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Incorporating Adult Community Services in Students' Transition Planning

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ABSTRACT

Despite the 15-year focus on transition planning, students with learning disabilities (LD) continue to experience less positive postschool outcomes than their peers without disabilities. Outcome data indicate that experiencing successful transitions from public schooling into the adult world seems to be a complex and elusive process. The 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act promote the development of interagency linkages between school personnel and community agencies in an effort to mobilize all available resources. In many cases, however, these linkages are not being made. This article provides information on available community agencies, the resources they offer, and ways school personnel might work with these agencies in an effort to enhance successful transitions for individuals with LD.

COLLEY AND JAMISON (1998) AND HALPERN (1993) have argued that parental initiative, early interventions, and broad community experiences are more critical to students' outcomes than traditional school services. Halpern (1993) and Benz and Blalock (1999) suggested that added school and community resources will result in higher-level outcomes such as social participation, community integration, and employment. Available, accessible community resources can bring that value-added component for students' benefits (Benz & Blalock, 1999). Benz and Blalock (1999) have stressed the value of a school-family-community partnership for improving the transition of secondary-level students. They posit two reasons for building these relationships:

"(a) to secure the resources needed to help an individual student accomplish the transition goals" and "(b) to improve the capacity of schools and communities to deliver services and provide resources that enhance the transition of all students with disabilities" (p. 4).

Our focus is to describe the importance of school staff who can develop important interagency linkages within the community, as suggested in the 1997 IDEA amendments. Those amendment changes included that schools must direct attention to student outcomes; develop interagency linkages; broaden the scope of curricula and programs to include instruction, related services, community experiences, and employment; involve students, parents, and community agencies in the transition planning process; and recognize role changes for school staff to service coordination. For many districts, these substantive changes will require significant effort for implementation. Building these linkages may reflect a significant shift in school personnel activities in that the academic attainments commonly associated with school accountability may be less relevant to the lives of these students with disabilities.

PURPOSE

In the remainder of this article we turn our attention to addressing two questions.

1. What are the common post–high school outcomes for persons with learning disabilities?

2. What alternative services are available to parents and transition teams for planning successful transitions?

As we address these questions, we acknowledge that schools' staffs confront significant issues in improving students' outcomes and that in some individual settings, great strides are being made. Such sustained efforts are commendable. Apart from those highlights, the difficulties of achieving positive outcomes are generally pervasive and, as the following section indicates, require critical examinations of current policies, procedures, and practices.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON POST–HIGH SCHOOL OUTCOMES FOR PERSONS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES?

The transition of individuals with disabilities from school to adult life has been a focus of researchers, educators, and advocates for many years. Despite the services and supports available to persons with disabilities both during secondary school and upon exiting, these individuals seem to experience poor postschool outcomes compared with their nondisabled peers (e.g., Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). Specifically, research has demonstrated that individuals with learning disabilities do not fare as well as their nondisabled peers in such quality-of-life indicators as employment, postsecondary education and training, and independent living (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, & Edgar, 2000; Schmidt-Davis, Hayward, & Kay, 2000; Sitlington & Frank, 1993; Zigmond & Thornton, 1985).

One factor contributing to poor outcomes for individuals with learning disabilities could be a significantly higher dropout rate (approximately 28%; SRI International, 1997) compared with their peers without disabilities (approximately 13%; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics [USDE NCES], 1997). Dropouts with disabilities are less likely to live independently and less likely to get enrolled in any postsecondary education or training than their nondisabled peers (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Clearly, completing school is crucial to the potential success and quality of life of individuals with disabilities.

Although employment rates for individuals with LD who receive a high school diploma are higher than for their peers who drop out, room for improvement exists (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Schmidt-Davis et al., 2000). Goldstein, Murray, and Edgar (1998) found that during the first 4 years following high school graduation, adults with LD earn more and work more hours than adults without LD; however this trend reverses during and following the 5th year, with adults without LD earning far more despite no significant difference in hours worked. One explanation for this trend is that adults without LD are finishing college or specialized training and

receiving promotions during and following the 5th year of employment while adults with LD are experiencing career stagnation. Gender differences are also reported. Female graduates with LD fare worse, with significantly lower employment rates, lower wages, and less full-time employment than males with LD (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996).

Several studies have examined postsecondary school attendance and completion for individuals with and without disabilities (Holliday, Koller, & Thomas, 1999; Murray et al., 2000). Murray et al. (2000) found differences between the two groups in postsecondary education attendance and graduation favoring individuals without disabilities. Of those who did attend, adults with LD were more likely to attend training and community college than those without disabilities, who were more likely to attend 4-year colleges. Ten years after graduation from high school, the majority of adults with LD had not graduated from postsecondary school while the majority of adults without LD had graduated from either community college or 4-year college programs.

For each of these rather bleak outcomes, researchers suggest best practices in the field of transition that could work toward helping students with LD earn a diploma, attain gainful employment, succeed in postsecondary settings, and enjoy a suitable quality of life. These best practices also meet the suggestions set out in the 1997 amendments to IDEA. For example, in her review of transition literature, Kohler (1993) found that participation in vocational training, parent involvement in transition planning, and interagency collaboration were cited as best practices in over half of the documents analyzed. Other frequently cited practices included social skills training, paid work experience during school, and individual transition plans and planning. More recent literature supports her early findings (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Dunn, 1996).

Many of the practices mentioned thus far, such as parent involvement and social skills training, are the responsibility of the school. Others, such as vocational training and individualized transition planning, although largely the responsibility of schools, require collaboration from others outside of the school setting. This interagency collaboration is also needed for job seeking and placement, follow-up, and support services. Unfortunately, recent research shows that programs in a number of states are not rigorously inviting parents or other adult agency representatives to transition planning conferences and are not creating individual plans based on students' interests, preferences, and needs (Williams & O'Leary, 2001). If schools are to influence improved outcomes for students with LD, new models must be implemented.

WHAT SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE FOR PLANNING SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS?

As parents, instructors, the youthful student (age 14), advocates, and adult service providers begin planning the stu-

dent's transition, the above statistics and findings should clearly impress all with the critical importance of successful transition programs. As indicated earlier in this article, students with LD generally do not fare well as adults. Because students with LD represent the largest group of students with disabilities in the schools and the largest group of persons with disabilities as adults, their outcomes are of concern.

Numerous adult or postschool agencies and services are available to assist adults. Knowledge of and access to them can lead to a significant positive outcome for persons with disabilities. The following text describes several of these agencies and services, including adult education (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002), centers for independent living (Colley & Jamison, 1998), community-based agencies (Benz & Blalock, 1999; Lourie, Stroul, & Friedman, 1998), vocational rehabilitation (Dowdy, 1992; Price-Ellingstad & Berry, 2000), postsecondary education (National Education Goals Panel, 2000), and the Social Security Administration (National Council on Disability & Social Security Administration [NCD & SSA], 2000).

Adult Education

Students with disabilities drop out or are "pushed out" of high schools at disproportionately high rates. These students may leave school for a host of reasons, such as pregnancy, marriage, family problems, lack of interest, the need to support their families with jobs, and low achievement (Brown, 2000; Scanlon & Mellard, 2002). For those students who later seek to complete high school, an adult education (AE) program may be an alternative. A second reason for considering AE is as an alternative placement for current high school students. AE programs are available in many types. For our immediate purpose, two types are of note: English as a Second Language (ESL) and adult secondary education programs. The ESL classes have multiple levels graded according to the students' English language proficiency. These classes are very interactive and frequently rely on the learners' experiences as a basis for generating the lesson content (e.g., work activities, family activities, community events). Because ESL classes frequently enroll persons seeking U.S. citizenship, the content also includes relevant civics content.

Separate classes are available for addressing secondary-level (high school) content needed for successful employment and passing the five tests included in the General Education Development (GED) exam, which yields a high school diploma. Generally these classes are locally administered through a school district, community college, or community-based organization. The state, however, sets the standards for earning the GED diploma. That is, each state sets its own pass score for the five tests and the total test score. The state-sponsored classes are free of charge, but a fee is charged for taking the GED exam. Students should also be aware that within some communities, proprietary businesses or educational institutions may charge fees for the classes;

attending such a fee-based program may be suitable, but one would initially want to investigate the free classes. Many individuals are unaware that only approximately 70% of high school graduates would be able to earn passing GED scores. That is, the pass score is such that many students who have earned the traditional high school diploma would be unsuccessful on the five exams. That statistic should be part of any discussion with a student who considers "getting a GED" just a matter of taking a test over a couple of days.

In addition to the classes related to earning a high school diploma, AE classes offer a variety of other skill-related content focusing on job readiness, retention, or advancement. Individual AE programs can be quite variable in these contents and instructional methods (e.g., tutors, independent study, computer-based delivery, small class instruction). One will have to investigate the local programs to determine what they offer and how instruction is provided. On the downside, most AE programs are tremendously underfunded given the participants' skill levels and goals. While AE programs are obliged to meet the accommodation requirements of Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, they generally do not receive the financial support available to public schools through IDEA and state entitlements. The consequence is that resources are significantly limited.

In summary, AE provides an alternative, free high school completion program. AE also provides ESL, citizenship, and job-related classes. In some states these services are available as an alternative high school placement. In other states, a student must not be enrolled in the public schools and must essentially forfeit his or her opportunity for public school services, including special education and related services. While AE may not appear to be an attractive alternative, for students who would otherwise drop out, this option can be important.

Vocational Rehabilitation

As early as 1973, the federal Rehabilitation Act authorized funding for vocational rehabilitation (VR) services in each state. These services are intended to help persons with disabilities become employed, economically self-sufficient, independent, and integrated into their communities. The 1973 Act and its 1998 amendments include provisions to ensure that persons with disabilities are not discriminated against and that they receive appropriate accommodations, modifications, and auxiliary aids (Cozzens, Dowdy, & Smith, 1999; Price-Ellingstad & Berry, 2000; Rehabilitation Services Administration, 1993).

Accessing VR services, however, may pose a new hurdle for students, namely that the VR definition of disability differs from the IDEA's. The VR disability definition is similar to that of the Americans with Disabilities Act. In addition, two important differences are that VR's eligibility for services requires (a) a substantial impediment to employment and (b) that the student's employment outcome will benefit

from VR services. As a consequence, many students with school-identified disabilities may not be eligible for VR services because of a lack of explicit impact on employment (Dowdy, 1992).

In addition to the possible lack of an employment impact, students with LD were commonly determined as lacking a severe disability. That is, although students are failing in the education environment and succeeding only because of the support offered through special education, academic achievement is not a sufficient standard for VR services. In many state VR agencies, priority for service has been based on an "order of selection" described in the 1992 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 1993, p. 42). The order of selection means that those persons with multiple or the most severe disabilities and potential for rehabilitation are given a priority over those persons with less severe disabilities. Generally, persons with LD are lower in the order of selection and, thus, less likely to receive services. The implication for planning transitions to the VR system is to ensure (a) that the student's disability is clearly documented and (b) that its impact on major life activities, especially on employment and career areas, is substantiated. VR's standard for success is employability, not remediation, and given limited funding and extensive caseloads, selection decisions are involved. We believe that in general the severity standard is difficult to substantiate when students are mainstreamed or integrated into the general education environment without accommodations. Assessments and documentation must indicate that the student's disability is severe, significantly limits employment options, and could be helped with VR services, that is, shows the potential for a successful outcome.

One other important point to recognize is that under the VR model, individuals compete for services with other persons with disabilities; a threshold rule of demonstrating a disability, which is a public school model, does not apply. In public schools, the service delivery model is that if a student meets the definition of disability and a need for services, the student is entitled to the services and school districts are obligated to provide appropriate services. In states' VR services that have an order of selection, however, an individual must not only demonstrate the disability but also have a disability severe enough to entitle him or her to services over other persons who also have a disability. Thus, school staff and parents must diligently attend to VR's documentation procedures and exhaustively demonstrate the implications of a disability across environments (e.g., home, school, work, community); across activity domains (e.g., following directions, orientation in time and space, independent functioning); and for the potential for rehabilitation. The last point is important because the VR staff want to have a sense that their program will be effective with the person and, thus, have a successful case closure.

VR services can be quite valuable (Colley & Jamison, 1998; Dunham, Schrader, & Dunham, 2000; Gardner & Scott, 2001; Price-Ellingstad & Berry, 2000), although predicting a successful outcome continues to be problematic (Dunham, Koller, & McIntosh, 1996). VR services include counseling and guidance; referral; job-related services (on-the-job training, work conditioning, mentoring, and vocational training); diagnostic and treatment services; maintenance, transportation, and commuting expenses (vans, taxicabs, private cars); services to family members to benefit the individual; restoration services (surgery, therapies, and hospitalization); and assistive technology services and devices (e.g., telecommunications, sensory aids). Education services may include tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, and lab-related fees. These services must show a clear connection to the rehabilitation plan leading to employment.

In summary, an important consideration for transition team members, including the student and his or her advocates, is that VR services can provide an important supplement to a person's educational and job preparation and support services. The great variation of available supports means that individual needs can be addressed. On the other hand, VR does not use the public school model of disability or entitlement. Thus, teachers and parents must invest energy in learning the local VR system of disability determination and access. Persons with LD will typically have difficulty qualifying for those services when (a) the state's VR system is using an order of selection model based on disability severity and (b) the schools are using a curricular model of disability (i.e., disability is based on a failure to achieve in the general education curriculum).

Social Security Administration

The Social Security Administration administers programs that may be particularly important for some students with disabilities, especially for those whose disability-related conditions limit their employment potential. If one thinks of employment potential as a continuum, various programs and agencies can be located along that continuum for the services that they provide. VR assesses one's potential to work and the effect of one's disability on substantial gainful activity. If the disability is interfering with employment and a person demonstrates the potential to work, VR can assist. The Social Security Administration can assist the person when the disability interferes with employment and is not likely to improve. Each agency has its own program goals, physical location, eligibility requirements, and services. Because the eligibility rules change when a student turns 18 years old, those advocating for the student should contact the Social Security Administration and have eligibility determination completed prior to the 18th birthday.

For some students with disabilities, supplemental income may be critical to their ability to participate in educational programs or employment. The Social Security Administration administers the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. SSI is an entitlement to income assistance depen-

dent on the person's disability severity and income or resource level. Persons of any age can apply, including infants (parental income level and resources are counted for students under age 18). SSI was designed for persons whose disability prevents them from working currently and is likely to continue in the future, for at least 12 months. One's eligibility is redetermined periodically; this process occurs every three years and is referred to as a *continuing disability review.* While the program was initially designed for low-income adults, the rationale for including children was that the added costs of meeting their disability-related needs would pose another burden on their low-income parents and consequently limit their access to developmental supports (NCD & SSA, 2000).

As Cozzens et al. (1999) indicated, working with the Social Security Administration is a complex process. Two important features of SSI concern (a) student earned income exclusion and (b) the Plan to Achieve Self-Sufficiency (PASS). As indicated earlier, a person's eligibility is based on his or her disability condition and income level. Under provisions for working students, approximately $400 per month, or $1,620 annually, of a student's income is excluded from the qualification criteria. This feature is important because students still have an incentive to participate in a work-related training program as part of their other transition activities. The PASS program encourages individuals to develop a plan for self-sufficiency, which is likely a penultimate outcome of successful transition (Morningstar, Kleinhammer-Trammill, & Lattin, 1999). The PASS plan includes such features as goal statements, disability information, income and resource levels, and anticipated expenses for services or items needed for achieving self-support. The list of expense items might include education-related items such as books, tuition, fees, tools, clothing, transportation, and even child care. In addition to serving as one model of a transition plan, another value of the PASS is that the anticipated expenses can be applied against earned income and resource levels. Thus, SSI eligibility status can change by having a PASS.

The Social Security Administration orientation regarding SSI contrasts with the schools' efforts in transition planning. Social Security Administration programs are for persons whose disability prevents their employment. School programs are intended to increase the employment success of persons with disabilities (NCD & SSA, 2000). The SSI provisions may be helpful in students' transition, though, and thus should be routinely considered for each individual. The information should be gathered as soon as a disability determination has been made for school services. If school staff access the Social Security Administration, they can learn how to best assist students regarding SSI.

With the enactment of the Ticket to Work and the Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (P.L. 106-170), the Social Security Administration's work-related initiatives changed dramatically. For persons over 18 receiving SSI, several of the disincentives to work were removed or reduced,

and they may be eligible for a "ticket," or voucher, to obtain employment services of their choosing from employment networks (NCD & SSA, 2000). The ticket is given to an employment or rehabilitation provider who will provide the needed supports for employment with sufficient income that the SSI or SSDI cash benefit is no longer needed. The employment networks may include traditional services, such as vocational rehabilitation services, or services from other public or private providers, such as centers for independent living.

We recognize that successful transition is more than a sustained employment outcome, but an employment outcome is usually necessary to provide for successful adult life in the community. The Ticket to Work has two features that make it attractive to high school students in transition: (a) the voucher feature just described and (b) the individual work plan. Under the supporting regulations (20 CFR 411.465), a work plan has 10 components, including the vocational goal and, where appropriate, earning and job advancement goals, a statement of needed services and supports to attain the goal, a description of the financial arrangements with the employment network, dispute resolution procedures, privacy rights, and steps of amending the plan. With the shift in orientation under the new legislation, the Social Security Administration is no longer focused on supporting persons with disabilities who were judged as too disabled to work. The shift means that the Social Security Administration has an interest comparable to VR—helping persons receive the training and supports necessary to work and have a career.

In summary, the Social Security Administration is an often underutilized resource for persons with LD. The burden of proof is to demonstrate the disability's severity in terms of employment implications. This test of LD manifestation is difficult to pass and certainly will not be satisfied by merely referencing academic skill deficits. The LD manifestation must be evidenced in home and community activities, and the lack of employment proficiencies. School-based data generally will have limited support for Social Security Administration program eligibility. On the other hand, the opportunities available through Ticket to Work regulations have a positive potential of providing valuable opportunities for developing employment skills and increasing the likelihood of high-quality employment.

Centers for Independent Living

As noted earlier in the review of high school outcomes, few students with LD are achieving goals indicative of a high quality of life. Centers for independent living (CILs) offer community-based programs that may be able to improve on those outcomes. CILs are nonprofit service agencies operated by, and for, persons with disabilities whose primary goal is to help their consumers live more independently (White, 2000). Seekins, Innes, and Enders (1999) reported that the United

States has 336 CILs plus an additional 245 satellite or outreach offices.

The CILs have an important role for the student in transition, but are infrequently accessed (Colley & Jamison, 1998). In one statewide study, only about 5% of high school graduates with any disability had accessed CIL services. The CIL has an open-door policy that encourages self-advocacy and the person's self-directing of his or her services. These characteristics reflect what is known as the independent living movement (Hanson, 2000; Wehman, 1999). This self-directed model contrasts markedly with team-directed efforts common to schools. In schools, staff and parents work within the IDEA framework, which outlines legal safeguards and was designed to ensure that children receive a free, appropriate education. Within the CILs, the orientation is consumer direction. Common service delivery themes include consumer sovereignty, self-reliance, inclusiveness, and integration. As these themes imply, the idea is that the person with the disability chooses the services that best fulfill his or her needs and interests (Hanson, 2000). A fundamental belief is that the problems of daily living reside in the environment, not the person. This shift in perspective is in stark contrast to most general education perspectives of disabilities. Because CIL clients are working extensively with persons with disabilities, they encounter attitudes, information, and experiences that are different from those they would encounter in the schools. In the CIL, a student with LD will encounter and learn from other persons with disabilities and the strategies they have used for flourishing in a broader public environment that tends to ignore, neglect, or actively discriminate against persons with disabilities.

Our experience is that parents, teachers, and students with LD have had little contact with their local CIL. The CILs' core services of (a) advocacy, (b) referral, (c) peer counseling, and (d) independent living skills development are appropriate supplements to the schools' services. We are suggesting not that Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals should include objectives delivered through the CIL, but that the student's interactions with CIL staff members can be valuable to the student's formal educational experiences and IEP development. For example, CIL staff can assist the student (and, as appropriate, the parents) with accessing services through vocational rehabilitation or the Social Security Administration. As trained advocates, the CIL staff members are thoroughly familiar with the legalistic hurdles associated with accessing VR and Social Security Administration services. In addition, the staff can assist with employers and employment settings that may present handicapping situations. This assistance might be in the form of advocating for the student; providing information that can help address a concern (e.g., determining an appropriate accommodation, accessing needed technology, identifying tax incentives, using one-stop workforce centers); or identifying services that may assist in problem solving.

In summary, given the well-documented relationship among person-driven goal setting and attainment and a person's sense of mastery and control (e.g., Ackerson, 2000; Halpern, 1993), CIL staff members can be valuable contributors to a student's transition. For too many students, the CILs are underutilized but are a potential resource for addressing many transition-related issues.

Community and Technical Colleges

The resources reviewed thus far have addressed many of the quality-of-life issues confronting individuals with LD, and we have described resources available through public services or agencies. Postsecondary options address quality-of-life concerns as well. From some perspectives, participation in postsecondary education is an even more important transition goal than employment (Halpern, Yovanoff, Doren, & Benz, 1995). Like the Social Security Administration or VR, postsecondary participation has a financial benefit. The twist, though, is that postsecondary participation offers the potential of a significant rate of return on a person's investment. That is, rather than an entitlement or financial assistance, the financial return is significantly tied to the participant's efforts and accomplishments in the postsecondary setting. Educational benefits are rarely described from a monetary orientation, although common references allude to the disparity in income across groups based on educational attainment: persons who do not complete high school, who are high school graduates, who have some college experience, and so on. Educational attainment also has benefits associated with personal satisfaction, social position, and economic growth as well as benefits to the larger society regarding citizenship and participation (USDE NCES, 1997). Another perspective on financial gain can be computed as a rate of return. In a U.S. Department of Education report (2000), the real rate of return on college investment was calculated at 12% based solely on earnings. A 12% return appears to be a wise investment, especially given the documented outcomes of persons with LD. The question might be that given the significant potential benefits from participation, why are so few students with disabilities successfully matriculated?

The trouble is that few students with disabilities are prepared to take advantage of that investment opportunity. Halpern et al. (1995) noted that few students with disabilities were academically prepared for postsecondary education. Differences were not only curricular and instructional, such as type and number of preparatory courses, but also procedural, such as completion of college entrance tests or visiting postsecondary settings. In a National Center for Educational Statistics report (Rossi, Herting, & Wolman, 1997), the national longitudinal data indicated that students with disabilities (except for disability groups with health problems) were less prepared test-wise (either ACT or SAT) or academically than were nondisabled peers. Postsecondary participation and

completion rates reflect those findings. Summary statistics cited in several reports (NCD & SSA, 2000; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000) suggest that about 9% of postsecondary education students report a disability, which is a significant increase over the last 10 years but is still about 50% lower than the general population. Out of the population of students with reported disabilities, the largest portion of students participating in postsecondary education is students with learning disabilities (NCD & SSA, 2000; see also Scott, McGuire, & Shaw, this issue).

The potential for improving postsecondary education participation rates is increasing through several courses of action. As indicated previously, VR services can provide important assistance, but associated costs seem to be an issue. In a jointly issued paper, NCD and SSA (2000) noted,

> For far too many students with disabilities, compliance with federal regulations regarding paying for and providing auxiliary aids for vocational rehabilitation (VR) clients with disabilities who enroll in postsecondary institutions has been hampered due to the lack of guidance on the issue from the U.S. Department of Education, and the refusal of some state agencies to share the cost associated with servicing students who need reasonable accommodations. (p. 15)

Apparently cost concerns are significant enough to delay addressing these regulatory issues. The consequence is that school staff members and student advocates will have responsibility for negotiating a VR–postsecondary agreement regarding services. The individual transition plan provides another avenue for supporting students in education settings. The transition plan provides a legal framework for working through the needed agreements between high schools, postsecondary settings, and services such as VR. From the stories of students attending community and technical colleges a general pattern emerges for the process of attending postsecondary education: Colleges have little outreach to students with disabilities (Mellard & Berry, 2001), and the typical transition team offers very limited, perhaps nonexistent, student support for exploring postsecondary options. The high school is motivated to pass a student and graduate him or her for several reasons: to reduce the opportunities for dropping out; to help the school's graduation rate; to reduce potential discipline issues; and to support a public perception that the school is responsive to the needs of all the community's students. Thus, the benefits to the school accrue from graduating students, not necessarily developing their skills and knowledge attainment.

Brinkerhoff, McGuire, and Shaw (2002), Mellard (1996), and Davie (1990) described issues and strategies for transition to postsecondary educational settings. Engaging the learner in a discussion about the value of or need for early consideration of postsecondary options was among those strategies. Planning is critical because of the impact on high school course selection and tailoring of services for a postsecondary setting (e.g., preparing disability determination documents [Mellard, 1996], exploring career options, developing self-advocacy skills [Field, Sarver, & Shaw, this issue], determining and evaluating accommodations, planning college courses with consideration for waivers and substitutions, matching student needs with college services [Brinkerhoff et al., 2002]).

California's community college system has made an exemplary statewide effort to support students with disabilities. Those supports include assessments for LD eligibility as well as extensive in-class and out-of-class supports (e.g., counseling, priority registration, assistive technology, and agreements for transfer to 4-year settings). Not all colleges offer the trained personnel and extensive range of services available to students attending California's community colleges. Thus, special consideration must be given to which colleges to consider. Most colleges provide a much more limited range of services that focus on accommodations, and even then they have significant variation. For example, colleges allow note takers as an accommodation, but in some settings those note takers must be solicited by the student with the disability and are not paid. In other settings, the college staff will hire a note taker, word process the note taker's class notes, and then have the printed copy available for the student by the end of the class day.

While we have promoted the value of postsecondary education and strategies for success, hurdles for participation do exist. Many faculty members report limited experience and knowledge of methods designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities (e.g., Cook, Gerber, & Murphy, 2000). Leyser, Vogel, Wyland, and Brulle (1998) reported their findings based on surveying university faculty. Mellard and Berry (2001) found comparable results among faculty at community and technical colleges. The postsecondary education faculties expressed a willingness to work to accommodate students, but they were equally concerned about maintaining the integrity of their academic rigor and a sense of fairness for all students. The faculties expressed particular concerns about accommodating students with disabilities whose disability-related characteristics were not readily apparent. These concerns posed particular problems because of learning disabilities' lack of visible characteristics as opposed to physical or sensory disabilities.

In summary, postsecondary options provide a tremendous opportunity for students with LD. Participation, however, is generally very difficult for this group due to a lack of preparation for the college course work and lifestyle and the varied levels of support available in postsecondary settings. Developing individual responsibility, self-advocacy, and requisite academic skills needs early attention in a student's high school planning. Successful completion has clear benefits

that contribute to a person's quality of life and other enriching opportunities.

Other Agency Contacts

Other agencies also may play a role in the student's successful transition and can be reviewed with the student and parents. These agencies may be options that are unfamiliar to instructors, parents, and students, and they are not commonly mentioned as potential student options. Programs such as workforce centers (also known as one-stop centers), adult and family literacy programs, community mental health services, the county health department, and county extension services may be important resources in individual communities. The network of agencies and, more important, the formal and informal linkages among them provide accessible resources that may be particularly important to an individual's goals. These resources, however, are often not included in transition planning. Assessing their value to individual students is important in increasing students' awareness that these agencies and their services are available and helpful in addressing particular concerns. Such agencies may be even more important if we are successful in helping our students understand that they are lifelong learners and that their education can continue in a variety of venues, for example, (a) credential programs leading to postsecondary degrees, vocational or technical diplomas, or other education certificates related to meeting job qualifications; (b) apprenticeship programs with formal, on-the-job training leading to a skilled trade or craft; (c) work-related courses connected to a job or career and enhancing one's skills or developing new job skills; and (d) communities' personal development courses available to develop one's personal interests, such as hobbies, sports, foreign languages, dance or music, or Bible study (Kim & Creighton, 1999).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics data (Kim & Creighton, 1999), adults are most likely to participate in (a) work-related courses and (b) personal development courses (23% for each) with an overall participation rate of 46% during the 12 months prior to the data collection interview. In the 1995 National Household Education Survey (Darkenwald, Kim, & Stowe, 1998), the overall participation rate was 31%. As the National Education Goals Panel (2000) suggests, the desire for continuing education is an important characteristic in this era of rapid social and technological changes that will affect the workplace and community. Even if the list of agencies is not considered for a student's transition, constructing, updating, and reviewing such a list with local contact information makes good sense as one of the student's last activities during school participation.

One other aspect of working with the agencies we have outlined is that one will become much more knowledgeable about disability definitions, agency requirements, and the value of self-advocacy. Sometimes the phrase "working the system" is used in a pejorative sense of someone who takes advantage of agencies' services. In light of the conflicting policies and mandates that various agencies implement, however, an enlightened approach is to take advantage of those services in hopes of developing a plan that can improve a person's quality of life and their likelihood of self-sufficiency. Certainly the history of outcomes from special education and for persons with disabilities in general substantiates a miserable record of inaccessible and discriminatory policies, procedures, and practices. Students likely to seek assistance from agencies such as VR, the Social Security Administration, or postsecondary settings and in the employment setting need to be mindful that their schools are generally moving away from the rigid documentation and reliance on standardized testing required by the adult service agencies (e.g., Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001) or employers to document LD. Thus, for school staff to actively plan for students' transition, they must recognize other agencies' requirements and the discrepancy that exists with their (the schools') limited approach to identification and focus on academic deficits.

CONCLUSION

We began with the concept that schools alone are ill-equipped to provide for the successful transition of students with LD. While exemplary transition models exist, issues of institutionalization, personnel preparation, interagency collaboration, and the competing agendas for school resources continue to limit success. Other important models exist for understanding the students' needs and addressing those needs through available community services. These models do warrant careful consideration by school district staff. No cookbook recipe exists for effective transitions. The recipe for success must be developed with ingredients including the students' needs and the community's resources. Numerous ingredients of successful transition programs have been delineated. Community resources such as VR, the Social Security Administration, CILs, adult education, and postsecondary settings can contribute significant capacity for increasing the individual student's success. Table 1 summarizes a description of available agencies and some of their services. The young adults with disabilities with whom we have interacted indicated that they had very little knowledge of these agencies and their services.

Increasing student success will come at the expense of school staff altering some of their comfortable roles, team interactions, and rituals and experimenting with new partners to ensure improved quality of life for their graduates. We can imagine that staff roles and responsibilities will change in response to different agencies' involvement and setting demand characteristics.

In closing, another aspect is worth noting in regard to the equity with which services are available and accessible. White (2000) and NCD and SSA (2000) described the disparity of available services between consumers in rural areas and those in urban areas. These disparities were noted in

TABLE 1. Community Agencies and the Services Available

Agency/service	Application to individuals w/LD	Services provided
Adult education	Learning opportunities for literacy skills and English for non–native speakers	Educational option for high school dropouts GED preparation Preemployment and job retention skills
Vocational rehabilitation	Helps adults with tasks related to employment and independent living	Vocational assessment Develop individualized plan for employment (IPE) Acquisition of assistive technology Support for educational services Restoration services such as speech therapy, readers, note takers, and tutors
Social Security Administration	Financial assistance and services through various programs	Supplemental Security Income Voucher for employment services Individual Work Plan Plan to Achieve Self-Sufficiency (PASS) Eligibility for Medicaid and Medicare
Centers for independent living	Direct and referral services to develop independent living	Self-advocacy skills Peer counseling Advocacy with agencies and employers
Community and technical colleges	Educational programs and services	Development of academic, vocational, and technical skills through degree and nondegree programs Job placement Career assessment and counseling Accommodation selection

important transition services: vocational rehabilitation, rehabilitation medicine, and centers for independent living. Given the population and geographical parameters that distinguish rural settings, we will need to research the feasibility of alternative models to increasing availability and access. ∎

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