



# Career Counseling for Students with Significant Disabilities: Strategies for Success

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# Learning Objectives

- To provide an understanding of the additional barriers students with significant disabilities face in achieving successful employment or postsecondary education
- To provide an overview of the critical components of Career Counseling to help professionals understand the skills and strategies needed to address barriers to transition for students with the most significant disabilities.
- To share examples of Career Counseling strategies used in working with students with most significant disabilities.

# Agenda

- **Setting the Stage**
  - What we know about Transition
  - What we know about Transition for Students with Significant Disabilities
  - Contemporary Context - why now?
- **Foundations of Career Counseling**
  - Phases of Career Exploration
- **Emerging Strategies for working with Students with Significant Disabilities**
  - Borrowing from Customized Employment (Facilitated Discovery and Employer Engagement)
  - Family Engagement
  - Braiding and Leveraging of Resources/Resource Coordination
  - Collaboration

# Setting the Stage



# What We Know about Transition from School to PostSecondary, Employment, and Community Living

- The Transition from school to postsecondary, employment and community living is challenging for many students, this is particularly true for students who experience disability and even truer yet for students who experience significant disabilities.
- All students, regardless of disability, need access to a high quality education, exposure to the world of work including the chance to participate in work experiences, opportunities to develop leadership and advocacy skills, connections to caring adults, safe places they can interact with their peers, and access to support services and accommodations that can allow them to transition from youth to adulthood. (NCWD-Youth, Guideposts for Success)

# What We Know About Transition (Continued)

- In addition to what all students need, students with disabilities need access to quality transition planning, inclusive of work exposure and experience that aligns itself with the interests, preferences, skills and support needs of the student.
- Ideally, Transition planning for students with disabilities is led by the student and is a collaborative effort between the local education agency, vocational rehabilitation, the student's family or natural support system with a focus on Competitive Integrated Employment.
- Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE), real work for real pay is the gold standard of transition outcomes for students with disabilities. (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (2017). Competitive Integrated Employment Toolkit, R. Allison, J. Hyatt, K. A. Clark, & D. W. Test. )

# What We Know About Transition For Students with Significant Disabilities

- Students with significant disabilities need access to all of the same high-quality transition planning activities and services that students with and without disabilities need, however, students with significant disabilities often face additional challenges. Those challenges include but are not limited to:
  - Lower Expectations
    - Family
    - Local Education Agencies
    - Other Service Providers (VR, CRPs, etc.)
  - Concerns around current or future benefits
    - Concerns about long term care management (needs surrounding medically necessary care, ie. personal care attendants)
      - Maintaining eligibility for SSI and/or Medicaid both in near and long term
  - Family Involvement
  - Employer Engagement
    - Lack of knowledge about how to engage employers regarding accommodations

# Contemporary Context: Why Now?

- The passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) on July 22, 2014, included major changes under Title IV of WIOA, formerly known as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
- The changes to Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended under WIOA, included a dramatic change in services for youth and students with disabilities, including the implementation of Pre-employment Transition Services for students with disabilities to be delivered in coordination with Transition services outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- The Act requires that Pre-Employment Transition Services, (Job Exploration Counseling, Work-Based Learning Experiences, Counseling on Opportunities for Enrollment in Comprehensive Transition Planning or Postsecondary Education, Workplace Readiness Training, and Instruction in Self-Advocacy) must be made available to all students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services.
- State Education Agencies and State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies have been tasked with revisiting the State-Level Interagency Agreement that accounts for how both entities provide the services associated with their respective laws, IDEA and WIOA.

# Contemporary Context: Why Now? (Continued)

- In addition to changes surrounding Transition services, the passage of WIOA also saw changes under Section 511 for the purpose of limiting the use of subminimum wage. Section 511 demonstrates the intent that individuals with disabilities, especially youth with disabilities, must be afforded a full opportunity to prepare for, obtain, maintain, advance in, or reenter competitive integrated employment.
- The purpose of Section 511 is to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to information and services that will enable them to achieve competitive integrated employment. It includes requirements for State VR agencies, subminimum wage employers and local and/or State educational agencies, including specific requirements for youth prior to their participation in subminimum wage employment.
- Prohibits SEAs and LEAs from entering into contracts or agreements with community rehabilitation providers to transition youth into segregated programs. Schools currently contracting with agencies holding subminimum wage certificates will no longer be able to continue. Schools and VR can use community rehabilitation providers to provide services in community integrated settings

# Contemporary Context: Why Now? (Continued 2)

- The implications for youth as it relates to Section 511 go beyond that of the items relevant to schools noted in the previous slide and include that before a youth with a disability can begin work at subminimum wage, the youth must demonstrate, through documentation, completion of the following:
  - Obtain transition services under IDEA or Pre-employment transition services under VR;
  - Apply for VR services and been found ineligible or closed from VR after unsuccessfully pursuing employment for a reasonable period of time\*\*;
  - Receive career counseling and information and referral services;
  - Receive information about self-advocacy, self-determination and peer mentoring training opportunities available in their geographic area.
  - If youth are determined eligible or ineligible for VR services, career counseling and information and referral services must be provided prior to obtaining subminimum wage employment

\*\* “reasonable period of time” to achieve employment must take into consideration Vocational and disability related needs of the youth Anticipated length of time to complete IPE services, For supported employment goals, up to 24 months or longer

# Contemporary Context: Why Now? (Continued 3)

- The changes in WIOA, related to both the delivery of Transition Services, and even more specifically, the changes in Section 511, create the potential for momentous impact on Students with Significant Disabilities, as subminimum wage, while still possible as a post-school outcome, is no longer a viable straight path.
- As such, there is an increased need to look at how we can best prepare and support students with significant disabilities in pursuing and obtaining competitive integrated employment as a postsecondary goal, including how we do career counseling with them, how we engage their families and natural supports, how we engage employers, and how we collaborate across multiple entities to leverage and coordinate resources in order to create a successful, seamless, and holistic transition.

# The Foundation: Building Blocks of Career Counseling



# Facilitated Career Counseling Process



# Career Exploration



# Career Exploration

- Lindstrom et al. (2007) recommended utilizing community learning experiences and providing information regarding the variety of training programs available to students.
- Learning experiences might include:
  - Internships,
  - Service learning opportunities, or
  - Job shadowing,
- Information on training programs could be provided through parent meetings that include panel members from local community support groups.

# Preparation

Skills Training Model Elksnin and Elksnin (2001) to help teach occupational social skills.

1. Special Ed. teachers or Counselors (school or VR) **define or describe** the skill
2. Provide a **rationale** for needing to learn the skill,
3. Offer **situations** when the skill might be used
4. Use **role play** to teach the skill, and
5. Finally help students **understand the nuances** of using that skill

# Example: Greeting Someone for the First Time

- The instructor would first **define** what greeting means.
- Next, students and the instructor would **discuss reasons for needing the skill** and situations in which the skill might be used, such as a job interview or meeting new coworkers.
  - A rationale might include that making a good first impression increases the possibility of a job offer.
- Next, the class would **discuss the steps involved in the skill**. In this case, it might include a firm handshake and introducing oneself by name.
- During the **role plays**, students would work through each step, including practicing how closely to stand next to the person, how loudly to talk, what exactly to say, and appropriate eye contact.
- Finally, students would **learn generally acceptable behavior** related to greeting someone, such as waiting until the person is ready.
- This type of training can be used to teach any occupational social skills.

# Strategies for Career Counseling Students with Significant Disabilities



# Abandoning the Medical Model: Looking at Strengths NOT Deficits

- Reframe perceptions of students with significant disabilities
- Focus on preferences and what a person can do, not what they can't
- Shifts emphasis to adding value, not what needs to be fixed
- Able to target employment settings where job seeker's unique characteristics and skills will be assets - where they will fit in and make friends

# Borrowing from Customized Employment

- Customized Employment (CE) is a universal employment strategy in which the relationship between a job seeker or employee and an employer is negotiated to meet the needs of both parties.
- Because CE seeks to circumvent the pre-set demands of the traditional personnel process by personalizing the relationship between the employer and the employee, while simultaneously meeting unmet needs of a business that align to the employee's skills, strengths, interests, and preferences, it is patently more flexible than traditional demand employment.
- Customized Employment, at its very core, is strength based and thus Customized Employment has been proven to be an effective strategy for people with significant disabilities because it presumes that all people, regardless of severity of disability, can work if CE is used.

# Borrowing from Customized Employment: Facilitated Discovery and Employer Engagement

- The foundation for Customized Employment is a process called Discovery. Discovery is a qualitative “no fail” gathering of facts and observations around the job seeker’s interests, strengths, preferences, and needs. Discovery is a qualitative strength-based answer to the traditional comparative assessment process.
- Discovery is an additional tool to aide in the process of career counseling for students with significant disabilities, in large part, because it is holistic in nature which aligns itself with successful transitions.
- Employer Engagement in the context of CE is about negotiating an individualized position, not a traditional advertised and competed position, for the student that meets unmet needs of the employer and aligns itself to the skills, interests and preferences of the student.

# Family Engagement

- Family Engagement is another key component to the career counseling process for students with significant disabilities.
- Engaging parents and families may include the need to frame or re-frame expectations and may also include the need to offer direct information regarding the impact of work on current or potential social security benefits and medical coverage.
- Parent involvement directly influences career development
- Although special education teachers keep in touch with parents about transition planning and the IEP process, school counselors and/or vocational rehabilitation counselors or transition coordinators can provide information to parents on:
  - Financial planning for college,
  - How to talk with their students about career planning, and
  - Who to talk with in postsecondary institutions about disability services.
- Counselors might teach parents how to learn about their student's strengths, needs, values, and interests.
- Counselors could hold a parent workshop- not just for parents of students with disabilities, but all parents, on how to talk with their student about their skills and interests.

# Collaboration: A Key Component

- No one individual or organization can provide everything a student with a significant disability needs. You don't have to be the expert in all areas of transition, in fact, it is a promising practice to utilize multiple service providers, in a coordinated fashion, to address the multiple areas of transition.
- You may find that while the Secondary Education Agencies are great at programs of study, Vocational Rehabilitation may have more experience in Career Development, inclusive of Career Counseling, and the Independent Living Center may focus more on Self-Advocacy and Community Living. Reach out to your community partners - because each of these elements of transition are important. Career Counseling cannot exist in a vacuum.
- Individual planning and a Multi-Disciplinary Team are key components of successful service delivery plans. Coordinating across plans based on the needs of the student creates a model for collaboration that doesn't require formal MOUs and allows for a robust approach to Career Counseling for students with significant disabilities.

# Braiding and Leveraging of Resources: Resource Coordination: Collaboration

- An informal team of service providers (including the student and their family) that come together based on the needs of the student to establish:
- Student-driven Shared Goals
  - Post-Secondary Education/Employment and Community Living,
- Alignment of Plans
  - (IEP/IPE),
- Alignment of Activities,
- Lines of Communication, and
- Sequence of Services

# Braiding and Leveraging of Resources: Resource Coordination: Interdisciplinary Team

- Student
- Student's Family Member
- Special Education and General Education Teachers
- School Counselor
- Transition Coordinator
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
- Title 1 WIOA Youth/Adult Case Manager
- Foster Care Case Manager
- Juvenile Justice Parole/Probation Officer
- Independent Living Center Staff
- Mental Health Counselor
- Community Rehab Provider
- Developmental Disability Agency Staff

# Braiding and Leveraging of Resources: Resource Coordination: Interdisciplinary Team (continued)

- Why an interdisciplinary team? How is this different than the team that meets around an Individual Education Program (IEP)?
  - IEP Teams tend to be led and focused around education related objectives and goals and while transition planning under an IEP does tend to be broader in scope, the majority of the goals are still driven by outcomes associated or measure by education standards.
  - An Integrated Resource Team (IRT) or Interdisciplinary team is focused on the broader short, intermediate and long-range goals of the student and is an opportunity for multiple service providers to align their plans and coordinate a sequence of services. The IEP team ceases to meet once the student completes their secondary career or ages out, the IRT/Interdisciplinary team continues on beyond the life of the secondary career. It is understood as well as the student ages out of resources (i.e. State Education, Title 1 Youth etc.) and ages into additional adult resources (i.e. Traditional Vocational Rehabilitation Services, WIOA Adult, SNAP E&T etc.) that the members of the team will change as they are unique to the student's needs and challenges.
  - The IRT/Interdisciplinary team coordinates a sequence of services across agencies to ensure a continuous supportive delivery without duplication.

# Resources

- Guidance and Career Counselors' Toolkit:  
(<http://www.health.gwu.edu/images/stories/Toolkit.pdf>)
  - Answers many questions typically asked by parents; including information about assistive technology, vocational rehabilitation, and college disability services
- Turner, Steward, and Lapan (2004) suggested the following activities for developing student career interests:
  - help teach parents to model career-related behaviors,
  - remind parents that student anxiety about courses and career planning is normal, and
  - offer parents tips on goal-setting with their students.
- Once these skills are taught to special education teachers, school counselors can act as consultants to ensure the new skills are implemented

# Resources (continued)

- Two resources that can be easily utilized with students are the O\*NET website and Occupational Outlook Handbook.
- These resources offer accurate information for students regarding salary, training and education, and work related tasks.
- These websites can be used during transition planning to create specific goals and student outcomes.
  - <https://www.onetonline.org/>
  - <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>

# Resources (continued 2)

- Other activities for small group guidance include:
  - providing information on salary and benefits,
  - offering modified interest inventories,
  - recognizing work-related skills,
  - completing values card sorts, and
  - creating panels of previous students with disabilities who can share their job experiences.

# Sources

- National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (2017). Competitive Integrated Employment Toolkit, R. Allison, J. Hyatt, K. A. Clark, & D. W. Test. [http://transitionta.org/system/files/toolkitemployment/CIE%20Full%20document.March2017.FINAL .pdf?file=1&type=node&id=1225&force=](http://transitionta.org/system/files/toolkitemployment/CIE%20Full%20document.March2017.FINAL.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=1225&force=)
- National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD Youth). Guideposts for Success, <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/guideposts>
- “Proposed Essential Elements of Customized Employment for Universal Application” - WINTAC/Y-TAC
- The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) <http://transitionta.org/>
- A Guide to Developing Collaborative School-Community-Business Partnerships (2015). Luecking, Deschamps, Allison, Hyatt, and Stuart. <http://transitionta.org/download/PostsecondaryEducation/SCB%20Partnerships%20Guide.FINAL%201.pdf>
- TransCen, Inc. <http://transcen.org/>
- Center on Transition to Employment <http://www.transitiontoemployment.org/>

# Other Questions?



# Thank You!

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