Handouts, Reading and Resources for TOTAL Module 5: Implementation of Secondary Transition Best Practices

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Current Challenges Facing Secondary Education and Transition Services: What Research Tells Us

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ABSTRACT: This article presents findings from research that identifies key issues influencing the implementation of the federal transition requirements of the IDEA Amendments of 1997 and policies at the state and local levels; examines the impact and implications of recent general education reform initiatives on secondary education and transition services; and presents major policy, system, and other challenges that must be addressed over the next several years. Specific strategies and recommendations are offered in relation to each of the major challenges examined in this article.

Beginning with the Reagan administration in the mid-1980s, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), stressed the importance of improving transition services nationally. Since this time, the federal government has assumed a crucial role in stimulating state and local efforts to improve transition services through a variety of policy, interagency, systems change, model demonstration, and research efforts. Specific language on transition was included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990, and again in the IDEA Amendments of 1997. From this federal legislation, regulations were established requiring state and local education agencies specifically to address the school and postschool transition service needs of students with disabilities. These needs would be met
through coordinated planning among special education parents and students, general education, and community service agencies.

Progress in creating comprehensive and responsive secondary education and transition services has, however, been slow and inconsistent across states and school districts nationwide. This situation has occurred despite the supporting influences of federal legislation and mandates, the availability of research on effective secondary education and transition models and practices, and the emphasis placed on interagency collaboration as a means of helping young people achieve positive postschool outcomes (Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999; Johnson & Sharpe, 2000). A variety of recent policy and educational reform initiatives have also added to the challenges public schools must now face in addressing the secondary education and transition needs of youth with disabilities.

This article presents findings from research that identifies key issues influencing the implementation of the federal transition requirements of the IDEA Amendments of 1997 and policies at the state and local levels; examines the impact and implications of recent general education reform initiatives on secondary education and transition services; and presents the major policy, system, and other challenges that must be addressed over the next several years. These challenges have broad implications for special education and its relationship with general education, and a wide range of community agencies and organizations responsible for supporting youth with disabilities as they make the transition from high school to postsecondary education, employment, independent living options, lifelong learning, and other aspects of adult life.

EMERGENT POLICY INFLUENCES ON THE PROVISION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRANSITION SERVICES

Since the mid-1980s, the efficacy of public education programs has been challenged by policymakers, business leaders, professionals, and the general public. Whether the impetus for reform comes from a perception of “falling behind” our international counterparts, as asserted in A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983); not producing youth prepared for the labor market, as in the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1991); or “falling short” of providing equitable opportunities to all U.S. children, as documented in The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America’s Youth and Young Families (Grant Foundation, 1988), the consensus seems to be that there are serious things wrong with public education, that the problems are systemic rather than programmatic, and that nothing short of major structural change will fix these problems (Cobb & Johnson, 1997; Thurlow & Johnson, 2000). While these concerns initially focused on improving general education, there are now efforts to closely align special programs with emerging general education reforms (e.g., Elmore & Rothman, 1999; McDonell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997).

Special education programs have been influenced by several recent federal and state education reforms, including the School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994, Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, and the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994, all of which have promoted comprehensive strategies for improving public school programs for all students, including those from diverse, multicultural backgrounds and situations of poverty. These reforms 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.

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. IDEA ’97 also expanded previous transition requirements by requiring that the individualized education program (IEP) include, at age 14 or earlier, a statement of transition service needs that focus on the student’s courses of study (such as
participation in advanced-placement courses or vocational education programs). The IEP must also include, beginning at age 16 or younger, a statement of needed transition services and interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages.

The current challenge is to integrate and align these transition requirements with other IDEA ’97 requirements that give students with disabilities greater access to the general education curriculum and assessment systems. Several recent studies indicate that the implementation of transition service requirements has been too slow, with many states failing to achieve minimal levels of compliance (Hasazi et al., 1999; Johnson & Sharpe, 2000; National Council on Disability, 2000). Areas of greatest noncompliance include having appropriate participants at IEP meetings, providing adequate notice of meetings, and providing a statement of needed services in students’ IEPs. These problems have been complicated further by state and local standards-based assessment systems that either fail to include students with disabilities or provide inadequate accommodations that support their participation.

Students with disabilities have also experienced difficulties in meeting state and local graduation requirements, and concerns are mounting about the relationship between students’ academic experiences and the formulation of postschool transition plans that address how students will access postsecondary education, employment, and community living opportunities (Guy, Shin, Lee, & Thurlow, 1999; Johnson, Sharpe, & Stodden, 2000; Policy Information Clearinghouse, 1997; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000a, 2000b). Limited levels of service coordination and collaboration among schools and community service agencies create difficulties for students with disabilities and families in achieving postschool results. Strategies are desperately needed to help state and local education agencies and community service agencies address the transition service requirements as students access the general curriculum and meet state standards and graduation requirements.

**CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES IMPACTING SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRANSITION SERVICES**

**CHALLENGE 1: ENSURE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ACCESS TO THE FULL RANGE OF GENERAL EDUCATION’S CURRICULAR OPTIONS AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

IDEA ’97 provides many students with disabilities new opportunities to participate in and benefit from a wide array of general education courses and learning experiences. A major goal of accessing the general education curriculum is to prepare students to earn a diploma and help prepare them for adult life (Policy Information Clearinghouse, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Although the general education curriculum contains both academic (e.g., math, science) and nonacademic (e.g., career education, arts, citizenship) domains, student performance is assessed primarily in academics. As a result, it is not uncommon for portions of the general curriculum as well as transition goals to receive limited or no attention (Hasazi et al., 1999; Warren, 1997). There also may result a narrowing of curriculum and instruction to focus on content assessed in state or local tests. This may limit the range of program options for students due to intensified efforts to concentrate on areas of weakness identified by testing (Education Commission of the States, 1998; Lane, Park, & Stone, 1998; Nelson, 1999; Thurlow & Johnson, 2000). Efforts must be undertaken to ensure that students with disabilities remain on a full “curriculum” track, with learning expectations that guide the instruction of general education students. IEP teams must work to ensure that high expectations are maintained and students are afforded opportunities to develop skills through a wide range of curriculum options, including vocational educa-
tion, service learning, community work experience, and adult living skills (Hasazi et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2000).

Access to the general education curriculum requires more than common standards, the integration of academic and applied learning, and universal design. It also depends on other factors, such as the knowledge and skill levels of educators, appropriate instructional materials and strategies (Boudah, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1997; Carnine, 1995; Kameenui & Carnine, 1994; Tralli, Colombo, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1999), use of accommodations during instruction and testing (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000; Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 1998; Thurlow, House, Boys, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 2000), and collaboration between general education and special education personnel in designing educational programs for students with disabilities (Knight, 1998; Lenz & Scanlon, 1998).

There is a critical need to develop assessment, curriculum, and instructional strategies that are relevant to all students (including those who drop out and have significant learning needs), allowing them to successfully achieve state and local standards, as well as to develop other essential adult life skills through vocational education, training in adult living skills, community participation, and others. Strategies such as “universal design” offer another approach to ensuring that students with disabilities access the full range of learning opportunities in the secondary education curriculum (Jorgensen, 1997; Orkis & McLane, 1998; Rose & Meyer, 1996). Secondary education and transition models are also needed that integrate academic, career, work-based, service learning, and other learning experiences.

To ensure that students with disabilities access the full range of general education’s curricular options and learning experiences, there is a need to:

Promote high expectations for student achievement and learning. High expectations must be maintained for students with disabilities across the full range of academic and nonacademic courses and programs available within middle schools and high schools nationally. This is consistent with the Bush administration’s blueprint for education reform, no child left behind, that makes schools accountable for ensuring that all students, including disadvantaged students, meet high academic standards. In order to maintain high academic standards, instructional strategies that promote differential teaching, universal design, integrated academic and applied learning, and other practices will need to be broadly adopted.

Make systematic and appropriate use of assessment and instructional accommodations. General education and special education teachers need information and skills on how to appropriately use accommodations in assessment and instructional situations. Improved teacher preparation at the preservice and continuing education levels, promotion of collaborative teaching models, and other strategies are needed to address this issue. State and local agencies are also grappling with inconsistent policies, procedures, and practices on the use of accommodations. Consequently, accommodations are many times viewed as unacceptable in meeting state or local district testing conditions, often overused in the hope of “boosting” student performance, and commonly considered too expensive and difficult to implement (Thurlow et al., 2000; Thurlow & Johnson, 2000). The latter factor often results in students’ not receiving needed accommodations.

Ensure that students have access to the full range of secondary education curricula and programs. Students’ IEPs must focus on the broadest range of curriculum and programs that support students with disabilities in successfully meeting state academic and related standards as well as developing essential adult-life skills. In addition to the academic focus of the general education curriculum, high school curricular options must also involve students with disabilities in: community-based work experience, vocational education, dropout prevention and reentry programs, independent living skills programs, Tech Prep programs, service learning opportunities, and others (Thurlow & Johnson, 2000).

Challenge 2: Make High School Graduation Decisions Based on Meaningful Indicators of Students’ Learning and Skills and Clarify the Implications of Different Diploma Options for Students With Disabilities

Requirements that states set for graduation can range from Carnegie unit requirements (a certain
number of class credits earned in specific areas), to successfully passing a competency test, high school exit exams, or a series of benchmark exams (Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Anderson, 1995). States may also require almost any combination of these requirements. 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 include special education diplomas, certificates of completion, occupational diplomas, and others. States are also developing strategies designed to improve the passing rates of students with disabilities on state exit exams and in meeting other requirements for graduation. Strategies, to date, have included grade-level retention, specialized tutoring, and special instruction during the school day and after school, on weekends, and in the summer (Nelson, 1999; Thurlow et al., 1998).

A major concern arises for students who become frustrated at repeated failures on state graduation tests and related requirements and drop out of school. Dropping out of school is one of the most serious and pervasive problems facing special education programs nationally. For the 1998-99 school year (the most recent data available), approximately 26.8% of students with disabilities exited school by dropping out. These dropout rates vary by disability type and level. For example, dropout rates are as high as 55% for youth with serious emotional disturbance and 32% for students with learning disabilities (Wagner et al., 1991). As more education reforms (e.g., high-stakes testing) are adopted, it is important to study whether there is an association between these reforms and changes in drop-out rates among students with disabilities (Sinclair, Christiansen, Thurlow, & Evelow, 1994).

State and local education agencies also need to examine the implications of developing and granting alternative diploma options for students with disabilities. The question here is whether receiving less than a standard high school diploma may limit a student’s access to future postsecondary education and employment opportunities. Currently, most states offer and grant alternative diplomas in addition to the standard high school diploma (Guy et al., 1999). State and local education agencies need to thoroughly discuss the “meaning” and “rigor” of these alternative diplomas with, at a minimum, postsecondary education program representatives and employers. Consensus must be reached on their use for postsecondary education admissions and in making hiring decisions.

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Clarify the implications of different diploma options for continued special education services. It is important for 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, however, do not have such policies. Special educa-
tion and general education teachers should carefully work with students and families to consider what it actually means to receive a high school diploma. In some cases, it may be advisable to delay formal receipt of a standard high school diploma until the conditions (goals and objectives) of the student’s IEP have been fully met, including all transition service requirements outlined in IDEA ‘97.

**Challenge 3: Ensure Students Access to and Full Participation in Postsecondary Education, Employment, and Independent Living Opportunities**

Young adults with disabilities still face significant difficulties in securing jobs, accessing postsecondary education, living independently, and fully participating in their communities. With the passage of recent federal legislation (Americans with Disabilities Act, P. L. 101-336; and IDEA ‘97, P. L. 105-17) has come an expanding social awareness of accessibility and disability issues surrounding youth with disabilities seeking access to postsecondary education, lifelong learning, and employment (Benz, Doren, & Yovanoff, 1998; Horn & Berktold, 1999). 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).

Since 1990 there has been a 90% increase in the number of colleges/universities, community colleges, and vocational technical centers offering opportunities for persons with disabilities to continue their education (Pierangelo & Crane, 1997). Information available from the National Longitudinal Transition Study illustrates that of those who graduate, 19% of students with disabilities, in contrast to 56% of students without disabilities, attend a postsecondary school within the first 2 years of leaving high school (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Further, difficulties experienced by young people with disabilities in completing high school or receiving a postsecondary education credential also influence adult employment opportunities (Benz et al., 1998; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Gilson, 1996). Only 15.6% of persons with disabilities with 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 with at least 4 years of college (Reskin & Roos, 1990; Yelin & Katz, 1994).

The National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports (NCSPEs), a rehabilitation, research, and training center funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education, at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, has conducted an extensive program of research focused on the access, participation, and success of youth with disabilities in postsecondary education and subsequent employment. Based on this research, NCSPEs has framed issues concerning students with disabilities and postsecondary education within the following four areas of intervention:

- Include within the secondary education preparation received by students with disabilities opportunities for students to understand themselves and their disability in relation to needed services and supports, with a focus on advocating for those needs in different postschool educational and employment settings (NCSPEs, 2000a).
- Develop effective models of assistance and support that are personally responsive, flexible, and individualized, as well as coordinated with instruction and integrated with the overall life support needs of the student (NCSPEs, 2000b; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000a).
- Coordinate and manage postsecondary education supports and services with those provided by other community service agencies (health, mental health, human services, transportation, and others) required by many students with disabilities to successfully participate in and complete their postsecondary education programs (NCSPEs, 2000a; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000b).
- Ensure that the educational supports required by students during their postsecondary education program experiences transfer to eventual employment settings (NCSPEs, 2000a; Thomas, 2000).
Another pressing societal challenge concerns the overall unemployment rate among adults with disabilities in the United States. Although employment has improved somewhat over the past 14-year period for people who say they are able to work, employment is still an area with the widest gulf between all people with disabilities and the rest of the population. Currently, only 32% of persons with disabilities, ages 18 to 64, work full- or part-time, compared to 81% of the nondisabled population—a 49% gap (National Organization on Disability, 2000). According to the National Organization on Disability’s study, employment prospects for 18- to 29-year-olds are the most promising. Among this cohort, 50% of those with disabilities who are able to work are working, compared to 72% of their nondisabled counterparts.

Related to the future workplace participation of youth with disabilities is the need to involve these young people in state and local workforce development initiatives, such as the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. WIA services for youth include (a) establishment of local youth councils, (b) Youth Opportunity Grants that promote employment and training, (c) comprehensive career development services based on individualized assessment and planning, (d) youth connections and access to the one-stop career center system, and (e) performance accountability focused on employment. Strategies must be developed to ensure that youth with disabilities are included in WIA programs.

It is well understood that preparation for the transition from high school to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living must begin early, or at least by age 14. It is at this age that students’ IEP teams must engage in discussions regarding the types of course work students will need, at a minimum, to be able to enroll in postsecondary education programs, the types of learning options and experiences students will need to develop basic work skills for employment, as well as skills needed for independent living.

Specific types and levels of accommodations and supports a student will need to overcome barriers to participation in these postschool environments must also be identified. President Bush’s New Freedom Initiative is intended to help Americans with disabilities by increasing their access to assistive and universally designed technologies that remove barriers to postsecondary education, employment, and community life. Increased access to assistive technologies, funding for low-interest loan programs to purchase these technologies, and better coordination among agencies in prioritizing the immediate needs of young adults with disabilities for assistive technology needs in communities nationwide are part of this initiative.

Prior to the student’s graduation from high school, it is the responsibility of the student’s IEP team to identify and engage the responsible agencies, resources, and accommodations required for the student to successfully achieve positive adult life outcomes. State vocational rehabilitation programs have, for example, served as a major resource in the preparation of transition-age youth for employment. A recent longitudinal study of state vocational rehabilitation programs reported that transition-age youth currently represent 13.5% of all vocational rehabilitation clients, or approximately 135,391 persons nationally (Hayward & Schmidt-Davis, 2000). This study also reported that receipt of specific vocational rehabilitation services, including education or training services, physical or mental restoration services, and diagnostic or evaluation services, were strongly associated with achieving a positive employment outcome and to entering competitive employment. Overall, nearly two-thirds (63%) of transition-age youth who were vocational rehabilitation clients achieved an employment outcome as a result of the services they received (Hayward & Schmidt-Davis). Prior to a student’s graduation, all agencies responsible need to:

Ensure that community service agency participation systematically occurs in the development of
postschool transition plans. Strategies such as formalizing agency responsibilities through interagency agreements or memoranda of understanding, and formalizing follow-up procedures and actions when agencies are unable to attend should be considered.

Engage in integrated service planning. The IEP should be coordinated with the individualized service plans required under other federal and state programs (Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title XIX of the Social Security Act [Medicaid], Title XVI of the Social Security Act [Supplemental Security Income], and other federal programs).

Provide information to parents on essential health and income maintenance programs. Information on the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, including information on basic program eligibility, 18-year-old’s benefit redeterminations, appeals processes, and use of the SSI work incentives in promoting employment outcomes must be readily accessible to professionals, parents, and students with disabilities. Special education personnel must play a major role in making such information available and assisting parents and students in accessing needed benefits.

Promote collaborative employer engagement. Increased secondary and postsecondary work-based learning opportunities, and ultimately jobs, are predicated on available and willing employers. Vehicles are needed, such as intermediary linking entities that were developed through recent school-to-work legislation, that convene and connect schools, service agencies, and employers to maximize the important learning adjuncts that workplaces represent. Given multiple youth initiatives that typically exist in communities, it is expedient to engage employers through collaborative efforts that minimize the distinction between categories of youth.

Establish partnerships with workforce development entities. The participation of youth and young adults with disabilities, family members, and special education and rehabilitation professionals in state and local workforce development initiatives should be promoted. This is critically important to ensure that initiatives such as the WIA’s youth employment programs are fully accessible to individuals with disabilities as they pursue postsecondary education and employment opportunities.

**Challenge 4: Support Student and Family Participation**

The importance of student participation has been reinforced by emerging practices in public schools emphasizing the core values of self-determination, personal choice, and shared responsibility. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has played a major role in advancing a wide range of self-determination strategies through sponsored research and demonstration projects. The IDEA ’97 regulations are explicit and require that all special education students age 14 and older are to be invited to their IEP meetings when transition is being discussed. Recent studies have shown that many students are attending their IEP meetings (Hasazi et al., 1999; Johnson & Sharpe, 2000). There remains, however, a significant number who are not involved. This raises obvious concerns as to whether these students are not being extended opportunities for involvement, or are simply choosing not to attend. It is difficult, however, to imagine conditions under which students would not attend their IEP meetings other than by personal choice. Questions must also be raised as to how well prepared these young people feel to participate in and ultimately lead discussions concerning their goals.

Parent participation in IEP meetings has been required since the inception of the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) of 1975. A large part of the discussion in the literature centers around the role of parents as participants in the development of their child’s IEP. IDEA 1990 and the 1997 Amendments have also required that state and local education agencies notify parents and encourage their participation when the purpose of the meeting is the consideration of transition services. While existing policies have strongly encouraged the participation of parents, it is less clear how successful these strategies have been in creating “meaningful” and “valued” roles for parents. Because of the critical role that parents play in assisting their children in making the transition from school to adult life, additional attention must be given to establishing strategies and methods needed to actively engage them in discussions and decisions concerning school and
postschool options. Special attention must be given to funding effective training and outreach strategies for parents from diverse multicultural backgrounds and those living in poverty. To improve student and parent participation, there is a need to:

Support students in the development of decision-making, communication, and self-advocacy skills necessary to assume a leadership role in their transition/IEP meetings. Strategies may include offering classes specifically designed to enhance decision making, efforts to promote self-determination and goal-setting throughout the curriculum, and sending information home to assist parents in preparing their child for participation. Students’ goals for self-determination must also be clearly stated within IEPs. Resources should also be committed to large-scale technical assistance and dissemination efforts to ensure that elementary, middle, and high schools nationwide have ready access to relevant information, curricula, and strategies to promote self-determination.

Ensure that each Parent Training and Information (PTI) center has the information and capacity to support parents and students in the IEP and transition planning process. These PTIs represent a national network of organizations charged with the responsibility of providing parents information and support in relation to their child’s participation in special education. PTIs must be viewed, in part, as a logical and important network for sharing information on the transition service requirements of IDEA ’97. In addition, parents also need information on the juvenile justice systems, appropriate strategies and programs for serving youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities, information on community service programs and their availability, and many other issues.

**Challenge 5: Improve Collaboration and System Linkages at All Levels**

The effective use of interagency collaboration and cooperation to address transition needs of youths with disabilities has been difficult to achieve due to widely varying factors, including (a) lack of shared information on students across agencies, making it virtually impossible to develop integrated service plans that support individuals in achieving school and postschool results (Johnson et al., 2000); (b) lack of follow-up data on program recipients that could be used to improve service effectiveness (Johnson, McGrew, Bloomberg, Bruininks, & Lin, 1997; Stodden & Boone, 1987); (c) lack of adequate attention in IEPs to health insurance, transportation, and other aspects of adult living; (d) lack of systematic transition planning with those agencies that would assume responsibility for postschool service needs (Hasazi et al., 1999; Johnson & Sharpe, 2000); (e) ineffectual interagency agreements (Guy & Schriner, 1997); (f) difficulties in anticipating needed postschool services; and (g) ineffective management practices for establishing interagency teams (Johnson et al., 1997). Despite these problems, interagency collaboration and coordination of services must continue as a major strategy in addressing the needs of youths with disabilities.

A wide range of collaborative approaches and models have been part of the ongoing effort to improve transition services and postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities and families for more than 2 decades. OSEP’s State and Local Implementation of IDEA (SLIDEA) study (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) illustrated recent strategies by states to improve the coordination of services. The study found, for example, that states have relied extensively on the development of interagency agreements to provide services that support students with disabilities as they transition from school to adult life. The study found that 89% of the states have written agreements with vocational rehabilitation, 56% with mental health agencies, and 51% with agencies responsible for employment and training (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). States have also funded transition coordinators whose primary responsibility is assisting districts to help students transition from school to postsecondary education, employment,
and community living. Currently, 46 states report employing one or more transition coordinators (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). To improve collaboration at all levels, there is a need to:

**Promote general education and special education collaboration.** This would include collaborative models of student assessment, IEP and transition planning, and instruction between general education and special education to promote positive school and postschool outcomes.

**Establish cross-agency evaluation and accountability systems.** This would include evaluations of school and postschool employment, independent living, and related outcomes of former special education students.

**Develop innovative interagency financing strategies.** Fiscal disincentives should be removed and waiver options provided to promote cost-sharing and resource-pooling among agencies in making available needed transition services and supports for students with disabilities.

**Promote collaborative staff development programs.** Approaches such as cross-training, train-the-trainer, team-building, and others involving collaborative relationships between state and local agencies, school district personnel, institutions of higher education, parent centers, and consumer and advocacy organizations must be promoted.

**Implications for Practice**

It is evident from the research and related discussion presented in this article that we have reached a point where immediate steps must be taken to ensure that students with disabilities fully access and benefit from the general education curriculum, and leave our school systems prepared to successfully participate in postschool education, enter meaningful employment, live independently in communities, and pursue lifelong learning opportunities. Each of the challenges examined and discussed in this article addresses this issue and several strategies and recommendations are presented, focused on improving current practice.

Challenges 1 and 2 address a set of recent developments that have far-reaching implications for students with disabilities as well as administrators, teachers, and parents. The 1997 reauthorization of IDEA brought forward significant new requirements to ensure students greater access to the general education curriculum. The current challenge, and perhaps one of the greatest challenges, is to integrate and align the IDEA requirements concerning access to the general education curriculum with the transition service provisions. There is an urgent need to view these requirements as unified and complementary in helping students to achieve the broadest possible range of school and postschool goals and results. Strategies for accomplishing this include promoting high expectations for student achievement and learning, making appropriate use of assessment and instructional accommodations, and ensuring that students have access to the full range of secondary education curricula and programs. There is also a critical need to promote the use of alternate assessments to support graduation decisions and to move forward with caution in the development of alternative diploma options for students with disabilities.

Challenge 3 focuses on the postschool experiences of students with disabilities in the areas of postschool education, employment, and independent living. In an effort to increase the access, participation, and success of youth with disabilities in postschool education, several strategies need to be considered. These include ensuring that students with disabilities leaving their secondary education programs have the self-advocacy skills necessary to successfully negotiate the postschool education environment; making sure that students have access to appropriate support services provided by the postschool education institution as well as supports provided by community service agencies (health, mental health, human services, transportation, and others) to successfully participate in and complete their programs of study; and ensuring that the supports required by students during their postschool education programs transfer to eventual employment settings. Improving postschool outcomes in the areas of postschool education, employment, and independent living will also require increased levels of school and community service agency collaboration and the active involvement of employers.

Supporting increased student and family participation in discussions and decisions regard-
ing secondary education and transition goals and plans is advocated in Challenge 4. Strategies such as teaching students decision-making, goal-setting, and other self-determination skills are important in improving the quality and level of student participation. Families will also need additional tools that support their participation and involvement in the IEP and transition planning processes. The preparation of concise and user-friendly information on school and community services is one major strategy in supporting family involvement.

Challenge 5 stresses the importance of improving collaboration and coordination of services at the federal, state, and local levels. Strategies here include promoting cross-agency staff development programs, developing cross-agency resource sharing options in making available needed transition services, and developing mechanisms to share information across agencies on the progress and outcomes of former special education students.

Accomplishing these and other varied strategies will require that we engage a much larger audience in our discussions on how best to proceed. This would include parents and young people with disabilities; general education teachers and administrators; community service agency staff, including those who serve youth and adults without disabilities; postsecondary education programs; and employers. Promoting increased levels of general education and special education collaboration at the local level also remains a major goal in bringing about needed improvements in school and postschool services.

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Exceptional Children
Universal Design: A Strategy to Support Students' Access to the General Education Curriculum

By Christine D. Bremer, Ann T. Clapper, Chuck Hitchcock, Tracey Hall, and Mera Kachgal

Introduction

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 require that students with disabilities have access to, and participate and progress in, the general education curriculum. These provisions represent a significant enhancement to the federal requirement of physical access to classrooms in schools. The focus is now expanded to include educational access to the general education curriculum. This has posed significant challenges to general and special educators in terms of designing curricula that accommodate students’ diverse learning needs and styles.

The Challenge

While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 promise curricular access for students with disabilities, school curricula are still largely designed for students without disabilities. While a number of techniques are available to teachers to help them adapt curricula to individual students, these post hoc modified solutions are time consuming and vary widely in effectiveness. These approaches stem from the outdated view that the fundamental problem resides in students with diverse needs, rather than in the design of curricula (King-Sears, 1997).

Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, and Jackson (2002) note that most classroom curriculum materials rely almost exclusively on printed text. As a result, full participation and progress in the curriculum is possible only for those students who can access textbooks and other text materials in the form in which they are produced. While some schools and teachers provide adaptations and use assistive technologies to help individual students use printed text materials, “these adaptations can significantly change or water down the concepts and skills of the curriculum, offering in effect access to a different, diminished curriculum” (p. 12). Hitchcock et al. also note that some assistive devices, such as page turners, are too cumbersome to be readily moved from one classroom to another during the school day. Therefore, they should not be relied on to facilitate access to textbooks.

The premise underlying Universal Design is that environments and products should be designed, from the start, for maximum usability. From the standpoint of curricular access, Universal Design seeks to offer flexible curriculum and learning environments that allow students with widely varying abilities the opportunity to access the general curriculum and achieve the academic content standards that have been established for all students in the school, district, or state.
The Universal Design Approach

The concept of Universal Design originated in the field of architecture as a response to concerns about the inefficiency of individualized retrofit solutions in buildings, and the inappropriateness of placing the burden of adaptation on individuals. Architect Ron Mace coined the term Universal Design in the early 1980s, and defined the concept as "the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design" (Center for Universal Design, 1997, para. 1). Mace, a wheelchair user, had personal experience with the failings of traditional design and was a pioneering advocate of aesthetically pleasing and usable design to meet the needs of people, regardless of their age or ability (Center for Universal Design, 1998).

Architects practicing Universal Design create structures that are intended from the outset to be used by all individuals, including those with disabilities. "The intent of Universal Design is to simplify life for everyone by making products, communications, and the built environment more usable by as many people as possible at little or no extra cost" (Center for Universal Design, 1997, para. 2). Universally accessible features such as ramped entrances and automatic doors are now routinely included in new construction intended for public use, such as government buildings, shopping malls, and schools.

In addition to physical structures, the concept of Universal Design has been extended to other products and to the field of communications. For example, when television captioning was first made available, it was only available to those who purchased expensive decoder boxes. Later, decoder chips were built into all televisions, making captions universally available. The captioning feature has proved to be of benefit to many users who do not have hearing impairments, including patrons of noisy restaurants, exercisers in health clubs, individuals seeking to improve their English language skills, and couples going to sleep at different times (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

Applying Universal Design to Learning Environments

The principles of Universal Design developed for architecture (Connell et al., 1997) are being applied to learning environments to improve access (Rose & Meyer, 2000). Table 1 illustrates classroom examples for each of the seven principles of Universal Design.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Classroom Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Big ideas</td>
<td>Curricula emphasize major concepts, principles, categories, rules, techniques, and hierarchical structures related to critical ideas and themes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Conspicuous strategies</td>
<td>Curricula include explicit instruction on steps to complete required tasks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Mediated scaffolding</td>
<td>Curricula include questioning, feedback, and prompts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Strategic integration</td>
<td>Big ideas are explicitly linked within and across curricula.</td>
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<td>5. Judicious review</td>
<td>Previously taught content is reviewed and linked to applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Primed background knowledge</td>
<td>New content is linked to and builds on students' background knowledge.</td>
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More access to information is neither sufficient nor synonymous with learning. Accordingly, the UDL framework consists of three overarching operative principles, each intended to minimize barriers and
Table 1: Classroom Examples of Universal Design Principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles of Universal Design (Connell et al., 1997)</th>
<th>Classroom Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Equitable Use</td>
<td>“The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.”  Students of all ability levels are appropriately challenged. Students with disabilities are neither segregated nor stigmatized, and privacy is respected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Flexibility in Use</td>
<td>“The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.”  Different learning styles are accommodated. Students can demonstrate knowledge through multiple means. Equipment allows left- or right-handed usage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Simple and Intuitive</td>
<td>“Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.”  Textbooks are available digitally and provide hot links to definitions of difficult words (click on the word and see a definition). Lab equipment has clearly labeled controls, with symbols as well as words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Perceptible Information</td>
<td>“The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.”  Students with sensory impairments can access materials in alternative formats. Texts are available in different formats and media; videos include captioning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tolerance for error</td>
<td>“The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.”  Students review each others' work and make changes prior to grading. Computer programs offer hints to help students with difficult problems. Lab equipment is designed to minimize breakage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Low physical effort</td>
<td>“The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.”  Microscopes are connected to computer display screens. Lab equipment is physically easy to operate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Size and space for approach and use</td>
<td>“Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user’s body size, posture, or mobility.”  Classroom space is arranged to accommodate assistive devices and personal assistance. All students have a clear line of sight to the teacher and material being displayed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
maximize learning through flexibility. Each of the principles advocates a particular teaching approach to support learner differences in recognition, strategy, or affect (Rose & Meyer, 2002). These principles propose adapting instruction to individual student needs through:

1. Multiple means of presentation of information to students (e.g., audio, video, text, speech, Braille, still photos, or images).
2. Multiple means of expression by students (e.g., writing, speaking, drawing, video-recording).
3. Multiple means of engagement for students (e.g. to meet differing needs for predictability, novelty, or group interaction).

The unifying theme of these three principles is the recommendation to provide students with a range of options while learning. Teachers begin the instructional decision-making process with goals. They must then select a range of materials and methods to most effectively and efficiently teach those goals.

One of the critical elements of instruction is assessment. Assessment of learners should inform instruction. Instruction and assessment must, therefore, provide students with adequate and equitable means to express knowledge and understanding (Dolan & Hall, 2001). Access to supports provided during instruction must also be provided during assessment to adequately analyze student performance. Although UDL seeks to improve curricular access for all students, Hitchcock (2001) cautions, “there is no such thing as a completely universally designed curriculum” (p. 23). Assistive technology and other adaptations will still be needed. However, technological advances will enable continual improvement in curricular access, and will reduce the need for adaptations.

Orkwis and McLane (1998) suggest using the following five strategies to implement Universal Design in the classroom. Orkwis and McLane note that the first four of these are consistent with accessible design guidelines from the Telecommunications Act of 1996, while the fifth step extends the concept of accessible design to include cognitive access. The strategies are:

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.

(Orkwis & McLane, Suggested First Steps section, para. 4)

Conclusion

The concept of Universal Design promises to improve outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities. Some aspects of Universal Design can be implemented at the local level; others will require the cooperation and commitment of manufacturers, publishers, and others. By changing the focus from remediation of individual disabilities to expansion of the usability of classrooms and curricula, benefits will be realized by students, teachers, and schools.

References


Resources

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST, Inc.)
40 Harvard Mills Square, Suite 3
Wakefield, MA 01880-3233
Ph: 781-245-2212
Fax: 781-245-5212
TTY: 781-245-9320
E-mail: cast@cast.org
Web site: http://www.cast.org

The CAST Web site includes information on how technology can help broaden opportunities for all, including people with disabilities. Information about Universal Design for Learning is featured.

The Center for Universal Design
North Carolina State University
College of Design
Box 8613
Raleigh, NC 27695-8613
Tel/TTY: 919-515-3082
Fax: 919-515-3023
InfoLine: 800-647-6777
E-mail: cud@ncsu.edu
Web site: http://www.design.ncsu.edu:8120/cud/

This organization was founded by Ron Mace, who led the Universal Design movement in architecture. The site includes information about the Principles of Universal Design, history of Universal Design in architecture, the Center for Universal Design Newsline, publications, and more.

National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators (NCITE)
University of Oregon
805 Lincoln
Eugene, OR 97401
Ph: 541-364-3405
E-mail: ncite@darkwing.uoregon.edu
Web site: http://dea.uoregon.edu/~ncite/

NCITE is affiliated with the College of Education at the University of Oregon. The organization addresses issues concerning technology, media, and materials for individuals with disabilities. This Web site includes NCITE publications and useful links.

Further Reading


Authors Christine D. Bremer, Ann T. Clapper, and Mera Kachgal are with NCSET. Chuck Hitchcock and Tracey Hall are with CAST.
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**And More!**
Supporting Youth with Disabilities to Access and Succeed in Postsecondary Education: Essentials for Educators in Secondary Schools

By Robert A. Stodden and Megan A. Conway

Issue: Efforts to improve the postsecondary school outcomes of youth with disabilities have focused on curriculum quality and non-academic opportunities. Equally important is ensuring that students are participants in the IEP process and understand the differences between secondary and postsecondary school environments.

Introduction

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) currently mandates that youth with disabilities in secondary school must be provided with the educational assistance (special education and related services) necessary for the youth to benefit from a free appropriate public education. School districts are required to identify and assess the needs of students for such assistance. Examples of types of assistance often provided at the secondary school level include the provision of direct services, such as instruction in a special classroom or the provision of special academic content, and/or related services, such as the provision of speech therapy, tutoring, orientation and mobility services, or a one-on-one classroom aide.

Both the type and method of educational assistance provision that a student receives throughout secondary school are planned and implemented by a team...
made up of professionals and parents who are responsible for the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). These teams are required by federal policy to consider transition planning, meaning planning for the transition from secondary school to postsecondary school or employment, beginning at age 14, or younger if appropriate.

Public agency is required to invite the student with a disability to participate in the IEP transition planning process. However, despite the intent of federal policy, the IEP process often does not consider the need that youth with disabilities have to participate in and understand the process of determining appropriate types of educational assistance. Nor does the process adequately take into account the differences in assistance determination and provision encountered by youth with disabilities as they transition into postschool environments (see Table 1)(Stodden, Jones, & Chang, 2002).

Focus on Immediate Needs and Assessed Deficits

The process of planning and implementing educational assistance for students with disabilities in secondary school is often focused upon their immediate need to benefit from current educational activities with less consideration given to future goals or the skills or behaviors required to function in postschool settings. For example, a student with a visual impairment might be assigned an aid to read aloud exams in English class, which takes care of the immediate problem of having access to the exam. However, the purchase of a computer with voice output in this case would likely allow the student to independently access most printed materials in all classes for the entire year and beyond.

Additionally, special education services in secondary school are often focused on the assessed deficits of a student with a disability rather than upon accommodations addressing the contextual needs of the educational setting (Stodden, Stodden, Gilmore, & Galloway, 2001). For example, students with learning disabilities might be assigned to special education classrooms with modified content, because it is the most efficient way to address the learning needs of these youth, and not because that environment is necessarily one where students learn skills and behaviors that are needed in order to perform after secondary school. The student may just as well have benefited from having the general curriculum material presented in a different format in a regular classroom setting.

Minimal Role of the Student in the IEP Process

Although youth with disabilities need to participate in and learn about the process of determining their own educational assistance, this is rarely encouraged in the IEP process. Although school districts are required by IDEA to invite students with disabilities to their IEP planning meeting, students are not required to actually attend. Students may choose not to attend out of lack of interest or understanding of the planning process (Brinckerhoff, 1994). Even if a student does attend, (a) the student may not possess the necessary self-advocacy skills needed to participate meaningfully in the process of determining the most appropriate types of educational assistance (Izzo & Lamb, 2002), and (b) there is no guarantee that the goals and experiences of the student will be considered by the IEP team (responsibility lies with the local education agency and the parents of the child to make such decisions until the child obtains the age of majority).

Differences in Federal Policy Pertaining to Secondary and Postsecondary School

Federal policy plays a significant role in governing the process of determining the level and type of assistance that will be provided to a young person with a disability in secondary school and in postschool environments (Stodden, Whelley, Chuan, & Harding, 2001). Within secondary schools the provision of educational assistance is regulated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), while within the postschool settings of postsecondary education and employment, the determination for and provision of assistance is regulated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation
Within postschool settings, youth with disabilities are no longer entitled to “services” that will ensure educational benefit or success. Rather, postsecondary schools are required to provide assistance in the form of the “accommodations” that a student needs in order to have equal access to their programs.

Consequently, the provision of assistance at the postschool level is often less comprehensive and not as individualized as it might be at the secondary school level. Examples of assistance, or accommodations, at the postsecondary education level include priority enrollment, the provision of class notes, and the provision of sign language interpreters. Another difference in terms of the provision of assistance at the secondary and postsecondary levels is that students are not required to have IEPs in postsecondary education settings. Nor, in fact, are postsecondary institutions even required to provide students with assistance unless students identify themselves as (a) having a disability; (b) having documentation of that disability (again, the IEP is usually not considered valid documentation at the postsecondary level); and (c) actively requesting and advocating for accommodations related to their disability. At the secondary school level, the local education agency and the IEP team are responsible for identifying and assessing students’ assistance needs, with the students’ participation in this process voluntary. At the postsecondary school level, students are required to initiate, document, and advocate for their assistance needs.

### Current and Recommended Status

**Differences in policy**

**Current:** Students with disabilities and their parents are often not aware that federal regulations under IDEA cannot be used as the basis for procuring assistance related to one’s disability beyond the secondary school years. Nor are many parents and students aware of the fundamental differences between the laws governing the provision of special services, supports, or accommodations in secondary school and those governing postsecondary school environments.

**Recommended:** Secondary schools should fully inform parents and students with disabilities about the differences in federal policy governing the provision of assistance in secondary and postsecondary school environments, and about how these differences will impact the provision of assistance once the student leaves high school. They are provided with comprehensive information about the process of determination and the different types of assistance that the student will need to seek out in order to succeed in postsecondary school environments. Likewise, they are informed about which agencies and/or postsecondary

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### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary School</th>
<th>Postsecondary School</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assistance mandated by the provisions of IDEA and due process requirements</td>
<td>Assistance directed by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and ADA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special classrooms, curriculum, and supplemental services to provide “benefit” and “success”</td>
<td>“Reasonable” accommodations to assist “equal access” as defined by ADA and the Rehabilitation Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students as non-participants or observers of the assistance process (limited or no self responsibility)</td>
<td>Students as initiators, advocates for and managers of their own assistance (full self responsibility)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success measured in terms of educational benefit</td>
<td>Success measured in terms of postschool competence and long-term goals</td>
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</table>
This information is provided at the beginning of the transition process, along with a mandated invitation to participate in transition planning, focused upon the requirements that will need to be met in order for the student to access and participate in postschool environments.

**Differences across environments**

**Current:** In secondary school, special education and related services are often provided in the form of direct services, with supplementary services provided in addition to or instead of direct services. In postsecondary education and employment, assistance is provided in the form of accommodations to the general setting that does not extend beyond what is deemed to be, as indicated in ADA, “reasonable” [SEC 101(9)] (Stodden, Dowrick, Stodden, & Gilmore, 2002). Students with disabilities are not always able to apply specialized educational content, learning strategies, or methods of assistance or support that they observed or learned in secondary school to the very different context of postsecondary school environments.

**Recommended:** Secondary schools should explore the effectiveness of models of assistance provision that best prepare students with disabilities to meet the requirements of postsecondary education and employment environments, without compromising the student’s need to benefit from their secondary school education. This process includes the movement towards participation in more inclusive settings by the time the student reaches the age of transition (14-16 years of age).

**Lack of attention to the role of youth**

**Current:** Despite the fact that IDEA requires public agencies to invite students to their IEP meetings when transition is discussed, the reality is that youth with disabilities often do not choose to attend, or are not encouraged nor prepared to be active participants in their IEP planning. Often as not, students transition from an environment where they are observers of the process of determining educational assistance (secondary school), to an environment where they are expected to be initiators, advocates, and active participants in the process of obtaining and maintaining their own assistance (postsecondary school and employment) (Izzo & Lamb, 2002). Youth with disabilities are rarely encouraged to become knowledgeable about the nature of their disabilities and how their disabilities affect their ability to learn and to work. Youth with disabilities are also seldom encouraged to develop the necessary skills they will need to initiate, advocate for, and manage the assistance that they will need in order to learn and work in the postschool world.

**Recommended:** Secondary schools should involve youth with disabilities in activities that fully inform students about the nature of their disabilities and their service, support, and accommodation needs in learning and work settings. This is accomplished through providing students with an understanding of their assessment results, including information about diagnosis, appropriate services, and the application of accommodations, in accessible and age-appropriate format. Schools also go beyond simply inviting students to attend their IEP meetings to fully includeing students with disabilities in the process of determining, advocating for, and maintaining their own modes of assistance.

**Preparation for postschool responsibilities and goals**

**Current:** The IEP process is often short sighted when focusing upon students' postschool educational and employment needs and goals (Izzo, Hertsfeld, & Aaron, 2001). When the IEP team fixates upon the immediate needs of a youth for specialized services and supports that demonstrate educational benefit, there is little consideration given to the youth's need to be prepared for the requirements of postschool environments.

**Recommended:** Secondary schools should structure IEP planning around the student's long-term goals and track the effectiveness of assistance provision in relation to attainment of those goals. This may be accomplished through the development of student portfolios that detail a record of student skill development, the relationship between skill development and effective and ineffective practices in the provision of assistance, and the student's long-term goals as they arise (see Table 2). These portfolios are reviewed and updated annually. Schools are encouraged...
Table 2

Steps that Secondary School Personnel Can Take to Address Problems Concerning Youth with Disabilities and the Provision of Educational Assistance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To address the problem that . . .</th>
<th>Secondary schools can . . .</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>. . . parents and students are not aware of differences in federal policy governing educational assistance provision in secondary and postsecondary school.</td>
<td>. . . include information about differences in legal requirements and student assistance needs in the transition process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . educational strategies used by students in secondary school cannot easily be applied to postsecondary school.</td>
<td>. . . explore new educational assistance (accommodations) strategies and move students towards more inclusive settings (similar to post-school environments).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . students are not knowledgeable about their disability related needs or how those needs can be addressed by the assistance that is available in different postschool settings.</td>
<td>. . . provide students with disabilities and their parents with comprehensive information and instruction concerning the process and results of disability assessments, and fully include students in the IEP process (deciding types of educational assistance).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . the IEP process does not take into account effective practices as they relate to long-term goals and the need of youth with disabilities to access and participate in postschool settings.</td>
<td>. . . ensure that IEP team structure and process during the secondary school years focus on long-term goals, and develop student portfolios that track the effectiveness of strategies of assistance provision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


Izzo, M., & Lamb, P. (2002). Self-Determination and Career Development: Skills for Successful Transition to Postsecondary Education and Employment. A White Paper written in collaboration with Ohio State University, the Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, and the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition. Available for download in PDF (45 pages) at http://www.ncset.hawaii.edu/Publications/index.html#papers
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Authors Robert A. Stodden and Megan A. Conway are with the National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational supports, University of Hawaii at Manoa.
Supporting Dynamic Development of Youth with Disabilities During Transition: A Guide for Families

By Kris Peterson

Introduction
The physical and emotional changes in adolescence are comparable in complexity to the developmental phases of infancy and early childhood. The level of knowledge and skills needed by young adults in order for them to thrive in their communities is increasing. At the same time, youth may experience decreasing structure and support in their lives as they seek to build the skills necessary for success (Simpson, 2001; Larson, Brown, & Mortimer, 2002).

Family support is key to healthy adolescence. A family enables children to experience attachment, belonging, competence, and self-esteem, and at the same time allows them to experience success and failure, adventure and retreat, independence and interdependence. For families who have teens with disabilities, adolescence can be especially challenging. This brief provides information about healthy adolescent development for youth with disabilities, focusing on the role of parents and families in supporting the successful transition to adult life.

The Predicament of Parents and Families
Parents, whose roles include providing for and protecting their children, often find themselves at odds with the teen who wants to experience life, develop individual values, and achieve independence (Tempke, 1994). When a child is vulnerable, families may view control as a responsibility to ensure safety. Families may have extensive fear of how the world will treat their child, or they may hesitate to give up their primary role as protector and advocate. In spite of this, teens with disabilities want and need to experience and obtain the same things that all adolescents want and need no matter how significant their disability.

Challenges
Transition assessment and planning occur during adolescence, yet often in the search for academic and career development the vital elements of psychological,
social, emotional, and sexual development may be overlooked. Gerber and Okinow (1994) assert that the environment is crucial for these youth:

Adolescents with chronic illness or disability experience the same developmental transitions as their peers without disabilities, yet their illness or disability places them at risk for certain psycho-social problems as they move into adulthood. The risk is not solely in the medical complications of the illness or disability...rather risk is more often related to the degree of fit between the adolescent and his or her environment: family, school, peers, health care services, work, and societal attitude. The fit can lead to optimal integration and development, or it can result in isolation and low self-esteem (p. 1).

LoConto and Dodder (1997) asked people with developmental disabilities, “If you could wish for anything, what would it be?” The majority response was that they wanted the same things that all people want: material goods, a home of their own, emotional and intimate connections, vacations and leisure, and a way to feel useful. So often the focus for youth and adults with disabilities is safety and physical health at the expense of a valued social role and the need for human connections.

The parent/child relationship is strongly related to adolescent well-being. Parents’ vision for the future of their children is that they will grow up, move away, and develop lives of their own (Hanley-Maxwell, 1995). Having a child with a disability, however, may seriously threaten this vision. Although families may be able to adapt, build resilience, and develop greater emotional growth and togetherness as a result of the disability, they may also experience an on-going stress as they move through the life cycles of their own development and that of their child (DeMarie & LeRoux, 2002). Some families cope with the stress by dealing with the present moment and not thinking about the future of a child with a disability. They may have experienced many disability-focused assessments and programs, resulting in little vision of independence or quality of life for their child.

Most families also experience a loss and undergo a grieving process when they have a child who is born with, or acquires, a disability (Seligman & Darling, 1997). No matter what the disability, families find themselves in “uncharted emotional territory with no guides to direct them toward ways to express their grief in a culturally acceptable format” (DeMarie & LeRoux, 2002). For some families, the chronic care needs of a child with a disability can be overwhelming and never-ending. For those who have a child with a disability, pivotal milestones such as graduation from high school can trigger stress, grief, or fears that impede a vision of normal adulthood.

In addition, the social effects of a disability also impact the parent/child relationship and family dynamics. Families may respond by becoming strong advocates or by defending and fighting for supports and services. This role can become part of their core identity and may be difficult to relinquish when the time comes to transfer advocacy responsibilities to the teen with a disability.

Meeting the Challenges: What Can Families Do?

It is important for teens with disabilities and their families to have information from physicians, teachers, social workers, and other families about adolescent development, and to receive encouragement to create a vision of adulthood (see Table 1). It is also vital that they experience opportunities to share their dreams and hopes, fears and frustrations, and to dialog about their visions for the future. Autonomy, independence, problem-solving, and constructive role-related changes will increase if families can build safety nets amid the fear of life-threatening decisions and risk-taking that are part of the teen experience.

The National 4-H Council has identified eight “Keys for Kids” based on the work of Konopka (1973) and Pittman (1991):

- **Security**: Youth feel physically and emotionally safe (“I feel safe.”)
- **Belonging**: Youth experience belonging and ownership (“I’m in.”)
- **Acceptance**: Youth develop self-worth (“What I say and do counts.”)
- **Independence**: Youth discover self (“I like to try new things.”)
- **Relationships**: Youth develop quality relationships with peers and adults (“I care about others.”)
- **Values**: Youth discuss conflicting values and form their own (“I believe...”)
- **Achievement**: Youth feel the pride and accountability that comes with mastery (“I can do it.”)
- **Recognition**: Youth expand their capacity to enjoy life and know that success is possible (“I feel special.”)

Adolescent development is more than high academic expectations, career development, and independence. Families play a pivotal role in supporting teens to explore their identities and make connections with peers and other adults. Understanding all aspects of adolescent development helps families of youth with disabilities and those who work with them to address these critical issues and improve adult outcomes.
Table 1. Information Parents and Families Need

Families, their teens with disabilities, and the professionals who support them will benefit from information about normal adolescent development and the parent/child relationship. Since transition planning supports a person-centered, holistic approach to life planning, it is helpful to examine the concept of “development” within the process. Highlights from extensive research and literature on adolescent development and parent/child relationships include:

### Three developmental stages (Rapp, 1998)

1. Early adolescence (12-14): peer groups, emotional distance from parents, rapid growth, interest in sex;
2. Middle adolescence (14-17): self-discovery, performance orientation, vital relationships; and
3. Late adolescence (17-19): career focus, physical distance from parents, self-sustaining living.

### Eight developmental tasks (Havighurst, 1972)

1. Achieving new and more mature relations with age-mates of both sexes,
2. Achieving a masculine or feminine social role,
3. Accepting one’s physique and using the body effectively,
4. Achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults,
5. Preparing for marriage and family life,
6. Preparing for an economic career,
7. Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide for behavior, and
8. Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior.

### Internal and external developmental assets (Search Institute, 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Assets</th>
<th>External Assets</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement motivation</td>
<td>Family support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School engagement</td>
<td>Positive family communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>Other adult relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonding to school</td>
<td>Caring neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading for pleasure</td>
<td>Caring school climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Parent involvement in schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality and social justice</td>
<td>Community that values youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Service to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Family boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restraint</td>
<td>School boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and decision making</td>
<td>Adult role models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal competence</td>
<td>Positive peer influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural competence</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance skills</td>
<td>Creative activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaceful conflict resolution</td>
<td>Youth programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal power</td>
<td>Religious community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Time at home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of purpose</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive view of personal future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Core developmental tasks (Elliot & Feldman, 1990)

* Becoming emotionally and behaviorally autonomous,
* Dealing with emerging sexuality,
* Acquiring interpersonal skills for dealing with the opposite sex and mate selection,
* Acquiring education and other experiences needed for adult work, and
* Resolving issues of identity and values.

### Essential requirements for healthy adolescence (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995)

* Find a valued place in a constructive group;
* Form close, durable relationships;
* Feel a sense of personal self-worth;
* Know support systems and how to use them;
* Show constructive curiosity;
* Find ways of being useful to others;
* Acquire technical and analytical ability to participate in a global economy;
* Believe in a promising future with real opportunities;
* Master social skills and conflict resolution habits;
* Cultivate problem-solving habits;
* Achieve a reliable basis for making informed choices;
* Become an ethical person;
* Learn responsible citizenship; and
* Respect diversity.
Children don’t come with a user’s manual, and more often than not, parenthood often seems like a land with no clear roadmap…. There is increasing separateness while the connection is held onto, and parents must figure out the right amount of involvement in their child’s everyday life. The parent is more and more aware of the child’s individuality. Interpreting the world also involves setting standards for behavior in the world outside the home.

As difficult questions come up, parents are impelled to re-examine and perhaps revise their own theories of childrearing and parenthood. Over a period of several years images of the future are formed. If there are developmental challenges, this process can be much more involved. A child with special needs will have an Individual Educational Program (IEP); may be in special classes; and may have complex medical issues, engage in numerous therapies, and need medications. Cognitive development may be slower and more difficult. The road will have more twists and turns, and the emotional terrain may be even more difficult to handle.

With the teen years, there is the onset of the Interdependent Stage, which can be extremely turbulent as teenagers challenge parents’ authority. Emotional highs and lows are not far apart. Strong feelings are stirred up in parents. As their [youths’] bodies change with the dawn of their emerging sexuality, parents have to think about their authority relationship with their almost adult child. Because teenagers are by developmental necessity absorbed in themselves, they can be disrespectful, testing, worrisome, and upsetting to their parents. Parents must learn to talk less and leave the door open because their children still need them but on new terms. Limit-setting and guidance are still needed but must be based on the particular child’s needs.

More than ever parents must understand the deep passions that are evoked in this stage. Particularly challenging is accepting their child as a sexual being. As the separate identity is formed, separation brings feelings of envy, fear, anger, pride, and regret. Parents of children with special needs confront the reality of how far their child may be different from the norm once again, and may have special fears about their child being taken advantage of in the world. Overall, this further redefinition of the parent-child relationship brings to all parents the image of life without children at home which now looms on the near horizon.

The Departure Stage is something parents have thought about ever since their eyes first met those of their newborn. Now parents are faced with taking stock of the whole experience of parenthood. They redefine their identity as parents with grown-up children. The parents of children with special needs face the possibility that their children can never live independently and may live with them for the rest of their lives or in a community living arrangement with supports. But for all parents, it is clearer than ever that our job is never done for we are parents the rest of our lives, but our roles with our adult children are different.

At this point, parent and child alike waving good-bye to childhood and looking out to adulthood, with wobbly knees, I might add, from my own experience with my 22-year-old son with autism. We don’t know yet what the future holds for living and working. It’s a scary thought when your child is young. How do we get there? This may be far from what we imagined before our child, whether typical or not, was born. Nonetheless, through acceptance and courage and endurance, the road through parenthood brings peace and love. Our special children truly light the way and help us find the inner strength and wisdom we need.1

References


Further Reading


Resources

Search Institute
http://www.search-institute.org

Keys to Quality Youth Development
http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/youthdevelopment/DA6715.html

Academy for Youth Development
The Center for Youth Development and Policy Research
http://www.cyd.aed.org

America’s Promise
http://www.americaspromise.org

National Youth Development and Information Center
http://www.nydic.org/nydic

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
http://www.ncfy.com/supporti.htm

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Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in High School

By Martha Thurlow

Issue: Fewer students with disabilities in middle schools and high schools use accommodations than students with disabilities in elementary schools.

Defining the Issue
Accommodations are changes in materials or procedures that provide access to instruction and assessments for students with disabilities. They are designed to enable students with disabilities to learn without the impediment of their disabilities, and to show their knowledge and skills rather than the effects of their disabilities. While there is some controversy surrounding terminology (e.g., accommodations vs. modifications) and about the appropriateness of certain assessment accommodations (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1999; Thurlow & Wiener, 2000), in general there is an acceptance of the need for some changes in instruction and assessment for students with disabilities. Examples of common instructional and assessment accommodations are shown in Table 1.

There is nothing about students with disabilities, nor about instruction and assessment that would suggest that the number of students with disabilities using accommodations should change as they progress through school. Are there other things occurring that might affect the number of students receiving accommodations? Are there constraints on the provision of accommodations that can be alleviated to ensure that all middle school and high school students who need accommodations receive them?

What We Know

Legal Considerations
When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 1997, accommodations (and modifications) in administration were addressed. In Section 300.347 on Individual Education Program (IEP) content, IDEA states that there needs to be —... a statement of the program modifications or supports for school
personnel that will be provided for the child —

- To advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals;
- To be involved and progress in the general curriculum;
- To participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and
- To be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children in the activities described in this section.


Section 300.342 of IDEA also states that the IEP must be in effect at the beginning of each school year so that each teacher and provider is informed of “the specific accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided for the child in accordance with the IEP [Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(2)(A) and (B), Pub. L. 105-17, sec. 201(a)(2)(A), (C)].

In addition to addressing accommodations and modifications in instruction, the Final Regulations for IDEA state that for assessments, the IEP for each child with a disability must include a statement of —

Any individual modifications in the administration of state or district-wide assessments of student achievement that are needed in order for the child to participate in the assessment

The term “accommodations” is also used in Section 300.138, which indicates that —

The state must have on file with the Secretary information to demonstrate that — (a) Children with disabilities are included in general state and district-wide assessment programs, with appropriate accommodations and modifications in administration, if necessary [Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(17)(A)]

None of the language of the law indicates that the number of students with disabilities who need accommodations will change as students get older and

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### Table 1. Examples of Instructional and Assessment Accommodations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Accommodations</th>
<th>Assessment Accommodations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials/Curriculum</strong></td>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Alternative assignments</td>
<td>• Study carrel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Substitute materials with lower reading levels</td>
<td>• Special lighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fewer assignments</td>
<td>• Separate room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decrease length of assignments</td>
<td>• Individualized or small group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Copy pages so students can mark on them</td>
<td><strong>Timing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide examples of correctly completed work</td>
<td>• Extended time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Early syllabus</td>
<td>• Frequent breaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Advance notice of assignments</td>
<td>• Unlimited time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tape-recorded versions of printed materials</td>
<td><strong>Scheduling</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Methods/Strategies</td>
<td>• Specific time of day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Highlight key points to remember</td>
<td>• Subtests in different order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Eliminate distractions by using a template to block out other items</td>
<td><strong>Presentation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have student use a self monitoring sheet</td>
<td>• Repeat directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Break task into smaller parts to do at different times</td>
<td>• Larger bubbles on multiple-choice questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use study partners whenever reading or writing is required</td>
<td>• Sign language presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Secure papers to work areas with tape or magnets</td>
<td>• Magnification device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Present information in multiple formats</td>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use listening devices</td>
<td>• Mark answers in test booklet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use reference materials (e.g., dictionary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Special test preparation techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Out of level test</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

move from one level of schooling to the next, although the specific accommodations that students need may change over time (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000).

**Definitional Considerations**

"Accommodation" is just one of many terms that have been used to indicate a change in instructional or assessment materials or procedures. Another frequently used term, "modification," is generally (but not always) used to refer to a change in which scores produced are invalid or otherwise not comparable to other scores. IDEA uses both "accommodation" and "modification in administration," but intends that the terms be viewed as comparable and inclusive. As stated in a memorandum from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), "the terms as used in the statute and regulations are not intended to correspond with the evolving usage of these terms in the field of assessment.... "modifications in administration" should be viewed as a general term that would include both accommodations and modifications, as they are commonly used in assessment practice" (Heumann & Warlick, 2000, p. 8).

**Research Considerations**

Research on accommodations has increased dramatically in recent years, due in part to an infusion of funding from OSEP, but also due to dramatic increases in state efforts to include students with disabilities in their assessments, along with the need to study the potential effects of certain accommodations on test results (see Thurlow & Bolt, 2001). Most of this research has focused on assessment accommodations and their effects (cf. Tindal & Fuchs, 1999), rather than on the extent to which students are using accommodations in instruction and assessment.

Survey research gives some indication of the extent to which accommodations are used during assessments. In a survey of approximately 400 teachers, Jayanthi, Epstein, Polloway, and Bursuck (1996) found that elementary school teachers identified several test accommodations as more helpful for students than did either middle school or secondary school teachers. In comparison to the ratings of middle school and high school teachers, they also indicated that many of the accommodations were relatively easy to implement. Still, this research did not indicate the extent to which teachers actually used accommodations, just their perceptions of them. Perceptions about accommodations do differ between the elementary and middle/secondary school levels.

Lack of information about how accommodations are used in instruction and assessments is related to some extent to limitations in the availability of accommodations prior to the reauthorization of IDEA (Tindal, Ysseldyke, & Silverstein, 1995). It is also related to difficulties states have encountered in merging information on accommodations into data collection and management systems that have many limitations (Almond, Tindal, & Stieber, 1997).

Following the reauthorization of IDEA and recommendations that states begin to collect data on the use of testing accommodations (Elliott, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1996), several states implemented data collection mechanisms to do just that. By 1999, the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) found that 12 states had data available on the number or percentage of students using assessment accommodations during their state tests. These data are reproduced in Table 2.

The data in this table reveal that in most states, accommodations are used by greater percentages of students at the elementary school level than at either the middle school or high school levels (see Thurlow, 2001). In all but two states, there is a downward trend in percentages across two or three of the school levels. For the 16 tests reflected in the table, the downward trend is evident in 95% of the possible comparisons.

**What We Don't Know**

We do not yet know what is happening in the majority of situations in which accommodations are being used. Most of the data that we do have on use of accommodations is from assessments, usually state-level tests. Even so, we have a relatively limited number of states able to provide data on the use of accommodations by students receiving special education services. However, given these limited data, we do not yet have a real sense of why there are differences. The survey data of Jayanthi et al.
### Table 2. State-Reported Levels of Use of Accommodations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Assessment/ Subject Area</th>
<th>Elementary Grades (K-5)</th>
<th>Middle School Grades (6-8)</th>
<th>High School Grades (9-12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>FL Writing Assessment</td>
<td>51% (Gr 4)</td>
<td>39% (Gr 8)</td>
<td>34% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FCAT (Reading)</td>
<td>47% (Gr 4)</td>
<td>38% (Gr 8)</td>
<td>40% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FCAT (Math)</td>
<td>50% (Gr 5)</td>
<td>38% (Gr 8)</td>
<td>39% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Statewide Assessment - Math</td>
<td>28% (Gr 3)</td>
<td>34% (Gr 6)</td>
<td>80% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English/Language Arts</td>
<td>29% (Gr 3)</td>
<td>38% (Gr 8)</td>
<td>82% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>KS Assessment Program – Math</td>
<td>21% (Gr 4)</td>
<td>14% (Gr 7)</td>
<td>08% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>19% (Gr 3)</td>
<td>13% (Gr 7)</td>
<td>08% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>23% (Gr 5)</td>
<td>17% (Gr 7)</td>
<td>09% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>Kentucky Core Content Test</td>
<td>82% (Gr 4)</td>
<td>72% (Gr 7)</td>
<td>50% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>82% (Gr 5)</td>
<td>70% (Gr 8)</td>
<td>57% (Gr 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>Comprehensive Assessment System</td>
<td>61% (Gr 4)</td>
<td>38% (Gr 8)</td>
<td>25% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>MSPAP - Reading</td>
<td>53% (Gr 3)</td>
<td>25% (Gr 8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language Usage</td>
<td>51% (Gr 5)</td>
<td>16% (Gr 8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>44% (Gr 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>41% (Gr 5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20% (Gr 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>Terra Nova Complete Battery</td>
<td>51% (Gr 4)</td>
<td>42% (Gr 8)</td>
<td>44% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>PEP Test – Reading</td>
<td>50% (Gr 3)</td>
<td>32% (Gr 6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>31% (Gr 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>33% (Gr 5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Reading and Math Assessment</td>
<td>67% (Gr 5)</td>
<td>52% (Gr 8)</td>
<td>45% (Gr 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>Writing Performance Assessment</td>
<td>49% (Gr 3)</td>
<td>39% (Gr 5)</td>
<td>55% (Gr 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health Performance Assessment</td>
<td>39% (Gr 5)</td>
<td>55% (Gr 7)</td>
<td>60% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>61% (Gr 9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>Stanford Achievement Test (Language, Math, Reading, Science, Social Science)</td>
<td>63% (Gr 2)</td>
<td>59% (Gr 8)</td>
<td>46% (Gr 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>67% (Gr 4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>SAT 9 – Language, Math, Reading, Science, Social Studies</td>
<td>64% (Gr 3-11)</td>
<td>66% (Gr 8)</td>
<td>66% (Gr 10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Thompson, S.J., & Thurlow, M.L. (1999). Table 7. Percent of Students Receiving Special Education Services Who Used Testing Accommodations, reprinted with permission of the National Center on Educational Outcomes.

(1996) suggests that teachers at different grade levels do have different perceptions of the helpfulness and ease of administering many accommodations. Do these different perceptions translate into what is selected for students during assessments? Is there any reason to believe that students with disabilities who are in the upper grade levels have less need for accommodations? Could it be that those students who most need accommodations are the students who have already dropped out of school, and therefore the percentages of students using accommodations drops simply because the ones left need fewer accommodations? Could it be that teachers’ perceptions influence their willingness to provide accommodations to students who may actually need them? We do not know the answers to these questions. Perhaps most important is the question of how what we know (and do not know) relates to the accommodations that students
receive during instruction. Most assessment guidelines speak of the need for there to be an alignment between assessment accommodations and instructional accommodations (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000; Thurlow, House, Boys, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 2000). If students with disabilities are receiving fewer accommodations during assessments in the upper grades, does this also mean that they are receiving fewer accommodations during instruction? Is this justified? Do teachers at the upper grade levels face logistical barriers that make providing accommodations nearly impossible unless the student simply cannot function without them?

The grades in which students with disabilities are involved in transition planning are the same grades in which we see declining numbers of students using accommodations. Does that mean that students are less likely to be aware of their need for accommodations because they are not being built into transition plans? If they are not built in during transition planning, do students leave school without any idea of their accommodations needs? And if so, what impact does this eventually have on their success in their postsecondary work or education?

What To Do Now
There clearly are many unanswered questions about the issue of declining percentages of students with disabilities receiving accommodations as they reach middle and high school. An important next step is to begin to answer some of the many related questions.

References


References Cont.