



TRANSITION AHEAD

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*A bi-monthly newsletter
for teachers and administrators involved
in the special education transition process.*

Dear Friends in Education:

Self-determination is believing you can control your own destiny. It is the drive to determine our own thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and choices over life events. It is about being in charge, but it is not necessarily the same thing as self-sufficiency or independence. It means making your own decisions, learning to effectively solve problems, and taking control and responsibility for one's life. Practicing self-determination also means one experiences the consequences of making choices.

Self-determination is not an all-or-nothing set of skills. As youth with disabilities mature, they will probably experience different levels of skill and ability with regard to self-determination. Some may desire control over many life decisions, such as where they want to live, what kind of work they want to do, and what types of activities fulfill their recreational needs. Others may desire more support in order to take responsibility for certain aspects of their lives.

Mentors and families play a helpful role in this process by serving as role models and providing direction. By sharing the experiences and strategies that lead to their own independence, mentors and families guide youth through a challenging transition period, offering problem-solving advice and needed encouragement. Families are crucial in this development by giving a growing number of opportunities for youth to make their own decisions. Most importantly, families assist in this process by preparing themselves to accept their child's new role as an adult.

Self-determined and self-advocating young adults are a good thing for all of us.

-Eric Hoppstock, Assistant Superintendent/Chief Academic Officer, Berrien RESA

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Caution Ahead:

Are students capable of leading the IEP meeting? Do we as educators believe in this approach? If we are honest, at least a part of us wants to streamline the whole process as much as possible, and that would mean maintaining control over the scope and pace of the meeting. Why would we want to give control of the IEP meeting over to the student? Some further questions (from the student's perspective) may answer this question:

- What is my disability and how does it affect my learning, and my life?
- What tools help me learn the best, and what things get in my way?
- What do I want to do as an adult for a career?
- What can I do while in school to move toward that goal?
- If my career choice requires college, do I know the steps to apply and get financial aid?
- Who can help me with my plans?
- What further information do I need to live as an independent productive contributing member of my community?
- What classes do I need while in high school?

How many students with whom you work could competently answer those questions about themselves? At every IEP, starting the year the student turns 16, we write a transition plan. Who is transitioning, and what does that mean? The idea is huge, because it involves change. But, what if this kind of change resulted in stronger, more positive outcomes (more students in college or employed and living independently) after high school? Then, it might be worth the trouble of making the change. If in learning to manage their transition from school, students learned to manage their lives after school, it would be worth it.

This may sound like pie in the sky, but what if everyone involved with the Transition IEP were on board with this plan, and the teacher structured Transition plan prep around the student owning the plan? What if, at the IEP meeting, the student was not simply present, but totally invested in their own plan for success? Then it would be worth it.

A Look Down the Road:

The Dropout Challenge

Berrien County Transition Task Force (BCTTF) hosted its fall luncheon on September 13, 2012. Craig Blasko, Supervisor, Ancillary Services & Programs, shared transition news in Berrien County. Shari Lidgard-Pullins, Supervisor Ancillary Services & Compliance reviewed the updated Summary of Performance (SOP) process and Eric Hoppstock, Assistant Superintendent/Chief Academic Officer talked about student engagement and achievement at the secondary level. The keynote presenter was Leisa Gallager, Director of Reaching & Teaching Struggling Learners and Coordinator of Superintendent’s Dropout Challenge.

The keynote presentation was titled *Early Decision Making, Early Help and Warning Signs* – addressing transition earlier in students’ academic careers. Leisa focused on dropout warning signs and prevention. The National High School Center research indicates that we can predict with 90 percent accuracy if a freshman will graduate from high school in four years based on the early warning signs. Additionally, we can predict with 80 percent accuracy which freshman will take more than 4 years or will dropout.

Leisa shared the ABC early warning signs for high school dropout – **A – Attendance.** Of the students who miss 10 of the first 30 days of school, 80 percent do not graduate from high school. A student who misses two days during the month of September is 65 percent more likely to be chronically absent. **B – Behavior** which is measured by office referrals. Retention due to behavior in the middle school increases the risk of dropping out. Students who are suspended or expelled lose days of countless instruction. Research indicates one of the deepest drivers of dropout is lack of retention and daily instruction. **C- Course Proficiency** which is measured in grade points and curriculum benchmark scores. Of the students with a GPA below 1.2 in the first marking period of 9th grade, have an 80 percent risk of not graduating from high school in 4 years. Early warning research indicates the greatest risk is in middle school for students who are identified as having two grade levels below proficiency in reading and/or math. Students with the deepest risk of dropping out are: two grade levels below proficiency in 6th grade, students with emotional impairments and students of color, or students living in generational poverty with emotional impairments.

The U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences has a best practice guide for dropout prevention. The IES Practice Guide recommendations (within a Response to Intervention framework) include: 1) Using longitudinal, student-level data to get an accurate read of graduation rates and identify incoming student with histories of academic issues, truancy, behavior problems and retention. Use data to monitor academic and social performance of all students continually. 2) Assign adult advocates at risk of dropping out. 3) Provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance. Individual or small group supports in the areas of test-taking, study skills or targeted subject areas make a difference. 4) Implement programs to improve students’ classroom behavior and social skills. 5) Personalize the learning environment and instructional process, and 6) Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills needed once they leave school. All of these recommendations are part of Student Achievement Framework, a Berrien County initiative to improve student outcomes <http://berrienresa.org/programsservices/studentachievementframeworkmodel/>.

The BCTTF spring luncheon is Thursday, April 11, 2013. The meeting will feature teachers using best practices in transition and the outcomes of the three BCTTF subgroups – students earning diplomas, students earning certificates and students who are complex learners. If you are interested in attending the BCTTF luncheon or participating in a BCTTF subgroup, contact your transition coordinator today!

Caution Ahead: Off to College

Coming in January 2013!

Start thinking about current freshmen who you feel would want to participate in the Off to College monthly seminars at Lake Michigan College. Off to College requires a three-year commitment for the student and their family. Candidates for the Off to College program should be curious, care about their future, work hard, have a positive attitude and want to go to continue their education after high school. OTC posters, brochures, applications and nomination forms will be delivered to the districts the week of January 7, 2013.

- OTC nominations due to the high school counselors – February 8, 2013
- OTC applications are due to high school counselors – March 15, 2013
- OTC selections of students – March 25, 2013
- OTC acceptance letters sent – April 12, 2013



Cruise Control: Using Assistive Technology

Submitted by Berrien RESA Assistive Technology Specialist, Rosanne Burden

On November 13, the Transition Coordinators hosted a demonstration session for staff to “Get Connected with the MITS Freedom Stick”. It was presented by Barb Meier, Outreach Coordinator, from Michigan’s Integrated Technology Supports (MITS). The Freedom Stick is a portable USB drive that is a “take anywhere accessibility solution.” It is a set of tools that students can carry with them and use on any Windows computer. The Freedom Stick contains the full Open Office suite (comparable and compatible with Microsoft Office), the Balabolka Text-To-Speech system which reads text aloud, an on-screen calculator that allows students to paste their math work into homework or test documents, XMind a graphic organizer for brainstorming, the Audacity audio recorder/player, and many more supports. The software for the stick can also be downloaded from their website and put on a USB drive that you purchase yourself or school districts can buy them preloaded for \$8 per stick from MITS.

MITS is a statewide project that has the primary mission of providing information, support materials, and training for ISD/RESA’s and local districts in the area of using assistive technology to support students with disabilities. MITS also runs a Lending Library that contains assistive technology equipment and software that is available to Michigan’s PK-12 Public Schools for short-term use (8 weeks). It affords districts the opportunity to try assistive technology with students to assess effectiveness prior to purchase. There are numerous resources on the website—be sure to check it out at <http://mits.cenmi.org/>

iPad® app alert—Check out “Zite” which is a personalized magazine where you set up the topics you want to know about and the app brings in the latest information about them. Set up topics for work and fun! It is free!

Click It!

Adam Danapolis, Transition Coordinator for Kalamazoo RESA, put together a list of transition resources. We wanted to share a few Instructional Resources that we think you might find useful. We will be adding additional websites in future newsletters.

Transition Resources:

Resources for Best Practices – <http://www.nsttac.org/content/evidence-based-practices>
Online Transition Curriculum – www.youthhood.org
Learn to Pay the Bills Curriculum – <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/soft-skills/>
SAS Curriculum Pathways – <http://sascurriculumpathways.com>
Drive of Your Life – www.driveofyourlife.org
Mapping Your Future – www.mappingyourfuture.com
Careers Advice - <http://icould.com/>

Learning Resources:

Kahn Academy – <http://www.khanacademy.org>
Spelling City – www.spellingcity.com
Resources for Study Guides and Graphic Organizers – www.studygs.net
Worker Safety Curriculum – <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/talkingsafety/states/mi/default.html>

