Post-School Outcomes for Students with an Intellectual Disability.

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Students labeled as having ID have long been the forgotten students in our schools. For generations they were thought to be "unteachable." Every individual deserves a free and appropriate education to achieve success after graduation. This paper will explain what the post-school outcomes are for this population of students and how schools are preparing students for success. There are certain indicators of whether a student will be successful after graduation: transition planning, family involvement in transition planning, and students having learned self-determination skills. This paper will explore how teachers and families can ensure that these indicators are all being achieved. There have been multiple educational programs set up to achieve the best results for this population, and the positives and the negatives of certain programs will be addressed. An in-depth study into a private school will examine what professionals in the field are doing to ensure success for students with ID.

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Abstract:

Students labeled as having ID have long been the forgotten students in our schools. For generations they were thought to be "unteachable." Every individual deserves a free and appropriate education to achieve success after graduation. This paper will explain what the post-school outcomes are for this population of students and how schools are preparing students for success. There are certain indicators of whether a student will be successful after graduation: transition planning, family involvement in transition planning, and students having learned self-determination skills. This paper will explore how teachers and families can ensure that these indicators are all being achieved. There have been multiple educational programs set up to achieve the best results for this population, and the positives and the negatives of certain programs will be addressed. An in-depth study into a private school will examine what professionals in the field are doing to ensure success for students with ID.

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Introduction

Two-thousand years ago a child with an intellectual disability was left in the wilderness to die. One-thousand years ago a child with an intellectual disability was turned into the "village idiot." Five-hundred years ago a child with an intellectual disability was put onto a ship and sent from port to port originating the phrase "ship of fools." Seventy years ago a child with an intellectual disability was put into an institution once the disability was recognized. Twenty years ago we made special education a place instead of a service. Today, up to 50% of students with an intellectual disability are receiving services outside of the general education classroom.

As an educational society we claim to be doing all that we can to help this population of students reach their full potential, but are we really? The post-school outcomes for a student with a disability are not all that different than they have been in the past. They are not expected to be gainfully employed, live independently, be self-satisfied, and have a social life. As a teacher of students with an intellectual disability, it is your job to ensure that you are taking the necessary action to fully prepare that student for a meaningful life after graduation.

Family involvement in transition planning is essential to a student's post-graduation success. Even the smallest involvement in a child's education has shown beneficial results in a student's post-school outcomes. Not only are parents influential in planning for a child, but also extended family members, especially any siblings, are as well in order to help with planning after the passing of the parents.

Students with an intellectual disability are not given the opportunity to practice self-determination skills in real life situations which has lead to terrible post-school

outcomes in the past. The research has shown that the more control a child with an intellectual disability demonstrates in his/her everyday life leads to that child being more independent after graduation. Since a student with an intellectual disability has difficulty generalizing skills, educators must give direct instruction on how to make appropriate self-determined choices.

Many school districts and private institutions have made attempts at creating ideal transition programs. According to Dixon, "[ingredients] of effective practice involves a strength-based assessment, which directs the professional to identify and build on the existing strengths and skills that the child and family present" (2005, p. 109). The Start on Success model in Baltimore, Maryland, the Supported Employment Program in southern Maryland, the Brown High School Transition Team, the Independent Living Center, and others have demonstrated success in preparing students for life after graduation.

What are the Post-School Outcomes for Students with an Intellectual Disability?

Intellectual Disability is one of the thirteen disability categories identified in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as being eligible for special education services. A student with an intellectual disability is a person who has "certain limitations in mental functioning and in skills such as communication, taking care of him or herself, and social skills. These limitations will cause a child to learn and develop more slowly than a typical child" (NICHCY 2002, p. 2). These students' disability adversely affects their cognitive development, and they require assistance throughout their educational careers. People with an intellectual disability share some traits such as: tendency to forget skills through disuse and trouble generalizing skills from one situation

to another. These students have been thought to be un-teachable in the past; however, all students are guaranteed a free and appropriate education under the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is required for students with an IEP, especially students with ID, to begin transition planning at the age of 15, if not younger. These transition needs include: "occupational training, social skills development, leisure time activities" (Bassett, 1996, p. 5) as well as teaching self-determination.

With inclusion being the major movement in Special Education these days, it is important that educators not only focus on keeping all students in the classroom, but also meeting the needs of all students in the classroom. Yet, in 2003 "more than half of students" (Dixon, 2005, p. 111) were receiving services in a separate setting. Students with an intellectual disability require more direct teaching of the above mentioned transition skills. The reason these skills are so important is that students with disabilities "are under-employed, have difficulty adapting to community, have difficulty accessing education once they leave school, creating social relationships" and they also "experience profound feelings of loneliness" (Dore, 2003, p. 127). Research has found that "early exposure to employment activities" (Ankeny, 2009, p. 30) is a crucial component to transition planning.

On a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), the goals outlined should relate to how the student will be "expected to function after leaving school" (Dore, 2003, p. 127). These IEPs focus on getting the student ready for life after school. A study compared students with severe ID compared to students with a specific learning disability and students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder. The study found that only 7.8% of students with ID began transition planning before the age of 14 compared to 10.2% of

students with LD and 11.3% of students with E/BD (Dixon, 2004, p. 112). Studies show that the earlier transition planning begins for students with severe disabilities, the better their post-school outcomes.

For students with an intellectual disability, the post-school goal has been for them to attend a dayhab where they do not earn a wage or have any benefits. Employment for this population has long been thought impossible, and college even more impossible. In a study, only 9.8% of students with ID planned to attend a 2 or 4 year college (Dixon, 2005, p.112). In our society college is no longer seen as a means for higher education, but rather as the next step after high school. It is now assumed that every child will attend college, and students with disabilities should be expected to as well. If they enter the work force out of high school, then they no longer are with their peers and their social life will suffer greatly. A study showed that students with ID "had fewer contacts made to post-secondary education. . .However, substantial numbers of students with ID had contacts made to employment related agencies and programs, including vocational rehabilitation agencies, other vocational training programs, potential employers, job placement agencies, and supported employment" (Dixon, 2005, p. 113). However, educators have taken notice to the need for students with disabilities to be with their same aged peers and inclusive college programs have begun to spring up around the country. These programs often include continued education in transition skills as well as partaking in classes with their peers.

Students with an intellectual disability "have increased participation in general education" (Moon, 2006, p. 1). It is important to understand that inclusion in the general education curriculum extends past age 18. Between ages 18-21 it is important that the

curriculum places emphases "on access to the community and planning for the future" (Moon, 2006, p. 2). Access to the community includes a college program. There are now three models for students with disabilities in post-secondary education. Model 1 is in a substantially separate program. These programs have been around since the 1970's and are an alternative to day activity programs. The goal is to promote independence and access to the community with direct teaching (Moon, 2006, p. 3). Model 2 uses mixed programs located on a community college campus or a four year college campus (Moon, 2006, p. 3). There is "some separate classroom instruction, [it] also offers opportunity to enroll in college classes, participate in campus social activities, explore employment in community classes, participate in campus social activities, explore employment in community" (Moon, 2006, p. 4). During a study with this model 87% of students were working while in college and 65% were employed full-time after college (Moon, 2006, p. 5). Model 3 uses inclusive individualized services where each "student plans post-school goals with a team of individuals and then locates services or funds needed to meet the specific goals" (Moon, 2006, p. 5). In a Massachusetts study, 100% of students who participated in the model 3 approach were employed after the program compared to 42.9% of students who stayed in a high school setting; 66.7 % of students in the model 3 program worked without support vs. 28.6 % of students who stayed in the high school setting (Moon, 2006, p. 5). The model 3 approach is the most expensive at the point of instruction, yet cheaper in the long term because the students need less support when they get out into the community.

There is such a focus on post-school outcomes solely based on employment that educators often forget about the social lives of students with severe disabilities. It is

"incorrect to assume that if a student has a job once they exit high school they will experience satisfaction in other quality of life content domain areas" (Curtis, 2007, p. 32). Here are some numbers taken from a study on adults with an intellectual disabilities or other severe disabilities after graduation: 64% of adults were not participating in the community as they would like, 58% had not been to a movie in the past year (29% of non-disabled adults had not been to a movie in the past year), 76% had not attended a live music performance (43% of non-disabled adults), 83% had not participated in a community group in the previous year, and 80% had not gone to an athletic club (Modell, 2002, p. 46). These numbers illustrate how we as a society disregard people with disabilities after graduation. Community planners often do not take into account people with disabilities when they are planning community activities (Modell, 2002, p. 46). Modell (2002) states, "Watching television and listening to the radio are the top two activities for people with severe disabilities, bowling is a distant third" (p. 46). More Americans bowl, 53 million people, compared to any other sport and it is the easiest to adapt for students with severe disabilities. Bowling is usually seen as the easiest way for educators to get their students involved in the community, so they do not try to make any other accommodations. Students do not develop the "appropriate skills and attitudes toward community-based physical activity and recreation/leisure" (Modell, 2002, p. 46). It is possible for people with severe disabilities to learn how to participate in physical activities other than bowling and it should be encouraged. It is unfair to limit their possibilities for social interaction, and the only way they learn the skills is through repeated practice. Modell found in his research that "[s]tudents who participated more

regularly and had greater access to recreation and leisure activities were significantly more satisfied with their lives" (p. 46).

Family Involvement in Transition Planning

 It is vital that families play an important role in future planning. As stated by Ankeny, "families experience higher levels of satisfaction with services if they have even limited involvement in aspects of service delivery" (2009, p. 30). Even though educators understand that collaborating with families and students is vital to successful transition, "research suggests the existence of a significant gap between its assigned importance and actual practice" (Ankeny, 2009, p. 30). This limited involvement is as simple as including the parents' concerns in planning goals for the student.

Planning for life after school is not solely the responsibility of the professionals at the school, but the families must also take responsibility. The most important family members that need to participate are the parents. The most distinguishing factors of parental involvement in transition planning are: "higher incomes or higher levels of parental educational attainment, having two parents residing in the household, securing external supports, and belonging to support groups for families of children with disabilities" (Ankeny, 2009, p. 31). Parents who have a higher educational attainment level have better paying jobs where they can work regular hours. These parents also have learned more strategies for dealing with difficult situations and have learned how to access more community resources. With two parents in a household, the parents have more opportunity to discuss their child's future with each other and plan for the inevitable transition from school to the community. Parents who belong to support groups for

families of children with disabilities have a forum where they can discuss their feelings in a safe and understanding environment.

Professionals need to be able to:

Recognize and include all parents and family structures (gay/lesbian, adoptive, foster, grandparents, blended) as equal partners in decision making, encourage the participation of siblings and extended family members, include family resources and community members in planning, recognize that parents know their child best, respect the family's goals for the child, ask families to share areas in which they would like more support for their child, be understanding of levels of responsibility and involvement that parents are willing or able to assume. (Ankeny, 2009, p. 30)

Educators need to be able to educate all students no matter their background and respect their families. When there is respect between families and teachers, the child's education becomes the main focus.

In a study, "mothers described the transition process as a journey that began the day that their child was born" (Ankeny, 2009, p. 32). Research shows that the earlier families begin to think about how their child with a disability will transition, then the better that student's post-school outcomes will be. Parents have a tendency to go through a stage of denial when they discover that their child has an intellectual disability. The sooner parents can accept the fact, the sooner they can begin planning how to get services for their child. Parents will sometimes feel a sense of guilt for their child having an

intellectual disability. These parents need to be able to get passed the fact that their child will always have this disability. Parents feeling guilt and focusing on their child's disability will treat their child as a disability rather than a person. Parents need to begin the transition process in early childhood and "encourage their children to develop independence, decision-making skills, and social skills" (Ankeny, 2009, p. 30). Parents who treat their children as a disability and do not promote independence are only doing a disservice to their children. All parents want their children to be "independent, successful, and happy" (Ankeny, 2009, p. 32). However, many parents are afraid of letting go. When a child has a severe disability, they need more help with every day living and parents get used to being the one helping. Parents need to be able to give their children an opportunity to experience independence in as many realistic situations as possible.

The most realistic setting for students to practice independence is in an inclusive setting and a study showed "mothers reflected positively upon their children's experiences of inclusion" (Ankeny, 2009, p. 32). However, this same study showed that mothers with daughters were worried about how their daughters would deal with the desires of teenagers to date and eventually marry. These same mothers wanted their daughters to live like other young adults, but recognized a need to protect them (Ankeny, 2009, p. 32). Students need to be able to make their own decisions on as many levels as possible to promote independence. In most cases parents make all of the decisions for students with an intellectual disability all the way to what they will wear. The best way people learn is by making mistakes, and parents need to be willing to let their children make mistakes on little decisions. When students learn from mistakes on little decisions,

they will be able to better generalize those skills when they make larger decisions. Strategies and techniques can be taught to individuals with disabilities so that they can take care of themselves so that parents do not need to worry.

Forty-three percent of parents in a study were concerned with employment opportunities for their child (Dore, 2002, p. 130). On the new state mandated Individualized Education Program format there is a space for parent input under every portion of a student's present level of performance. It is the responsibility of the school professionals to have an open line of communication with parents in order to have a smooth time in transition planning. In students' IEPs during the transition age, all yearly goals should directly relate to what the student's plans are for after graduation. This will help students gain the necessary skills to adapt to life after school. Effective planning will likely result in establishing a formal working relationship between students, parents, and postschool case managers and adult service providers (Ankeny, 2009, p. 35). Parents need to be made aware of what employment opportunities and post-school services are for their child.

A model for involving parents in planning their child's future early in the transition process is as follows:

> Use a phased approach to adult service deliver, take a leadership role in creating interagency linkages, draw on the knowledge of different team members, provide families with the names of individuals responsible for implementing and following up on various aspects of the transition plan, help family members acknowledge their changing roles and responsibilities, provide ongoing communication and collaboration with

families, communicate with parents using their preferred mode (e-mail,

letter, phone, face-to-face), focus on the positive characteristics and

strengths of the child. (Ankeny, 2009, p. 29)

As the teacher of a student with an intellectual disability, it is vital to understand that the

majority of the responsibility for that student's education falls on your shoulders. Being

able to make connections to post-secondary work sites and help families utilize those

same resources is a priority. All education must be focused on what that child's post-

school goals are. Being able to collaborate with other educational and community service

professionals and a child's family will help ensure that a student's goals will be met to

the fullest capacity to ensure an optimum quality of life after graduation.

Siblings and extended family members will often take over care for students with

an intellectual disability after the passing of parents. Fifty-two percent of parents

expressed worries about their child's safety and uncertainty regarding who will assume

provision of support for the child after their passing (Dore, 2002, p. 130). Everyone needs

to be involved with the planning for the future of the student and know what that

student's future needs and wants are so that everyone can work together to achieve them.

An unheard voice in family involvement much of the time comes from the

student. In a study, during career planning students chose jobs they knew close family

members worked (Morningstar, 1995, p. 5). Students with an intellectual disability do not

have the ability to research jobs independently, so the most likely thing they think of

without proper teaching is something that is familiar to them. Also, when prompted to

decide where they will live after graduation, many students chose places where they have

family (Morningstar, 1995, p. 6). Often times family members do not notice why a child

may choose a certain career path to focus on and do not know how to approach it. Families need to have an open line of communication with the school so that they can know what a student wants to do at school compared to what they say they want to do at home.

Student Self-Determination

It is important for all individuals to feel a sense of control over their lives. Nobody likes to feel like other people are making all of his/her decisions. Unfortunately, students with an intellectual disability have not been given the opportunity to make their own decisions when it comes to their education and their future life. These students need to be taught self-determination skills. According to Stecker, "[self]-determination refers to acting as *the* primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life free from undue external influence or interference" (2001, p. 293). In the past, students with an intellectual disability have not been given any kind of voice in their transition planning. The "common assumption that *because of his or her disability* a person cannot gain the skills associated with self-determination limits the environmental opportunities and supports and accommodations provided to that person, which in turn restricts his or her ability to fully develop the capacity to act in a self-determined manner" (Garner, 2007, p. 490). These limiting factors do a disservice to a student with an intellectual disability because that student will never have the opportunity to learn self-determined behaviors in any other format. These students need to be taught the necessary skills and then given the opportunity to use them in realistic settings. Simply teaching self-determination skills will not ensure that these skills will transition

into the real world (Baker, 2001, p. 17). Students with an intellectual disability do not generalize well, so they need as many opportunities to practice these skills as much as possible.

Students with ID have lower levels of self-determination than students with other disabilities. However, a research study determined that "level of intelligence was not a significant contributor" (Garner, 2007, p. 489) to self-determination. The most contributing factor to student self-determination was students having the opportunity to make choices in their own environment (Garner, 2007, p. 489). With students with an intellectual disability not given these opportunities by parents and school personnel, the students develop "learned helplessness" (Stecker, 2001, p. 300). This learned helplessness leads students to believe that they are not capable of making their own decisions for major transitions, or even the smallest choices. Teachers have long recognized that students with an intellectual disability do not demonstrate "high levels of self-determined transition behaviors" (Stecker, 2001, p. 300) but they have not made any progress towards changing their views on these students.

One study recommended teaching self-determination using a combination of three approaches. The first has students making their own decisions during daily activities such as what to wear, what to eat, and what to do during the day. The second approach includes students participating in classroom decision making. This can vary from what classes the student wants to take to what a student might work on during class that day. These two approaches provided opportunities for students to "exercise choice-making, decision-making, and problem-solving skills on a daily basis" (Stecker, 2001, p. 301). These skills will help students "evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses and how to

deal with risk factors" (Stecker, 2001, p. 301). The third approach is to offer a "stand-alone, self-determination curriculum" in order to "provide students with effective skills and strategies for active engagement in their own transition planning" (Stecker, 2001, p. 301). A combination of all three of these methods will ensure that students learn the skills necessary to make self-determined decisions and also have an opportunity to practice them in a controlled environment before taking those skills into the community.

The inclusion movement in special education needs to be discussed when developing methods to teach students self-determination. According to Garner, "[several] studies have found that adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who live and work in more integrated settings tend to be more self-determined than adults in a segregated setting" (2007, p. 489). Students without disabilities are given a lot of leeway when planning their every day lives as well as their future plans. Why are students with disabilities not given the same opportunity? In a segregated setting students are grouped with other students who do not show self-determined behaviors. Research shows that adults living in a more inclusive environment correlates with more self-determined behaviors (Garner, 2007, p. 489). However, academic inclusion has been found to be a non-significant predictor of future self-determination (Garner, 2007, p. 495). This suggests that self-determination is not best learned in any particular educational setting, but rather on opportunities for the development of self-determined behaviors (Garner, 2007, p. 495). Teachers need to be educated on how to teach these behaviors as well as allow students to practice them in class. Stecker and his colleagues suggest that a "specifically designed training program should be made available for preparing transition specialists, and this program should be developed according to The Council for

Exceptional Children's newly added standards for the preparation of transition specialists" (2001, pg. 301). This will ensure that all people involved in teaching students with disabilities are prepared for helping students make their own direction in their lives.

The best practice for students to practice self-determination comes at their IEP meeting. "Increasing the degree to which students control the direction of transition planning meetings requires efforts that impact ecological factors" (Baker, 2001, pg. 17) such as where people at the meeting sit. At many IEP meetings parents sit next to their child on one side of the table while school personnel sit on the other side of the table. The table acts as a barrier between school personnel and the family and makes students feel inferior at their meeting. Teachers should be encouraged to sit next to family members and students in order to let the student feel more comfortable with the meeting. When the table serves as a barrier, it allowed the teachers to see themselves as "providers of information, not facilitators of student and parent involvement" (Baker, 2001, p. 26).

Students with an intellectual disability are less involved in their transition planning compared to students with a specific learning disability or emotional/behavioral disorder. The non-participation rate for students with ID was 10.6% compared to 6% for students with E/BD and 3.8% of students with LD (Dixon, 2005, p. 111). These numbers are even worse when you look at the numbers for students taking part in their legally mandated transition plans. Students with ID are less likely to provide input in discussing their transition plans (48.7% of students) compared to students with E/BD (52.8% of students) and students with LD (60.5% of students) (Dixon, 2005, p. 111). Students with ID also take less leadership during their transition meetings (3.3% of students) compared to students with E/BD (10.8% of students) and students with LD (14.6% of students)

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(Dixon, 2005, p. 111). In order for these students to be considered determining their own futures, these numbers should all be as close to 100% as possible.

The following graph comes from a study done by Stecker and his colleagues in 2001 and it illustrates teacher response to questions posed about their interactions with students with ID at IEP meetings:

Teacher/IEP Team	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Listening to student	61%	27%	10%	2%
Identifying interests	71%	27%	2%	0%
Identifying needs	84%	16%	0%	0%
Incorporating	62%	36%	2%	0%

Students needs,

interests, and preferences

into a draft transition service plan

The researchers found that teachers with less experience tended to facilitate more student involvement than teachers with more experience (Stecker, 2001, p. 296). The teachers with less experience are also the teachers who are newly graduated from school and have newly been certified. They are more up to date with research based practices in promoting self-determination in transition planning. Teachers with more field experience tended to ask leading questions to their students or give non-verbal cues to the student when giving answers (Baker, 2001, p. 21). Students have developed a sense of learned helplessness due to diminished expectations that educators and parents have for their

students. When students are held to high expectations of self-determination, they will rise to the occasion and be able to take a larger role in planning their lives.

Transition Programs

There are many quality transition programs throughout the country that help students with an intellectual disability gain valuable job training as well as helping them get jobs after graduation. What we know does not work is sending students out into the community without training in how to deal with real world expectations and work environments. These students need to be taught transition skills and have the opportunity to implement their learned knowledge in a realistic environment. We need to "look beyond the student's current status and provide opportunities for him or her to learn needed skills in environments that are as real-life and age-appropriate as possible, allowing each child the opportunity to grow into an independent, successful, and happy adult" (Ankeny, 2009, p. 35). Research shows that while in "high school, participation in work experiences, occupational education, and receiving special education services in integrated settings were associated with post-school employment" (Dixon, 2005, p. 110). These are the most realistic environments for students with an intellectual disability to practice their learned transition skills. When they go out into the community they will be working and living with people without disabilities which they get exposure to in a more integrated setting.

Several different resources agreed that there are ingredients to effective transition for students with ID. According to Dixon, "[ingredients] of effective practice involves a strength-based assessment, which directs the professional to identify and build on the

existing strengths and skills that the child and family present" (2005, p. 109). One study showed that certain strategies that help students enhance their transition process are having future expectations, planning and setting goals for the future, utilizing resources, and some possible non-traditional educational methods. Future expectations for students with ID in the past have focused on the negative characteristics of the individual. Research shows that when students have a plan focused on success, they have a higher chance of success after graduation (Curtis, 2008, p. 41). The goals for students with ID need to not only focus on success, but also need to be realistic and meaningful (Curtis, 2008, p. 41). A meaningful goal focuses on the student's specific individual needs when it comes to transitioning into the community after graduation. Utilizing resources means that students and parents know how to access community resources and actually use them (Curtis, 2008, p. 32). Even though students are often given information on resources, they are often not taught how to access them, or ever given the opportunity to practice before they graduate. Some non-traditional methods include home-schooling where parents continue practicing skills their children learned at school with their children at home (Curtis, 2008, p. 41). This will also help students with ID, who have difficulty generalizing information, generalize skills from school to the community. A major skill job sites said that need to be taught to students with ID in school are social skills because the skills necessary for a particular job can be taught on the job site (Milazzo, 1958, p. 412). Skills directly related to a specific job do not need to be taught to students, but rather general work and social skills that will generalize to any job or environment.

One model transition program directly taught problem solving skills to individuals with an intellectual disability. The treatment procedure was grouped into six categories:

modeling, consequence management, peer-mediated strategies, self-management training, social skills training packages, and process training (Crites, 2004, p. 301). Modeling is when teachers demonstrate appropriate actions and behaviors to show students how to act in certain situations. It is continued throughout all instruction and does not have to be taught directly: the students learn from observations. It is the only one of these methods that does not necessitate direct instruction.

The researchers in this study believe that "there are two intellectual aspects of social competence, practical intelligence and social intelligence. Social intelligence is made up of social skills and social awareness" (Crites, 2004, p. 301). The five-step problem solving method that these researchers used had students "identify the problem, size up the problem, think up solutions, decide upon a solution, and study what happens" (Crites, 2004, p. 302). They had a control group who was not taught the five-step problem solving method, and the experiment group who was taught the method. There was no significant difference between the two groups when it came to problem solving at the beginning of the study. Problem situations included:

> [Bus] driver yells at him because he doesn't sit down on the bus, his sister always wants him to go to the store and buy her gum, and working with the bricks (masonry class) at trade school is too hard. . . an argument with a friend at lunch, teacher won't let him work on his project at trade school, needed money for cigarettes, had a fist fight with a friend, and having a problem with parents because they don't do things with him anymore like they used to. (Crites, 2004, p. 305)

The results of this study showed that the students in the experiment group "performed better than the control group, clearly demonstrating that the participants learned to use the problem-solving procedure" (Crites, 2004, p. 307). Individuals with ID do not generalize skills well, and one that they particularly do not generalize well is generating solutions to problems. After this study, the experimental group was able to generate solutions 60% of the time compared to 28% of the time for students in the control group (Crites, 2004, p. 307). According to Crites, "[this] indicated the training was effective in increasing the number of solutions generated" (2004, pg. 307). This study found that the more students are motivated and excited about the training program, the more they participated and gained.

The Start on Success model in Baltimore, Maryland helped students with disabilities "discover that they have abilities that are necessary to the workplace" as well as help employers and nondisabled employees "understand the realities and advantages of hiring young people who are disadvantaged" (Macrine, 2007, p. 35) and to show how students, employers, and educators can work together to benefit the post-graduation outcomes of students with disabilities including ID. This model was founded in 1995 and helped place students in a hospital and a university setting. While the students were at their placements they were encouraged to interact with non-disabled employees and customers and work as independently as possible. A benefit of the program which was unexpected was that students were removed from negative influences in a general high school. They were introduced into a new social environment where they interacted with other employees working together for the same goal. However, working in the Start on Success program does not disallow the students to participate in "high school functions

such as dances, sporting events, and graduation" (Macrine, 2007, p. 36). It is important students with ID have the ability to practice their work skills in a realistic environment and social skills in several settings: in this case with their same aged peers at high school functions and also out to work with other employees. According to Macrine, the "SOS students demonstrate improved attendance, increased self-esteem, commitment to a work ethic, increased knowledge of community-based academics and economics, self-determination, and progress toward permanent employment" (2007, pg. 38).

The Supported Employment Program in south Maryland has a non-exclusion theory where all individuals with disabilities 14-21 participate. There are two methods to training in this program: enclave training teams and individual training. In the enclave training a job coach takes a group of 3-5 students to a workplace and teaches students the proper work skills. The job coach documents progress on each student's IEP goals. In the individual training, students work individually with a job coach at a work site and receive 1:1 instruction. The job coach still documents progress for that student on his/her IEP. In this method the job coach starts off with intensive assistance, but fades as more skills are mastered until independence is reached. From 1993-98 the program had 60 graduates. Of those 60 graduates, 44 were employed full time and only 16 were in sheltered workshops. This program showed a high success rate of placing students with disabilities in gainful employment. (Hood, 2000, p. 57)

The Brown High School Transition Team in South Dakota began with teachers taking coursework, attending workshops and seminars that emphasize teaching transition to students with disabilities. Students learned about their disability and what modifications they need in order to be successful independently. They learned about what

resources are available and how to access them. After studying pre and post test scores, attendance, 3-year evaluations, formal and informal observations, the team found that 100% of students gained skills from year to year. (Hood, 2000, p. 18)

At the Independent Living Center in Michigan, students live together in a house where they are taught how to take care of themselves in an independent living environment and are given the opportunity to practice these skills in a realistic setting. At the beginning of the house no students were able to cook a meal, shop without supervision, able to dial a ride independently, able to be mobile in downtown Iona independently, and none were competitively employed. Ten years later, the house had 8 students graduate and become fully employed. Seventy-five percent could cook a simple meal in a microwave, 75% could do household jobs with minimal assistance, 45% shop independently, 85% could travel independently and 10% of them could dial the ride as well, and 45% of the graduates could navigate downtown Iona independently. The house clearly showed that it helped students with ID and other more severe disabilities transition into the community (Hood, 2000, p. 31).

One study researched how independent students with severe ID and other severe disabilities respond to using a palmtop PC-based self-directed visual and auditory prompting system. The study found that one of the benefits in using the assistive technology is that it "reduces students' reliance on others for assistance" (Davies, 2005, p. 5). Another benefit was that it helps students remember all the steps required for complex tasks (Davies, 2005, p. 5). The study showed that after being properly trained on the operation of the AT, all students showed "tremendous growth in independence and decrease[d] amount of prompts and external prompts" (Davies, 2005, p. 6). The students

made fewer errors while requiring significantly fewer prompts, and were more productive. (Davies, 2005, p. 6)

Discussion

Students with an intellectual disability need continued support throughout their educational careers in order to make them as independent as possible in their post-school careers. In order for them to achieve post-graduation success, they need to be exposed to realistic post-school settings as possible while they are still in high school. All of the research showed that the best opportunity for students with an intellectual disability to have a successful and meaningful post-graduation life is for them to begin their transition process as early as possible, be with non-disabled peers in social settings, and be given as much opportunity to practice their transition skills in actual community environments.

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Methodology:

Participants:

The participants of this study were two teachers, an assistant principal, a principal, and a transition coordinator. The two different teachers were chosen for their experience with transition age students with an intellectual disability. One teacher has had over 15 years experience, and the other teacher is in her first year.

Setting:

All of the professionals work at a private school for students with disabilities in a suburban school on the east coast of the United States.

Procedure:

The participants were interviewed by the researcher in a 1:1 interview. Prior to the interviews each participant was asked if they would willingly give honest answers to the 5 interview questions, to which they all responded, "yes." The interviews were recorded by the interviewer. The interviews were analyzed by the researcher to evaluate the data.

Findings:

After conducting the interviews, the interviewer decided that the best way to record the findings were going question by question and indicating trends in the data. The trends will be documented in the following section.

Post-School Outcomes for Students with an Intellectual Disability

Question 1:

If you were to walk into a classroom with students with an Intellectual Disability, what would your expectations be for those students upon graduation?

Every professional interviewed shared the same response that they expect every student to be independent in regards to living and working. They expect that they will be able to interact with people without disabilities appropriately in the community.

Professionals with more years of experience expressed more concrete ideas of what they expect of the students. They expect that they will have a plan for their lives that will have been developed during their school years. They expect that their first day after graduation will look exactly like their last day at school. The student will go to their job, work all day, go home from their job, and interact in the community.

The principal and the transition coordinator both expressed the need for the individuals to be a part of the community or a neighborhood. They also stated that they do not feel the community is "ready for us" meaning individuals with severe intellectual disabilities.

Question 2:

When creating an IEP or at a CSE, how can teachers encourage student participation?

Every professional stated that it is the responsibility of the teacher to make the IEP in the student's voice. They stated that when students take ownership of their own IEPs, they

become more interested in them. Everyone explained that teachers need to ask students to create their own goals.

The teacher with only one year of experience stated that teachers need to make it an informal daily process. Let the conversations occur naturally rather than forcing them on the students.

The principal, transition coordinator, assistant principal, and teacher with years of experience stated that having the student present their own IEPs at a CSE is important. They stated that the students take pride in their lives and become more interested in their future. It also creates a tangible source they can point to when thinking of their lives after graduation.

Question 3:

How can teachers teach self-determination skills to students with intellectual disabilities?

All of the participants stated that students need to be given the opportunity to practice self-determination starting at an early age during every day activities. The choices can be as simple as choosing to get a pencil in order to complete a worksheet. All professionals agreed that students need to be given the opportunity to generalize these skills into the community.

Post-School Outcomes for Students with an Intellectual Disability

The transition coordinator, principal, and assistant principal stated that students need to be taught directly how to make their own choices. It needs to be built into the curriculum and then practiced.

Question 4:

How can teachers encourage family participation when planning for a student's education as well as their post-school life?

For this question the leading trend was that there has to be an open communication between home and school. This can be through any means such as: email, telephone conversations, school open houses, and letters home. The principal stated that with modern technology, "there is no excuse for there not to be communication between homes and school."

Every professional also stated that making parents feel equal partners when planning will help the parents feel that their perspectives are respected. When they feel that their opinions matter and go into the IEP, everyone stated that teachers are more likely to see carry-over to home life.

The administration members all stated that parent groups and trainings can be vital to helping parents understand the services that are available for their children.

Question 5:

What does your ideal transition program look like?

There were three main trends: transition planning needs to start as early as possible (preferably as soon as the student enters school), students need to be integrated into the community as much as possible, and the school needs more resources.

Every professional stated that they want student transition planning to start as soon as possible rather than 15 as mandated by New York State. The teachers and the transition coordinator said that student progress needs to be tracked by teachers in a transition binder. This will help understand what the student's strengths and needs, as well as where their interests reside.

According to the professionals at the school, the students need to be involved in the community as much as possible in order to make a smooth transition from school. The teacher with more experience stated that students should be integrated into the community they are going to live.

A major concern is the lack of resources. The principal, transition coordinator, and assistant principal would like to make the transition program very individualized. In order to do that, they would need more vans to transport students to work locations in the community and more job coaches.

Discussion:

The researcher determined that the best way to discuss his findings was to review the responses of the professionals question by question.

Question one asked, "If you were to walk into a classroom with students with an Intellectual Disability, what would your expectations be for those students upon graduation?"According to research, having high expectations for students with an intellectual disability yields better post-school outcomes for those students. So to hear the professionals express high expectations, it demonstrates that there are professionals who believe in the research.

One thing that the principal shared was that a difficult process is getting every staff member on board with how to achieve the goals of having the students work and live independently upon graduation. The principal stated that some staff members do not follow the research in regards to best practices because they think that students with ID need to "feel good" and simply be happy. If all staff members do not follow research based best practices, there will not be sufficient reinforcement school-wide which will lead to diminished post-school outcomes for the students.

The principal and transition coordinator also expressed dissatisfaction with the community's preparedness for students with ID to integrate into the community. The principal stated, "We are ready for them, but they're not ready for us." In an ideal world, we would be able to easily integrate students with ID into a job and an independent living situation without being looked at as "different" by the community. People without disabilities are naturally uncomfortable with people with disabilities due to the separation

of this population for millennia. If this group of individuals were more integrated from an earlier age, it would make the transition to the community upon graduation smoother.

The next question asked was, "When creating an IEP or at a CSE, how can teachers encourage student participation?" Getting students to take ownership of their education will make them take a vested interest in it. All of the professionals said that it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that the student's voice is heard in the IEP and at the CSE. Yet according to research, this is not always the case.

The principal brought up the fact that having students present a powerpoint portfolio with pictures and text about themselves helps everyone at the meeting get a sense of who the students are and what they want in their lives. This practice gives a tangible object that allows the student to look at their transition plan and visualize what life will be like in the future. Students with ID have a difficult time understanding intangible ideas, so creating something that is visible helps them "see" their future.

Question three asked, "How can teachers teach self-determination skills to students with intellectual disabilities?" According to all of the professionals making self-determination an every day event is vital. Students with ID need every opportunity to practice making their own choices. Often, people do not think this population of students is able to make choices, so they decide everything for them. This tends to begin with parents when the child is young. The most common reason for this is that parents feel guilt at their child's disability and want to make their lives fulfilling. However, they end up doing a disservice to their children who develop learned helplessness.

After a student has developed learned helplessness, it is difficult to have them become self-determined individuals. The teacher with less experience expressed that

when she began in her current classroom every one of her students was not able to make their own choices. She built it into every thing they did in the classroom throughout every day. She offered non-stop opportunities for students to practice making their own choices. She stated that after five months the students are still demonstrating inconsistent skills in making their own choices. They will continue to need opportunities to practice self-determination.

The principal and transition coordinator stated that students need to be directly taught self-determination skills. If the younger teacher was directly teaching the students self-determination skills and then allowing them to practice them in the classroom, would they have demonstrated greater growth by now?

The researcher then asked the participants, "How can teachers encourage family participation when planning for a student's education as well as their post-school life?" Family involvement in transition planning is vital to positive post-school outcomes for students with ID. Modern technology allows for quick and easy communication between home and school. This will allow for generalization from school to home. When parents and teachers are on the same page with what is expected and what students can do, there will be carry-over between home and school. The carry-over will lead to students practicing skills in several different settings which will make generalizing skills into new settings easier.

Research suggests that there is a gap between the importance of parental involvement and the actual practice of getting parents involved. As the principal stated, "There is no excuse for there not to be communication between homes and school." Each of these professionals stated that they value parental input in IEPs and have open lines of

communication. With New York State mandating parental input on IEPs, it is more important than ever to have frequent conversations with families in order to successfully plan students' futures.

The final question asked was, "What does your ideal transition program look like?" Every professional expressed their ideal transition program to follow research-based best practices: start early in transition planning, immerse students in the community as possible, and offer ample opportunities for students to practice work skills.

However, upon researching into the actual practices at the school it became evident that the staff members are not enacting their ideal transition programs. They have not created the transition portfolios they would like to in order to help planning for life after graduation starting as soon as the students enter the school. Being at a private school for students with ID, they are an extremely restricted environment. The only opportunity students get to go into the community is for about four to six hours during the week in the School to Work Internship Program or on a Community Based Instruction trip. They do not have the students at actual work sites as much as they would like. In the last three years, the school has graduated one student who has a part-time job with a paycheck.

Yet there are plans in place to have this private institution begin using research-based best practices in their program. The transition coordinator is only in her second year and is the first person hired to that role. She is in the process of creating a school-wide student portfolio initiative that will track from year to year students' progress and plans for after graduation. This will start as soon as the student enters the school. The principal has created a new "community classroom" that will be based in a public market. Students will attend a classroom at the public market for half of the day and then work at

an internship in the market for the rest of the day. Students will be completely immersed in the community for the entirety of the school day. Also with this program the students will be practicing work skills as well. If all of these programs go as planned, they will be on the right track to providing students the best opportunity to succeed after graduation.

Conclusion:

A major flaw in this research is that the interviewees were familiar with the interviewer and may have felt that they wanted to give the answers expected. It may have been best practice to give anonymous surveys to the participants.

Going forward with this research the interview sample would expand to not only include professionals in the area, but also parents and students. The research would also expand from one small private school to several public schools including inclusive and non-inclusive programs. This will lead to a broader sampling of school personnel and programs in order to determine whether or not schools are using research-based best practices to better the post-school outcomes for students with ID.

There is a copious amount of research that demonstrates how to best prepare our students with ID for post-school life, yet we consistently fail to use these practices in our schools. There needs to be research into *why* we are not using these practices to better our students' lives upon graduation. Every individual deserves to have their education be designed to prepare them for life after school, yet we consistently do not prepare students with an intellectual disability for a full life in the community.