

Adolescents and Transition Students with Disabilities in Rural Areas

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Overview

Transition services are activities and experiences that prepare students with disabilities to move from school to postsecondary environments and events. Transition services are individualized and based on the student's needs, interests, and preferences and are person-centered, planned with interagency collaboration, and inclusive of activities promoting movement from school to post-school (Flexer, Simmons, Luft, & Baer, 2008), and shall include activities in instruction, related services, community experiences, development of employment, and other postsecondary adult living objectives, acquisition of daily living skills (when appropriate), and functional vocational evaluation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 1990; Wright & Wright, 2007). Proportionately, a greater number of vocational rehabilitation transition-age clients reside in rural communities than urban areas (Rehabilitation Services Administration [RSA 911], 2009). In comparison to urban transition

students, rural students have lower rates of employment and enrollment in postsecondary education after graduation (Cobb et al., 2013; Harvey, 2002). In addition, rural transition students have limited job opportunities, limited access to counselors (Goe & Ipsen, 2013), and lower levels of social visibility and social connections (Farmer et al., 2011).

In a study to explore rural service delivery strategies, Goe and Ipsen (2013) found VR personnel considered transition services as important in rural VR service delivery. Several key findings resulted from this study. First, VR personnel identified outreach as a necessary first step for effectively serving rural transition students, with local connections with school officials and transitions teams as imperative to making service work and maintaining connections in rural area. Second, regardless of the structure of service delivery (i.e., assignment of a VR counselor to individual schools, a counselor to a special territory serving multiple schools, or a dedicated transition counselor serving multiple schools across a region), VR's involvement with transition students generally began in the student's junior year or earlier. Involvement in the individualized education plan (IEP) meeting was the primary form of contact with transition students. However, counselors were unable to provide services to students with less severe disabilities because of order of selection (OOS). Order of selection is a system organized by

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priority categories of disabilities based on how significantly disability impacts opportunity to work. Those with the most significant disability are given priority category one, then a person with a significant disability (priority category two), and all other eligible persons in priority category three (Arizona Department of Economic Security, n.d.). The result was longer wait time until well after graduation and a significant gap in services. Finally, clients received either career counseling or college counseling, which included job experiences and job exploration (interest testing and reviewing the labor market and related salaries) (Goe & Ipsen, 2013). Although these services provided rural students the opportunity to become familiar with assistive technology and gain job experiences, limited counselor resources and lack of transportation were difficulties to setting up job experiences in rural areas. In addition, because of the “No Child Left Behind” policy, schools were less willing to provide vocational programs so that students could attend classes in preparation for standardized tests (Goe & Ipsen, 2013).

Rural students with disabilities and rural schools face numerous barriers to programming and service delivery including limited funding and resources, geographic and social isolation, small size, transportation, and limited access to trained and qualified personnel (Dempsey & Stephens, 2011; Richards, 2004), and students with disabilities are more likely to have negative perceptions of school and lower postsecondary aspirations (Irvin et al., 2011). In addition, the type of school setting may be another barrier for students with disabilities in rural settings. For example, Eigenbrood (2005) found services for students with disabilities in rural faith-based schools were more limited than public school settings. Faith-based rural schools had (a) fewer students identified with disabilities, (b) less special education training for their special education teachers, and (c) less use of certain related services. Yet, another aspect that can influence the encounter of students with disabilities in rural areas is cultural factors. For example, rural American Indian children and families must contend with a myriad of special education agencies and subsequent policies (e.g., laws represented

by the USA, the state, the Indian Nation, and the local school district from the child’s birth to adulthood) (Collette, 2013; see Chap. 13 for more information on American Indians). Finally, school administrators and service providers who are linked to the provision of special education and related services perceive the greatest areas of need were for highly qualified personnel with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the needs of students with low-incidence disabilities (e.g., head/hard of hearing, blind) in rural areas and for timely information that would support the education of these learners (Harvey et al., 2005).

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, the reader should be able to:

1. Identify the components of transition planning.
2. Identify barriers to transition services in rural communities.
3. Understand characteristics of transition populations in rural areas.
4. Identify key participants in transition planning.
5. Understand the role of family participation in transition services.

Introduction

The purpose of transition services is to prepare students with disabilities for life after high school. Transition services are to be coordinated activities (e.g., vocational training, employment, adult services, living arrangements; see Table 10.1 for major categories of transition services). The federal law, *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), requires that an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) be written by the time a student is 16 years of age, and some states may require the ITP by age 14. The ITP is written by a team of professionals, the student, and parents that outline the training and support that will be necessary for the student to live, work, and participate in the community as an adult. In 2004, IDEA revised transition planning to (a) “be focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from

Table 10.1 Categories of transition services

Instruction – academic requirements for the student’s chosen course of study, employment skills training, career technical education, social skills, self-determination, driver’s education, and college entrance preparation
Related services – occupational/physical/speech therapy, counseling, special transportation, travel training, exploring disability
Support services – college or other professional supports may help to move the student toward post-school outcomes
Community experiences – community work experiences, recreation/leisure activities, tours of postsecondary education settings, residential and community tours, volunteering and training in accessing community settings, joining a team/club/organization
Employment – career planning, job shadowing, guidance counseling, interest inventories, job placement, internship options, on-the-job training, on-campus jobs, or supported employment
Adult living skills – referral to vocational rehabilitation services, researching social security benefits/work incentives, registering to vote, exploring residential options, and using navigation systems of the community
Daily living skills – self-care training, health and wellness training, independent living training, and money management
Functional vocational evaluation – situational work assessments, work samples, work adjustment programs, aptitude test, and job tryouts

Adapted from Autism Society of North Carolina (2016).

school to post-school activities” [Section 602 (34)], (b) appropriate measurable postsecondary goals be based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills, and (c) transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals ([34 CFR 300.320(b)]; Authority 20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(1)(A) and (D)(6)). The most recent reauthorization of IDEA introduced the concept of “response to intervention” (RTI) which is a tiered process ranging from least to most restrictive learning environment (tier 1 to tier 3). Part B of the IDEA was published in August of 2006, which deals with school-aged children, and part C was published in September of 2011 which deals with babies and toddlers (Graves, 2012).

The concept of transition includes various aspects of adult adjustment and participation in community life (Gargiulo, 2009). However, the availability of resources to support transition services often varies between rural and urban schools. Rural schools and communities are distinct from suburban and urban schools, as well as from one another in population composition, level of income, and level of poverty, and more students are eligible for free or reduced lunch (Hull, 2003). According to the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES, 2013), in 2010–2011 about one-quarter of all public school students were enrolled in rural schools. In 2013–2014, approximately 6.5 million (13%) children and youth (ages 3–21) were receiving special education services in public schools, and 35% of students receiving special education services had specific learning disabilities (IES, 2016). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2010) emphasized the need for federal solutions that effectively address the following issues in order to ensure that rural high school students are prepared for postsecondary education and employment (a) ensuring fair and adequate federal investment, (b) providing high standards and demanding courses, (c) improving rural high school accountability, (d) expanding student supports and options, (e) recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers, (f) building strong models of community support, and (g) setting high expectations for college and career success (pp. 4–5).

In a study of the quality of postsecondary transition plans against research-based criteria in preparing rural students with disabilities for postsecondary success, Miller-Warren (2015) found the majority of ITPs were inadequate in quality. That is, the plans were not well written and were “not sound” plans based on the literary criteria, and systematic assessment of the quality of the plans did not occur at the secondary level (p. 11). Overall, the ITPs failed to meet both federal and state mandates that students with disabilities engage in secondary transition planning activities that facilitate their movement into postsecondary success and all students are entitled to sufficient skills to successfully engage in postsecondary education and employment.

Miller-Warren concluded despite such laws as IDEA, the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act, students with disabilities graduating high school continue to face significant challenges when it comes to postsecondary success in the areas of employment, education, and independent living. Finally, the majority of the secondary ITPs were written as pro forma (required but with little importance) and were not properly designed to meet the needs of the students in preparing them for postsecondary success (Miller-Warren, 2015).

The remainder of this chapter will explore challenges to characteristics of transition in rural areas and discuss family involvement in the transition process. Rural communities are really diverse, and some situations explained in the rest of the chapter may be representative of some rural communities but not all. Recommendations for transition service improvement will be provided as well as recruitment improvement techniques used in some rural communities for special education teachers. The multidisciplinary approach often utilized in the transition process will be explored, and the role of parents/family will be examined.

Characteristics of Rural Students with Disabilities

Rural school districts comprise between 10% and 25% of school districts in the USA (Purcell, East, & Rude, 2005). When discussing rural school districts, it is important to understand that population scarcity and remoteness are the key characteristics of rural communities. The US 2010 Census Bureau defines a rural area as an area that is not urban. "Urban" is defined as either an urbanized area or places with populations of 2500 or more outside urbanized areas. An urbanized area includes places and their adjacent densely settled surrounding territory that together have a minimum population of 50,000 (Bureau of the Census, 2010). Rural school districts are responsible for the proper education and employment of their students and teachers. Overall, all school districts, rural or urban, strive to provide

high-quality education with their means and resources. However, rural school districts have some unique challenges in meeting the needs of their students. These challenges are more so when meeting the needs of their students with disabilities in rural school districts.

Students with disabilities in rural communities share many characteristics with students in urban and more populated communities. However, there are some characteristics that are more prevalent in students with disabilities in rural areas in comparison to those in urban communities. Specifically, rural students show significant difference in socioeconomic status, access to English as a second language and English proficiency teachers, and low expectation of education (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2016; Pennington, Horn, & Berrong, 2009; Smink & Reimer, 2005). With mass immigration and globalization, English language learning (ELL) programs are now greater in urbanized school districts (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2016). Overall, students in rural communities have limited English proficiency in comparison to their urban counterparts. However, providing services, programs, or classes to increase English proficiency remains a challenge in rural areas because of limited access to specially trained staff. The challenge is more compounded when considering that rural school districts fail to attract special education teachers due to low pay rates and lack of teaching resources (Pennington, Horn, & Berrong, 2009).

The 2010 US Census Bureau reports 2.8 million (5.2%) of school-aged children are reported to have a disability (Brault, 2011). Children in metro areas were provided with more education options than those living outside of metro areas. In addition, children living outside metro areas had a higher level of disability (6.3%) than those in metro areas at 5%. Of the states sampled in the census, children living outside metro areas had higher disability rates across disability types except for a few states (Brault, 2011). The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) indicated that children with a lack of access to resources and healthcare and exposed to poor working and

living conditions are more likely to become disabled. Moreover, poverty and disability reinforce each other and add to vulnerability and exclusion in the community (UNICEF, 2013). Furthermore, the US Census Bureau reports about 13.3% of people living in rural areas live in families with income below the official poverty threshold.

Another area of difference between rural and urban community districts is academic expectations of achievements. The lower the income level and the more rural a community, the lower the academic achievement expectations were for their students, especially, those students with disabilities (Smink & Reimer, 2005). Many families do not see education as a means to a better future for their children. The communities' culture, political orientation, and local job market affect the way families view the importance and role of education for the students in their communities (Roscigno & Crowley, 2001; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, Crowley, 2006).

Though students with disabilities throughout the nation face similar challenges, students in rural communities have different challenges posed by their unique characteristics. As discussed earlier, the three major characteristics of students in rural communities are their low-income or socioeconomic status, lower rates of English proficiency, and low expectations of academic achievement by their educators. Though these challenges are systematically rooted in the culture for educating students in rural communities, they can be challenged. One way to challenge these characteristics is to attract high-quality educators to rural areas by increasing pay, offering incentives, and providing resources such as distance education learning programs. Also, rural communities can work with their school district in designing after graduation transition programs for their adult students with disabilities. Though these alternatives will require funds and time, they are steps that will improve the quality of education and opportunities for students with disabilities in rural communities.

Challenges in Special Education Programs

In rural communities, postsecondary educational aspirations of students are often impacted by geographical and economic boundaries (Richards, 2004). Many adolescents with disabilities such as learning disabilities and emotional disorders experience poor transitioning outcome (Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016). Furthermore, these individuals are more likely to drop out of school than their urban counterparts. Richards goes on to state rural students with learning disabilities encounter limited local occupational opportunities. Thus, they must contend with whether to leave their rural communities to expand career opportunities and to advance their education. Limited school curricula and difficulties with poverty significantly impact access to resources and information needed to succeed in postsecondary settings. In addition, service providers in rural communities with an understanding of the federal, state, and local transition policies and mandates who assist individuals with disabilities are limited. Moreover, professionals working with students with disabilities with the transition process may be limited in their abilities and experiences working in a rural setting (Richards, 2004). Professionals may not be familiar with the transition process, may have credentials in other areas of teaching different from special education, and may have limited knowledge about the characteristics of rural communities.

Recruitment of Qualified Teachers

Special education teachers serve a vital role in the transition process for individuals with disabilities. In rural areas, critical shortages and difficulties with recruitment, retention, and supply of special education teachers and administrators has been ongoing and is difficult to address (Dempsey & Stephens, 2011). Another compounding issue to the challenge of recruitment and retention is that smaller schools in rural areas

are perceived as stepping-stones for teachers and administrator to move on to suburban schools. Teachers move to these areas in the hopes of getting better pay, increased access to resources, and possibly fewer classes for which to prepare. Limited financial support adds to the strain of staffing problems in rural areas. Schools with limited funding may limit the range of curricular options and course placement options (Dempsey & Stephens, 2011) which may significantly impact the transition planning process for students with and without disabilities. As previously mentioned, high turnover rates and difficulty attracting new teachers may be because of salary limitations. With few teachers and administrators to carry out duties, many must perform multiple roles, which may include roles beyond their expertise (Dempsey & Stephens, 2011).

An increase in the need for special educators is exemplified by the increase in students in special education programs. The shortages of qualified educators have produced an influx of individuals filling special education positions for which they are not certified. This is an important factor as researchers have shown there is a correlation between teacher's qualifications and student achievement (Canter, Voytecki, & Rodriguez, 2007). Canter et al. (2007) state one recruitment effort to meet the needs of students living in rural areas is to recruit preservice teachers and the use of distance education to allow access to higher education and special education instruction. Sutton et al. (2014) highlighted the use of "grow your own" programs to combat the shortage of special education teachers in rural areas. They describe these programs to include alternative routes to certification for teachers, tuition and textbook assistance programs, and reeducation centers for teachers. However, questions remain about the distribution of qualified teachers from capacity-building efforts to hard to staff, low performing, and high poverty schools found in rural areas (Sutton et al., 2014). Despite efforts to improve staffing issues and access to education, teacher preparation programs struggle to effectively track, assess, and provide timely feedback for teachers to make necessary adjustment in the implementation of evidence-based

practice (Bondie, 2015). In addition, lack of access to assistive technologies and instructional resources may have special educators assisting family members beyond their expertise with finding and or providing support services difficult to source in rural areas (Sutton et al., 2014). Furthermore, most rural school districts offer very little to no professional development programs resulting in special education teachers feeling professionally isolated with no means or opportunity to grow professionally as an educator (Pennington, Horn, & Berrong, 2009).

Low Expectations

There are a few assumptions to explain this lack of high expectations by families and educators of students with disabilities. One assumption is special education teachers in rural areas are often isolated and do not have access to funds, technology, support, and knowledge to provide high-quality education to a student with disabilities (Collins, 2007). An additional assumption is that teachers may feel there is no real need for students with disabilities to achieve high because they may not have many opportunities to live and earn independently after graduation because there is often a lack of transition options for students with disabilities in rural communities. Collins (2007) explains that even when students with disabilities acquire functional skills to be independent and self-sufficient, many rural communities have very little or no options for people with disabilities to work or live independently. Many rural communities do not offer apartments for supported living, public affordable transportation, or proper accommodations for people with disabilities. Therefore, many students with disabilities find themselves living at home with no opportunity for independence after graduation. According to Morris (2005), low expectations that create enormous barriers for people with disabilities are attributed to (a) attitudes that people with disabilities are commonly considered to be in need of care, and this undermines people's ability to see people with disabilities as autonomous people, and (b) people with disabilities are

often treated as not belonging to communities in which they live. Furthermore, expectations may be influenced further based on type and severity of disability, the more severe the disability, the lower are expectations.

Another consideration is the unintentional outcome of offering multiple paths in high school graduation requirements to students with disabilities. That is, many states currently offer alternative types of diplomas, skills certificates, or modified diplomas for students with disabilities that were intended to “provide students with access to future educational and work opportunities instead actually limit students in achieving these goals due to a lack of understanding and acceptance of alternative diplomas by postsecondary programs and employers” (Stansbury, 2013, p. 1). In the report on *Diplomas at Risk* by the National Center for Learning Disabilities (Coulter et al., 2013), the more diploma options offered to students, in fact, result in fewer high school graduates. According to McGrew and Evans (2004), expectancy effects for students with disabilities in the context of both IDEA and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) may lead to inappropriate and unrealistic academic expectations for these students, especially those with cognitive disabilities. Finally, attribution theory (Bandura, 1977) is considered an important theory with regard to teachers’ expectations of students and their performance. In a study of preservice teachers’ attributions of educational outcomes of students with learning disabilities, Vialle and Woodcock (2011) found general education teachers perceived students with learning disabilities as lacking ability in comparison to others in the class.

Job Placement and Employment

In rural areas, Kinnison, Fuson, and Cates (2005) reported parents of children with disabilities feared inadequate treatment of their children during the job training process. These parents did not have expectations of their children working in an inclusive setting but expected their children to be placed in sheltered workshops. A

general economic decline in rural areas has negatively impacted the school to work transition programs, and parents are faced with the possibility of their children leaving for larger communities in search of opportunities. Factors associated with low employment in rural areas can be associated with several issues and vary across locations. Chronic poverty, intense competition for limited jobs, high school dropout rate, and low priority on job placement in IEPs are major contributors of rural challenges (Morgan & Openshaw, 2011). Also, access to transportation, isolation, and service availability may pose formidable barriers to employment for individuals in rural areas (Pullmann, VanHooser, Hoffman, & Heflinger, 2010).

Morgan and Openshaw (2011) summarize that young adults with disabilities who are employed post high school are likely to remain employed. However, individuals with disabilities in rural areas are less likely to be employed than those in urban areas. Sharac, Mccrone, Clement, and Thornicroft (2010) posit stigma exist in a myriad of settings including employment and can negatively affect access to services, vocational, and leisure activities. Access to employment is fundamental to post-school outcomes for young adults’ economic well-being. When individuals with disabilities are stigmatized, employers may be reluctant to hire them, and this may affect the person on an individual and economic level.

Parents’ Involvement

Parents play an important role in the transition process to help students with disabilities explore postsecondary opportunities (Miller-Warren, 2016). However, parent involvement in the postsecondary transition process may pose a challenge in rural areas owing to geographical distance and isolation. Difficulty collaborating with parents is exacerbated by the shortage of special education teachers, sometimes with only one at some school sites (Evans, Williams, King, & Metcalf, 2010). Parents express the need for continued and consistent communication from teachers throughout the transition process as they

have their own goals for their children's future. Miller-Warren (2016) posits parents may not be very knowledgeable of the transition process and may have unrealistic goals for their children. Often, parents may feel confused during the individualized education plan (IEP) meeting and the planning process. Parents, teachers, and children may not always share the same vision as it relates to the transition planning process. It is the duty of the special educators to help parents to shape realistic views and enlighten them about the transition process as their input is very valuable. Culturally diverse and non-English-speaking families may face additional barriers in IPE meetings, as they may need the assistance of a translator due to meetings being predominantly in English. Translators may not effectively translate or communicate everything discussed at the meeting, and thus, parents are often left listening rather than actively participating in the IPE meeting.

Parents have played an instrumental role in the disability movement for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which contains the rights and protection for parents of students with disabilities and views them as an equal contributor to the special education process (Burke & Sandman, 2015). Parents may feel disempowered and unable to express their feelings and concerns in IEP meetings instead of being viewed as experts about their children. Parents may experience this disconnect to rural educators as Ludlow, Conner, and Schechter (2005) state rural educators have a greater sense of isolation and lack support in the school system. In very rural areas, some special educators may be the only one in the rural school or system. With this in mind, rural special education teachers may be overwhelmed and unable to create meaningful relationships with parents of children involved in transition planning. Parents want additional services covered by the IDEA and thus more supports for their children including a lower starting age for transition services from 14 to 12 years (Burke & Sandman, 2015). The more recent reauthorization of the IDEA has raised the age of transition planning from 14 to

16 years and requires appropriate measurable postsecondary goals in training, employment, and independent living skills (Hethering et al., 2010). Parents express deficiency in funding is stated to be an influential factor in their children receiving appropriate services required (Burke & Sandman, 2015) which is important in transitional goal attainment (Bridges & Maxwell, 2015).

Transitional planning, implantation, and success have been deemed difficult in rural areas and will need steps to create opportunities of interdisciplinary, student-focused, and family involvement to be successful. Some parents may not be fully aware of their rights and the laws relating to transition planning, and efforts need to be made to share information with parents in a manner they can understand (Matuszny, Banda, & Coleman, 2007). Parents are motivated to be a part of the transition process; however, they would like more knowledge and resources about the various components of the transition plan and services available post high school (Hawranick, 2013).

Student Diversity

The student population in rural schools is growing faster than in any other geographic area, and its student composition is becoming poorer and more racially diverse (Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester, 2014; Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012). Nationally, 26.7% of rural students are children of color, 75% of rural students of color attend school in the 17 states with rural minority student rates above the national average, and nearly 69% of all rural minority students in the USA are concentrated in the 13 states where they make up one-third or more of the state's rural student population. Across the USA, the Hispanic/Latino student enrollment is growing three times as fast in rural areas as in nonrural areas (Johnson et al., 2014). Developing positive classroom environments and access to general curriculum to foster success has become increasingly difficult as classroom environments become more diverse (e.g. race, disability, ethnicity, and

socioeconomic status) and have seen a growing non-English language learner population (ELL, Evans et al., 2010). Evans et al. explain that many students struggle to learn and experience language and cultural barriers that put them at risk for school dropout. Native Americans Indians are more likely to be identified as having a learning disability (Blanchett, 2010). The increase in cultural diversity in public schools in special education classrooms reveals a lack of teacher competencies to assess, teach, and evaluate culturally and linguistically (CLD) diverse students with and without disabilities. Moreover, the acute shortage in special education teachers has seen little variation in a diverse background of special educators as majority are white and very few are males (Utley, 2011).

In a study of a cohort of preservice teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach diverse students in rural areas, Wenger and Dinsmore (2005) found teachers from these cohorts confront the challenges of meeting diverse learners' needs in rural school by frequently calling on their teacher friend networks for more materials, suggestions, and support. These teachers believed it is exhausting for new rural teachers to design curriculum with students whose lives are different from their own. Also, as novice teachers, they are surprised that schools consider them resources for dealing with diversity.

As mentioned previously and further discussed below, parent involvement with their children's educational process is important to student achievement and self-perception. Parents of English language learners in rural areas face additional challenges. Shim (n.d.) identifies three broad themes as obstacles that inhibit productive ELL parent-teacher interactions: (a) teachers' judgments toward ELL students and their parents, (b) ELL parents' frustration about their inability to influence a teacher's decision making, and (c) ELL parents' fear of repercussions for speaking up. Consider the below case study and how culturally competent special education teachers and services are needed in rural schools.

Case Study

Trinity County, California, has a small population of 13,786, according to the 2010 census report. The population is about 87% (12,033) white, 4.8% (655) Native American, 0.4% (59) African American, and 0.7% (16) Asians. There are approximately 500 students between the third and fourth grade in the county. Ms. Sharon is a 35-year-old American Indian first grade teacher in the rural Trinity County. She has been familiar with all her students and their families as a result of being born and raised in the community. She predominantly taught local white and American Indian students. She is very comfortable with teaching her students according to the state requirements and the culture of her community.

Recently, Jacob, a child of a refugee family from Kashmiri, has joined the class. Jacob's family is well educated, and he previously studied in a British medium school. There is no language barrier. He exhibits behaviors that Ms. Sharon is concerned about. Jacob is easily startled. He does not like to be held, rocked, or cuddled. Jacob avoids small play areas like the playhouse. Jacob does not fall asleep easily during naptime; if he does he wakes up startled and lost. Abrupt, and especially loud, sounds make him cry and try to flee the area. He constantly runs toward the door and cries to go out. Jacob does not like to engage in the classroom activities. Instead, he keeps to himself and repeats the same routine and steps that he learned the first day of class. Ms. Sharon is concerned about

Jacob. She wants to help Jacob. Jacob is exhibiting concerning behaviors to Ms. Sharon.

1. How do you address his behavior in his transition plan meeting?

2. Ms. Sharon is concerned about Jacob's career goals. Where would you recommend for her to go to seek knowledge, advice, support, and recourses to guide her?
3. Ms. Sharon is part of the minority group in her community. What challenges and strengths do these bring her when teaching Jacob?

Rural Families' Participation in Transition Planning

Transition to adulthood is an important stage in life for students with disabilities but also for their parents. Planning for transition provides parents with links to teachers, counselors, related service personnel, and postsecondary adult agency services (Rowe & Test, 2010). Transition planning in rural areas can be challenging. The transition process is important for the whole family, and its level of success affects the well-being of everyone involved. Rowe and Test (2010) stated that very few parents are highly involved in transition planning training. This suggests that parents are not taking part in the transition planning trainings being offered, so it seems important to explore alternatives to providing information to families. Another observation was that some studies found that families felt they did not play a role in transition planning because they were unsure of how they fit into the transition planning puzzle.

In their discussion, Rowe and Test (2010) stated that literature focusing on increasing parent and family involvement in the transition process consists primarily of conceptual discussions and recommendations from experts in the field about how to encourage parent participation and improve communication among all stakeholders involved with assisting students in transitioning from school to adulthood (e.g., providing ongoing communication and collaboration with families, including family resources and community members in planning). The discussion also indicated that family members were unfamiliar with the various adult agencies and their services, and

in most cases, during transition team meetings, school professionals shared information and made decisions about transition programming without input from parents. Furthermore, parents felt they lacked understanding of the transition planning process and did not realize what transition planning entailed. In addition, Rowe and Test indicated that there was some evidence that parents lacked sufficient knowledge because parents assumed their children would automatically qualify for a sheltered workshop or some other day program due to the severity of their child's disability. Moreover, they believed these were the only postsecondary options available for their children. Beliefs such as these would eventually lead to parents having limited participation in the transition planning process.

In Australia, one study explained that few studies have focused on the issues faced by young adults with disability and their families in the transition-from-school period. In comparison to the USA, studies have noted negative findings related to both the transition process and post-school life for young adults with disabilities and their families. It was reported that the parents consistently reported low levels of family participation in the transition process and they also coordinated transition planning poorly. For the parents with young adults with more severe disability, the concerns that were identified were related to high levels of unemployment, restricted levels of participation in community activities, and a prevalence of continued living with and dependence upon families (Davies & Beamish, 2009). Though this study was carried out in Australia, it reveals challenges experienced in rural areas similar to that in the USA.

It is postulated by Magnuson (2013) that families of young adults with intellectual disabilities find high school transition more stressful than families of their peers without disabilities. Since some parents are hardly ever adequately prepared for transition of their loved ones with or without disabilities, the complications families face as a result of supporting members with disabilities are not new at the point of transition. A contributing factor might be because parents of children with disabilities also face transitions of their own.

The implications of the study noted that families receive little input from school and adult-based transition professionals, experience disruption and instability as their children exit secondary school settings, and struggle with a mix of positive expectations and anxieties about postsecondary planning outcomes.

The transition process is a time of significant change where teenagers and families must navigate developmental changes, increasing self-direction and independence of the adolescent from family, develop social and romantic relationships, and explore vocational opportunities. This change is experienced in adolescents with disabilities and may pose challenges from the possibility of additional complications due to disability or health-related issues (Timmons, Whitney-Thomas, McIntyre, Butterworth, & Allen, 2004). Timmons et al., through their review of the literature on transition, found that families adopt roles throughout the transition process as service developer, teacher and learner, advocate, decision maker, and primary supporter. Parents have to manage supports, services, and service systems from school and community agencies including those that provide adult supports. Parents report learning about services from their children's school and may include a network of opportunities ranging from education and vocational rehabilitation services to health-related services (Ankeny, Wilkins, & Spain, 2009).

Parents describe several challenges to negotiating complex relationships involved in the transition process or what Timmons et al. refer to as the "bureaucratic transition." They posit that parents perceive this system as being complex in its service delivery owing to the lack of coordination between all parties involved (agencies and schools). Parents describe the system as being unresponsive owing to the inability to respond to the need of their child. This may be due to lack of resources, staffing issues and difficulties related to inaccessibility. Furthermore, in dealing with the above issues, parents explain the continued task of advocating for their child as potentially exhausting, and they must ensure their own wellness to avoid burnout (Timmons et al., 2004).

This is necessary as families are the providers of "backup services" where services otherwise fall short and may continue indefinitely into the child's life (Ankeny et al., 2009).

Families and parents of children with disabilities describe playing a continued role in their lives by promoting good work ethics, being supportive of vocational and independent goals. Ankeny et al. (2009) report high levels of parental involvement are correlated with more family resources and higher parental education, having two parent households, obtaining external funding, and belonging to family and children support groups. Parents want to ensure safety and stability with the increased social life that comes with independence. As it relates to independence, mothers do not see their role as supporter diminishing over time, as is sometimes the case of mothers of children without disabilities.

Transition to Adulthood and Postsecondary Life for Rural Students

Postsecondary life, which includes employment, poses a lot of challenges. Transition to post-school activities can be a daunting process for any individual as young adults try to establish independence and their own identity. For individuals with disabilities additional barriers to services, complicated policies and services requirements may be even more challenging (Foley et al., 2013) compared to their nondisabled counterpart. Key factors in successful transition from high school are having accurate knowledge about civil rights of individuals with disabilities and attitude and self-advocacy (Office of Civil Rights [OCR], 2011). In addition, OCR proposes high school educators encourage students to know the functional limitations that result from their disability and have the ability to explain their disability to disability coordinators if accommodations are needed (understand their disability). Young adults who are capable must take primary responsibility for their postsecondary outcomes and be able to advocate for them-

selves as parents may be less involved. Also, engaging in high school programs that will help with them to meet standards at whichever higher education institution they chose to attend. Learning time management skills is essential as young adults will be expected to manage their own time with little supervision connecting with vocational rehabilitation counselors, and other counselors can assist young adults with disabilities to identify resources to help with this (OCR, 2011). Counselors and high school educators can help students with disabilities and parents to research postsecondary school pathways and provide resources to assist with community involvement.

Parents

Transition to adulthood for young adults with disabilities shows parental support as a strong asset for this population. Parental roles may include providing material, emotional support, and continued advocates for services. Rossetti et al. (2016) postulate parents of young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and pervasive support needs were actively involved as fierce advocates and creative problem solvers. The active involvement of parents included (a) attitudinal facilitators, (b) advocacy efforts and perceptions, and (c) strategic actions. The complexity of post-school avenues for students with disabilities deems family involvement an essential part of the post-school process (Davies & Beamish, 2009).

According to Ankeny et al. (2009), families may be seen as the only consistent source of support for individuals with disabilities post high school. By being an active supporter for their children, parents are in an informed position to evaluate the quality of services and program outcomes for their child (Davies & Beamish, 2009). On the other hand, Davies and Beamish highlight that there are positive and negative experiences documented in the literature of parents with children with disabilities. Parents of young adults with more severe disabilities have stated concerns related to high levels of unemployment and

restricted community participation resulting in continued dependence on family members for support. Moreover, Davies and Beamish put forward that there are some studies that reveal some parents may play a minimal role in the transition process or postsecondary life for young adults with disabilities.

Based on the above discussion about transition, professionals implementing transition plans in rural areas experience additional resistance. Difficulties include too few resources like transportation, remoteness, financial and economic factors, and low population density. Collet-Klingenberg and Kolb (2011) studied secondary and transition programming for 18–21-year-old students in rural Wisconsin, and their results indicated issues related to transition planning which included decreased funding and difficulties connecting to adult services. Again, rural students preparing for transition to post-school life experience a lack of community resources, such as job shadowing opportunities, to support efforts that are made by their schools. Cultural differences, including values, communication styles, and learning styles between educators and the local community, can impact transition negatively (Anderson, 2012).

Recommendations for Best Practice in Rural Areas

Promising practices for transition services are based on research-based interventions and use evidence-based student development practices for improving transition outcomes. Replication of evidence-based practices in rural areas offers potential to enhance transition services. Transition services for individuals with disabilities are a necessity and expectation for adolescents during their secondary education process. Although necessary transition services have been well documented in the literature, those interventions may be challenging in rural communities. One of the most widely accepted services during the transition period is paid work experience. The literature is clear that if an individual has a work history while in high school,

then students' employment options are significantly enhanced (Morris & Goodman, 2013). Rural communities are a tight-knit group who are familiar with each other, which makes demand-side job placement quite effective. Rural communities have the opportunity to intimately get to know potential employers and develop effective working relationships, which has the potential to result in more placement opportunities. Another promising practice relating to transition in rural communities is the creation of business advisory boards whose members participate in quarterly job meetings in the local high school (Hendrickson, Carson, Woods-Groves, Mendenhall, & Scheidecker, 2013). The purpose of these meetings is to allow potential employers to meet with students to answer questions about available opportunities and to begin to establish effective working relationship. This allows students to begin to learn what types of jobs are available and what the various requirements are.

Other recommendations are more specific to promoting students' self-determination and self-advocacy. A lack of administrative support and limited resources often lead to student self-determination programs that are limited to individual classrooms and teachers who are dedicated to do whatever they can to further their students' self-determination (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004). Thus, the following recommendations are made: (a) provide opportunities for decision-making starting early in life and encourage children to make informed choice through their lifespan; (b) begin self-determination instruction early in elementary grades and intensify specific skills during high school; (c) promote development and use of self-advocacy skills, focusing on an internal locus of control; (d) make work-based, self-directed learning and career exploration opportunities available to all students; and (e) incorporate self-determination and career development skills in the general curriculum (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004). Although these recommendations apply to students with disabilities in urban as

well as rural areas, rural areas should have a heightened awareness of them.

Professional and Training Opportunities

Collaboration of transition planning would make transition process effective (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997). The use of an asynchronous transition seminar series for professional development may be advantageous in rural areas where geography and accessibility may be a barrier. This series has been shown to increase the knowledge base and the ability to implement best practices and allows for the development of meaningful collaborative relationship with rural colleagues across the country. Frequently, professionals working in rural communities feel isolated and lack the opportunities for collaboration afforded to their urban counterparts.

In addition, self-determination and community-based education must be included as best practices in transition (Rouleau, 2012).

Parent Participation and Education

Lastly, due to the importance of family in many rural communities, having family members attend IEP meetings is critical. This type of involvement can significantly affect the student's outcomes and affords counselors and educators the opportunity to learn more about the student and their supports. Transition is important for students who have a disability. Effective collaboration in any transition setting is paramount. Ensuring effective communication with parents by using their preferred mode of communication (e.g., email, phone call, letter, and face-to-face meetings) will help to ensure reliable information dissemination. Providing thorough information and contact informational resources to individuals responsible for implementing various parts of the transition plan is vital for parents to follow up. Many individuals with disabilities receive

financial supports, therefore educating parents and young adults on social security work incentives and transition services provided by other government/state and nonprofit agencies.

Parents should be familiar with the domains of adulthood to be addressed during transition planning: postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2016). It may be helpful for parents to complete the *Parent Transition Survey* (Fournier, 2014), even if only as a way to help them identify important information. Finally, parents should be aware that educating themselves about transition and post-transition (adult) services is an ongoing process.

Summary

Transition planning serves to help prepare young adults with disabilities for postsecondary life. This process includes an interagency and collaborative relationship with the goal of providing young adults with disabilities a pathway and full access to participation in vocational, independent living, and postsecondary education opportunities. Individuals living in rural areas experience certain challenges which impact the rehabilitation process, e.g., lack of resources, qualified professionals, and financial capacity to name a few. By incorporating families in the transition plan, it helps them to acknowledge their role as experts of their child's abilities and strengthens their resources in providing support for their child. Educators, counselors, and case managers should provide innovative quality transition services for young adults with disabilities as mandated by the IDEA and allow them the ability to learn needed skills in the most restricted and age-appropriate environments.

Resources

Center for Rural Education: <http://www.ed.gov/rural-education>

Condon, E., & Brown, K. (nd). Planning for your transition from high school to adult life: A workbook to help you decide what you want your life to look like after graduation: <http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/Articles/PlanningWorkbook.pdf>

National Rural Education Center: <http://www.nrea.net/>

Navigating Resources for Rural Schools <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/>

Rural School and Community Trust: <http://www.ruraledu.org>

Transition of Students with Disabilities to Postsecondary Education: A Guide for High School Educators (first published March 2007. Reprinted March 2011).

Transition Services for Students with Disabilities: An Administrator's Guide: www.kings.k12.ca.us/SELPA/SecondaryTransitionResources/1-TransitionMaterialsforProgram

Learning Exercises Self-Check Questions

1. What is the purpose of the individual transition plan?
2. Who should be on the transition planning team?
3. What are the barriers to transition planning and services for students with disabilities in rural areas?
4. What community service agents may be incorporated into an individualized transition plan?
5. What are the categories of transition services?

Experiential Exercise

1. Develop an individual transition plan for a transition student with autism spectrum disorder living in a rural area. Be sure to identify key services and timeline for delivery of services.
2. Interview a special education teacher, a special education coordinator, or rehabilitation

counselor to survey their perspective on transition planning and services for students with disabilities in rural communities.

3. Interview a parent of a child with a disability to obtain their perspective/experience of the transition planning process.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Which of the following is the most recent reauthorization of the IDEA Act?
 - (a) 1997
 - (b) 2012
 - (c) 2000
 - (d) 2004
2. The transition planning process for individuals with disabilities should begin at what age?
 - (a) 12
 - (b) 8
 - (c) 21
 - (d) 16
3. Which of the following composition makes up the transition team?
 - (a) Educators, friends and family, and fellow classmates
 - (b) Educators, counselors, and legislators
 - (c) Educators, counselors, service professionals, and parents
 - (d) None of the above
4. Which of the following are barriers to transition in rural areas?
 - (a) Too many qualified professionals in special education to fill positions and as a result having to migrate to areas where opportunities are more favorable.
 - (b) Few qualified professionals in special education and teachers having to teach beyond their expertise.
 - (c) Not many accessible transportation and as a result having to rely on family for support is often met with reluctance.
 - (d) Students in rural areas have unlimited access to resources but are not motivated to work toward transition goals.
5. Are parents experts of their own child as it relates to transition planning?
 - (a) Yes, parents are experts of their own children and should be incorporated into all aspects of the transition planning process.
 - (b) Yes, they should be included in the transition planning process for the first meeting but not included in subsequent meetings.
 - (c) Yes, parents are only experts at home life activities and their opinions are only valuable in planning independent living goals.
 - (d) Yes, but only special education professionals are experts of their child outside of the home setting.
6. ITP stands for which of the following?
 - (a) Individual transition plan
 - (b) Initialized training program
 - (c) Independent training plan
 - (d) Intervention transition plan
7. Which of the following are goals of a transition plan?
 - (a) Independent living skills training only
 - (b) Vocational training and postsecondary education
 - (c) Complete high school with the goal of working in a sheltered workshop
 - (d) Parenting skills and homemaking skills only
8. What role are parents considered to play once a young adult with a disability graduates from high school?
 - (a) Continue in their parental role but do not participate in transition activities after graduation.
 - (b) Continue to be a support system for their child by being an advocate for inclusive services.
 - (c) Parents continue to lobby to have their child stay longer in school instead of graduating high school.
 - (d) Parents are responsible for themselves and have done enough for their child upon graduation from high school.
9. Which of the following best describes benefit of participating in a family and or child support group?
 - (a) Is beneficial for the family and or child
 - (b) Is only helpful if there is a crisis

- (c) Cannot help with connecting to community resources
 - (d) Is the only resource a child or parent need in the transition process
10. Transition planning is an individualized process that is determined based on the child's:
- (a) Goals and needs and starts at age 16.
 - (b) Goals and needs lasting no more than 2 months
 - (c) Goals and needs, however, the teacher's needs are more important than those of the child
 - (d) Goals and needs and continues into a child's elderly years

Key

- 1. D
- 2. D
- 3. C
- 4. C
- 5. A
- 6. A
- 7. B
- 8. B
- 9. A
- 10. A

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