

State of Nevada Autism Task Force
Transition, Employment and Community Inclusion Subcommittee
MINUTES

Wednesday, April 30, 2008
Teleconference

Members Present: Flo Laroy, Barbie Lauver, Kathy Treants, Angel Lomboy, Dr. Tessie Rose, Tammy Garrison, Korri Ward, Scott Harrington and Suzanne Thomas.

Members Absent: Joan Shaffer, Melissa Pegg, and Jessica Lomboy.

Staff: Melanie Stevens

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

Flo Laroy opened the meeting at 1:05 pm by welcoming those present and asking all to introduce themselves.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Harrington motioned to approve the minutes from the April 15, 2008 meeting of the Transition, Employment and Community Inclusion subcommittee. Ms. Lauver seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING TRANSITION ISSUES:

Ms. LaRoy re-distributed a document of findings and recommendations for the Transition subcommittee (see below). As the committee went through the document, they made additional suggestions and edits. Ms. LaRoy asked if anyone had any information concerning the Autism Registry that resulted from the Autism Summit. **Mr. Harrington agreed to connect with Debra Vigil to find out its status. Ms. Treants will forward out the latest from the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Counsel concerning the Autism Registry. Ms. Lauver and Ms. Thomas will look at registries from other states and bring that information back to the next meeting.** The committee discussed and recommended the State of Nevada offer a Transition Certificate Program for anyone interested in it. Ms. Thomas will approach the teachers union to encourage them to provide Autism Training to teachers and aides. Ms. Thomas suggested proposing to the Legislature the idea that people be paid extra to be use visual aides for individuals with Autism, similar to those who are paid as translators for Spanish or sign language. She will run the idea past a couple of legislators she knows to see what they think. **Ms. LaRoy will get more information on after-school programs for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Mr. Harrington will send out a video of the Student First organization to the group.** Ms. LaRoy would like to see a mentorship program for after-school programs and clubs installed in the schools for children with Autism to interact with other students who would be willing mentor them. **Ms. LaRoy will write a recommendation for transportation funding for after-school programs for children with Autism.**

PUBLIC COMMENT:

There was none.

SET NEXT MEETING DATE:

The committee agreed to meet again on May 15th, 2008, at 10:00 a.m. to continue their discussions.

ADJOURNMENT:

With no other business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 2:35 p.m.

TRANSITION

1. Data Collection & Student Tracking System

Findings:

Numbers do not reflect actual number of students with ASD.

There is a significant problem in capturing the information on the number of students in the transition process served by school districts. Although school districts are required to collect data on students under the primary category of autism, the numbers do not reflect the actual number of students with ASD. Autism may be marked as a secondary disability or not at all. Students with Asperger's may not even be identified or misidentified. Many students with ASD may have one of the other disability categories checked on their IEP, for instance, developmental delay (up to age 6), learning disability, speech and language, emotional or multiple. Students with Asperger's may be in regular education with accommodations. Therefore, the numbers students with ASD are far greater than reported. One would not think this would be an issue except that many students with ASD still experience significant social issues across all ability levels. Misreading of social situations, along with a lack of appropriate or generalized social skills often result in inappropriate behaviors that could be reduced or avoided through appropriate teaching and support. This lack of social intuition will often undermine success, especially once students leave the supportive school environment and move into the community. Even students still in school may experience challenges if their social skill deficits are not addressed satisfactorily. So it is important that students with ASD are identified and subsequently receive an education that will meet their needs and be successful to the best of their abilities.

Clark County School District

308 students aged 14-21 with a primary diagnosis of Autism.

Fifty (50) students with primary diagnosis of Autism are 18 – 21

Elko County School District

Per the Dec.1 count, 30 students in the Elko County School District were identified with Autism. 9 of the students were between the ages of 14 and 21. There are no Autism specific programs in our school district at this time.

Easter Seals – McComb Transition Connect Program (S. NV) Five youths with ASD are being served by this program.

PALS – Social and Life Skills Program/Community Inclusion and Employment Services

Transitions from high school to college or adult life - currently working with four young adults. Two of these young adults (17 yr old Female, 19 yr old male) attend our weekly social skills group that has a mix of individuals with ASD from 14-19 years old. The other two young adults work in a 1:1 setting (one individual was mentioned above 23 yr old male, and the other is an 18 yr old male).

Recommendations:

- Develop data collection system that tracks all students with ASD and the programs in which they are being served.
- Collect data on post school outcomes to determine where supports and programs are needed to serve students with ASD.

2. Training - Teachers/Support Staff/Transition Specialists

Findings:

- a. Inadequate supply of teachers trained in ASD and experienced in transition needs of students with ASD. This is true for regular education and special education teachers.
- b. Teacher support staff is also inadequately trained and lack experience with the ASD population.
- **The numbers of transition specialists available in CCSD are decreasing as the number of students in need of services are increasing.**

Transition specialists (TS) are hired by CCSD to aid teachers and parents in facilitating the transition from school to post-school services, specifically vocation rehabilitation. The lack of expansion commensurate with district growth and budget cuts has reduced the number of transition specialists to 4-5.

In 2000-2001 SY, there were 7 transition specialists and 2 SPTAs serving the schools. Then in 2001-2002 SY, CCSD went to the regional model where one TS was assigned to each of the 5 regions, and one TS and ones SPTA was assigned to Helen J Stewart Special School and the 7th TS floated for the postsecondary programs while the last SPTA left the position and was not replaced. Today, there is one TS in each region - although one of the positions was unfilled for the majority of this school year, 1 TS at Helen J Stewart, one part-time TS at Variety school who is also a Work Experience coordinator and one SPTA in ONE of the regions.

Recommendations:

- Provide regular and special education teachers with ASD training so students with ASD can be served in all educational settings.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of teachers and transition specialists in the transition planning. Provide professional development opportunities for teachers who are unclear about their role in the process.
- Teacher preparation institutions should collaborate to identify desired outcomes of transition courses in the state. A greater focus in preparing teachers in the process is vital.
- Consider a university training program (person preparation) to prepare transition specialists statewide. Currently, few specialists are available to bridge the gap between school and community-based services.
- Consider funding additional transition specialists to assist school personnel in connecting students with community agencies. Create positions for transition specialists with specialized training to work with students with ASD.

3. Transition Activities in School-based Settings/Supports

Findings:

- Focus on transition currently is mandated to begin at the age of 14 years old. At this age a student would be moving from middle to high school or would already be in high school. However, beginning the examination of transition at this age may not allow for enough time to prepare students for college,

the work force, etc. If the transition process is examined at an earlier age (10 years old), then there may be more time to help build the skills necessary for successful transition.

- Lack of support in participation in extracurricular activities (clubs, sports, etc.) and lack of transportation to and from such activities. Participation in these activities and organizations may help to build necessary life/social skills (such as following directions, good sportsmanship, working as a team, etc.) that may aid in the transition to high school, college or work.

Recommendations:

4. Transition Programs

Findings:

Although there are specialized transition programs in some school districts, they are inadequate to meet the needs of the current population of ASD students. Thus there will be a shortage of programs as the number of ASD students increase over the coming years. Once students age out of school-based transition programs there is no vehicle to move them into the community employment sector. Students often experience job placement wait times of months to years. During periods of unemployment student often lose job, life, and social skills due to lack of exposure to work and community settings.

Barriers to CCSD transition programs

1. The topic of transition and specialized post-secondary transition programs, are not often talked about in IEP meetings unless the

- student is graduating. Due to this late start, students often encounter waiting list to participate in the CCSD programs.
2. Knowledge of when to apply for CCSD programs is not always afforded the student/family
 3. The intent and outcomes of the programs are often not fully communicated.
 4. There is a lack of follow through with VR or DRC once a student ages out
 5. The programs are not individualized at all. A comment was made about a “group IEP” for incoming students in the PACE, POST, and JDP programs!
 6. How can a student capable of competitive employment be able to transfer the skills learned in the PACE program when they are disinterested in building maintenance or culinary arts? Where will these same students learn social skills & other soft skills?

Although Easter Seals – McComb Transition Connect Program in S. NV is serving students with ASD information about the program does not appear to widely disseminate so parents and teachers may not be aware of its offerings.

Recommendations:

- Increase the capacity of the current transition and post-school programs to provide services to more students in need.
- Provide a seamless movement from school transition programs to community job opportunities

5. Transition Planning Documents /Activities

Findings:

Futures planning is not a regular activity for most students. Parents are often unaware that transition activities for their children must be started early

Recommendations:

- Futures planning for each student beginning at age 14 (although earlier is preferred). The purpose is to identify desired post-school outcomes and develop an action plan to help the students work toward those goals. Futures planning encourages person-centered planning and helps facilitate movement toward a common vision for the future.
- Create a transition planning document that is given to parents/individuals with Autism to empower them in the process and clarify their roles in the process. The purpose is similar to what we discussed about the questions parents should think about before coming to the Transition IEP.
- Consider restructuring the transition IEP to put post-school outcomes first. Assessment data should not guide the Transition IEP (currently 1st in the document). Instead, the students' post-secondary goals (as identified by IDEA; e.g., go to college, work, move in with friends) should guide educators and parents in identifying potential areas of need and which assessments will be used to assess those areas of need. The transition action plan should be developed from that data and then supplemented with a few key goals and objectives. Everyone should be responsible for items in the action plan, including parents, students, and teachers.
- Increase parent participation at transition workshops, parent trainings, job fairs and community transition events. Provide incentives for families to participate. Find alternate ways of informing parents of opportunities rather than relying on the student to bring information home.

Use technology to connect working parents to transition opportunities, such as a virtual job fair.

6. Transition to Post Secondary Education

Findings:

An increase in the number of students with ASD and early intervention services has correspondingly resulted in an increased interest in attending colleges and universities. Postsecondary education and training are recognized assets in obtaining employment and establishing a career track. Students with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) are often encouraged to attend post secondary schools due to their high academic achievement.

Students can find the college experience daunting due to the following barriers:

1. The lack of preparation at the middle and high school level to develop the skills needed to navigate the college environment, including self-advocacy, organizational tools, and social skills.
2. Self-help and independent living skills may be an issue for students living away from home for the first time.
3. Students not seeking assistance with coursework when challenges are first recognized.
4. Poorly developed social skills or lacking support to correct social errors.
5. Students are not hooked up with disability resource centers
6. Resource center personnel do not understand the needs of students with ASD and how to support them.
7. Academic and social supports are inadequate or not available.

Northern Nevada

UNR serves 16 kids diagnosed with ASD, as well as 16 at WNC in Carson. The DRC services are exceptional in both institutions, and the directors understand they will be getting more kids with ASD. Literature shows that even attending one class at a college results in a high probability of being employed (85%). Students can take classes for credit, audit them, or just hang out at the social events on campus with their same-age peers. It is a win-win situation with Post Secondary Education

Recommendations:

- The student's IEP team should assist the student and family in exploring and developing accommodations needed. Pre-requisite skills needed for college should be goals in the IEP.
- High school guidance and VR counselors can assist students in navigating the admission process and linking students with the college disability resource center.
- Utilize a Autism Transition Specialist to contact colleges who have successful programs for students with ASD. Such programs utilize student mentors that assist in developing routines, socializing, and adapting to college life.
- VR services can help by developing an Individual plan for employment and review financial needs.
- Students need to develop self-advocacy skills and understand when to inform the instructor/professor the needed accommodations for their courses. Students will need to decide when or if they want to disclose their disability. The New England Asperger's Association suggests that "early disclosure to appropriate college personnel improves the chances for success, and minimizes the chances of misunderstandings

or unfortunate incidents... We highly recommend that you give college information about yourself and about AS after you are admitted and before the first semester” (Jekel & Loo, 2003)

Resources:

Ask and Tell: Self-Advocacy and Disclosure for People on the Autism Spectrum by Ruth Elaine Joyner Hane, Kassiane Sibley, Stephen M. Shore, Roger Meyer, Phil Schwarz, and Liane Holliday Willey.

The 411 on Disability Disclosure: a Workbook for Youth with Disabilities by the Office of Disability Employment Policy and the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability can be purchased or downloaded at <http://www.transcen.org/>.

- Provide college student with ASD additional supports.

Sample of useful college supports listed in the 32nd Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (IRI), and published a resource titled, *Rehabilitation of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (Dew & Alan, 2007).

1. Access to assistive technology, especially in relation to learning needs and or planning, organization, and scheduling
 2. A reduced course load, at least for the first semester
 3. A single dorm room
 4. A social mentor
 5. An assigned point person to serve as liaison with the student
 6. Support for executive functioning needs, such as regular check-ins or helping with prioritizing
 7. Counseling, especially related to social issues that can be quite baffling since there are many new situations, including dating, drinking, and parties
- Share information on ASD programs, options and supports currently available at Disability Resource Center (DRC) Offices at UNR and WNC with other Nevada universities and colleges.

