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How do High School Senior Students Perceive Their Transition Programming at a Career and
Technical School?

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate senior high school students' perceptions of the transition programming they received during the course of their high school years at a local career and technical school. Ten students that received special education services at a career and technical school were randomly selected to complete the *In-School Transition Survey Interview*. The survey examined opinions of postsecondary education, employment plans, community participation, and their plan for where they intend to live one year after graduation. Survey data was analyzed and reported by transition area.

Students need to be prepared for life after high school graduation and the transition programming students receive impacts their future. This research provides a snapshot of the perceptions high school seniors had of their transition programming at one career and technical school. The data provides relevant information to the school, district, and region in order to make evidence-based decisions regarding program improvement and contributions to the transition literature, providing the students' views and perceptions.

How do High School Senior Students Perceive Their Transition Programming at a Career and Technical School?

Test, Fowler, White, Richter, and Walker (2009) note that “one of the more significant transitions in a person’s life is being graduated from high school and pursuing a productive adulthood” (p. 16). Furthermore, “approximately 28% of students with disabilities do not complete high school (National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, 2005), which increases the likelihood that students with disabilities will experience low wages, high rates of incarceration, and limited access to postsecondary education” (p. 16).

High school students that receive career and technical education can influence their transition from high school. Brown (2003) remarks that:

Career and technical education (CTE) can benefit students directly by providing earning advantages, both before and after graduation. It can provide indirect benefits by increasing student engagement, retention, and persistence and directing them to postsecondary education and the pursuit of lifelong learning. (p. 3)

Wehmeyer & Sands (1998) suggested that “although significant attention has been devoted to identifying methods of promoting parent and professional participation in education and transition planning, comparatively little focus has been placed on directly preparing students to assume responsibility for their own planning” (p. 188).

This research examined areas of high school students’ transition programming at a career and technical school. All study participants were receiving special education services. Students’ responses explore their perceptions of postsecondary education, employment plans, community participation, and plans where they will live one year after graduation. This research is important to educators as educators need to be aware of the findings and whether or not there may be gaps in the transition programming provided at the career and technical school. If any gaps do exist, they can be addressed so that future students are prepared to take responsibility for their transition from high school.

Review of Literature

Transition

Transition is an important part of everyone's life. Halpern (1994) indicated:

The word "transition" as it applies to special education and rehabilitation programs, has developed 2 distinctive meanings within the United States literature. In its generic sense, transition refers to that period of time during which students leave school and begin to assume adult roles in their communities. In recent years, however, the term has also been adopted as a label for a specific program of federal support that was designed to enhance transition programs and services for adolescents and young adults with disabilities. (p. 194-95)

Super 1963 (as cited in Kochhar-Bryant, Bassett, & Webb, 2009) reported that:

All adolescents face a range of developmental tasks as they make the transition from high school to adult roles and make difficult choices about relationships, careers, and postsecondary options. Exploring and forming a clear choice about a career path is a very important stage for older adolescents and young adults. (p. 16-17)

Greene and Kochhar-Bryant (2003) investigated why transition is important. In their review of the literature, they found that youth with disabilities are not ready for employment and adult autonomy. Outcomes for youth transitioning from high school remain disturbing. In 2000, the National Council on Disability indicated that 88 percent of the states failed to ensure compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The disability council called it 'a crisis' for youth with disabilities.

Transition is important because as Greene and Kochhar-Bryant said, "Young people with disabilities lag behind their peers without disabilities on every measure of success—graduation rates, diploma achievement, employment, postsecondary education participation completion, and independent living" (p. 7).

Legal Mandates for Transition

Test, Aspel, and Everson (2006) noted that IDEA was amended in 1997. The authors said the amendments to IDEA that effect transition either directly or indirectly are that:

“...related services was added to the list of possible transition services. Related services may include, to name a few, speech and language therapy, psychological services, physical therapy, rehabilitation counseling, therapeutic recreation, social work, occupational therapy, and /or transportation. Second, the definition of special education was broadened to include educational activities designed specifically to prepare students for transition, including vocational education and applied technology education. Third, a statement of transition service needs that focuses on the student’s course of study must be present in the IEP beginning at the age of 14. (p. 21)

In 2004, IDEA was amended again. As in 1997, amendments also had an effect on transition services. Test, Aspel, and Everson (2006) indicated:

First, the definition of transition services was changed to emphasize that services must be designed “within a results-oriented process” focusing on “improving the academic and functional achievement” of students. In addition, vocational education was added to the list of potential transition services and each student’s strengths as well as preferences and interests must be taken into account when considering his or her transition needs. “...the purpose of each student’s free, appropriate public education is to ‘prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living’. “...all references to transition activities beginning at age 14 by mandating that all transition requirements are to be followed no later than the first IEP in effect when a student turns 16 years old. “...schools are not required to include transition goals beyond high school in IEPs by including appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments and describe transition

services.” “...as students with disabilities graduate from high school, they must be provided with a summary of their accomplishments and transition needs.” (p. 22-23)

In regards to postsecondary transition, Nielsen (2008) indicated that for children with disabilities, it is challenging entering adult life. With IDEA regulations, the transition can be easier. When a student ages out or drops out of school, according to the law, there may or may not be a continuation of services.

The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) took effect in 1992 (Gordon, 2008). “By law, educators must now provide programming and services to special populations, including individuals with disabilities” (p. 162). Morrissey 1993 (as cited in Gordon, 2008) said,

The ADA defines an *individual with a disability* as one who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, one who has a record of such a disability, or is regarded as having such a disability. (p. 162)

Career and Technical Education

Gordon (2008) noted:

Career and technical education in high schools and community colleges no longer should be restricted to occupations that do not require a bachelor’s or advanced degree. Instead, the statutory definition should encourage collaboration between vocational and nonvocational educators to prepare students both for work and for education. (p. 15)

Harvey and Wonacott 2001 (as cited in Haber & Sutherland, 2008) recognized that the outcomes for students with disabilities reveal that employment, wages, and on the whole, financial success was improved if they received Career and Technical Education as part of their secondary education.

Students that need special education services can be successful and meet their academic and IEP goals while attending a career and technical school. All accommodation and modifications can be met at a career and technical school. Depending upon a student’s degree of disability, career

assessments can be done with the student to ensure that the program the student selects will allow him/her the opportunity for success.

Post Secondary Education

Several students with disabilities begin college unprepared with the necessary skills to successfully transition from secondary to postsecondary education (Gill, 2007). “Although postsecondary institutions have an obligation to level the playing field for students with disabilities, the rules for requesting and receiving accommodations differ from the rules in high school” (Hurtubis Sahlen & Lehmann, 2006, p. 28).

A summary of students’ accomplishments and transition needs is documented on the Summary of Performance (SOP). A SOP is completed for all students participating in special education prior to graduating from high school. The SOP is typically completed by the Intervention Specialist after receiving input from the student’s academic and/or technical teachers and the student. When the student enters college, the SOP can be given to the Office of Disability Services at the college. The SOP provides pertinent information about the student’s academic accomplishments, functional performance, accommodations and/or modifications from the IEP, and specific student’ needs.

Employment

The 2004 National Organization on Disability/Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities as reported in Guy, Sitlington, Larsen, and Frank (2009) found that:

Only 35% of people with disabilities reported being employed full- or part-time, compared with 78% of those who do not have disabilities. Nearly 3 times as many people with disabilities live in poverty, with annual household incomes below \$15,000 (26% vs. 9% of those without disabilities). (p. 31)

Muthumbi (2008) had this to say about employment: “Although students with disabilities share similar post-school goals with their counterparts without disabilities, including attending continuing education and training, attaining employment, enhancing social competencies, and

increasing independence, most students with disabilities identify obtaining employment as a primary goal” (p. 94).

Rusch and Braddock 2004 (as cited in Carter, Owens, Sweeden, Trainor, Thompson, Ditchman, & Cole, 2009) said:

Leaving high school without these early work experiences can set a future course of unemployment, underemployment, and lowered expectations that can last throughout adulthood. Such discouraging outcomes underscore the need for innovative but practical approaches that lead to more meaningful high school transition experiences for all youth. (p. 38)

Making the choice to attend a career and technical school is a step towards gaining employable skills for the future. A career and technical school provides hands-on training, employability skills, job shadowing experiences, social interactions, and can lead to school-to-work opportunities and apprenticeship employment.

Independent Living

Cronin 1996 (as cited in Mazzotti, Rowe, Kelley, Test, Fowler, Kohler & Kortering 2009) outlined the area of independent living as: “...includ[ing] all skills that enhance and individual’s ability to live independently” (p. 49). As stated by Olson and Platt (2004), “Children with disabilities grow up. They grow up to become adolescents and adults with disabilities” (p. 357). It is important that students with disabilities are prepared to adjust to adult life after high school graduation. Developing crucial skills such as meal planning and preparation, budgeting money to meet household expenses, housekeeping, personal hygiene, planning recreational activities, and accessing transportation are needed for successful independent living. Therefore, independent living skills should be addressed as part of students’ transition plans.

Leisure and Community Participation

The one person who knows which activities are best and most enjoyable for the student is the student him/herself. In regards to this area, Pierangelo and Giuliani (2004) said, “Many youth with disabilities need special assistance to learn how to use their recreation and leisure time constructively.” Leisure and Community Participation should also be addressed during a student’s IEP meeting and included in the transition planning. Items that could be included to contribute to the overall well-being of students with disabilities include: attending church activities, joining a local sports team, attending free workshops of interest at the library, joining a gym, spending time with a mentor or friend, and participating at community gatherings at the park. Having a sense of purpose and belonging to the community is fundamental for everyone’s well-being. It is important to take into consideration that students with disabilities may need guidance on how to access activities that they will enjoy after high school.

The purpose of this research was to examine senior high school students’ perceptions of the transition programming they received during the course of their high school years at a local career and technical school. The data offers pertinent information to the school, district, and region in order to make evidence-based decisions regarding program improvement.

Method

Location

The career and technical school chosen for this study is located in a rural county in the Appalachian region of Ohio. The 11th and 12th grade students that attend this career and technical school come from one of the 16 home schools located in three-county area. This specific school was chosen because the researcher is employed there as an Academic-/Technical Tutor working with students that receive special education services.

Instrument

The instrument selected for this research was a survey created and initially used by The Center for Innovation in Transition and Employment (CITE) located at Kent State University, in cooperation with Ohio's Office of Exceptional Children (OEC) and one of Ohio's former Special Education Regional Resource Centers. This survey was first used to gather data on high school graduates who received special education services who were preparing to exit high school. The survey was revised and the revised version is currently used as part of the Ohio Longitudinal Transition Study (OLTS). The purpose of the OLTS is to gather perceptions of graduating high school students just prior to graduation with a follow up one year after high school graduation (Center for Innovation, 2009).

The *In-School Transition Survey Interview* consists of ten multiple choice questions. The questions explore the areas of postsecondary education, employment plans, community participation, and the participant's plan of where they will live one year after graduation. There is also a question that asks the participant, "How do you plan to pay for the things you need after graduation?" There are 11 items for the participant to choose from for this question. The survey also delves into how helpful such things as job shadowing, in-school job, visits to college, paid work on their own, and IEP/Transition Meetings were preparing for life after graduation.

Participants

At the career and technical school, there are 408 students enrolled. Of the 408 students, 71 students have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Forty-four 11th graders have an IEP and twenty-seven 12th graders have an IEP. Only the students that were at least 18 years old and would be available to complete a survey were considered to be prospective participants. This left a total of twenty 12th grade students that were considered prospective participants.

Procedures

Following approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), informational letters were mailed to all parents of the 20 potential participants. The parental letter was just a

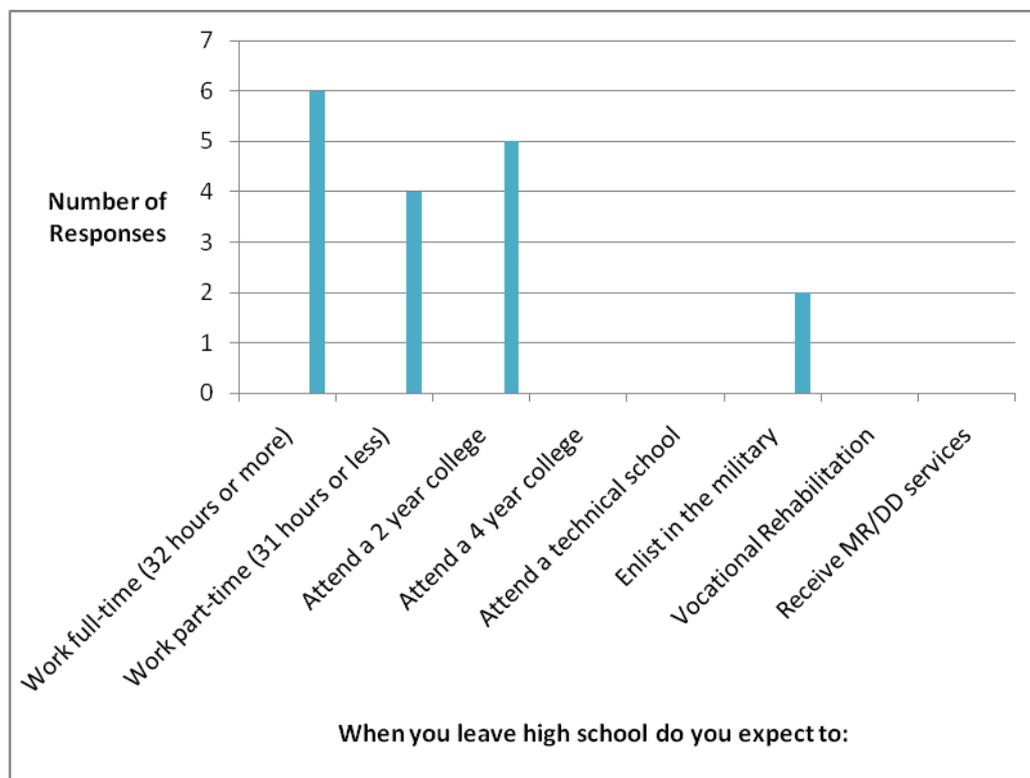
formality because all of the potential participants were over the age of 18 years old. No responses were required from the parents of the potential participants. One week after the letters were mailed out, the researcher used an online random number generator to select ten potential participants. The researcher met with each student individually to discuss both the survey and the university consent forms. After each potential participant signed the consent form, the researcher gave each participant a survey to complete on his/her own if they chose, or have it read aloud by the researcher. If the participant chose to complete the survey on his/her own, it was completed with the researcher nearby who was available to answer any questions. However, all participants chose to complete the survey on their own. Participants asked the researcher for clarification when needed. It took most participants an average of 15 minutes to complete the survey. The researcher collected the consent form and survey upon completion. The first ten potential participants that were approached by the researcher signed the consent form and answered the questions on the survey.

Results

For each of the ten questions on the survey, the researcher tallied all responses and charted each item. This section reports findings in terms of students' perceptions of their preparation for expected employment and postsecondary outcomes, expected fields of employment, leisure and community participation expectations, and the participants' plans on how he/she will pay for things.

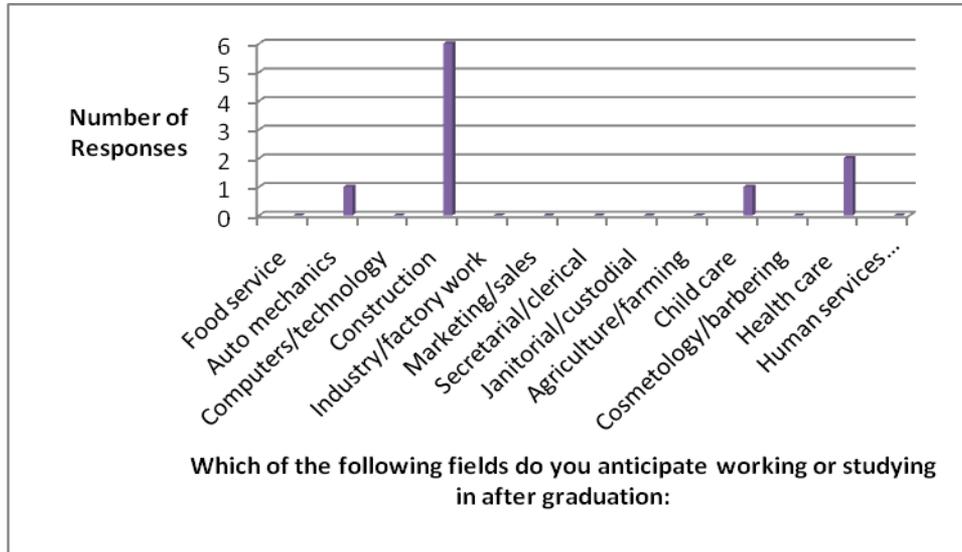
After the participants exit high school, 60% reported they intend to work full-time (32 hours or more). Fifty percent of the participants plan to attend a two year college while 20% of the participants indicated they intend to enlist in the military. None of the participants planned to attend a four year college, technical school, nor receive vocational rehabilitation or MR/DD services. See Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Expected Employment and Postsecondary Outcomes

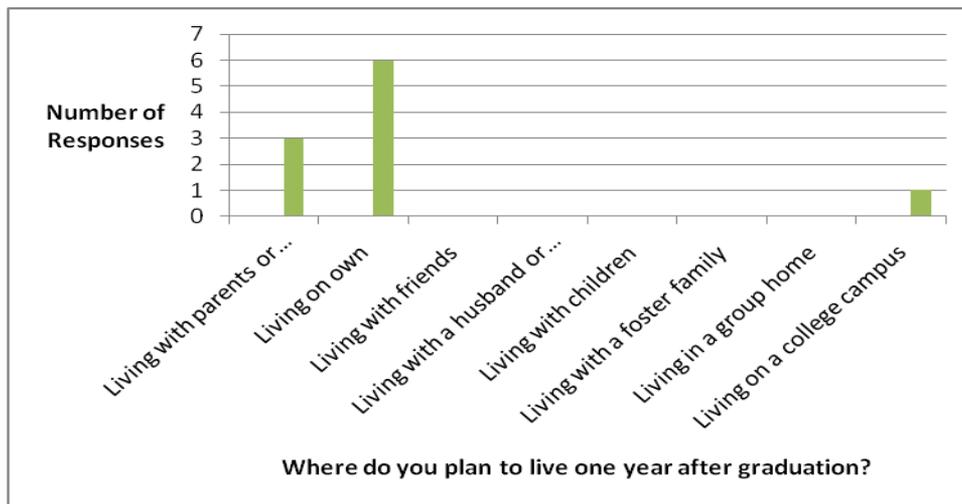
Of the 13 fields that participants could choose from to indicate where they foresee working or studying after graduation, construction was first with 60%. Healthcare was chosen 20% of the time followed by auto mechanics and child care that both received 10% of the participants' choices. This information is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2.
Expected Fields of Employment.



One year after graduation, 60% of the surveyed participants implied that they plan to live on their own. Thirty percent of the participants planned to live with parents or a relative one year after graduation. One participant, or 10%, marked that he/she plans to live on a college campus one year after graduation. See Figure 3 for details.

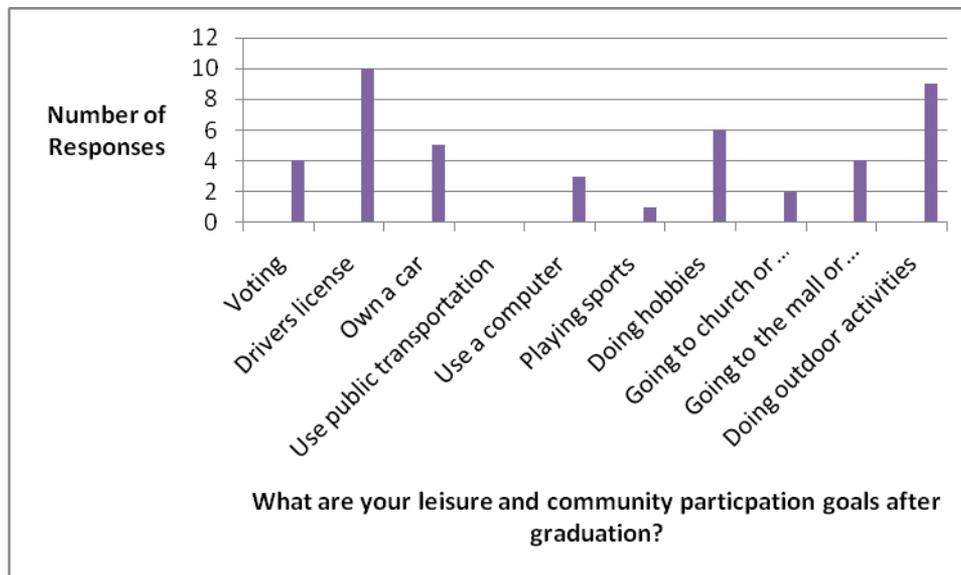
Figure 3.
Living Plans One Year After Graduation.



All ten participants have their drivers' license while only five of the ten participants own a car. None of the participants indicated that they intend to use public transportation after graduation. Ninety percent of the participants plan on doing outdoor activities and 20% of the participants plan to attend church as part of their leisure and community participation goals after graduation. Thirty percent revealed they will use a computer as part of their leisure and community participation goals after graduation. This information can be found in Figure 4.

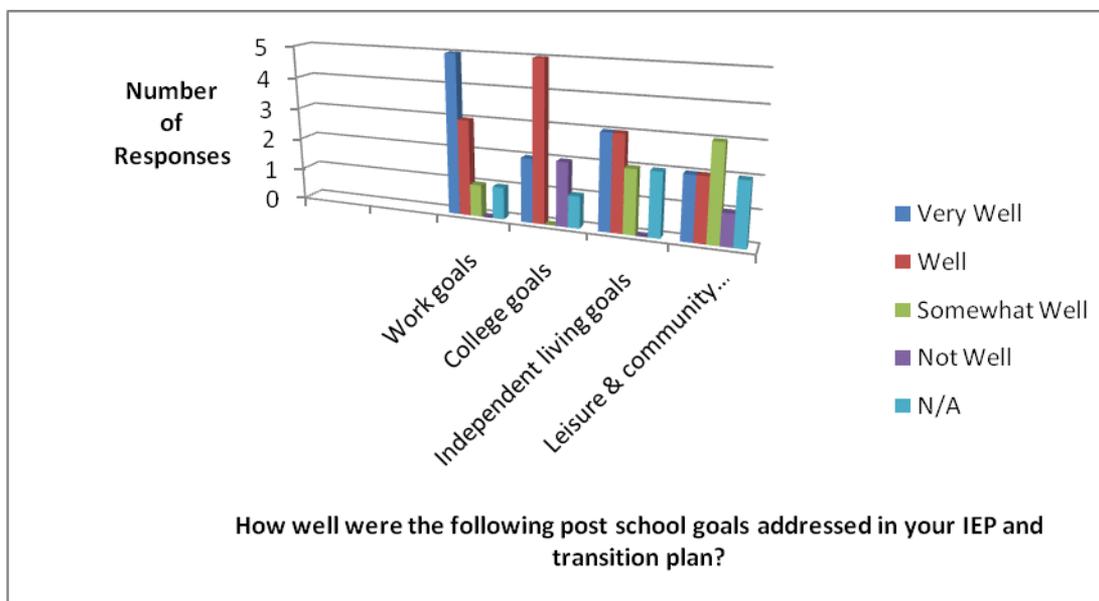
Figure 4.

Leisure and Community Participation Goals after Graduation.



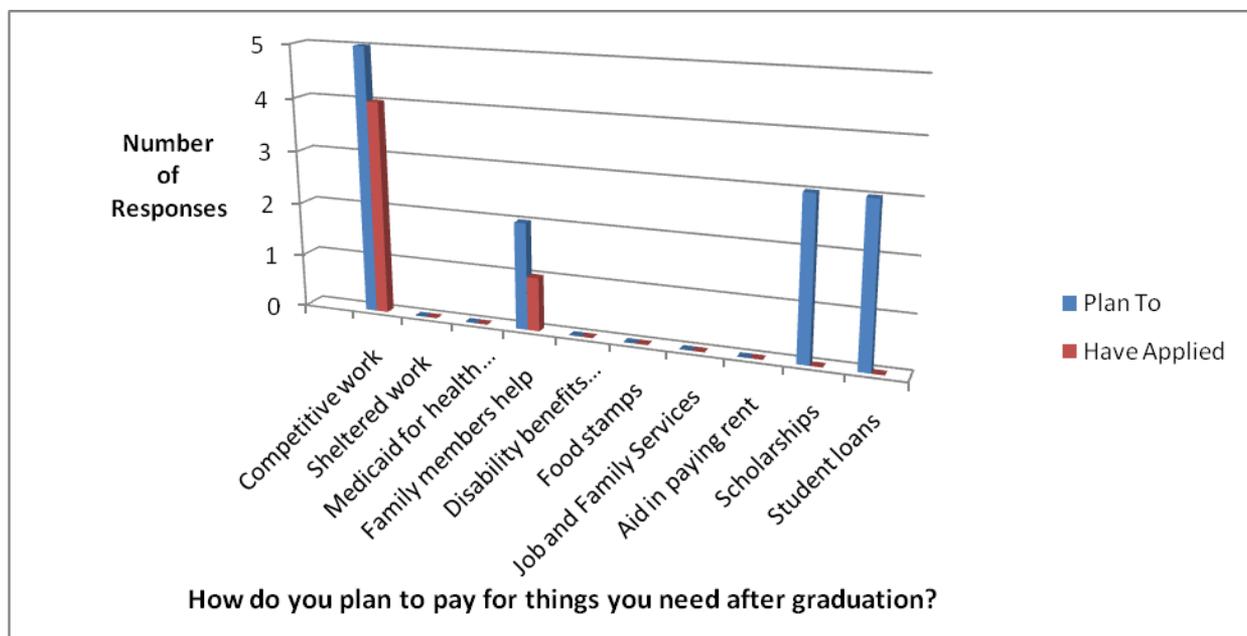
Fifty percent of the participants believed that their work goals were addressed very well in their IEP and transition plan better as compared to their college goals, independent living goals, and leisure and community participation goals. Collectively, fifty percent of the participants rated that their college goals were addressed well. For independent living goals, participants indicated equally 30% each as their goals were met *very well* and *well*. Twenty-percent rated *somewhat well* and *not-applicable* for independent living goals. For the leisure and community participation goals, 20% believed their needs were addressed *very well* or *well*, 30% *somewhat well*, and 10% as *not well*. See Figure 5 for specifics.

Figure 5.

Post School Goals Addressed.

After graduation, 50% of the participants plan to competitively work to pay for the things they need after graduation while 40% have already applied for competitive work. Twenty percent of the participants plan to have family members help while 10% have applied for family members help. Thirty percent of the participants plan to use scholarships or student loans to help pay for things after they graduate. See Figure 6.

Figure 6.

Plan to Pay for Things After Graduation.

Students were asked to rank how helpful a list of several items were in preparation for life after graduation. Table 1 indicates student rankings from highest to lowest. Career/Technical Education was ranked the highest with 90% of the students ranking it as helpful or very helpful. Seventy percent of the students ranked IEP/Transition meetings and Career Assessment as being helpful or very helpful. Ten percent of the students ranked school-supervised paid work in the community and Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR, BSVI) services helpful or very helpful. Note: Ninety percent of the students indicated that Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR, BSVI) services were not applicable to them.

Table 1.

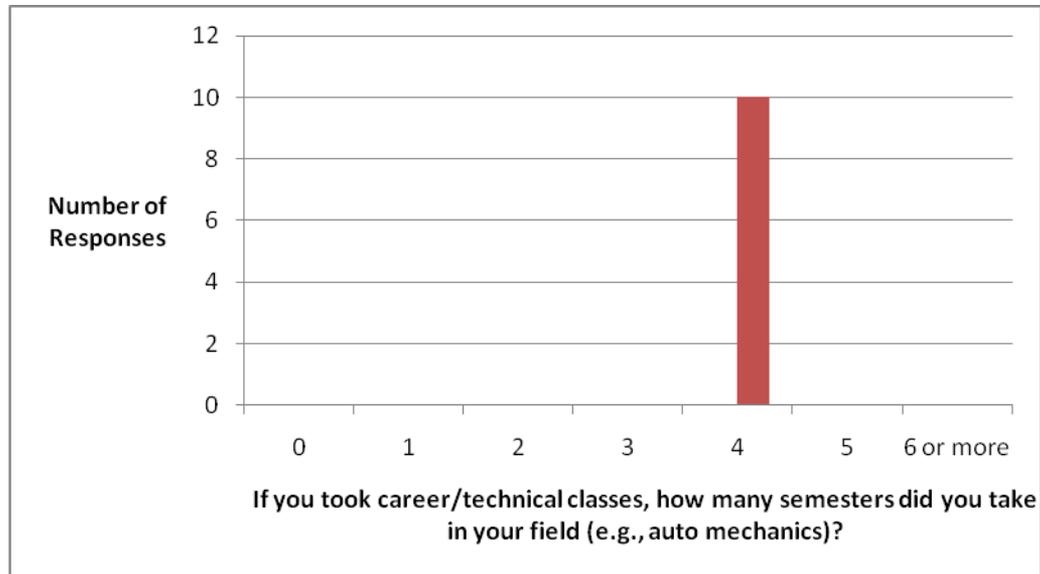
Student Ranking of Helpfulness of Activities.

Activity	Percent of Students Ranking Helpful or Very Helpful
Career/Technical Education	90%
IEP/Transition meetings	70%
Career assessment	70%
Job shadowing	50%
Paid work on your own	50%
Proficiency testing	40%
In-school job	40%
Extracurricular activities	40%
Help applying for college	40%
Visits to college	40%
School supervised volunteer work in the community	30%
Preparing for college entrance exams (SAT, ACT)	30%
School supervised paid work in the community	10%
Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR, BSVI) services	10%
Classes at a community college	N/A
Coursework (specify)	N/A
MR/DD services	N/A
Other school-to-career activities (specify)	N/A

One hundred percent of the students indicated that they took four semesters in their field of career/technical classes (e.g. auto mechanics) These findings are reported in Figure 7.

Figure 7.

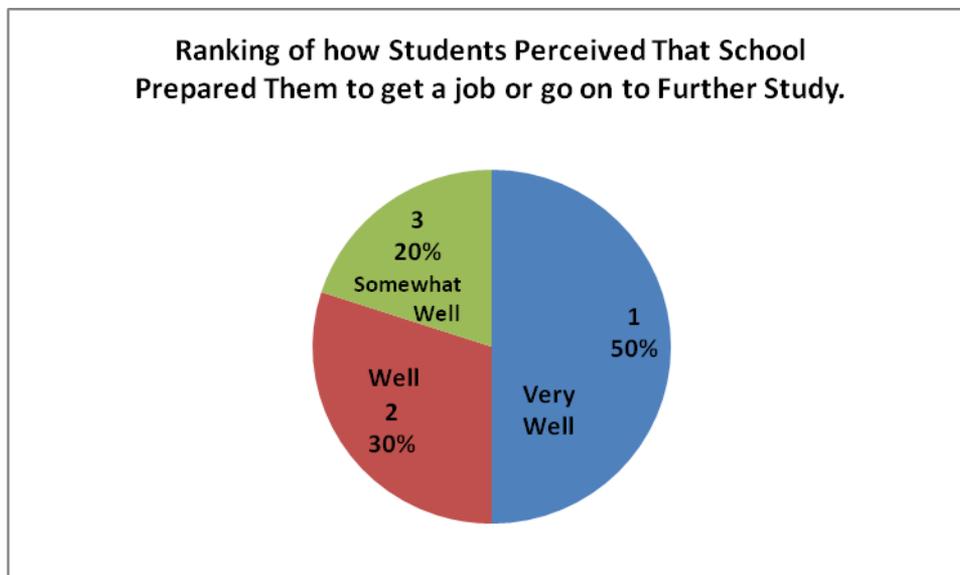
Semesters Taken in Career/Technical Education Field.



Eighty percent of the students indicated that school had prepared them very well or well for getting a job or going on for further study. Twenty-percent of the students indicated that they were prepared somewhat well for getting a job or going on to further study. None responded that school did not prepare them well at all. See Figure 8.

Figure 8.

Student Preparedness for Getting a job or Further Study.



Thirty-percent of the students surveyed specified that having classes offered at a community college would have helped them better prepare for life after graduation. Twenty-percent of the students responded that an in-school job and paid work on their own would have assisted them for life after graduation. These findings are reported in Table 2.

Table 2.

Courses That Would Have Helped Students Better Prepare for Life After Graduation.

High School Courses or Activities That Students Were not Able to Take	Percent of Students Indicating That Course or Activity Would Have Better Prepared Them for Life After Graduation
Classes at a community college	30%
In-school job	20%
Paid work on your own	20%
School supervised paid work in the community	10%
Job shadowing	10%
Other school-to-career activities (specify)	10%
Proficiency testing	0%
IEP/Transition meetings	0%
School supervised volunteer work	0%
Career/Technical Education	0%
Extracurricular activities	0%
Preparing for college entrance exams (SAT, ACT)	0%
Help applying for college	0%
Visits to college	0%
Coursework (specify)	0%
Career assessment	0%
Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR, BSVI) services	0%
MR/DD services	0%

Discussion and Implications for Practice

The literature gathered for this study confirmed the results of the *In-School Transition Survey Interview*. Ninety percent of the students surveyed ranked career and technical education as being helpful or very helpful. Brown (2003) concluded that students that attend a career and technical school have the opportunity to earn money prior to and after graduation. In addition, direction to postsecondary education can be explored and student engagement, persistence, and retention are increased when attending a career and technical school.

It is essential that students be exposed to post secondary options while still in high school. Students with disabilities need to be prepared to advocate for themselves and to request needed accommodations. Although Intervention Specialists (special education teachers) are required to complete an SOP before each student that participates in special education before he/she graduates, it is imperative that students know what is on their SOP and how their SOP can benefit them if they continue onto post-secondary education. Interestingly enough, 30% of the students surveyed indicated that having classes offered at a community college would have helped them better prepare for life after graduation. This could warrant further investigation by school administration as a way to increase post-secondary outcomes.

There is a great deal of research available in regards to employment for students with disabilities. The literature I reviewed for this study strongly suggests the benefits of attending a career and technical school to provide work experiences and employable skills for life after high graduation. If sophomore students with disabilities choose not to attend a career and technical school for their junior and senior year of high school, it could be part of their transition plan to investigate attending an adult education program upon graduation.

In regards to independent living, 100% of the students surveyed had their driver's license while only 50% of those surveyed own a car. Also, 60% of those surveyed indicated they plan to live on their own one year after graduation. If the researcher were to conduct this research again, or if

another researcher were to replicate this study, some things should be done differently. For instance, students should be probed about budgeting, savings, and banking to find out if there are any gaps within any of these areas and/or unrealistic ideas of the costs that will be incurred if students are intending to live on their own.

Conclusion

Transition is an inevitable part of all of everyone's lives. Attending a career and technical school can improve employment options and wages for students with disabilities. So that students with disabilities do not lag behind their peers, transition planning should include the areas of post secondary education, employment, independent living, and leisure and community participation.

Eloquently, Kiernan (2008) said:

At the present time, with our nation's emphasis on test scores and grades, we often lose sight of individual differences and forget that students are more than a test score and grade. We overlook the fact that even when a student does not meet the academic standards, they still become productive members of society. (p. 7)

Teachers need to be knowledgeable about transition planning so they can provide all students access to the many paths available to them for a productive and successful life after high school graduation.

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