The Brookes Transition to Adulthood Series

TEACHING TRANSITION SKILLS IN Inclusive Schools

by

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and

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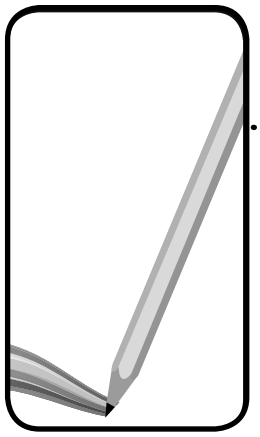

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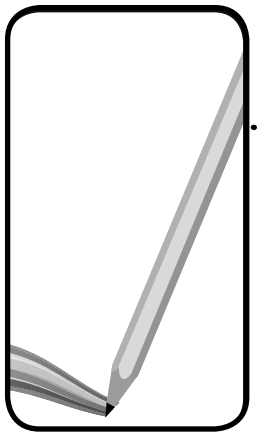

About the Authors

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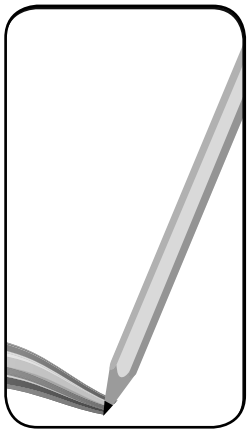

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Expanding Our Thinking About High Schools

A Unified Framework for Secondary Transition Services

Today's high schools are charged with preparing students for college and careers. This may not sound new; however, preparing all students for life after high school has changed drastically from even a generation ago.

The workforce of the future will be more highly educated, and students will be part of a global workforce and society. Current data indicate that

- An estimated 60% of jobs in America will require some postsecondary education by 2018 (Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010)
- Over the next 25 years nearly half of the projected job growth will be in occupations that require higher education and skill levels (Wagner, 2008)

> *The Obama Administration has set a goal for the U.S. to have the best educated workforce and highest proportion of college graduates by 2020 asking all Americans to commit to taking at least one year of higher education or career training after high school.*
>
> *–Obama, 2009*

For the past three decades, many leaders have realized the urgency to create high schools that give students the skills, habits, and confidence to be successful in the global workplace. The education field has known for years that to effectively guide students toward necessary higher education and career preparation, high schools must be more student centered with greater personalized programs, support services, and meaningful instruction that connect students to their passions, interests, and learning preferences.

Despite the widely recognized need for change, many high schools have continued to operate and function in the same way that they did 50 or more years ago. Progress can be paralyzed by the day-to-day challenges that high schools face, such as high-stakes testing and increased accountability, limited resources, increasing student body size, diversity of student populations, increased external pressures (e.g., business, government, private sector), the fast pace of technology, students who have intensive behavior and health needs, lack of community and parent involvement, changes in administrative leadership, and bureaucratic structures.

However, there are models of successful and innovative high schools. The field relies heavily on Ernest Boyer's work *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America* (1983); Ted Sizer's *Horace's Compromise* (1984); *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence and Education, 1983); and *Breaking Ranks II* (for which Sizer wrote the

foreword; 2004), which provides a comprehensive, practical report on how high schools might better meet the needs of all students. All of these early works call for

- Greater personalization
- Increased rigor
- Student-driven, inquiry-based learning
- Self-reflection
- Instruction based on student interests
- Development of students' mind and character
- Collaborative structures
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Smaller units of learning (learning communities)
- Interdisciplinary teams
- Continuous program improvement
- Inclusive practices

INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGH SCHOOLS

Rethinking high schools has a large impact on students with disabilities. Like other students, those with disabilities struggle with the traditional approaches to instruction. One of the key challenges facing students with disabilities is having access to full participation in postsecondary education and employment (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2003, p. 1). Students with disabilities participating in postsecondary education continue to increase, from 31% in 2003 to 55% in 2009 (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, and Shaver, 2010), but still lag behind their peers without disabilities. As requirements for success after high school increase, it is even more urgent to look at changes in high schools that better support all students so that they can access postsecondary training and education.

Myisha and Brad

Myisha is a high school junior who has been provided support for her education through an individualized education program (IEP). Prior to entering high school, Myisha had opportunities through elementary and middle school to be educated with her peers: She was a full member of her general education classrooms, where she received adaptations and modifications that enabled her to have full access to the core curriculum. She sometimes received additional support from a learning specialist who supplemented her program for reading and taught her strategies to manage anxiety. In middle school, Myisha participated in the Reality Store, a simulation in which students choose careers, make decisions about their budgets and lifestyles, and then review and assess their decisions and financial status. Like all her friends in high school, when Myisha was a freshman, she took an assessment to understand her learning style and strengths and completed a graduation plan that included a career interest inventory. In her second semester English

class's career unit, she researched her top two careers and wrote about the careers and their requirements, as well as how to use online resources. In her sophomore year, Myisha toured the Career-Tech Center (i.e., Career Technical Center or Vocational Education Center), which specializes in vocational education, to explore potential careers in her interest areas of nursing and health careers. She also completed a self-determination assessment with her resource teacher to help with decision making and understanding her accommodation needs. Now as a junior, Myisha is working hard to keep up her GPA by using her reading comprehension learning strategies in her content classes and applying self-advocacy skills by voicing her accommodation needs to her teachers. Although she chose not to attend the Career-Tech Center to complete the health care career pathway courses, she is looking forward to attending the college and career nights at the high school next semester. Her goal is to study nursing in college. She is looking forward to sharing an apartment with her best friend and being on her own.

Brad is also a high school junior who has had an IEP since his early education years. He struggles with attention, organization, and study skills and often has difficulty engaging with his peers. He is a strong visual learner and notices small details. He loves hands-on activities and does well in science. Prior to entering high school, Brad was assigned to general education homerooms and was pulled out to a special education classroom for services in reading and math. Throughout middle school, Brad continued to receive pull-out services during language arts and math periods. As he entered high school, his IEP team decided Brad probably would not pursue postsecondary education, and so Brad was enrolled in self-contained special education content classes. Based on a career interest inventory and his father's influence, Brad had a strong interest in cars and hands-on activities. In his sophomore year, he toured the Career-Tech Center to explore the options of enrolling in auto mechanics. He also completed a self-determination assessment with his resource teacher to help with goal setting and understanding his accommodation needs. Like Myisha, he participated in the Reality Store simulation. It was during this experience that Brad knew he wanted to work on cars. The transition coordinator identified possible community sites where Brad could get work experience, perhaps even paid. Brad's dream is to one day own a repair shop.

It is clear that Brad and Myisha had similar abilities and goals. However, access and expectations differed for Brad. His experiences from elementary to high school were primarily associated with special education services rather than with experiencing the general education environment. Access to the general education environment would have provided him with access to a broader curriculum, higher expectations, and possibly a different career path.

A study of postsecondary outcomes of students with mild disabilities across inclusive and noninclusive settings found that students in inclusive settings

- Had greater access to the general education curriculum
- Had higher rates for passing the state proficiency test
- Had higher expectations and were more involved in extracurricular activities
- Had higher graduation rates and improved postschool outcomes (Grossi & Cole, 2007)

Transition services looked different in the two settings: Students in inclusive high schools participated in many transition activities that were available to all students, such

as interest inventories and career planning, often led by the guidance counselor. Students in noninclusive settings engaged in transition activities that were often separate and led by the special education teacher, with limited access to the rich information that other students received. As students in inclusive settings moved through high school, these general transition services were supplemented with additional resources for their unique needs, such as vocational rehabilitation services, connection to college services for students with disabilities, and mental health supports. Not surprisingly, outcomes were best for students who spent time in inclusive settings from preschool through high school. The Grossi and Cole (2007) study and others such as the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) highlight that quality transition outcomes are dependent on excellent educational systems–systems that are unified and that provide all students with access to high quality curriculum and instruction, flexible structures, and a culture of caring and personalization.

Over the years, the movement toward including students with disabilities in general education programs has significantly changed the way these students access education. Yet, many students with disabilities continue to move through high schools in a parallel track, with separate classrooms, separate curriculum, and separate transition services and activities. These students, like Brad, are not a part of the general education classroom and miss the full experience of extracurricular activities and graduation planning that is essential for positive postsecondary outcomes. For these students, transition planning is often an event that takes place in isolation, rather than in conjunction with the kinds of activities that can be embedded into classroom instruction and typical high school experiences. However, since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (PL 101-476) and its amendments of 1997 (PL 105-17) mandate both that instruction should occur in the least restrictive environment and that transition planning must be part of adolescents' IEPs, transition planning must be a unified part of a student's high school experience, rather than a separate system.

There are recommended, promising, evidence-based practices for transition education and service provision that support the broad categories of student development, student-focused planning, interagency collaboration, family involvement, and program structures and attributes (Kohler, 1998; National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center [NSTTAC], 2008). In addition, there are recommended courses and assessments for graduation (e.g., state graduation requirements, state proficiency tests, Common Core State Standards initiative) and recommended reforms to improve high schools (Sizer, 2004b; *Breaking Ranks II*, 2004). The challenge for educators is to combine these efforts. Students receiving special education services are required to meet rigorous education standards, but their transition needs also should be met–both to meet the requirements of the law and to ensure positive postschool outcomes. This is most possible when students have access to high expectations, quality instruction, general education experiences, and personalization.

The push and pull of school change is strong; while there is a strong push from all segments of society for changing how high schools do business, the pull to continue doing school as usual can be equally strong. However, as curricula are now being revised in many states to align with the Common Core State Standards (see http://www.corestandards.org/), new opportunities exist to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the environments that prepare them for college and careers.

A UNIFIED FRAMEWORK FOR SECONDARY TRANSITION SERVICES

The following conceptual framework outlined is based on a set of our guiding principles for educating all students.

1. All students have the right to meaningful participation in the core curriculum with their neighborhood peers.
2. Transition planning and services should be provided within a unified system of supports for all students.
3. A culture of collaboration among students, families, administrators, and staff is essential for transition planning.
4. Special education services should supplement rather than supplant core curriculum.
5. A student's education must consider academic, social, and emotional learning.
6. Knowledge and understanding of a student's culture must be considered in a child's education and preparation for future environments.

Expanding on the work of Kochhar-Bryant and Bassett (2003) and Kochhar-Bryant and Greene (2009), in a unified framework, transition services are an integrated, cohesive process that provides experiences to prepare *all* students for college, careers, and citizenship. IDEA's requirements established a much-needed service for students with disabilities, but it has been operationalized and practiced as something unique for students with disabilities. If, in fact, students are to be prepared for college, careers, and citizenship, then all students need individualized transition education and planning and access to the necessary services and activities.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the conceptual framework for a unified framework for delivering secondary transition education and services. At the center are the components that

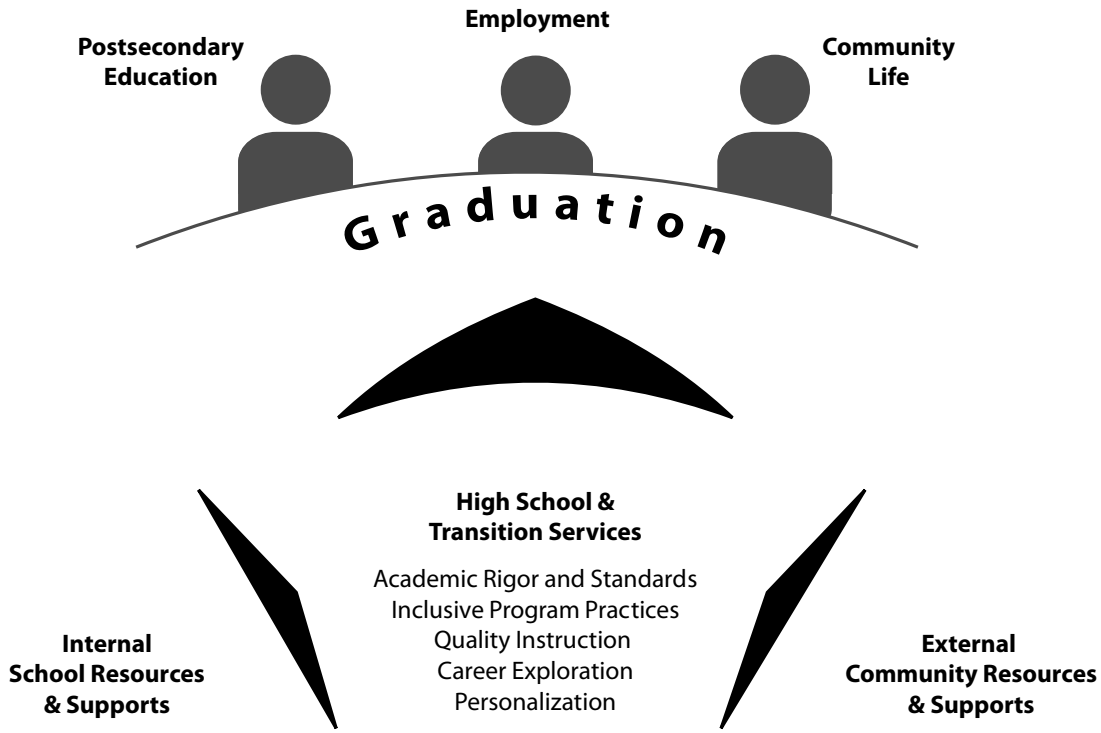

Figure 1.1. A unified framework for secondary transition services.

ensure a solid foundation for positive postsecondary outcomes for all students. Access to quality instruction, academic rigor and standards, personalization, career exploration, and inclusive practices should begin in the early elementary years and continue through to graduation. The components are interrelated, and as students move toward graduation, each component helps them to narrow and define their postschool goals.

A school that provides high-quality instruction ensures that staff use a variety of instructional strategies and assessments to accommodate individual learning styles. Educators have the knowledge and skills to design rigorous units of study that respect learner differences and apply the principles of differentiation to ensure that all students succeed in meaningful, appropriately challenging learning experiences (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Instructional design reduces barriers to access by utilizing universal design for learning (UDL), which provides multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement for all learners (Rose & Meyer, 2002). Teachers intentionally gather information from students and families to understand student readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 1999). Quality instruction matched to a student's assessed entry skills increases student success, reduces behavioral difficulties, and avoids the need for special education evaluation and placement (Gravois, Knotek, & Babinski, 2002).

Academic rigor and standards must guide quality instruction to ensure that high expectations are not reserved for a few. The Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010a) established the essential skills a student should master in order to graduate and be prepared for college or career. Positive postschool outcomes depend on the student's ability to access the standards, as well as adequate support to master them, and to apply knowledge and skills in the real world.

Personalization is also a key to academic success. Schools must create flexible structures (e.g., student schedules, school day, school year, advisories, organizational units) that provide students with opportunities to build meaningful relationships with adults and peers. It also requires that schools attend to the physical, social, and emotional needs of students.

In addition to rigor and personalization, McNulty and Quaglia (2007) added relevance as a necessary element of quality instruction. Relevant learning is interdisciplinary and contextual. It requires students to do authentic work and apply core knowledge, concepts, or skills to solve real-world, complex problems. Relevant learning involves the use of prior knowledge, the development of in-depth understanding, and the ability to develop and express ideas and findings through elaborated communication.

As students build their academic skills, they must have opportunities to apply them in a variety of settings, exploring the various careers that may match their strengths, preferences, and interests. Career exploration must be embedded in a student's high school life; teachers must facilitate career connections within their academic and extracurricular activities. Students should engage in a variety of career exploration activities, including career interest inventories, career assessments, and career units. Opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and early college experiences are examples of ways students can explore careers in real-life contexts (Luecking, 2009).

Finally, a solid foundation for student success requires that school structures and culture support the inclusion of all students in the everyday fabric of the educational institution. There should be a shared responsibility among all staff to address cultural, behavioral, linguistic, and academic differences of students so that all groups benefit equally from instruction, classroom management, and transition practices.

Multiple Levels of Transition Services and Supports

The core components previously described continue to support student growth and learning as students move toward graduation. During their high school experience, all students should have opportunities to participate in transition activities that are universal, not unlike the first tier of universal supports that all students can access in a response to intervention (RTI) model (National Response to Intervention Center, 2012) or Multi-tier System of Support (MTSS) model. MTSS is a term that many states are embracing to include behavioral as well as academic supports for all students. Examples of universal supports would include four-year high school plans, career guidance and counseling, career nights, college nights, college visitations, career-tech programs (vocational education), service learning, career assessments, elective courses of interest that support transition goals, and so on. These services and activities are expanded throughout students' high school years and are refined as they near graduation.

However, some students will need additional services and supports to assist in their transitions through high school and beyond (e.g., a targeted group like Tier 2 in RTI). Figure 1.1 shows internal (school) and external (community) supports that can be accessed by students. While some of these supports may be unique for students with disabilities, many of them can and should be accessed by any student. All youth benefit from having a support system or network as they prepare to exit high school and enter college, work, or community life (Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, 2011; Willis, 2008). It is important to note that these external and internal supports combine with the high school and transition services: They supplement, rather than supplant, transition services.

Internal supports are the services provided by individual schools or the school districts. For all students, these include school psychology services, guidance counseling programs, social worker support, and career planning. Specialized services include curricular accommodations and modifications, special education services, related services (e.g., speech-language pathology services, occupational and physical therapy services, assistive technology), school nursing services, suicide prevention and/or antibullying programs, and peer supports.

External supports are community resources that support students throughout high school and ensure graduation and postsecondary success. In addition to a student's personal community network, including neighbors, potential business contacts, and family and friends, there are specialized services for students requiring greater support. Often these services are provided through collaborative relationships with the schools and may include One-Stop Career Centers, business partnerships, health services, substance abuse and addiction services, family support services, social services (e.g., housing, food stamps), the juvenile justice system, and public transportation, as well as unique disability services from agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and postsecondary education disability support services.

Students with higher support needs may require a more individualized or unique approach to academic instruction and transition planning. Again, this would be more aligned to the Tier 3 of the RTI model, and we will talk more about support for students with unique needs in Chapter 5.

The outcomes represented by the arrows at the top of the Figure 1.1 indicate the ultimate goals we encourage for all students, based on a collaborative, unified framework for secondary transition services.

SUMMARY

How high schools work and look affects the experiences, level of achievement, and post-school outcomes of students with and without disabilities. In the past, high schools have

traditionally organized themselves and operated in ways that have marginalized students with disabilities and forced them into separate programs with different expectations. If the students with disabilities are to leave school to become productive citizens while furthering their education and training for a successful career or entering the work force, transition services must be unified and integrated with services and supports for all students.

If we were to apply the unified framework presented in this chapter to Myisha's and Brad's experiences, Myisha's education would be similar to what was described early in this chapter. Brad's experience, however, would look much different. At an early stage, he would have had access to the general education core curriculum and other inclusive school experiences with his peers. He would have had a variety of supports and services that enabled him to access the rigor of a high school curriculum without being pulled away from content teachers with the knowledge and skills to provide this rigor. His options upon entering high school would have been broader, and he may have been encouraged to go to a two- or four-year college to obtain the necessary skills to open his own business. He would have been afforded an opportunity to further explore his desire to open his own business by attending courses at the Career-Tech Center, while at the same time earning credits that would allow the opportunity for postsecondary education. His transition experiences would not have started with the transition coordinator, which supplanted the universal transition activities. Instead, the transition coordinator would have provided the supports, as needed, to facilitate his participation in the universal transition experiences (e.g., Career-Tech Center).