arrangements of 60%.

The survey of the parents found that 33% of them had no idea what their children would be doing in ten years and 25% had no idea what their living arrangements might be. The parents did tend to see their children becoming more productive occupationally and more independent in their lifestyles in the near future years.

This study is noteworthy in that it supports with statewide data the findings of government agencies on the state and national level that show several components of transition services are deficient in many secondary programs. These components can be summarized as (a) the role of written agreements and school personnel (b) the

level of parent involvement and (c) the follow-up of previous students.

A study by Johnson, Bruininks and Thurlow raises many of the same questions as the previous article but the authors here are concerned with the transition services for the severely disabled (4).

They state: " The quality of life and the extent to which the handicapped youth achieve the desired goals of employment, community living and social/leisure opportunities are dependent upon the effectiveness of cooperative service planning and the availability of needed adult services. However, deficiencies in service availability and service planning for handicapped youth have been well documented in recent studies on post school employment outcomes and studies on residential living, social/leisure opportunities and transportation."

The central premise of this article is that improvement in the development of effective transition service planning and coordination can be accomplished only by (a) developing consistent policy goals at all levels; (b) formulating more effective management strategies to interpret and articulate policy goals and objectives, using proven planning models in organizing and coordinating services; (c) collecting reliable and valid information to guide decision making; and (d) using systematic evaluation of participant outcomes

and the costs and benefits of services.

The available evidence and collective experience of families and practitioners suggest that current transition efforts are far from optimal. They are fragmented, disorganized and ineffective. There are many reasons for these problems however, if the effectiveness of management efforts in the delivery of services through cooperative efforts of the schools, postsecondary educational programs, health care and rehabilitation with social service agencies can be improved, the transition experience of students from school to adult life could be much more successful.

The application of more effective management practices would require the use of valid and tested planning models, more accurate information on the needs and characteristics of individuals with disabilities and service availability, and a comprehensive evaluation of program outcomes, costs and benefits.

In the review of the literature one problem that is continuously cited is the lack of

coordination between the school districts, government agencies and the families of the students.

In the current study, the researcher believes similar findings will be the case with regards to impediment to transition. It is hoped that information collected can be used to help coordinate the transition from high school to the outside world. Many of the students in the district being studied have difficulty in attempting to carry out the functions of daily living and need support services. The only effective way to accomplish this is to coordinate the services from the schools. How this is to be accomplished will possibly be answered in part by this study.

Chapter 3

Research Strategy

The school district in which I am conducting my research is located in a primarily suburban area of upper middle class families. Average family income in the area exceeds \$100,000. The names of classified students who have either graduated or "aged out" from the district were made available to me.

A list of classified students who graduated or "aged out" of the district between 1993 and 1995 was compiled. Every third name on the list was chosen until a sample of 200 names was obtained. A sample size of 200 was selected on an apoxi basis with the hope that a 50% rate of return would result in 100 subjects in the study.

After compiling a list of the former students to be surveyed, each will be mailed a survey form to be filled out and returned in a stamped envelope that will be provided. This will be done at the end of January or early February of 1996.

Researchers in different areas of the country were contacted in an effort to obtain a survey

instrument that had previously been used and proven effective in collecting the data that I require. None of these was available for a reasonable fee, therefore a survey instrument was constructed which would provide the necessary data to answer the questions posed in this study. A copy of the survey is contained in appendix A.

CHAPTER 4

Survey Results

The results of the survey conducted in the Spring of 1996 are as follows. Two hundred questionnaires were sent to students who graduated between 1993 and 1995. Thirty eight former students returned the questionnaire which represents a 19% response rate to the survey. Results are reported here:

TABLE 1 Results of Questionnaire (N=38)

Question	YES	NO
1. During your last year of high school did you meet with your Case Manager from the Child Study Team to discuss plans for your future beyond high school?	27	11
2. When meeting with your case manager to discuss your transition from school were different options discussed with you? (examples: military, college, vocational school)	25	13
3. Do you feel the case manager spent enough time with you planning your future beyond high school?	19	19
4. Do you feel the transition planning that was done with you during your senior year helped to prepare you for life beyond high school?	19	19

Question	YES	NO
5. Were you put into contact with any local, state or private agencies, such as The New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, if it was thought that you would benefit from their services?	14	24
6. Were your future living arrangements after high school discussed?	10	28
7. Were your parents present for the transition conference?	21	17
8. Since leaving high school have you been helped by any government agencies in finding employment, job training, continuing education or making living arrangements?	15	23
9. Do you feel that the education you received adequately prepared you for living in the community?	21	17
10. In looking back at your school years do you feel that the teachers, counselor, and case managers helped to make the transition from high school to the outside world a good experience for you?	21	15

Interpretation and Analysis

With a response rate of only 19% answering the survey, the results can't be considered a representative sample of the students who have left the district after receiving services. However some

conclusions can be drawn from the results.

Hopefully this information can be used by the district to make any needed revisions in the transition process.

In question one the respondents were asked if they had met with their Case Manager during their senior year to discuss future plans. The majority or 27 students answered "yes". This indicates that students do meet with the case manager and their future plans are discussed. As for the 11 negative responses, it is possible that these respondents forgot about the meeting, did not meet with their case manager or are deliberately providing a negative response to skew the results.

In question two the students were asked if the meeting with the case manager covered school and career options. The majority or 25 answered "yes". The 11 negative responses could be attributed to poor recall or other undetermined factors.

Question three asked the respondents if they felt the case manager spent enough time with them planning their future beyond high school. The respondents were split evenly on this question with

9 responding affirmatively and 19 responding negatively. This could be interpreted as an area needing attention and the case managers should be made aware of the problem in this area.

Question four asked the respondents if they felt that the transition planning in their senior year helped to prepare them for life after high school. Again the responses were split evenly with 19 responding "yes" and 19 responding "no". This question also points out problems that need to be addressed by the case managers.

Question five asked the respondents if they had been put in contact with any state, local or private agencies that they may have benefitted from once they left high school. The response was 24 "no" and 14 "yes". This area should be addressed by the team members as soon as possible.

Question six asked the respondents if they were questioned about their future living arrangements once they left high school. The response was 28 "no" and 10 "yes". With a nearly 3 to 1 negative response this area clearly needs to be addressed by the Child Study Team.

Question seven asked if the parents were present for the transition conference. The response was 21 "yes" and 17 "no". While this indicates that a majority of the parents attend the conference further effort is needed to get more of them to attend this important meeting which helps to determine the future of the students.

Question eight asked the respondents if they had received any help from government agencies in attaining employment and/or job training, education or living arrangements. The results were 15 "yes" and 23 "no", clearly showing a need on the part of the state to help these students. Budget considerations being what they are it is unlikely that there will be any improvement in this area any time in the near future.

Question nine asked the respondents if they felt the education they received helped to prepare them for life after high school. The response was 21 "yes" and 17 "no". This is a positive response for the district but could likely be improved upon.

Question ten asked if teachers, counselors and case managers helped to make the transition to the

outside world a good experience for them. The response was 23 "yes" and 15 "no". This was a good response and shows that the district personnel are doing a good job in helping these students to get started in the outside world.

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

Due to the low response rate the results of this survey cannot be considered conclusive. At the onset I had hoped for a return of 50% which was not achieved and a response rate of only 19% was obtained. Reasons for this could be many and may include hostility toward the school system, a former student no longer living at home and in four instances, families no longer living at the address in the district records. With these limitations being acknowledged the survey can still provide us with valuable information that can be used to improve the transition process in the district in which it was conducted.

In reviewing the surveys I found that 11 of them had responses that were all negative. The first question of the survey asks if the respondent met with their Case Manager during their senior year to discuss transition. The only negative responses came from these 11 surveys. I questioned members of the Child Study Team in the district and they assured me that all senior students have a

transition conference. It cannot be determined if the completely negative response to the survey by these individuals was done to deliberately sabotage the results or if they genuinely had only negative responses to the questions.

For the purposes of this report I am going to assume that the responses received were all clearly thought out answers that the respondents made in hopes of improving the transition process.

In reviewing the results of the survey it was found that 5 of the 10 questions were answered "yes" a majority of the time. These questions asked if there was a transition conference, if the parents were there and if options for further education or training were discussed. They also asked if their schooling had prepared them for life in the outside world and if their teachers, counselors and case manager had made the transition from high school a good experience for them. The responses to these questions reflect well on the district. They show that the case managers are meeting with the students and their parents and are trying to make a workable plan for the future of

students. They also show that the students have good feelings toward the district and the staff members with whom they had contact.

The district should work to keep these feelings alive in the students. There is a transition process in place and the students are familiar with its purpose. The answers given to the survey show that most classified students who leave the district feel prepared for life in the outside world.

Negative responses to questions 5, 6 and 8 indicate problems with coordination of government and private agencies after the students have left the district and with their living arrangements. This is in part due to the Transitional Planning Form used by the district (included with this report). One person is designated as the liaison to post-secondary resources. In discussing this with the case managers they stated that the parents or student themselves were encouraged to take this responsibility. When questioned as to why it was done this way they stated that they and guidance personnel simply had too large a case load and

couldn't do an effective job of coordinating these resources. If school personnel had to take the responsibility it was given to the guidance counselor who would look into what services would be appropriate for the student.

APPENDIX A

TRANSITION SURVEY

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. The information gathered will be used to improve the transition process leading from the school to the world beyond high school.

1. During your last year of high school did you meet with your Case Manager from the Child Study Team to discuss plans for your future beyond high school?
yes___ no___
2. When meeting with your case manager to discuss your transition from school were different options discussed with you? (examples: military, college, vocational school) yes___ no___
3. Do you feel that your case manager spent enough time with you planning your future beyond high school?
yes___ no___
4. Do you feel the transition planning that was done with you during your senior year helped to prepare you for life beyond high school? yes___ no___
5. Were you put into contact with any local, state or private agencies, such as The New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, if it was thought that you would benefit from their services?
yes___ no___

6. Were your future living arrangements after high school discussed? yes___ no___
7. Were your parents present for the transition conference? yes___ no___
8. Since leaving high school have you been helped by any private or government agencies in finding employment, job training, continuing education or making living arrangements? yes___ no___
9. Do you feel that the education you received adequately prepared you for living in the community? yes___ no___
10. In looking back at your school years do you feel that the teachers, counselors, and case managers helped to make the transition from high school to the outside world a good experience for you? yes___ no___

In the space provided below please put any additional comments you would like to make.

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