

Postsecondary Education Experience for Students with Developmental Disabilities: A Look into Perceptions of Parents of Senior High Transition Students on a Small University Campus

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Abstract

The transition program in this study is associated with a local school district, and is currently housed on the campus of a small college in the Midwest. This transition program is for students who have been diagnosed with intellectual disabilities. The purpose of this paper is to provide information about the perceptions of parents who have or have had students in the transition program in relation to the university community and their students' time here on the university campus. This paper also intends to educate the parents of these transition students, the university community, and the local school district about the role the university plays in relation to the campus program and its efficacy. Lastly this paper explores the possibility of, and interest in, beginning a college-level program at the university for students diagnosed with intellectual disabilities; this would allow them to earn a college certificate or an Associate's degree.

Postsecondary Education Experience for Students with Developmental Disabilities: A Look into Perceptions of Parents of Senior High Transition Students on a Small University Campus

Transition programs are the series of strategies or activities that a school or a cluster of schools, agrees to implement in order to assist students making the transition from primary school to secondary school, secondary school to career training, or secondary school to the work force. Successful transition often requires careful analysis, a structured approach and forward thinking. There are many conflicting demands for the time of teachers, students and parents. However, few efforts pay off as highly as a carefully planned and meaningful transition program between secondary school and the workforce.

The transition program in this study is associated with a local school district, and is currently housed on the campus of a small college in the Midwest. This is a secondary transition program for students who have been diagnosed with intellectual disabilities and are 18-21 years of age. Classroom space is provided for students, and office space provided for the teachers and staff who work in the program. The transition area is located in the basement of one of the university dormitories and provides study rooms (classroom space) and a common area used by students during "after school" hours. These transition students typically will work in the morning on IEP goals and outcomes and, most often, will eat lunch in the campus dining hall. Additionally, some of the

students are employed by the university to work in the dining hall or mailroom as part of their learning process.

Until recently, candidates enrolled in a teacher education practicum worked with these transition students on IEP goals and outcomes. However, there was an accreditation-related need to move this practicum back into the traditional school setting. However, some candidates continue to work with these transition students to obtain community service hours. Fortunately, the university students are very accepting of the transition students and have invited these students to eat lunch in the dining hall; this too has kept some of the interactive opportunities intact. Eating together has also proven to be an excellent teaching tool for social skills and relationship building. Some transition students have also been invited to, and have attended, university sporting events, as well as visited a local amusement park with a group of university students.

At the beginning of the venture between the university and the local school district, questions were asked about the specific role of the university community. These included inquiries about how transition students would be supervised, what the program would look like, how the university would prepare a place for the program, how much space was needed, and whether the transition students would be taking classes. Looking back, one might suppose that there may have been some resistance to having a program like this on the university campus; however, during the time both entities have partnered together, there has been little to no resistance. In fact, there has been outreach by many university faculty, staff and students to the transition student community, as well as a reciprocal outreach from transition students to the university.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide information about the perceptions of parents who have or have had students in the transition program in relation to the university community and their students' time here on the university campus. This paper also intends to educate the parents of these transition students, the university community, and the local school district about the role the university plays in relation to the campus program and its efficacy in the process. It is the hope of the authors to further build the relationship between the university and the local school district, and to continue to enable students with intellectual disabilities to have a meaningful "college" experience. This experience starts in the transition program but one has the potential to evolve into a program that allows students to earn a college certificate or Associates degree.

Lastly this paper explores the possibility of, and interest in, beginning a college-level program at the university for students diagnosed with intellectual disabilities; this would allow them to earn a college certificate or an Associate's degree. Although this idea has not yet been implemented, the possibility exists (Appendix A). Imagine what students could accomplish if given the opportunity!

Background Information

Students with intellectual disabilities have aspirations, hopes and dreams for their futures, just as typically developing students do. Often, when elementary students are asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” they reply “I want to be a doctor, a fireman or a veterinarian.” Often these dreams change from elementary to high school. However, one thing stays the same: they have dreams. When students with intellectual disabilities consider what may happen after high school, dreams of a college education are usually not among the viable option. Calefati (2009) states that less than one quarter of students with intellectual disabilities have participated in some type of postsecondary education, and none have completed a degree. Furthermore, these students may not be aware that there are actually programs available to students in their position.

Recently, a broadcast on National Public Radio (NPR), told of a lawsuit filed by a student with intellectual disabilities attempting to win the right to live on a college campus. This student was diagnosed with an intellectual disability and the college held that he was not capable of living on campus. The college’s stance came despite the fact that in order to get to college in the morning, the student would take the public bus near his home and then transfer to a second bus for a total of a two-hour trip. This news report has shown by example that some students with intellectual disabilities can exhibit independent living skills as college students and as adults.

The growth that students may experience in college can be measured in a number of areas, including academic, personal, employment, independence, self-advocacy, and self-confidence skill building. For students with intellectual disabilities, this growth may also be measured by increased self-esteem as they begin to see themselves as less different from their peers and more similar as classmates. According to Dagnan and Sandhu (2001), a positive correlation is found between positive self-esteem and social comparison. Students with intellectual disabilities often know they are viewed differently from their typically developing peers. Thus being involved in the same activities in which typically developing students participate, such as engaging in campus life, taking classes, and learning to navigate a world of high expectations, develops the skills needed for successful adult life and can increase self-esteem in students with intellectual disabilities.

According to Butterfield and Authur (1995), best practice for students with intellectual disabilities focuses on the quality of social interactions with students throughout the day. By emphasizing the role of communication in relation to their peers and providing interactive environments that increase communication opportunities, students with intellectual disabilities can have more meaningful and robust conversations with their peers.

Practices that support individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities to gain access to and be successful in inclusive postsecondary education can be developed through programs within the United States Department of Education. According to this department, “The Model Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Programs for

Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) provides grants to institutions of higher education or consortia of institutions of higher education to enable them to create or expand high quality, inclusive model comprehensive transition and postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities”(U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The goals of this program are to (A) increase academic enrichment; (B) provide opportunities for socialization; (C) develop independent living skills, including self-advocacy skills; and (D) provide for integrated work experiences and career skills that lead to gainful employment.

In 2010, TPSID awarded 10.9 million dollars to 27 two and four -year colleges to create opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to attend institutions of higher education (Winder, 2010). Table 1-4 provides the list of colleges and universities. Further examples of institutions of higher education that provide programs for students with learning and intellectual disabilities include Landmark College, Clemson University, Think College at UMass Boston, and Vanderbilt University.

Currently, there are programs on some college campuses that foster participation of individuals with intellectual disabilities. There are three types of community programs in use: mixed/hybrid, substantially separate, and totally inclusive. Below, each model is defined and described in the order of prevalence.

- Substantially separate model: Students participate only in classes with other students with disabilities.
- Mixed/hybrid model: Students participate in social activities and/or academic classes with students without disabilities, and also participate in classes with other students with disabilities. This model typically provides students with employment experience on- or off-campus. Students may have the opportunity to participate in generic social activities on campus and may be offered employment experience.
- Inclusive individual support model: Students receive individualized services (e.g., educational coach, tutor, technology, natural supports) in college courses, certificate programs, and/or degree programs. The focus is on establishing a student-identified career goal that directs the course of study and employment experiences (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, work-based learning) (retrieved October 2010 from http://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=178).

In each of these program types, students can focus on creating and developing a vision and goals, accessing services and supports, receiving assistance to enroll in college classes and assistance in gaining employment.

The university’s relationship to the local school district can be categorized as a mixed/hybrid model. Transition students have participated in some social activities such as games and performances and/or academic classes with students without disabilities.

Transition students have also participated in classes with other students with disabilities such as Adaptive Physical Education. In addition, the university has provided students with on-campus employment experiences and, in one instance, this experience led to a full time job opportunity for a former transition student.

Table 4-1 Colleges and universities awarded TPSID grant

AK	Anchorage	University of Alaska-Anchorage	Karen Ward	907-264-6229	afkmw@uaa.alaska.edu	\$420,870
AZ	Tucson	University of Arizona	Stephanie Z. C. MacFarland	520-621-5165	szm@email.arizona.edu	\$500,000
CA	Fresno	California State University-Fresno	Charles Arokiasamy	559.278.0325	charlesa@csufresno.edu	\$500,000
CA	Los Angeles	University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA)	Carlos O. Cortez	310-794-1235	pathway@uclaextension.edu	\$122,397
CA	Taft	West Kern Community College District	Jeffrey G. Ross	661-763-7776	jross@taft.org	\$497,243
CO	Fort Collins	Colorado State University	Catherine L Schelly	970-491-0225	catherine.schelly@colostate.edu	\$307,391
DE	Newark	University of Delaware	Laura T. Eisenman	302-831-0532	eisenman@udel.edu	\$426,650
FL	St. Petersburg	University of South Florida-St. Petersburg	Jordan T. Knab	727-873-4662	jknab@mail.usf.edu	\$421,269
HI	Honolulu	University of Hawaii	Robert A. Stodden	808- 956-9199	stodden@hawaii.edu	\$425,000
IN	Bloomington	Indiana University	David M. Mank	812-855-6508	dmank@indiana.edu	\$493,120
IA	Iowa City	University of Iowa	Jo Hendrickson	319-384-2097	jo-hendrickson@uiowa.edu	\$499,770
KY	Lexington	University of Kentucky	Beth Harrison	859-257-3586 x225	b.harrison@uky.edu	\$424,923
LA	Baton Rouge	Louisiana State University	K. Alisa Lowrey	504-556-7567	klowre@lsuhsc.edu	\$290,384
MN	Brainerd	Central Lakes College	Suresh Tiwari	218-855-8058	stiwari@clcmn.edu	\$365,636
NY	Rochester	University of Rochester	Martha Mock	585-276-3363	mmock@Warner.Rochester.edu	\$500,000
NJ	Paramus	Bergen Community College	Tracy Rand	201-612-5589	trand@bergen.edu	\$394,918
NJ	Trenton	College of New Jersey	Rick Blumberg	609.771.2210	blumberq@tcnj.edu	\$245,851
NC	Cullowhee	Western Carolina University	David L. Westling	828-227-3287	westling@email.wcu.edu	\$500,000
ND	Minot	Minot State University	Janet Green	701-858-4473	janet.green@minotstateu.edu	\$180,085
OH	Columbus	Ohio State University	Margo Vreeburg Izzo	614-292-9218	izzo.1@osu.edu	\$499,060
OH	Kent	Kent State University	Robert Baer	330-672-0722	rbaer@kent.edu	\$384,997
SC	Charleston	College of Charleston	Cynthia May	843-953-6735	mavc@cofc.edu	\$418,140
TN	Knoxville	University of Tennessee	Elizabeth Fussell	865-974-9176	lizfuss@utk.edu	\$321,683
TX	Houston	Houston Community College	Sue Moraska	713-718-6833	sue.moraska@hccs.edu	\$499,434
VT	Burlington	University of Vermont and	Susan Ryan	802- 656-1143	Susan.Ryan@uvm.edu	\$309,270

Methodology

Development of the survey

During the development process, the director of the transition program and the associate director of special services were consulted to gauge the appropriateness and validity of the questions. Questions centered only on the role the university played in the partnership of the transition program. The focus was never to determine the efficacy of the transition program in relation to the local school district, but only to conclude how the parents of students in the transition program perceived the university investment. (Appendix B)

The survey was developed and distributed via <http://www.surveymonkey.com>, with a link to be distributed via an email list by the director of the transition program to parents of former and current transition students. Originally, 18 parents/guardians were sent the link to the survey by the director of the transition program.

Domains on the survey were placed in three specific areas: 1) University community access and involvement, 2) Comfort and welcoming atmosphere, and 3) Benefit and increase of self-esteem/efficacy of transition students on the university campus. These domains were important in determining how the university interacts with parents and students from the transition program.

University community involvement might include activities like chapel, sporting events, and performances. Questions on the survey that related to this domain were: Q2 “University students have made my student feel like a part of the university community.” Q9 stated “university representatives invited my student and me to community activities like chapel, sporting events, and performances”: and Q3 suggested, “The University helped my student feel like a college student while on the campus.” These statements were posed due to the nature of most college students’ activities.

As with all new student orientation programs on college campuses, a comforting and welcoming atmosphere directly increases success of students early on. Q1 stated, “The University made my student and me feel comfortable on campus”: Q7 stated “I felt like I could ask university faculty/staff questions about my students’ involvement on campus.”

Lastly, to show the importance of developing emotional and social skills, the domain of benefit and increased self-esteem/ efficacy of transition students was used. Q5 stated “My student’s self-esteem increased after being on the campus of the university while in the transition program,” and Q4 stated, “In relation to the university community only, my student benefited from his/her time in the transition program”.

Data collection

An email for the link to Survey Monkey was distributed in October 2010. A second reminder email and a hard copy of the survey were sent to those on the email recipient

list in early November 2010. This alternate means of delivery and time extension were to provide ample opportunity for participation. The participant's name and email address were not provided to the authors. Thus anonymity was kept in tact. Only the transition program staff knew to whom the email links were distributed to.

Over all, eleven parents /guardians participated by answering the survey. Because the authors did not know the number between former students who attended the transition program, there was no differentiation of former and current students on the survey. A response rate was not able to be determined.

Data was then analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. Data collection and analysis were designed to provide the perceptions of parents of transition students in relation to the university. Additionally, data collection provided the thoughts of parents regarding a future study of a certificate/Associate's degree program at the university.

Results

Results of the Survey

The first domain analyzed was university community access and involvement. The statements included: Q2 "University students have made my student feel like a part of the university community.": Q9 "University representatives invited my student and me to university community activities like chapel, sporting events, and performances" ; and Q3 "the university has helped my student feel like a college student while on the campus." According to the responses, 100% of those surveyed stated that they agreed to strongly agreed that their student felt like part of the university community ($\mu=3.33$). In regards to students being invited to community events at the university, a mean score of only 2.75 was achieved from the respondents. 62.5% stated that their students were invited to community activities while 37.5 % disagreed to strongly disagreed with the statement regarding being invited. Lastly, 88.8% of the respondents reported that their students felt like they were college students while on the campus of the university.

For the domain of "a comfort and welcoming atmosphere on the university campus," the following results are provided. Q1 stated, "The University has made my student and me feel comfortable on campus. In regard to this statement, 100% of the respondents stated that they agree to strongly agree that their student felt comfortable on campus ($\mu=3.75$). Q7 stated "I felt like I could ask University faculty/staff questions about my students' involvement on campus." 57.2% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed to feeling like they could ask university faculty/staff questions about their students' involvement on campus ($\mu= 2.57$).

Lastly, the domain of benefit and increased self-esteem/efficacy of transition students was analyzed. Q5 stated, " My student's self-esteem increased after being on the university campus while in the transition program," According to the data collected, 88.9% of the respondents stated that their students' self-esteem increased after being on the university campus ($\mu=3.56$). For Q4, "In relation to the university community only, my student benefited from his/her time on the University campus," 88.9% of the

respondents stated that their transition student benefitted from their time in the transition program housed on the University campus ($\mu= 3.56$)

For the domain of “comfort and welcoming atmosphere on the university campus,” Q1 stated, “The University has made my student and me feel comfortable on campus”. 100% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their student felt comfortable on campus ($\mu=3.75$). Fortunately the university is providing a comfortable place where transition students can learn valuable life skills among their age-specific peers. This result shows that the university has room for improvement and can become a more open and welcoming campus.

Q7 stated “I felt like I could ask University faculty/staff questions about my students' involvement on campus.” 57.2% of the respondents stated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement ($\mu= 2.57$). This result was somewhat disappointing. Over half of the respondents felt that they could not approach university faculty and staff about their students' involvement. Fortunately, the authors feel that is the result of the lack of education on the parts of both the University community as well as the parents of transition students. Currently, most University faculty and staff have no direct contact with the majority of transition students. As a result, the parents of transition students would have no reason to interact with university faculty and staff. Also, due to the nature of an institution of higher education being populated by adult students and FERPA privacy laws, faculty and staff often do not interact with parents of students in an academic or co-curricular fashion unless specifically contacted by parents. Thus, faculty and staff may not be accustomed to dealing with parents unless they are in a department such as financial aid, accounts services or community formation.

Conclusions

In the area of university community access and involvement Q3 stated, “The University has helped my student feel like a college student while on the campus.” According to the responses, 100% of those surveyed stated they agreed or strongly agreed that their students felt like part of the university community ($\mu=3.33$). Respondents of the survey feel like their students were college students, and were having college life experiences while attending transition program classes and activities. Siegel (1997) states that students with cognitive disabilities including autism are in need of experiencing daily routines; interactions and socialization just like the typical college student. From the data collected, it is clear that the university does provide these opportunities. Part of this may be due to interaction in the Campus Center dining hall, where transition and university students often eat lunch together. Additionally, transition students have been in some P.E. classes with university students, and this interaction may increase the feeling of being a “college student”. Lastly, informal interaction in buildings across campus could also contribute to the transition student feeling like a college student.

For students being invited to community events at the university, a mean score of only 2.75 was achieved from the respondents. 37.5 % disagreed or strongly disagreed to being invited to community events. One can infer that the University could do a better job

involving transition students and parents/guardians alike in University community activities. Again, this could be from the lack of education on both parties.

Lastly, 88.8% of the respondents felt like their students had the feeling they were college students while participating in activities on the university campus. However, there was still a disconnection between transition students and the university community. This domain provides important information as to how and if transition students are involved on in university community activities. Dardig (2008) speaks of the importance of involving the parents and students in community activities and providing access to resources within the community to help students acclimate. Access to events on campus, can help increase student success and aid students as they adjust to their surroundings. Unfortunately, not all transition students or parents were invited to university activities. However, it has been determined that some transition students were invited to university football, basketball and baseball games. Additionally they were invited to a local amusement park. These examples of involvement may be due to a bond that formed between University students and individual students in the transition program where each party involved took the time to make it a priority to get to know each other.

One of the reasons that transition students may not have been invited to university activities was lack of education of the on the part of University students/faulty/staff. Generally university students that invited transition students to activities were involved with the transition program in some form (via class or community service). An increase of involvement of university students with the transition program will most likely be attributed to increased exposure to the mission and function of the transition program. Additionally, increased opportunities of university students to interact with transition students must be considered. For example, the University could specifically invite transition students to homecoming activities. University students could utilize the global mission of the University to reach out beyond the University community and become an active part of curricular and extracurricular activities.

Finally the question “Did transition students benefit from being on the campus of the University?” was asked. According to the data, 88.9% of the respondents stated that their student benefitted ($\mu= 3.56$) as a transition student, and the time was beneficial to their student’s academic, social and behavioral growth. Hiatt-Michael (2004) has shown that one of the goals of schooling is to provide education so as to develop productive and contributing citizens in society. This response from the participants alone provides a rationale for having the transition program here on the university campus. The university has provided a vehicle for individuals participating in this transition program to grow as students and has helped these students to continue to reach the goal to become productive citizens.

Summary

The purpose of this paper was to provide relevant perceptions of the parents/guardians of high school transition students in relation to the role a small midwestern university plays in their lives. Overall parents are happy having their students on the University campus, they are please with the reception the students have received while here, and they feel

that their students have benefitted from “college interactions” among their peers. Specific areas that need to be addressed are: 1) providing more opportunities for transition students to become part of the university family by inviting students and parents/guardians to campus activities like chapel, plays, concerts, and athletic events, and 2) cultivating and encouraging the relationships between transition students/parents/guardians and university faculty and staff. Through the application of this data, the partnership between the university and the transition program will continue to become stronger. With that, everyone will benefit.

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Appendix A

10. Please describe your thoughts on the possibility of a certificate/Associates degree program at the University for students with intellectual disabilities, provided that your student could independently attend classes, or attend classes with limited support and become a part of the University community.

The goal of the question was to determine what interest, if any, the parents/guardians of ACCESS students have in a specific program targeted for students with intellectual disabilities. Overwhelmingly, all the respondents of the surveys stated they were interested in a program on the campus of the University that would offer a post secondary experience to their students. Some of the comments were as follows:

- “That would be a wonderful option here.”
- “Yes, please do this!” “You would be surprised how many local kids and parents would want this.”
- “Our son goes there and he proudly tells everyone he goes to the university!”
- “There are programs around and the closest is at CMU. We would love a program here.”
- “We would probably run to enroll in a program like that at the university!”
- “I believe each student would feel successful after receiving some sort of certificate from university!”
- “Lets get started!”

As one will discern, there is an interest in a program that offers a post secondary certificate/degree at the university. Unfortunately, this type of program is a dream as of now, however, there is a reality of starting a program like this at the university. Additional funding must be obtained to make a program like this viable. Funding sources like the (TPISD) The Model Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities grant would provide a funding source to staff and maintain a program of this sort. Minot State was awarded over \$150,000 from this grant. The author feels like this amount would get this type of program up and running here at the university, However a grant of \$300,000+ would provide sustainability to the program.

The following is sample course schedule from one semester of a possible program:

Post secondary Education Program

Sample Course Schedule

Monday & Wednesday

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| • UNIVERSITY Applied Math
Major/Professor | Taught by:
–Math |
| • UNIVERSITY College Skills -
Instructor/Professor | -Student |
| • UNIVERSITY Personal Fitness Training
instructor/PE /student/prof | - Certified fitness |
| • UNIVERSITY Job Internship | – Job coach |

Tuesday & Thursday

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| • UNIVERSITY Literature -
Instructor/Professor | -Student |
| • UNIVERSITY Technology Skills
Instructor/Professor | -Student |
| • UNIVERSITY Daily Health
Professor | -PE Student/ Health |
| • UNIVERSITY Job Internship | -Job Coach |

Friday

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| • UNIVERSITY Communication Skills
Major | -Communications |
| • UNIVERSITY Friday Seminars (these change each month):
instructors | -Rotation of |
| o <i>Independent Living , Self-Advocacy, Social Strategies, and Critical
 thinking</i> | |

Appendix B Sample Survey

1. The university has made my student and me feel comfortable on campus

Choose one	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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2. The university students have made my student feel like a part of the university community

Choose one	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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3. The university has helped my student feel like a "college student" while on the campus.

Choose one	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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4. In relation to the university community only, my student has benefited from their time in the transition program.

Choose one	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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5. My students' self-esteem increased after being on the campus of the university while in the transition program.

Choose one	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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6. I am glad the transition program is on the university campus.

Choose one	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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7. I felt like I could ask university faculty/staff questions about my students' involvement on campus.

Choose one	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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8. My student felt like they were NOT wanted on the university campus

Choose one	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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9. University representatives invited my student and me to community activities like chapel, sporting events, and performances.

Choose one	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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