

Transition Planning: A High School - Postsecondary Connection

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Education is functionally different at each level, from infancy to postsecondary instruction. Approaches to quality education and challenges faced by educators are, therefore, unique to each level. Early childhood educators, elementary, high school and postsecondary teachers are independently supported by their own professional associations which address their specific challenges. These organizations give opportunities for sharing common experiences, concerns and ideas that ultimately benefit students at particular levels.

While this camaraderie is extremely important to education, it is also important for educators across all levels to come together. It is a well-established fact that an essential aspect of every educational program is providing transition to and from that program level. In order to do that, there has to be a clear understanding of what came before and what lies ahead. While teachers are ultimately playing a part in preparing students for independent and fruitful adult life, a more immediate goal is preparing students to simply acquire the skills necessary to take the next step. It is an unfortunate reality that in many cases, the only exposure a teacher has to that next step might be the memory of their own experience--for instance, remembering "when I was in high school." Obviously, that isn't enough understanding to provide long-term quality transitional experiences for students. Teachers of varied levels of instruction need to get to know and understand one another's goals and expectations. They first need to connect with one another.

Making a Connection and Identifying a Common Goal

A prevailing theme of the 1994 PEC Regional Conference was partnership. An aim of partnership is developing mutual recognition and understanding in order to attain creative, workable and effective solutions. In 1994, as now, educators and services providers in secondary and postsecondary education were given an opportunity to connect. As a direct result, elementary, high school and college educators from Missouri were linked, quite by chance, and began talking about transition for deaf students in our state. As we got to know one another during the course of the conference, we found ourselves discussing our concerns and sharing strengths and weaknesses of our individual programs. We learned that we faced many similar challenges and that perhaps it was possible to face some of them together.

Transition education for Missouri students was a common concern. Our most animated discussions were inspired by a particular presentation made by staff from Hinds Community College and Jacksonville State University called “Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students from High School to Postsecondary Education: A Proposed Curriculum to Facilitate the Process.” A comprehensive curriculum for a Freshman orientation class was described which included creative strategies for addressing transition issues. Providing effective transition experiences in Missouri soon became our goal. Developing a partnership between the Missouri School for the Deaf and St. Louis Community College would be a means to that end. And so, a friendly partnership developed and our dialogue about transition began to take shape.

Identifying Challenges

It was important for us to recognize the challenges and barriers we would face when creating transition experiences for deaf students statewide. The major challenges we identified were:

- I. Diversity
 - A. Students come from a wide variety of educational experiences.
 1. One state residential/day facility for the deaf
 2. Two private residential/day facilities
 3. Five large local school districts with programming for deaf students
 4. Numerous smaller districts with specialized programming
 5. Many local education (LEAs) providing services
 - B. Methods, philosophies, and evaluation strategies differ greatly among the educational programs.
 - C. Students’ personal backgrounds vary widely.
 1. They represent a range of economic and cultural environments.
 2. The levels of familial stability and support are all-encompassing.
 3. There are students from hearing families as well as deaf families.
 4. Language use ranges from ASL to oral English; some have minimal use of language in any form.
 - D. The levels of hearing loss vary from hard of hearing to profoundly deaf.
 - E. Options for future achievement include:
 1. Vocational education
 2. Community college
 3. University
 4. Immediate entry into the world of work
 - F. There are a variety of organizations and agencies providing services for deaf adults, including interpreting, counseling, and job training. All have a stake in the transition process.
- II. Critical Mass Issues
 - A. There are large concentrations of deaf/hard of hearing people in some areas of the state.

- B. There are scatterings of deaf/hard of hearing people in small or singular numbers throughout the state.
 - 1. These individuals often do not know their options.
 - 2. They have limited to no contact with the deaf community.
 - 3. They have difficulty accessing services.
 - 4. They often remain unrecognized.
 - C. In postsecondary settings, a deaf person is often one in a class/department or one of few with specific needs. Therefore, it is difficult to justify the cost and effort of specialized services and instruction.
- III. Curriculum
- A. As we strive to accommodate diversity in our curricula, time, space, and creativity are often at a premium.
- IV. Finances
- A. New and improved transition curricula are not likely to receive top budgeting priority.
 - B. The time and expertise needed to acquire funding for a new or improved program is prohibitive to the realization of a good idea.

Choosing a Path

It is no easy task to realize a goal. There are so many possibilities for action that it is difficult to know just where to begin. Brainstorming is the first step; getting all the possibilities before you and then choosing the one that best fits. We wanted a high school - postsecondary transition experience that would be: inclusive (in spite of the diversity); inexpensive (anticipating financial constraints); collaborative (fostering partnership); and effective (giving practical and useful information to students about how to make a transition from high school to adult life). Such a transition experience could be anything from the development of a full-fledged year-long curriculum to a half-day seminar for students. Recognizing all of the challenges, we decided to start relatively small. We would work together to provide a 2-day workshop for high school juniors and seniors across Missouri who were deaf or hard of hearing.

What kind of information could we provide during the two days? Our primary tool in planning topics for the workshop was the curriculum guide developed by Hinds Community College for their freshman orientation course. Essentials of College Living presents nine topics considered to be crucial for beginning postsecondary students who are deaf and hard of hearing. We focused on six of these topics and related activities as we planned our statewide workshop. Our goal was to give useful information and to provide students with an opportunity to get their own individual questions addressed. The topics we included were: the college structure, rules and resources; self-esteem; healthy lifestyle; personal finance; time management; and stress management. In order to meet our needs, we added interpreter services to the list. These particular topics were chosen based on what we saw as the most crucial to our students at the time. In limiting ourselves

to just those areas, we were able to present more comprehensive and effective information and activities in the short amount of time available.

How did we organize this kind of workshop and get all the support we needed? When individuals from more than one organization are trying to plan an event together, it can be confusing. We took the “divide and conquer” approach and each individual was involved in the planning. This included making contacts within the sponsoring organizations as well as with community collaborators; designing workshop activities; advertising; and accomplishing the tremendous number of incidental tasks such as typing itineraries, getting refreshments, and planning social activities and meals. Obviously, someone had to take the lead in seeing the plans to their fruition. In our case, the host school, Missouri School for the Deaf, became the core organizer.

Communication is always a challenge and “the left arm doesn’t always know what the right arm is doing.” We developed a simple organizer that, when used in an effective manner, can be a big help in keeping everyone aware of what has been accomplished and lined up so far. That organizer is included in Appendix A.

The Workshop

After several planning meetings between the Missouri School for the Deaf and St. Louis Community College, presentations and activities were arranged for the transition workshop. The two-day agenda is included in Appendix B.

How was it inclusive? Students from all over the state were invited to spend two days at the Missouri School for the Deaf. Letters describing the event were sent to all of the school districts and programs that identified deaf or hard of hearing students. Teen clubs were also sent fliers. This workshop included students that were college-bound as well as those who were not. Parallel programming was planned that would encompass nearly all of the same topics. Students who attended represented all program types and all communication styles.

How was it collaborative? Representatives from a variety of state agencies, colleges, and local organizations made presentations to small groups. While these speakers focused on particular topics, they also had the opportunity to give information on the particular services they had to offer to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Interpreters-in-training from a local college were present to provide interpreting services. The interpreter coordinator from St. Louis Community College provided “coaching” to both the students and the interpreters-in-training.

How was it inexpensive? No speakers received stipends for their participation. All of the agencies and organizations that sent representatives routinely provide those kinds of outreach services at no cost. In cases where speakers came in from out of town, accommodations were paid for by their respective agencies. Students were housed at the state school and additional costs for food and increased supervisory staff were nominal. Those costs were absorbed by the state program and students were not asked to pay a fee for the

workshop. Interpreting services were provided by practicum students and collaborating colleges, so there was no cost involved. Incidental costs, such as advertising, copying, and refreshments were minimal.

Was the workshop effective? We accomplished what we set out to do which was to provide practical and important information for students in transition to postsecondary settings. Students were active participants in activities and discussions. They interacted with one another in spite of diversity and they seemed to genuinely enjoy their experience. Their evaluations of the workshop indicated that they had learned some valuable lessons. Naturally, they still had many questions and concerns that more extensive transition activities could address.

College representatives at a subsequent annual college fair indicated that students seemed to be more informed than in previous years. They asked more pertinent questions and appeared to have a better understanding of college terminology. So, a fairly immediate positive difference was perceived. Realistically, this single two-day workshop alone could not be expected to fully prepare students to make their transitions. But from the perspective of the planning committee, this event was a positive step taken toward the greater goal of increased awareness and preparedness for all Missouri students who are deaf.

Appendix A

Transition Workshop Organizer

Workshop dates:

Location:

Audience (*note communication modes/assistive devices and special health needs*):

Advertising (*how will you find and attract this audience*):

Organizational Support (*identify persons within your organization from whom support/input is needed*):

<u>Person</u>	<u>Contact</u>	<u>Commitment/ Input</u>	<u>Written Update</u>
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Goals:

Interagency Support:

<u>Agency/Contact Person</u>	<u>Phone Number</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Written Follow-Up</u>	<u>Address</u>
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Interpreters:

<u>Name/ Address</u>	<u>Phone Number</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Written Follow-Up</u>
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Site Support (*teachers, office personnel, supervisors, etc.*):

<u>Name/Location</u>	<u>Phone Number</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Written Follow-Up</u>
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Schedule (*attach*):

Appendix B

Transition Workshop Agenda

Day One

7:30 Breakfast

8:15-9:00 Welcome
Performance presented by M.S.D. Drama Club

9:00-9:40 Breakout Sessions

Group 1: “Everything” You Need to Know About College
Presenter: Theresa Smythe, St. Louis Community College

Group 2: “Everything” You Need to Know About On-the-Job Training
Presenter: Toni Scrivner, Callaway County Special Services

Group 3: “Everything” You Need to Know About On-the-Job Training/Shadowing
Presenters: C.J. Prather, Advent and Diane Ludden, Missouri School for the Deaf

Group 4: Financial Planning
Presenter: Sherri Andrews-Lammert, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation

9:45-10:30 Using Interpreter Services
Presenter: Loretto Durham, St. Louis Community College

10:30-11:00 Role-Play: Use of Interpreters
Interpreters: William Woods University

11:00-12:00 Self-Advocacy
Presenter: Jerry Covell, Missouri Commission for the Deaf

12:00-12:45 Lunch

12:45-2:00 Breakout Sessions Repeated

2:00-3:15 Self-Esteem
Presenter: Steve Hamerdinger, Department of Mental Health

Day Two

7:30 Breakfast

8:15-11:45 Breakout Activities

Group 1: Field Trip to William Woods University

8:30-9:00 Introduction to Scavenger Hunt
9:00-10:00 Scavenger Hunt
10:00-10:45 Regroup and Discuss Scavenger Hunt Experiences
10:45-11:45 Surviving Postsecondary Classes
Presenter: Paula King, St. Louis Community College

Group 2: Activities for Students Entering the Workforce

Coordinators: Joan Carrington, Cheryl Hibbett, Susan Anderson, Missouri School for the Deaf and Eric Driskill, St. Louis Community College

8:15-9:15 Future Dreams
9:15-10:15 Stress Release/Leisure Skills
10:15-11:15 Job Vocabulary Scavenger Hunt
11:15-12:10 Healthy Lifestyles

12:00-12:45 Lunch

12:45-2:00 Deaf Adult Panel Discussion
Panelists: Jessica, Calvin, Angela, and Katie

2:00 Wrap-up, Evaluation, Dismissal