Transition to Post-secondary Life for Students with Disabilities:

Promoting Student Success

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Abstract

The transition to life after high school for students with disabilities and the vital role that school counselors have in assisting the students and their families to achieve success are discussed. As there may be unique requirements for these students in making this transition, it is important that school counselors are acquainted with particular matters and techniques critical to student success. The educational categories of disabilities and special considerations that are presented may be beneficial to school counselors as they enhance their students' opportunities to achieve their goals.

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School counselors are a vital resource for all students, including students with disabilities. On the secondary school level, they may play a particularly important role in working with these students and their families in assisting them with the transition from high school to post-secondary life. Most adults identified with a disability have difficulty in being hired and maintaining a job (Heward, 2013). Moreover, continuing assistance may be a part of the employment scenario for many individuals with a severe disability (Heward, 2013). As some of the students with disabilities may have increased or unique requirements for making this transition from high school successfully, it is critical that school counselors be familiar with specific concerns and techniques of importance to these students and their success. Although all students, with and without disabilities, have individual goals, a discussion of each of the educational areas of disabilities and its special considerations for the transition to post-secondary life may prove beneficial to the secondary school counselors' implementation of this aspect of their role.

Consequently, this discussion will focus on the particular areas of disability noted in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Public Law 108–446, 2004), and highlight matters of importance to the classification in regard to transition from high school. An in-depth conversation of the individual disability areas is beyond the scope of this discussion. Yet, for particular disability areas in IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Public Law 108–446, 2004), this discussion will focus on matters for the students which should be overriding topics of

focus for the school counselor when assisting them in making the transition to life after high school.

Post-Secondary Transition for Students With Specific Learning Disabilities

Because of the heterogeneity of the characteristics and behaviors associated with specific learning disabilities (SLD), some students will require more support than others as they make the transition into adulthood. If students with SLD have a serious reading or language-related focus they may have more challenges as they pursue postsecondary options or career options (Rosenberg, Westling, & McLeskey, 2011). In addition to career concerns, the reading and nonverbal social difficulties may also be problematic in making and maintaining friendships (Lerner & Johns, 2012). At the same time, an increasing number of students with disabilities are pursuing options for college and more institutions of higher education are providing more support (Smith, Tyler, & Smith, 2014). Clearly, with their background and expertise, school counselors may play a vital role in assisting students with SLD not only to complete their high school education but make a smoother transition to their postsecondary life, be it a career option or postsecondary education.

Examples of major skills for students with SLD as they make the transition to adult life include the practice of self-determination, self-advocacy (Mercer. Mercer, & Pullen, 2011), and perseverance, as well as involvement in setting goals, and working with a strong support network (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009). These skills and activities should be of substantial benefit to students with SLD whether they pursue postsecondary education or vocational options, and in their personal lives as independent adults.

Intellectual Disabilities

Intellectual disability (ID) is a term used when a person has certain limitations in mental functioning and in skills such as communicating, taking care of him or herself, and social skills. These limitations will cause a child to learn and develop more slowly than a typical child (Ohio Department of Education, 2016a, para. 5). There are several matters with which school counselors should be familiar in regard to students with ID. While some students with ID will not require support in their adult lives, there are some who will require assistance as they pursue employment, independent living, and/or postsecondary educational options. For example, students with the more severe types of ID may live in community residential environments or with their families after leaving high school, and may work in supported occupational settings or more restrictive environments, such as sheltered workshops (Rosenberg et al., 2011).

In general, the picture of employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities is still not as positive as one would want. Through the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, Carter, Austin, and Trainor (2011), as cited in Wehman (2013), examined "the early work experiences of youth with severe disabilities (i.e., intellectual disabilities, autism, multiple disabilities). They explored the extent to which various student-, family-, school-, and community-level factors were associated with paid work experiences during high school. Findings highlighted the elusiveness of early work experiences for many youth with severe disabilities" (Wehman, 2013, p 13).

Clearly, effective transitional programming, in which the school counselor may play a critical role, should increase the likelihood for success in the challenges of employment as well as other matters. At the same time that the employment domain

may still be in need of attention, the area of postsecondary education for students with ID is expanding in that opportunities in this regard have become more available in recent years. On the website, *Think College, College Options for People with Intellectual Disabilities* (n.d.), it is noted that *The Higher Education Opportunity Act*, which was enacted in 2008, "contains a number of important new provisions that improve access to postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities" (para.1), including provisions for financial assistance, program funding and a National Coordinating Center.

Along with the strong emphases on employment, postsecondary options, and independent living, school counselors should also be aware that students with ID should be encouraged to attain and actively practice social skills and self-determination (Beirne-Smith, Patton, & Kim, 2006; Gargiulo, 2015; Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2012; Rosenberg et al., 2011). While it is generally accepted by professionals in the field that self-determination should be encouraged early in the student's school career, the emphasis is even more pronounced as the student is progressing toward life after high school (Hallahan et al., 2012).

Traumatic Brain Injury

IDEA defines traumatic brain injury (TBI) as an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. "Traumatic brain injury applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem- solving; sensory, perceptual, and

motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. Traumatic brain injury does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma. (20 §1401 [2004], 20 CFR §300.8[c][12])" (Heward, 2013, p. 425).

Students with TBI may access the same post-high school options as other students. As to the level and type of accommodations and modifications required to promote a successful transition, that will depend on the student's individual requirements, preferences, and interests. Effective transition programming will have a critical role in the student's success in making the progression from one environment to another (Gargiulo, 2015). The importance of transition programming is particularly evident when considering the results of a national investigation, which found that the outcomes were not particularly favorable for individuals with TBI in regard to the areas of postsecondary education, employment, and living independently (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009, as cited in Rosenberg et al., 2011). In this study, the students had been away from high school for a period of time between 1 and 4 years: only 43% were identified as being employed when they were interviewed, and only 18% were considered to be living independently.

Rosenberg et al. (2011) note that some individuals with TBI are employed in jobs based in the community while being provided supports (e.g., job coaches) to implement the functions of the position. These authors note that, for these students, transitional activities which promote them being engaged in vocational training in authentic environments may be advantageous to the acquisition of critical skills.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is "characterized by impairment in social interactions, deficits in communication, and patterns of restricted or repetitive behavior" (Virginia Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Student Services, 2011, p. 7). Some students with ASD can be successfully employed, but their matters with social skills and the requirement for sameness could be problematic in the workplace (Smith, 2006). In addition, participation in community options can also be limited by the availability of programming and an inadequate skill set for leisure activities of some students with ASD (Gargiulo, 2015). Consequently, it is clear that transition is critical for students with ASD, and should focus on various areas, including life skill activities, communication and social abilities, self-management and self-determination, participation in community opportunities, transportation and mobility concerns, housing and residential matters, and vocational skills (Gargiulo, 2015; Hall, 2013).

Emotional Disturbance

According to the Ohio Department of Education (2016b), IDEA defines emotional disturbance (ED) as:

> …a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:
>
> 1. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
>
> 2. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
>
> 3. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
>
> 4. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

5. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (para. 1).

As defined by IDEA, emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance" (Ohio Department of Education, 2016b, para. 1-2).

Students who have been identified as having emotional or behavioral disorders have the highest rate of dropouts among all the classifications of students with disabilities (Gargiulo, 2015). Clearly, school counselors as well as other pertinent individuals in the student's life should identify the importance of providing appropriate services and programming for the student's transition to post-school life.

There are many facets that may be involved in successful transitional programming for students with emotional or behavioral disabilities. Components take into account "vocational training, parental and student involvement, interagency collaboration, paid work experience, follow-up employment services, community-based instruction, and community- referenced curriculum" (Gargiulo, 2015, p.316). An additional consideration for transition programming for students with ED is the importance of making the process student-centered and involving the acquisition of such skills as self-determination for the student. The practicing of such skills should enable the students to actively participate in and achieve their post-school goals (Katsiyannis, Zhang, & Mackiewicz. 2012).

Multiple Disabilities

According to the Ohio Department of Education (2015a):

"Multiple disabilities" means concomitant [simultaneous] impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness, intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment, etc.),

the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in a special education program solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf- blindness (para. 1).

In addition to pursuing postsecondary educational and/or employment opportunities which may be appropriate for the specific individual with multiple disabilities (MD), "transition to adulthood should honor the concepts of person-centered planning and natural supports, feature vocational programming, and include community and domestic living skills" (Hallahan et al., 2012, p.394). Person-centered planning should involve collaboration among stakeholders who will be partners with the students and provide services and supports as they move into their adult years (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2013; Westling & Fox, 2009). Inclusion in community activities and the fostering of positive social relationships are also key considerations when looking to future outcomes for students with MD (Westling & Fox, 2009).

Vocational education may be the course to pursue for some students with MD and the goal of such instruction should be community placement. Students may even be involved in work placements in the community before leaving school to provide authentic experiences as a foundation upon which to build their post-school job opportunities (Hallahan et al., 2012; Westling & Fox, 2009).

Whether the students will be pursuing postsecondary education or employment options, technology is a major matter for consideration in the transitional process. Assistive technology and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices are items that must be addressed for students whose particular matters require them. This is the case whether the technological option is for postsecondary education, employment options, and/or independent living skills. Technology has opened up

numerous possibilities for students with disabilities and has increased accessibility to jobs for many students (Gargiulo, 2015).

A skill which has been a running theme in this discussion of successful transition for students with disabilities is that of self-determination. "It has become best practice for transition teams to focus on promoting and enhancing self-determination as a means to improve outcomes for students with disabilities" (McGuire, 2010, p. 103). It is imperative that students be aware of their interests and aptitudes and have the proficiency to make educated choices in regard to their future goals and activities (Storey & Miner, 2011).

Physical Disabilities

According to the Ohio Department of Education (2015b):

Orthopedic impairment is defined as a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly (e.g., clubfoot, absence of some member, etc.), impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, etc.), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures)" (para. 1).

In addition, the Ohio Department of Education (2013) stipulates that:

Other health impairment means having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and adversely affects a child's educational performance. [§300.8(c)(9)] (Ohio Department of Education, 2013, para. 1-2).

Depending on the disability and its impact, students with orthopedic impairments (OI) and other health impairments (OHI) may have to learn to compensate for particular limitations, such as mobility matters, problems with motor skills, lack of stamina, and pain (Rosenberg et al., 2011). Even with these matters, however, with the assistance of "legislation, technological advances, and options for support, more opportunities now exist for individuals with physical and health disabilities than ever before" (Gargiulo, 2015, p.521). Students with OI and OHI have the right to access the same opportunities as non-disabled students. Therefore, the same options for postsecondary education and training, employment with varying levels of support, if needed, and independent living skills and arrangements that have been discussed in regard to other disability areas are applicable herein. Moreover, the strong emphasis throughout this article on self-determination is also vital for students with OI or OHI. If the students engage in self-determination and self-advocacy, they will be able to pursue accommodations and modifications as well as assistive technology options which may assist them in all areas of their adult lives.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Although attention deficit hyperactivity (ADHD) is not noted as a particular area of disability category in IDEA, students may have the option of accommodating and/or modifying programming, which makes it important to discuss the classification. There are some matters which should be taken into consideration when assisting students with ADHD make the transition to life after high school. Although behavior may be a focus of various disabilities, behavioral difficulties such as depression or low self-esteem may become more apparent in adolescence, and adults with ADHD may

continue to have problems with organization, interpersonal relationships, and post-secondary or vocational success (Lerner & Johns, 2012). For example, the post-secondary environment may prove problematic in that the student is moving from a relatively structured environment to one with less organization. Assisting the student with learning how to make contacts with college offices for students with disabilities is vital (Kewley, 2011). Employment also has some challenges and as Gargiulo (2015) notes: "Successful employment for adults with ADHD often depends on a 'goodness of fit'-that is, matching the job requirements with the individual's unique profile of symptoms" (p. 276). Counseling strategies and interventions focusing on critical behaviors may prove beneficial to students with ADHD as they make the transition from school to post-school life.

Sensory Impairments

The Ohio Department of Education (2016c) provides the following definitions for deafness and hearing impairments:

Definition of Deafness (Ohio Administrative Code 3301-51-01 (B)(10)(D)(iv)) "Deafness" means a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Definition of Hearing Impairment (Ohio Administrative Code 3301-51-01 (B)(10)(D)(vi)) "Hearing impairment" means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness in this rule (para. 2-3).

The concepts and practices which were discussed in the previous section should be taken into consideration during the transition process for students with HI. Such accommodations, as well as others not discussed herein, should be made available to

the students, depending on their individual requirements, as they progress from high school to post-school life. As with all areas of disability, students with HI should have access to the same post-secondary options as students without disabilities.

If students with HI pursue employment after high school, they must be aware that the Americans with Disabilities Act mandates that employers provide reasonable accommodations for individuals with hearing loss, which may involve such activities as the installation of a telecommunication device (TDD), the implementation of pagers, and access to interpreters (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2013). Institutions of higher education also have disability service offices or some systems of support which may provide counseling and tutoring, as well as provide for note takers and lecture captioning (Turnbull et al., 2013).

Students with HI should also be made aware of the community services available to them, such as their state's vocational rehabilitation service, which may provide counseling, vocational evaluation, job site placements, and assistance for entry into postsecondary educational options. There are also state commissions or offices that may provide such services as advocacy, agency referrals, and occupational placements (Gargiulo, 2015). Clearly, self-advocacy and self-determination are vital skills for the students as they pursue their postsecondary goals.

Visual Impairments

"Visual impairment" including blindness means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance" (Ohio Department of Education, 2016d, para. 1) As was recommended with students with HI, practices and matters which were discussed previously should be considered in regard to

assisting the students in making a successful transition to postsecondary life. As with all areas of disability, students with visual impairments (VI) should have access to the same post-secondary options and activities as students without disabilities.

Students with VI must also be aware of the opportunities and supports that are available to them whether they pursue employment or postsecondary educational options. Disability service offices are present on college and university campuses, and reasonable accommodations are to be made in regard to employment opportunities. As with all students with disabilities, students with VI should be aware of these facts and practice self-determination and self-advocacy. Schools can be instrumental in teaching such skills and promoting their practice, as well as provide opportunities for the students to engage in problem-solving and in refining their technological capabilities (Bishop, 2004).

In addition to postsecondary education and employment, major areas of focus to consider for adults and adolescents with VI are the ability to succeed in the areas of mobility and orientation in the community, movement toward appropriate levels of independent living (Turnbull et al., 2013), access to reading options, implementation of travel skills, and involvement with socialization opportunities, community activities and appropriate community resources (Gargiulo, 2015). Technological advances can also play a key role in the lives of students with VI as adults in numerous ways, and individuals with VI should be provided the opportunity to access such options. With these and other alternatives, many individuals, even with blindness, have the opportunity for leading independent lives (Hallahan et al., 2012).

Deaf-Blindness

"Deaf-blindness" means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness. OAC 3301-51-01 (B)(10)(d)(iii)" (Ohio Department of Education, 2016e, para. 2).The topics and options which have been discussed previously in regard to the other areas of disability apply to students with deaf-blindness, depending on their individual interests and requirements. There are, however, a few points which should be emphasized, in particular.

Students who have had limited experiences in life because of their disability may encounter limitations in employment opportunities, which speaks to the importance of setting up students with deaf-blindness for the world of work while they are in school. Community-based experience could be particularly beneficial (Rosenberg et al., 2011). As for the pursuit of postsecondary education, while the same options for assistance should be made available to students with deaf-blindness, the students should also be strongly encouraged to practice self-advocacy in that they may not only have to coordinate services and obtain orientation and mobility assistance and training, they may be involved in teaching others about their disability (Arndt, 2011).

Speech or language impairment

IDEA officially defines speech and language impairments as "a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance." (Ohio Department of Education, 2015c, para. 1).

Based on data reported by Smith et al. (2014)**,** the outlook for students with speech or language disabilities, as they make the transition from school to post-school life, is encouraging. As Smith et al. note, upon review of a follow- up investigation of young people with disabilities, the students with communication matters were among the most probable to exhibit behaviors associated with independence and were most likely to have employment or be in attendance at some type of postsecondary educational option.

Clearly, the degree of impairment and whether or not there are concomitant conditions or factors that influence the individual's speech or language will have an impact on the amount and type of services and supports that will be required for post-school life. Individuals with serious speech and/or language involvement may continue to require the services of a speech language pathologist (SLP). Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) materials/instruments may also continue to be required, and mastery of functional language may be a priority for some individuals with more involved impairments (Hallahan et al., 2012). Collaboration and partnerships with community agencies and interdisciplinary approaches may be warranted, again depending on the particular requirements of the individual.

Summary

Successful transitioning from high school to post-secondary life is a major area of focus for all students. The likelihood of increased requirements for students with disabilities to achieve an effective transition is a critical area of focus for the school counselor. While each student with an identified disability is unique and has individual goals for the future, school counselors may add to their effectiveness if they focus on

such matters as discussed in this paper, categorized according to area of disability. Moreover, the welfare and success of the students will be enhanced as they move into new facets of their lives.

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