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ABSTRACT

A three-stage model transition program is proposed for the successful transition to higher education for learning disabled (LD) secondary students. Transition planning is defined as a process initiated by high school personnel to establish and implement a plan upon high school entry for LD students with college potential. Such planning should occur well before the senior year of high school, involve parents, and include interdisciplinary cooperation. The three stages of the process are: (1) high school instruction, (2) planning for transition, and (3) placement into an appropriate college program. The high school functional curriculum should be based on those entry level college skills needed by LD students and on integration into regular college preparatory classes. Individual transition plans should focus on any continuing services the college should be prepared to provide as well as careful selection of the college based on admissions criteria and availability of special services and accommodations. Colleges need to play a more active role in the transition process by assigning individuals to serve as high school liaisons and providing counseling support. Follow-up of students after college placement is important for program improvement. (DB)

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THE HIGH SCHOOL/COLLEGE CONNECTION:
A GUIDE FOR THE TRANSITION OF
LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS

Pearl L. Seidenberg

Long Island University Transition Project
Learning How to Learn: A High School/College Linkage Model
To Expand Higher Educational Opportunities for Learning Disabled Students

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Abstract

In order to expand the opportunities for a successful transition to higher education for learning disabled (LD) secondary students, there is a need to design a transition support system that provides for effective collaboration between secondary and post secondary personnel, parents and LD students. In this paper, a definition and rationale for transitional planning has been presented and a three stage transition model that provides for systematic linkages between secondary and post secondary programs and services for LD students has been described. It has also been suggested that implementation efforts and future evaluation of this transition model should provide information into its effectiveness in achieving more comprehensive programs for secondary and post secondary LD students.

The transition from school to work or to post-secondary training is a critical period for all students and calls for a range of career options that have lifelong consequences. For those learning disabled (LD) high school students, who have the potential to pursue higher education, colleges and universities offer an age-appropriate, integrated environment in which they can expand personal, social and academic abilities leading to an expansion of career goals and employment options. However, the transition of learning disabled students to higher education settings has been made difficult by limitations imposed by inadequacies in both the preparation they have received in secondary schools and the supports that have been made available for them at the college level. In order to increase the opportunities for a successful transition to higher education for learning disabled students there is a need to develop a transition support system that involves more effective collaborative linkages between secondary and post-secondary personnel, parents and learning disabled students.

In many high school systems today, LD students with the potential for college are not always provided with appropriate training for, or guidance about, post-secondary education options. Although there are varied degrees of appropriate educational experiences and counseling services made available to LD high school students, systematically planned transition to college is not usually available. To a very significant extent, this lack of transitional planning accounts for the fact that many LD high school students either do not perceive a college

education as a viable option or fail to successfully complete college programs. Therefore, there is a need to identify and develop effective mechanisms for integration of information and continuity of instructional and support services between high school and college programs for LD students.

For the purposes of this paper transition planning will be defined as a carefully planned process which can be initiated by high school personnel to establish and implement a plan upon high school entry for the LD student with college potential. The key aspects of the transition process to be outlined are that (a) transition planning must occur well before the senior year of high school, (b) parental involvement is essential, (c) interdisciplinary cooperation is needed, and (d) the process must be planned and systematic. It is the purpose of this paper to present a three-stage high school-college transition model that provides for a continuum of services and encompasses components that will facilitate the transition of LD students from high school to college.

THE TRANSITION MODEL

Facilitating transition from secondary school to college for LD students is not a one-step process. It requires movement through three (3) stages: (a) high school instruction, (b) planning for transition, and (c) placement into an appropriate college program. Within the context of the transition model, transition planning is defined as a carefully planned process that needs to be initiated by high school personnel in order to establish and implement a plan for the LD student with

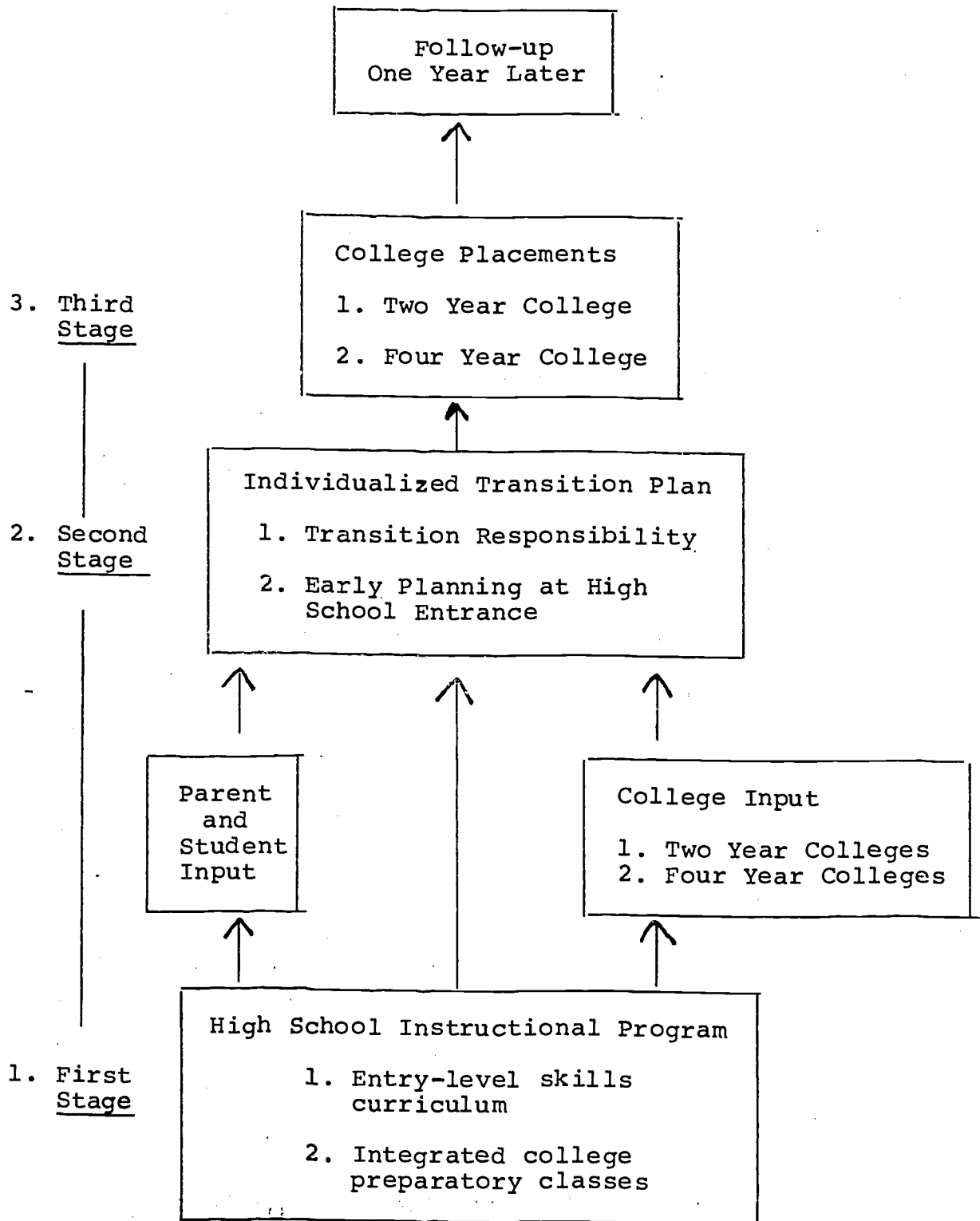
potential upon entry into high school. With the current increased emphasis on transition, it is essential that service providers do not focus exclusively on the transition itself and ignore the content and quality of the instructional programs provided for LD students by the high schools or the range of college programs and services offered by post-secondary institutions.

Figure 1 presents a model that illustrates the three (3) stages. An effective high school instructional program is characterized by a functional curriculum which is based on those entry-level college skills needed by LD college-bound students. It is also characterized by a high school setting that reflects integration of LD students into accommodative, regular, college preparatory mainstream classes. These secondary instructional program characteristics are essential to the college transition process. The actual transition planning process includes a formal individualized transition plan which includes significant parent and student input, and cooperation from targeted colleges. Finally, neither the high school program nor the transition planning will be effective without a range of possible college placements and options available to students after graduation. (See Figure 1)

HIGH SCHOOL: THE FOUNDATION OF EFFECTIVE TRANSITION

The suitable preparation of potential college-bound LD students for the demands of college settings should be a major goal for the secondary educational system. Without careful planning and preparation for post-secondary education placement,

FIGURE 1
THREE STAGE HIGH SCHOOL/COLLEGE TRANSITION MODEL



this goal is seldom effectively achieved by LD secondary students. Critical high school program components which can contribute to effective programming need to be identified and characterized. These components can provide the foundation for meaningful transition from high school to college. Major components should include preparation planning at high school entry, curriculum based on prerequisite entry-level college skills, a transition plan, and follow-up procedures. These are characterized below.

Preparation planning at high school entry: Important factors to be considered in program planning for the LD secondary student are the student's history of special education services, the patterns of achievement gains in academic areas prior to high school entry, and the student's and parents' goals for post high school. If the student enters the high school program with basic competencies in reading and math (e.g., functional literacy skills at a fifth or sixth grade level) a college preparatory program should be considered as a viable programming option. At high school entry the interdisciplinary study team needs to identify the college preparatory program components needed by the college-bound LD student and include these in a post-secondary opportunity form which is appended to, or included as part of, the IEP. Such early college preparatory planning would also serve as a planning vehicle for identification of appropriate curriculum and needed resources in order to ensure provision of an adequate college preparatory instructional program for LD students.

Curriculum: An instructional program needs to be designed for LD secondary students that is characterized by a curriculum based on those skills that reflect the demands of college classrooms. Many LD students reportedly fail in college because of weaknesses in reading comprehension, reading rate and written language ability. They also exhibit ineffective study habits and lack organizational and time management skills. It has also been found that rapid notetaking and essay writing under time pressure is problematic for many LD college students. They also appear to have difficulty in skimming an article and deriving the main points even after repeated readings and are often unable to integrate information from different sources.

The research on learning disabilities in adolescents and young adults and the findings from current research on metacognitive development, and its impact on academic learning can inform decisions for the design and development of a secondary curriculum for LD high school students that can provide them with many of the requisite academic skills that they need to acquire prior to college entry. The major practical implications of the research on LD secondary and post-secondary students are that many LD students frequently exhibit skill deficits in reading-related study strategies (e.g., comprehension monitoring, notetaking, summarizing, outlining, scanning, test-taking, etc.) and that these students can be supported in a regular academic curriculum by teaching them specific learning strategies or metacognitive skills. At the same time, the research on the impact of metacognitive variables on learning from text has not

only shown that explicit instruction can be effective but clearly suggests the content of a curriculum for teaching students successful strategies for the acquisition of academic skills. Therefore, a secondary curriculum that addresses the reading, writing and study skill deficits of LD learners, incorporates a specific teaching methodology that promotes skill generalization, and includes the metacognitive variables that influence learning appears to hold the most promise for enabling LD students to become more effective learners and thereby enhance their opportunities for academic success (Seidenberg, 1986a).

Based on the development and implementation of a viable college entry-level skills curriculum, curriculum-referenced assessments procedures also need to be designed and implemented in secondary settings in order to establish relevant linkages for the LD student between the curriculum and their instructional program. In contrast to formal assessment procedures, informal tests that are curriculum-referenced permit the collection of data on those specific skills that have been identified as directly related to needed competencies. For this reason, information generated by informal assessment practices can lead to the specification of academically more relevant instructional goals and objectives for the college-bound LD secondary student than information generated by formal testing procedures. Therefore, assessments and program planning for the secondary LD student needs to be based upon informal achievement testing of the present performance levels of those observable skills

that are equated with the requisite college entry-level skills characterized earlier. In this way, the assessment results can be used for placement of the student in a curriculum continuum, for the design of instructional interventions, and to characterize any supportive services needed by the student for survival in the regular core secondary classroom.

In addition to the implications of a curriculum-based assessment approach for program planning and evaluation, this approach will also provide better data for more effective communication with parents and students with regard to options and opportunities for post-secondary education.

The curriculum-based assessment approach described above is probably not a new concept for many special educators. However, the framework in which it has been placed, that is, the specific focus on the prerequisite skills needed by the high school students, is important for a successful transition to a college setting. Many of the inadequacies and limitations of current assessment practices can be eliminated when the data about a student's achievement is made more integral to instruction and to teacher decision-making by the use of a curriculum-referenced approach (Seidenberg, 1986b).

Transition Plan: Individual transition plans should be developed with a focus on any continuing services that will need to be provided by the college following graduation. The transition plan should be cooperatively developed by the school, parents, students and appropriate college personnel. It should be written at least one-year prior to graduation. Components

of a transition plan could include the college options the student is seeking, the services needed to achieve the outcomes, the names of the persons who will be engaging in activities to help achieve these outcomes, and a description of, and timelines for, completion or continuation of the activities. Ideally, one person (e.g., special education teacher or guidance counselor) should be assigned as the school-based "case manager" to serve as an advocate for the student with the college transition service provider(s) (e.g., LD Program Director, Dean of Students, Director of Admissions, etc.).

Follow-up Procedures: Systematic follow-up procedures for contacting students and/or colleges after graduation should be designed and implemented in order to determine students' college status, utilization of college services, relationship of preparation to demands of the college program and other relevant information.

In order to continually improve instructional and curriculum planning and coordination efforts with colleges, it is imperative that high schools be given and collect information from colleges and former students regarding the effectiveness of the high school programs, the students' current academic status, use of college resources and any additional educational needs. The person designated as the "case manager" for the transition plan at the high school would be responsible for contacting the student or parent and/or the responsible college staff person(s) one-year after graduation from high school.

COLLEGE: THE KEY TO EFFECTIVE TRANSITION

Historically educational programs for LD students focused on the elementary level. Although this emphasis has currently shifted to the secondary school level, expanded services for students with learning disabilities have only recently begun to reach the post-secondary level. College programs and personnel need to work more closely and collaboratively with secondary schools in order to better support the transition planning process for LD students. Colleges must also provide effective support services for those LD students who will still require them in order to be successfully integrated into the college environment.

The characteristics of effective LD college programs have been outlined in the literature and include (a) establishing criteria for admissions, (b) provision of special services, and (c) reasonable accommodations (Vogel, 1982; Cardoni, 1982; Mangrum and Strichart, 1983).

Admissions Criteria: Currently admissions decisions and standards revolve around a number of questions that must be resolved on an individual basis by post-secondary institutions. These include (a) what is a learning disability and how do admissions personnel determine whether an applicant is learning disabled; (b) are traditional criteria for admissions such as standardized tests (i.e., SAT, ACT), and high school rank and grade point averages appropriate criteria for LD students, or do they merely reflect the LD student's handicap; (c) will the college accept modified test results and/or credit from high

school courses completed in a special class; and (d) how much weight should be given to letters from high school personnel and/or an interview with the LD student?

If the college is more directly involved in the transitional planning for the LD high school student, as outlined earlier, and there is a mechanism for ongoing communication and cooperation with secondary personnel many of the admission questions outlined above are more readily resolved because of pertinent information that becomes available to the college relevant to the level of college preparatory training of the LD student.

Special services: After admission issues are resolved, college administration must determine the types of special academic support services that need to be provided for admitted LD students. Two models have been identified. One model provides for the development of special self contained programs (i.e., courses, etc.) for LD students before they are "mainstreamed" into the regular college program and also include special remedial classes, learning centers, and counseling. Another model has the LD student adapt to current institutional academic standards with support from counseling, tutoring and other support services such as learning labs and basic skill centers. Here again, a better understanding of the characteristics and needs of the LD students to be served, as an outcome of closer cooperatwon with secondary schools, can inform decisions about effective services for these students (i.e., need for a special orientation period or a college exploratory experience

such as a summer program prior to college entry, type of academic support services to be provided, etc.).

Also, the unique career development needs of LD students should be recognized and addressed by post-secondary institutions. By young adulthood there is a good possibility that LD students will have experienced the indirect effects of a learning handicap manifested by poor self-perception, lowered self-concept or reduced motivation and these feelings may be incorporated into their perceptions of what they consider to be appropriate career options. Therefore, career planning and placement for LD students at the post-secondary level needs to be responsive to their unique needs and concerns and they may need to be encouraged to consider a wider range of occupational roles.

Accommodations: Because initiation of a program for LD students often meets resistance from college faculty, there has to be active systematic efforts to inform and to maintain liaison with faculty in order to have their cooperation in providing any needed modifications in traditional practices. Modifications typically sought include oral tests, extended time for test and/or assignment completion, provided lecture notes or unit outlines, lists of key terms, and frequent monitoring of progress and feedback.

Other accommodations can involve institutional policy changes for the LD student in order to afford more equitable access for the LD student such as flexibility in requirements with substitution of specific courses (i.e., foreign language

requirement, etc.), and lengthening of time for completion of degree requirements. Finally, auxiliary aids such as taped texts, recorders for taping class lectures and note takers for lectures are also made available to LD students.

BRIDGING HIGH SCHOOL/COLLEGE PROGRAMS

Colleges need to play a more active role in the transitional planning process for the college-bound LD secondary student. The effort to assist LD students in the effective transition from high school to college will take planning and cooperation on the part of both high school and college personnel involved in the transition process. It is a difficult task to coordinate activities and share information when traditional boundaries need to be crossed. However, if colleges recognize this responsibility, they can introduce mechanisms that provide for sharing of information and assistance in the implementation of transitional programming for college-bound LD high school students.

There needs to be one individual who is identified by the college as the liaison with high school staff and who acts in an advisory capacity in order to provide input into the transitional planning process. College personnel can contribute in two ways. They can provide high schools with information regarding the different college options available to the LD student and attendant information that can keep the high school curriculum relevant and current in relation to the demands of the college setting. In addition to providing input into the

high school transition efforts. They can also provide specific information services to counselors, parents and students with regard to the special LD support programs and services available to the LD student. Here again, establishing on-going linkages with high schools provides the college with critical information that can guide them in making decisions about the types of programs and services that need to be provided in order to support the most effective transition for the LD student. For example, options that might be made available to LD students could include an early registration period which would enable the college to pre-plan and organize the necessary resources (i.e., taped text books, tutors, notetakers, academic advisement, etc.) that will be needed by admitted LD students.

CONCLUSION

Current practices compromise the LD adolescents' opportunities for success in post-secondary education settings. Secondary education needs to better equip LD learners with the skills necessary for access to and success in college programs. At the same time, communication and cooperation between secondary and post-secondary educators is essential to the development and delivery of comprehensive transition services. Such a comprehensive collaborative effort would also serve to inform and guide programmatic decisions at both the secondary and post-secondary levels.

In this paper, a definition and rationale for the meaningful transition of LD secondary students from high school to college settings have been presented. A three-stage model for

implementing the transition process has also been outlined. A major emphasis has been on the importance of establishing mechanisms that provide for on-going collaboration and linkages between the programs and services offered by secondary and post secondary institutions for LD students. In addition, it has been suggested that the transition process should include a formal individualized transition plan that includes significant parent and student input as well as cooperation from targeted colleges.

Developmental efforts and future investigations of this transition model should provide greater insight into the dynamics of high school/college collaboration and its impact on the effectiveness of programs and services for LD students in secondary and post secondary settings. Information generated from these efforts has the promise of contributing to the achievement of comprehensive and effective education programs for LD high school and college students.

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