



Marshall Street



Igniting Postsecondary Aspirations

PROVEN SCHOOL-BASED PRACTICES TO EMPOWER STUDENTS TO TRANSITION INTO MEANINGFUL COLLEGE, CAREER, AND POSTSECONDARY PATHWAYS









A Collection of Research-to-Impact Practices Developed with the Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities

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Preface

In Igniting *Postsecondary Aspirations: Proven school-based practices to empower students to transition into meaningful college, career, and community postsecondary pathways*, we share a set of best practices for improving learning and postsecondary outcomes in secondary students — particularly Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty — using transition programming that empowers students to seek individualized postsecondary pathways. The Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities (NIC), a group of 10 public charter school networks serving more than 75,000 students nationwide, identified the best practices through their work between 2019 and 2023.

Led by **Marshall Street** at Summit Public Schools, in partnership with technical assistance providers NIRN, RTI International, SRI International, and SWIFT Education Center, the purpose of the three-year NIC was to systematically improve the way our education system serves Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty and share these solutions with school systems everywhere. This report is funded by the Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Gates Foundation.

The NIC used continuous improvement to translate existing research for improving learning and postsecondary outcomes into best practices and to iterate the practices to ensure they worked in a variety of school contexts.

In ***Igniting Postsecondary Aspirations: Proven school-based practices to empower students to transition into meaningful college, career, and community postsecondary pathways***, we share the results of this vital work:

- A **literature review**, summarizing the key research related to providing transition planning and services
- Three **best practices** that schools used while in the NIC as part of their transition planning and services to successfully improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. Each best practice includes:
  - Case studies highlighting how schools in the NIC implemented the practices
  - Step-by-step implementation guidance
  - Key prerequisites and accelerants for successful implementation in any context
- Two **case studies** that showcase how schools supported students and families in connecting with internal alumni success coaches and external organizations to ensure students received resources after high school

We share these best practices so that any school in the country can leverage the learning from the NIC to accelerate dramatic gains in learning and postsecondary outcomes for their students with disabilities. We hope that administrators and educators across the country can use the stories within this collection to build their school cultures of continuous improvement as well.

Acknowledgments

About Marshall Street

Marshall Street is a division of Summit Public Schools based in Redwood City, California. Marshall draws from more than 15 years of institutional knowledge and extensive experience in school improvement. Through our programs, we increase the capacity of our school partners to carry their work forward in the ways most meaningful to their communities.

Continuous Improvement is a set of principles and practices to help educators "get better at getting better." Marshall's Continuous Improvement team uses these tools to tackle intricate, systems-level problems in K–12 education. From 2019 to 2023, Marshall led a multi-year Networked Improvement Community (NIC) to make dramatic gains in the learning experiences, environments, and outcomes for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty.

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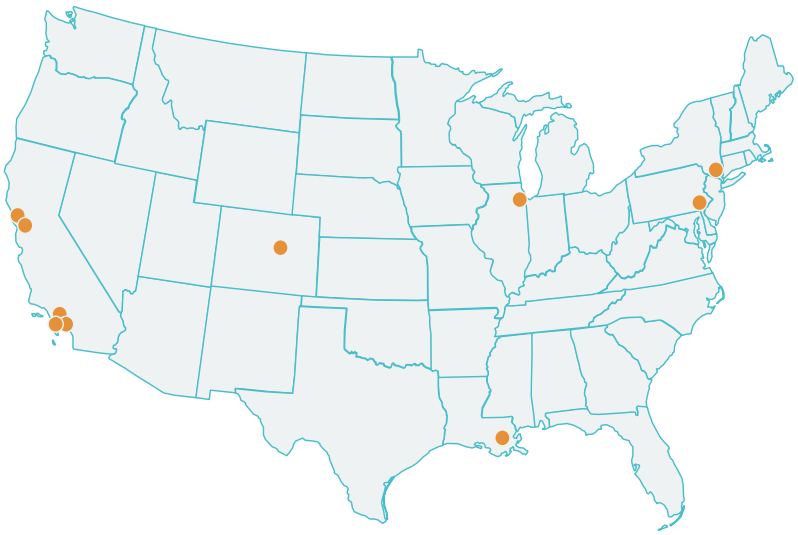
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Marshall Street

Overview

IGNITING POSTSECONDARY ASPIRATIONS

A collection of research-to-impact practices developed with the Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities

COLLECTION OVERVIEW

Igniting Postsecondary Aspirations

Introduction

The Challenge

Postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities lag behind those of their peers.

Public schools across America struggle to meet the diverse needs of students, particularly those furthest from opportunity. When marginalization intersects with disability, students often face low expectations, are systematically segregated, are denied access to college and career curricula, and do not receive sufficient support to obtain a high school diploma and pursue their postsecondary goals.[1] Ensuring that students have the necessary skills to successfully transition into adulthood after high school — whether to 2- or 4-year college, workforce development, employment, the military, or community living — is an essential goal for schools. Unfortunately, people with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 64 are considerably less likely than people without disabilities to be employed, to both enroll in and complete postsecondary education programs, and to live independently.[2] **In 2023, only 37.1% of people with disabilities were employed; the same year, of people without disabilities, 75.0% were employed.**[3] Despite requirements in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to center Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) on postsecondary education, employment, and community living goals for students 16 years and older,[4] schools continue to struggle to make sure students are achieving those goals.

Competing priorities reduce opportunities for students with disabilities to learn necessary skills.

While college enrollment after graduation continues to be an important focus for high schools, the explicit teaching of postsecondary skills is also necessary for ensuring students with disabilities experience success in college, a career, the military, or in their community once they leave high school. The focus of many high schools on college enrollment after graduation for all students has made it

difficult for special education programs to teach postsecondary skills. As a result, there is limited time during the school day for special educators to teach postsecondary employment and community living skills when schools focus solely on college preparation.[5] Students receive college readiness activities through college preparation programs (e.g., seminars, advisory, or college counseling), but additional time is necessary to support students with the development of employment and community living skills.[6] When school goals don't align with the goals of students and families, it is difficult to provide students with disabilities opportunities to gain the skills necessary for successful postsecondary transitions.

Schools do not invest in the staffing necessary to create diverse postsecondary opportunities for students.

Even when schools are interested in providing a diverse range of opportunities for students to reach their postsecondary goals, they often lack the necessary infrastructure and relationships.[7] Schools may want to make more opportunities available for students with disabilities to learn postsecondary skills, particularly through work-based learning opportunities, but they do not invest in staff who can develop relationships with external organizations, businesses, and programs. There must be staff with dedicated time for building connections with programs[8] in a variety of industries so that students can build skills regardless of the type of goal they have. In addition, schools need to ensure that students with moderate to severe disabilities are sufficiently supported when engaging in activities outside the school building in the same way they would be supported in school.[9] Currently, not enough schools are investing in their goal to provide students with diverse postsecondary transition learning opportunities so that students with disabilities can experience the same successful outcomes as their peers.[10]

Our Approach

Experiential and work-based learning opportunities are necessary for students with disabilities to learn the skills required for successful postsecondary transitions. **Existing research demonstrates that when students with disabilities engage in career and technical education programs, they are more likely to graduate from high school, earn an industry certification,[11] and be employed[12] after graduation.** By creating postsecondary pathways aligned with student goals and giving students real-world opportunities in those pathways, students can be better prepared for life after high school.

The implementation of effective postsecondary programming and support is essential to the NIC's aim of systematically improving the way our education system serves Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty. To close the research-to-practice gap, the NIC explored and developed a set of accessible and effective interventions to accelerate choice-filled postsecondary pathways for students. At the foundation of these interventions are the following guiding principles.

Working with external organizations ensures students can pursue the pathway of their choice.

Postsecondary transition programming needs to be designed so that, regardless of disability, students can choose their postsecondary goals and have a variety of ways to work toward those goals. Every student should be able to pursue their pathway of interest. This is particularly important for students with moderate to severe disabilities, who have long been denied self-determination of their future.[13]

Partnering with community-based organizations is a necessity for providing students with a variety of postsecondary readiness opportunities. Schools have to invest in hiring staff who can maintain relationships between the school and community-based organizations; conduct ongoing research into programs and potential partners, including making contact, acquiring information, and visiting locations; develop and maintain a collaborative process for the program; and coordinate information-sharing across various stakeholder groups (e.g., students, families, postsecondary teams, and IEP teams).

Engaging in inter-agency collaboration (e.g., collaboration between schools and the state department of rehabilitation), as **Uncommon Schools** did while in the NIC, has proven to result in improved outcomes for students with disabilities, including increases in both postsecondary employment and enrollment in postsecondary education programs.[14] Services — such as pre-employment training, job placements, and workplace accommodations — are often essential for students with moderate to severe disabilities once they complete high school and lose services they have relied on for years.

Mastery Schools, while engaged in the NIC, was able to develop new partnerships with external organizations and thus increase the number of pathways available to their students with and without disabilities. For schools to provide a range of opportunities and support in all students' chosen pathways — as **Mastery** and **Uncommon** did — they need to be dedicated to developing relationships with external partners and organizations.

Engaging key stakeholders ensures students have a team supporting their transition.

Engaging key stakeholders, including those who can continue to support students after graduation, is central to ensuring postsecondary long-term success for students with disabilities. Families are particularly important partners because students often need parents' or guardians' information to qualify for programs. Educators can intentionally serve as liaisons and coordinators to help families who qualify for services to:

- understand program eligibility criteria (e.g., income verification, documentation of disability, or service needs),
- complete initial applications,
- submit required documentation,
- participate in intake interviews, and
- attend meetings to develop service plans.

While in the NIC, **Uncommon** solidified a process for engaging families throughout the school year to support student enrollment in postsecondary services at community-based organizations. Connecting families with the organizations was important for the students in Uncommon's self-contained program because they and their families often depend on higher-level and longer-term services more than students who are fully included in the general education setting.

Collaboration among school-based stakeholders, including special education case managers, transition coordinators, and college counselors, is also critical for supporting students in choosing and pursuing the right postsecondary pathway. When postsecondary transition teams are composed of a diverse set of staff members with various knowledge and viewpoints, team members can each give input, focus on students' interests, integrate family preferences, and mitigate potential biases that can unintentionally

direct our priority population to less lucrative or lower-status occupations. **Uncommon** built structures for regular collaboration between their career and college success coaches, alumni success coaches, and special education team members to ensure the engagement of students with disabilities in postsecondary planning throughout high school and after graduation.

Using data regularly enables teams to assess and monitor students' transition progress.

Regularly reviewing data on student progress toward postsecondary goals and providing interventions when needed increases the number of students who successfully complete their postsecondary pathways. Team members at NIC schools updated data as they interacted with students so that their teams understood students' current performance. Data on student attendance, grades, behavior, and home life, considered alongside data on progress toward postsecondary goals, helped teams to support students more efficiently. **Mastery Schools** accomplished this by refining meetings between the postsecondary team, special education case managers, and social workers to regularly collect and monitor data on students' progress toward their transition goals. By reviewing this data at least biweekly, **Mastery's** team could respond promptly to student needs rather than waiting for students to fall behind. Schools also used this data to determine whether all students with disabilities were accessing transition opportunities, not just students with mild disabilities or those pursuing more traditional pathways.

Enabling Conditions

Each of the practices in this collection strengthens postsecondary transition planning and services to improve outcomes for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty. **The effective implementation of these practices was made possible because of three core enabling conditions that were in place in NIC members' schools: strong transition plans, collaboration time with stakeholders, and dedicated staffing.** Without these three conditions, the practices' impact is dramatically reduced.

Clear, Measurable, and Attainable Transition Plans

All students with disabilities ages 16 or older must have transition plans with a goal in each of the following: postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. Some states and localities require transition plans as part of the IEP when students are 14 years old. Clear transition plans that are developed with the students' and families' input are essential for schools to create and implement effective transition programming. Student interviews, career interest surveys, transcript audits, and parent interviews are examples of ways that educators can collect data to help determine what students' IEP transition goals will be.

Like academic goals, transition goals need to be measurable and attainable for students. It is especially important for transition goals and related activities to be aligned with the language used by the school so that all educators and administrators can clearly understand how students' goals fit with existing structures. Nevertheless, students' goals should be based on what is best for each student, not on what is best for the school. In some cases, students' IEP goals will require schools to develop new

programming, some of which is described in this collection, to meet individual student needs. Clearly stated transition goals and goal-aligned activities can help schools shape their postsecondary transition programs to better meet the needs of all students.

Dedicated Time for Stakeholder Collaboration

For successful implementation of the transition best practices described in this collection, educators leading the transition practices need dedicated time to collaborate with fellow educators, students, and community-based organizations. Both before those meetings and after, educators need time to work directly with students on their transition activities, assess and document progress toward transition requirements, visit students at work-based learning sites, and enact additional support for students who are off track toward their transition goals. Finally, at least one staff member needs dedicated time to communicate and interact with community-based organizations to build and maintain relationships so that students have access to important resources and programming. **Mastery** was able to create these structures with biweekly team meetings that were led by a dedicated transition coordinator who kept the team accountable.

Dedicated Staffing

Transition programs are strengthened when staffing allows a dedicated educator to monitor, develop, and support transition services for students with disabilities. Having a staff member focused on ensuring that every student successfully transitions to the postsecondary programming of their choice is key to improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Case managers can write transition plans for students' IEPs, and special education teachers can teach skills or collaborate with advisors or seminar teachers to ensure students learn skills in school. However, a strong transition program requires solid relationships with community-based organizations, which takes significant time and effort that needs to be dedicated to those tasks. Both **Mastery** and **Uncommon** devoted resources so that individuals at the school and network levels could support the further development of external partnerships and ensure staff collaboration between general and special education within their schools and networks. These staff members were integral to the implementation of their transition programs.



The Collection

This collection includes **three best practices** that support the education of students with disabilities on behalf of improving their postsecondary outcomes, and **two case studies** on additional ways to ensure that students and families are able to access postsecondary resources.

Each of the practices detailed in this book is an independently strong and valuable practice. However, each practice is most effective when built on a programmatic foundation that provides opportunities for academic learning, disability-related skill development, and postsecondary transition experiences.



The audience for this collection is educators, schools, and districts who believe that all students are capable of achieving the postsecondary goals of their choosing, who fundamentally believe that it is the system's responsibility to ensure this is a reality for all students it serves, and who are looking for ideas on how to initiate or refine their approach to this work. While a great many research papers, reports, and technical assistance centers provide guidance on postsecondary transition, this collection is unique:

- It ties together the multiple elements critical to addressing the postsecondary transition needs of all students and specifically those of Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty.
- It emphasizes the importance of using data at all levels of the school system and of engaging individuals from all levels of the school system.
- Each chapter is grounded in both the foundational and current research on the practice but emphasizes (1) detailed, real-world examples of the practice as implemented in secondary schools and classrooms within the NIC and (2) a step-by-step guide to the implementation of the practice.

Chapter 1: Building School-Based Transition Teams to Accelerate Student Progress Toward Postsecondary Goals

Schools should monitor transition progress in the same way they monitor other student outcomes so that teams can intervene and adapt support for students when data indicates it is necessary. Postsecondary and transition teams need to regularly review data and make decisions on how best to support students throughout the year in order to ensure all students achieve their postsecondary goals. This chapter describes how schools can create regular meeting structures so that school staff who work with students on their postsecondary goals can collaborate and monitor student progress.

Chapter 2: Establishing External Partnerships to Strengthen Work-Based Learning Opportunities

Typical dual enrollment programs allow students to receive high school credit while taking college courses. States like Pennsylvania allow students to receive high school credit while also meeting requirements for college, certification, licensing, or other pathways students may choose to enroll in after high school. To be successful, dual enrollment requires strong partnerships with external organizations or institutions, both public and private, to provide students a variety of choices for pursuing their postsecondary pathways. This chapter provides a guide to creating a dual enrollment program, describes the staff and additional resources necessary for its successful implementation, and outlines steps to create and maintain new external partnerships with community-based organizations.

Chapter 3: Providing Summer Transition Programming for Postsecondary Success

When students are unable to secure a placement in a postsecondary institution (e.g., college, workplace, workforce training center, community living, or the military) before graduation, intensive support during the summer after graduation can help those students meet their postsecondary goals. Counselors, working with students 1:1 and in small groups, can ensure that students are completing the steps necessary to secure a postsecondary placement by the end of summer. This chapter outlines how to develop such a summer program, including sample weekly schedules for counselors and an explanation of how to develop a summer transition plan for students.

Case Study: Partnering with Families to Expand Enrollment in Community-Based Programs

To ensure students' successful transition out of high school, schools and educators often need to engage directly with families in the steps necessary to obtain the continuing support and services students need. Many families require explicit directions and detailed information about opportunities for their children, as well as regular follow-up to ensure they are meeting application deadlines and are able to get all the necessary documentation. This case study explains the steps that schools or educators can use to help families enroll in community-based programs, particularly those provided by the Division of Vocational and Rehabilitation Services. These steps can apply to any external program and can help schools build stronger relationships with families.

Case Study: Developing Relationships Between Students and Alumni Success Coaches

Counselors who support students after graduation need to understand the unique needs of students with disabilities in order to properly support this population. In addition, students in separate classroom settings need opportunities to build deep, trusting relationships with these counselors in order for students to accept and use the support offered. This case study describes how one network met both needs by creating structures for collaboration between counselors and special educators, which led to students with disabilities better understanding the different staff members helping them reach their postsecondary goals. Though not all schools have the alumni success coaches described in the case study, the lessons offered in this chapter can be applied widely to collaborative activities between special educators and college or school counselors.

How to Approach this Collection

The pieces in this collection can be read in any order, as one is not necessarily dependent on another. Chapters are written to help the reader replicate the practices in their own context. Case studies can be read to inspire ideas but will not necessarily give the depth needed to implement the practice.

Further Reading

A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities
The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, US Department of Education

IEP Transition Planning Checklists for Educators
Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

A Guide for Teachers/Educators for Collaborating with Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Youth with Disabilities
The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition

Appendix

Notes

1 Rowjewski et al., “Effects of Inclusion on Postsecondary Education Outcomes”; Shifrer, *Stigma of a Label; Shifrer et al, Equity or Marginalization?*

2 Newman et al, “National Longitudinal Transition Study”

3 US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Persons with a Disability

4 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

5 Cease-Cook et al, “Work-Based Learning Experiences”

6 Mazzotti et al, “Predictors of Postsecondary Success”

7 Plotner, “Professional Characteristics that Impact Perceptions”

8 Scholl & Mooney, “Work-Based Learning Programs”

9 Kittelman et al., “Strategies to Support Work-Based Learning”

10 Moran, “Federal Coordination for Better Transition”

11 Dougherty et al, “Impact of Career and Technical Education”

12 Theobald et al, “Career and Technical Education”; Wagner et al, “Benefits of High School Career and Technical Education”

13 Brock et al., “Self Determination and Agency for All”

14 Kohler et al., *Taxonomy for Transition Programming*

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Marshall Street

Literature Review

IGNITING POSTSECONDARY ASPIRATIONS

A collection of research-to-impact practices developed with the Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities

IGNITING POSTSECONDARY ASPIRATIONS

Literature Review

ABSTRACT

Studies examining postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities report that this population consistently experiences poorer outcomes than the general student population across multiple indicators, including participation in postsecondary education and employment, independent living, and job benefits and earnings (Newman et al., Secondary School Programs, 2011). However, these results are not a foregone conclusion; research also supports the finding that effectively implemented transition planning and programming in middle and high school settings is positively correlated with improved postsecondary outcomes (Cobb et al. 2013; Cobb and Alwell 2009; Test et al. 2009). This literature review synthesizes the existing research on practical approaches to transition planning and programming. We define transition planning and programming for students with disabilities, explain why it is important, and summarize what is known about transition planning practices that are associated with positive postsecondary outcomes. Woven throughout are the findings specific to Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty.

Introduction

A primary mandate of public schools is to prepare students for postsecondary life as engaged citizens by equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in education, employment, and beyond. This school-to-adulthood transition can be particularly challenging for students with disabilities, and postsecondary outcomes for this population consistently lag behind those of their peers without disabilities. Across several decades, extensive research has been conducted to understand the challenges and best practices associated with postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

This literature review was written for an audience of educators, schools, and districts seeking to influence postsecondary outcomes for students with a focus on Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty. Our goal is to provide a comprehensive yet concise summary of recent research, literature reviews, and meta-analyses on this topic to aid our audience in understanding (1)

which practices are most likely to improve postsecondary education, employment, and independent living outcomes for students with disabilities and (2) under what conditions these practices should be applied. We begin with defining and clarifying the importance of transition planning and programming and proceed to summarize the following subtopics:

- **TRANSITION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH IMPROVED POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**
- **BARRIERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE PRACTICES**
- **RECOMMENDED FRAMEWORKS FOR DESIGNING TRANSITION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING SERVICES ALIGNED WITH EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES**

The review focuses on literature published in the last 20 years and includes older, seminal studies where relevant. We summarize the findings of several comprehensive literature reviews and meta-analyses of transition planning practices for students with disabilities and include additional studies published in scholarly journals where applicable.

This literature review is part of a larger collection of improvement tools for districts. The Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities (NIC), a group of 10 public charter school networks serving more than 75,000 students nationwide, launched in 2019 to make dramatic gains in the learning experiences, environments, and outcomes for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty. Led by Marshall Street at Summit Public Schools in partnership with technical assistance providers NIRN, RTI International, SRI International, and SWIFT Education Center, NIC participants used continuous improvement methods, supported by this literature review of leading research and a corresponding toolkit of best practices, to improve implementation in these areas with the potential to increase academic outcomes for students with disabilities: Collaboration, Literacy, Multi-tiered Systems of Support, Transitions, and Emotional and Behavioral Supports.

What is Transition Planning and Programming for Students with Disabilities?

Transition services for students with disabilities are a federal mandate outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Beginning in 1990, IDEA mandated that schools provide transition goals and services to students with disabilities aged 16 and older and required consideration of student interests, preferences, and needs (Kohler and Field 2003; Martin, Boon, and Love 2007). Presently, IDEA requires that Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students aged 14 and older include appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals that are based on age-appropriate transition assessments and transition services (including a course of study) needed to support the student with a disability to achieve those goals (Individuals with Disability Education Act 2004).

IDEA defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is:

- results-oriented,
- focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability,
- based on the individual child's needs, and
- inclusive of instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation (Individuals with Disability Education Act 2004).

School districts are further required to invite the student to participate in any IEP meeting related to transition planning and programming and to consider the student's strengths and preferences when developing the individual transition plan (US DOE 2017).

The transition planning process consists of the following steps (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, "Predictors of Post School Success," n.d.):

1. Collecting information on student strengths, needs, interests, and preferences in the areas of academics, career interests, self-determination skills, and independent living skills
2. Establishing post-secondary goals in the areas of training and/or education, employment, and independent living
3. Identifying services and activities (including a course of study) that will assist the student in achieving the established goals
4. Specifying annual IEP goals in alignment with the course of study
5. Engaging the student, family, and community organizations to facilitate the individual components of the transition plan

Why is Transition Planning and Programming for Students with Disabilities Important?

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) followed a nationally representative sample of students aged 13 to 16 years at the start of the study in 2000 until 2010 in an effort to understand their educational, vocational, social, and personal experiences as they transitioned from adolescence to adulthood (Newman et al., *Secondary School Programs*, 2011). The NLTS2 found that students with disabilities consistently performed more poorly than the general student population on a range of indicators: they were less likely to both enroll in and complete postsecondary education programs, were less likely to live independently, and experienced poorer employment outcomes (fewer hours per week, lower salaries, and reduced benefits). According to the US Department of Commerce (Newman et al., *Post-High School Outcomes*, 2011), an individual with a high school diploma who has not been identified as having a disability will earn, on average, one million dollars more over a lifetime than a similarly educated person with a disability.

Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty are at risk for greater postsecondary employment difficulties (Dutta et al. 2019). The NLTS2 found that Black students with disabilities enrolled in and completed postsecondary training and education programs at significantly lower rates than white students with disabilities. Students with disabilities from households earning less than $25,000/year are significantly less likely to be engaged in postsecondary employment than students with disabilities from households earning more than $50,000/year (Newman et al., *Secondary School Programs*, 2011).

While US schools have a long way to go to ensure students with disabilities achieve postsecondary success commensurate with their peers without disabilities, it is encouraging that school-based transition services have resulted in improved student outcomes. Since transition planning for students with disabilities was mandated in 1990, fewer students with disabilities have dropped out of school, and more have enrolled in postsecondary education. Students with disabilities are employed at higher rates now than they were prior to 1990 (Trainor, Morningstar, and Murray 2016), and transition planning during high school is associated with increased access to disability support in postsecondary education programs (Newman, Madaus, and Javitz 2016). This suggests that transition programs grounded in evidence-based practices have the potential to positively impact postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

Further, a body of research examining the predictors of postsecondary success for students with disabilities provides the field with a strong research base of specific interventions and evidence-based practices for transition planning and programming.

What are the specific benefits of implementing school-based transition planning and programming practices?

Research has documented a range of benefits of school-based transition planning and programming practices for students with disabilities, outlined on the following page.

DOCUMENTED BENEFITS OF TRANSITION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES		
Higher rates of post-secondary employment	Students with disabilities who participate in **work-based learning experiences** during high school experience higher rates of postsecondary employment than those who do not.	Dong, Fabian, and Luecking 2016; Luecking and Wittenburg 2009
	Students whose schools engage in meaningful **interagency collaboration** are more likely to obtain postsecondary employment.	Test et al. 2009
	Students with disabilities who exhibit **self-determination skills** are more likely to be engaged in postsecondary education and employment.	Algozzine et al. 2001; Berry, Ward, and Caplan 2012; Shogren et al. 2017; Doren and Kang 2016
Higher rates of enrollment in postsecondary educational programs	Students with disabilities whose **families are involved** in their transition planning are more likely to enroll in post-secondary educational programs than students whose families were not involved.	Test et al. 2009; Lindstrom and Beno 2020
	Having **transition goals focused on postsecondary employment** increases the likelihood that students with disabilities participate in postsecondary educational experiences.	Carter, Austin, and Trainor 2012; Chiang et al. 2012
	Students whose schools engage in **meaningful interagency collaboration** are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education programs.	Test et al. 2009
	Transition planning education in high school increased the likelihood that students with disabilities would seek and use disability services in postsecondary education institutions	Newman, Madaus, and Javitz 2016

Which School-Based Transition Planning and Programming Practices Predict Improved Postsecondary Outcomes for Students with Disabilities?

An extensive body of research examining transition planning and postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities has identified evidence-based practices that should guide schools in designing transition programming.

Work-Based Learning Experiences

Work experience refers to any activity that places students in authentic workplace environments. It can include work sampling, job shadowing, internships, and paid employment. Work-related experiences during school are consistently correlated with higher rates of employment and engagement in postsecondary education programs for students with disabilities (Test et al. 2009; Mazotti et al. 2021). These opportunities contribute to developing technical, vocational, and employment skills and assist students in making informed decisions about long-term career interests (Cease-Cook et al. 2015).

Work experiences are most effective when they include the following (Kohler and Field 2003; National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center, n.d.):

- "Soft skills" that will promote vocational success are explicitly taught
- Accommodations necessary for successful participation in work-based experiences
- Transportation as needed
- Job performance evaluations and feedback for students
- Vocational assessments to match students to work experiences aligned with their interests
- Course credit for successful completion of work-based experiences

Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy Skills

Self-determination refers to the combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable individuals to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. Self-advocacy is a subskill within self-determination, and refers to an individual's ability to "effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his/her own interests and/or desires" (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, "Instruction in Self-Advocacy," n.d.). Instruction in self-determination results in increased use of these skills and increased participation in IEP meetings (Algozzine et al. 2001). Self-determination skills are also associated with improved outcomes in postsecondary education programs (Test et al. 2009) and increased rates of independent living (Mazotti 2021).

Self-determination and self-advocacy skills can also increase the likelihood that students with disabilities have access to accommodations in postsecondary educational programs (Davis and Garfield 2021). Students with disabilities are more likely to successfully complete 2-year and 4-year college programs if they receive supports (those available to all students and disability-specific supports). Yet, only 24% of students with disabilities receive accommodations in postsecondary education. This is often because students do not disclose their disability status to their institutions (Newman, Madaus, and Javitz 2016). Active participation in transition planning meetings can serve to build student awareness of their disability and necessary accommodations and set up students for successfully advocating for services after high school (Morgan et al. 2017).

One evidence-based approach to building student self-advocacy skills is the Self-Directed IEP, in which students with disabilities learn to actively participate in and lead their own IEPs (Martin et al. 2006). The Self-Directed IEP uses video modeling, student assignments, and role-playing to teach skills like asking for feedback, stating goals, asking questions, and dealing with differences in opinion. Studies have found that participating in Self-Directed IEP meetings results in greater student leadership and participation in IEP meetings, more positive student and adult perceptions of the IEP process, and increased levels of self-determination (Martin et al. 2006; Askvig et al. 2020).

Interagency Collaboration

Interagency collaboration describes the exchange of information and sharing of resources across multiple stakeholders from schools, service agencies, community organizations, families, and students (Transition Coalition, n.d.) Schools should consider interagency collaboration with organizations that provide health and mental health services, vocational services, continuing education opportunities and supports, and services tailored to individual student circumstances (National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth 2018).

When executed effectively, interagency collaboration is associated with improved enrollment in postsecondary education programs and increased rates of postsecondary employment (Test et al. 2009). There are benefits to the participating agencies as well, including access to additional resources to support transition services, cost savings, and elimination of redundant services (Martin, Boon, and Love 2007).

Factors associated with successful interagency collaboration include (Kohler and Field 2003; Poirier et al. 2022):

- formal interagency agreements that outline roles, responsibilities, communication, and the like;
- a dedicated staff member (e.g., a "transition coordinator") responsible for transition planning and programming tasks, including establishing and overseeing interagency collaboration; and
- interagency participation in shared training opportunities.

Citing the lack of specific training for working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students and families in the transition planning process, Brown Ruiz and Scott (2021) present a framework for implementing culturally responsive practices during collaborative transition planning. The steps of the culturally responsive pre-employment transition services framework are as follows:

1. Service providers from the school and community agencies and organizations build professional relationships by establishing mutual understanding of roles and strengths, providing feedback, and holding each other accountable for understanding biases.
2. Service providers invest in a long-term process and work to understand the historical and institutional barriers faced by students and families.
3. Service providers engage in critical reflection to acknowledge systems of oppression and build social capital within the community.
4. Service providers incorporate culturally responsiveness and critical action in the transition planning process, including building student and family self-advocacy skills.

Family Involvement

Family involvement is a critical component of successful transition planning, as families serve as continuous partners across and beyond students' K–12 school experiences (National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth 2018). Family involvement in student-centered planning is associated with improved attendance, academic outcomes, and student self-esteem and reduced dropout rates (Kohler and Field 2003). Factors associated with increased family engagement in transition planning include (Benz, Lindstrom, and Halpern 1995; Lindstrom and Beno 2020):

- direct, routine communication strategies,
- joint training opportunities for educators and family members,
- a single, knowledgeable individual coordinating transition services at a school site, and
- support groups and networking opportunities with other families of students with disabilities.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families and families experiencing poverty have lower rates of participation in school-based transition planning activities than white, English-speaking families (Hirano et al. 2018; Ju, Landmark, and Zhang 2018). Factors contributing to these lower participation rates can be categorized into three groups:

- School barriers: lack of awareness of cultural values and issues on the part of school staff, lack of availability of interpreters, and untimely communication about transition planning activities
- Adult barriers: undervaluing of the family's role in student-centered planning, low expectations for family involvement, and the level of bureaucracy encountered by families and students
- Family barriers: low self-efficacy, stress, lack of resources, and lack of cultural capital

Strategies to increase the meaningful participation of all families in the transition planning process include the following:

- Provide training and workshops to families to increase their knowledge about the transition planning process.
- Create networking opportunities for families to build relationships with other families in the school community.
- Provide professional development and coaching to build school staff knowledge and skills related to the engagement of CLD families in the transition planning process.
- Improve school-family communication by using multiple means of presenting information, avoiding jargon in communication with families, and enhancing translation and interpretation services.

Inclusion in General Education Classrooms

Students with disabilities who are primarily educated in the general education environment consistently have improved outcomes when compared to students with disabilities who are primarily educated in special education settings. They are more likely to participate in postsecondary education, be engaged in postsecondary employment, and live independently (Baer et al. 2003; Test et al. 2009; Mazotti et al. 2021).

Practices associated with effective inclusive models of education for students with disabilities include (National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth 2018):

- leadership support for the alignment of general and special education curriculum,
- ongoing formative assessment and data-driven intervention planning,
- curriculum and instruction that encourages and facilitates full participation and progress, and
- inclusion in out-of-classroom experiences to promote relationships between students with and without disabilities.

What are the Barriers to the Implementation of School-Based Transition Planning and Programming Practices?

Despite the evidence that well-designed transition planning and programming structures are associated with improved postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, many US schools do not consistently implement evidence-based practices for transition planning (Martin, Boon, and Love 2007; Scheef and McKnight-Lizotte 2022).

First, many students simply fail to participate in high school transition planning activities (Trainor, Morningstar, and Murray 2016). There are a number of factors influencing participation in transition planning, including a lack of opportunity to practice the self-determination skills required to engage in transition tasks (such as leading IEP meetings) and a mismatch between the normalization and independence required for self-determination and familial and cultural values of particular students and their families (Griffin 2011). Research has also documented dissatisfaction from students with disabilities and their families who have not felt adequately valued or included in the transition planning process (Trainor, Morningstar, and Murray 2016).

While interagency collaboration has been established as a best practice for transition planning, it is an underutilized practice, with less than 25% of transition planning meetings including a representative from a community agency or organization (Trainor, Morningstar, and Murray 2016). Barriers contributing to low levels of interagency collaboration include a lack of training on how to establish interagency relationships and how to refer students for services and a lack of awareness from community organizations and agencies on the role they should play in transition planning (Scheef and McKnight-Lizotte 2022).

What Evidence-Based Frameworks Can Schools Use to Design Transition Planning and Programming?

Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition Programming

Kohler's *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* (Kohler et al. 2016) summarizes the literature regarding predictors of postsecondary outcomes and strategies to foster successful transition for students with disabilities into college and careers. It is the predominant framework for transition planning and programming referenced across the literature on transition. The taxonomy provides five primary practice categories:

- **Student-focused planning:** Student-focused planning refers to the activities involved in designing and implementing individual student transition plans. It includes IEP development, planning strategies, and student participation.
- **Student development:** Student development refers to the functional and academic skills that support a positive and successful transition into post-secondary activities. It includes instruction in academic, social-emotional, and employment skills, as well as assessment, student support, and instructional context.

- **Interagency collaboration:** Interagency collaboration refers to coordinating the efforts of schools and community agencies, such as college offices of disability services, vocational centers, and adult service providers, to most effectively implement transition planning and programming services for students with disabilities. It includes a collaborative framework and collaborative service delivery.
- **Family engagement:** Family engagement refers to the ways in which schools actively support family involvement in the transition planning and programming process. It also refers to schools' specific actions to build family capacity to implement transition plans and includes family involvement, family empowerment, and family preparation.
- **Program structures:** Program structures refer to the elements of transition programs that support postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities and the processes that schools use to evaluate and continually improve transition planning and programming for them. Program structures include program characteristics, program evaluation, strategic planning, policies and procedures, resource development and allocation, and school climate.

Guideposts for Success

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth established the *Guideposts for Success* in 2005 as a national framework for transition planning for students with disabilities (2018). The guideposts were revised in 2018, and they currently outline five domains essential to effective transition planning:

1. Career preparation and work-based learning experiences
2. Preparatory experiences
3. Youth development and leadership
4. Connecting activities
5. Family involvement and supports

The *Guideposts for Success* are meant to identify both what students with disabilities need to be successful in postsecondary education and employment as well as what is needed to ensure they achieve independence in adulthood.



Conclusion

In conclusion, formal postsecondary transition planning and programming for students with disabilities is not only a federal mandate (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004) but, when conducted in alignment with practices supported in the literature, it is a critical contributor to positive postsecondary outcomes (Cobb et al. 2013; Cobb and Alwell 2009; Test et al. 2009). Factors associated with improved outcomes for students with disabilities include work-based learning experiences, self-determination and self-advocacy skills, interagency collaboration, inclusion in general education, and family involvement. Kohler's *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* (Kohler et al. 2016) and the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth's *Guideposts for Success* summarize for schools and districts the factors and transition practices most closely associated with improved outcomes for students with disabilities. District staff looking to improve transition planning and programming for students with disabilities are advised to implement outcomes-oriented transition programs that reflect high expectations for students with disabilities, use data to continually evaluate and improve their transition planning and programming practices, and engage multiple stakeholders in the design, implementation, and evaluation of transition programs for students with disabilities.

FURTHER LEARNING

Taxonomy for Transition Programming

KOHLER ET AL.

Guideposts for Success: Framework for the Future

CENTER FOR ADVANCING POLICY ON EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH, N.D.

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition

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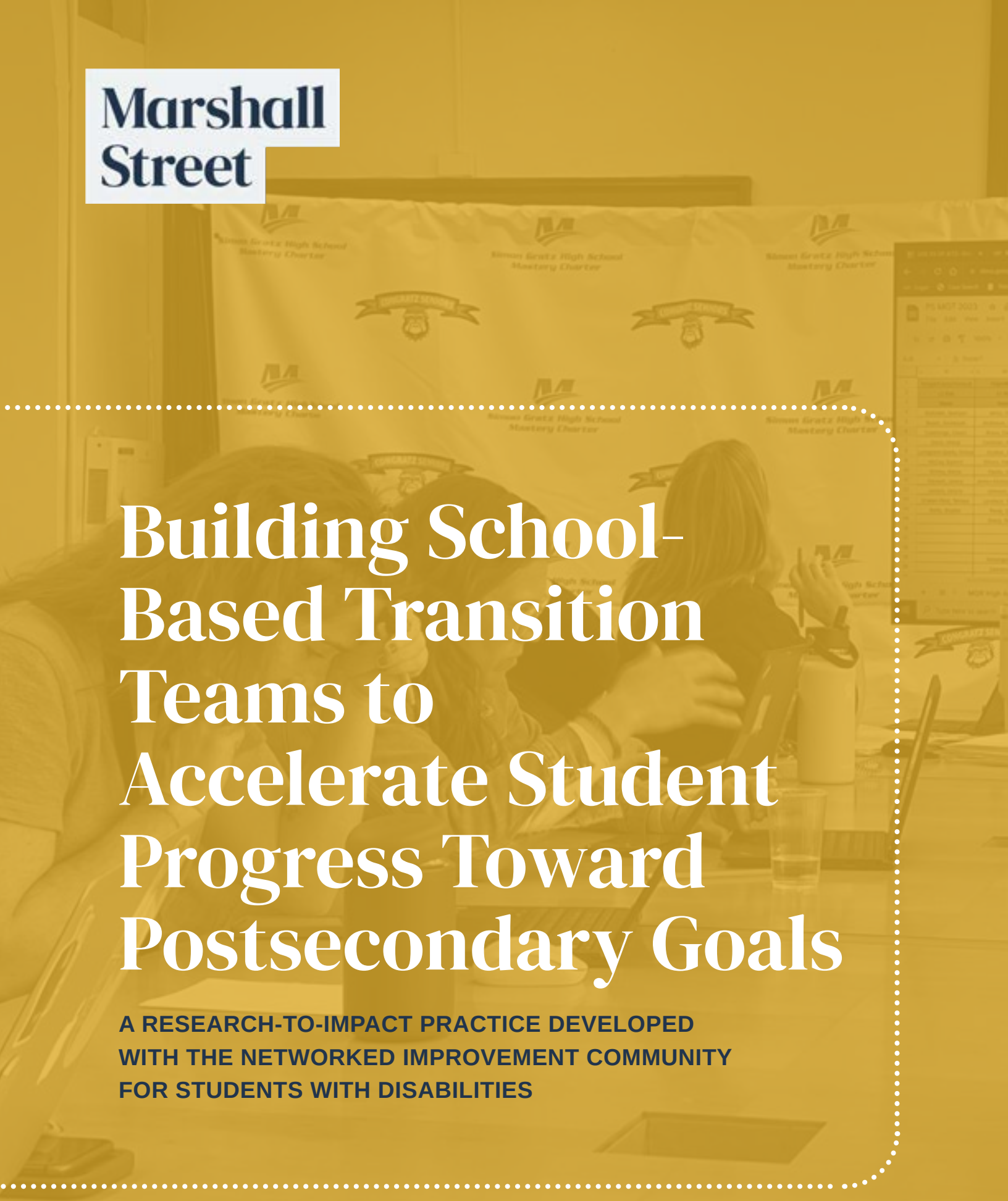
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Building School-Based Transition Teams to Accelerate Student Progress Toward Postsecondary Goals

A RESEARCH-TO-IMPACT PRACTICE DEVELOPED WITH THE NETWORKED IMPROVEMENT COMMUNITY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Building School-Based Transition Teams to Accelerate Student Progress Toward Postsecondary Goals

Implementation Level

- [x] District/Central Office
- [x] School
- [x] Program/Department
- [ ] Classroom

Who Implements

- [x] Teacher(s)
- [ ] Instructional Coach
- [x] Principal
- [x] Central Office Leadership
- [x] Specialist: Social Worker

Practice Overview

What is the Practice?

A transition team of postsecondary counselors, transition coordinators, and social workers meet biweekly to monitor whether students with disabilities are on track to meet postsecondary milestones and goals and to provide rapid action steps when needed.

Essential Elements of Transition Team Meetings

1. Meetings occur on at least a biweekly basis for reviews of student postsecondary milestone data and consistent, timely support.
2. Transition team includes staff with knowledge about different postsecondary pathways (2- and 4-year college, apprenticeships, community living, workforce development, etc.).
3. The team routinely designs rapid action steps for any student not on track to meet postsecondary milestones and goals.

Why is a School-Based Transition Team Important?

After high school, students with disabilities are less likely to live independently or to enroll in postsecondary education, and they experience poorer employment outcomes than their peers without disabilities.[1] Transition planning combined with rapid support in implementing transition plans can improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, no matter which postsecondary path they pursue.

Why it Works

TRANSITION PLANNING INCREASES THE LIKELIHOOD THAT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES RECEIVE SERVICES IN POSTSECONDARY SETTINGS.

Transition planning, like any other type of academic counseling, can have an outsized impact on a student's ability to meet their long-term goals. Students with disabilities who engaged in postsecondary transition-planning education, including education about what services they need after high school, were highly correlated with students actually receiving postsecondary services in academic and non-academic settings.[2] Despite this, only about 20% of students with disabilities are enrolled in a high school program that provides them with the opportunities and services to meet their transition goals.[3] This low enrollment indicates that, though transition planning and programs can have positive outcomes for students, a significant percentage of students with disabilities are not receiving the transition services that would best support long-term success.

TEAMS THAT USE DATA TO SUPPORT TRANSITIONS HELP STUDENTS MAKE PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS.

After establishing transition goals and plans, students with disabilities also need support in navigating enrollment in programs or other steps required to progress on their transition plans. School teams that provide support in implementation — including tracking student progress towards transition goals and intervening when students are falling off track — increase the number of students who successfully access their postsecondary pathways.[4]

COLLABORATIVE TEAMS BRING TOGETHER DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES.

Notably, systems for tracking student progress will be most successful when there is collaboration between the core stakeholders, including special education case managers, transition coordinators, college counselors, and families. Engaging in inter-agency collaboration (e.g., collaboration between schools and the state department of rehabilitation) has proven to result in improved outcomes for students with disabilities, including increases in both postsecondary employment and enrollment in postsecondary education programs.[5] When teams that support students' postsecondary transition progress are composed of a diverse set of staff members with various knowledge and viewpoints, team members can each give input, keep the team focused on students' interests, and include family preferences, as well as help mitigate potential biases that can unintentionally direct our priority population to less lucrative or lower-status occupations.

TRANSITION PLANNING IS THE LAW

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates transition planning activities for students with disabilities starting at age 16, though many states require it to begin earlier. The act intends for these transition planning services to be a collaborative endeavor that includes all individuals and agencies involved in an individual student's postsecondary plan.

Implementation at a Glance

The information in this section provides a high-level view of what to consider when implementing this practice. Enabling Conditions describes the minimum conditions needed for successful implementation, including resources, mindsets, staffing, and recommended time allocation. Steps to Implement presents a concise checklist of action items, which are explained in detail in How to Implement this Practice, below.

Enabling Conditions

Prerequisites	• Staff understand state policies that affect postsecondary pathways. Requirements for graduation and alternative ways to meet criteria are continuously in flux, and staff need to be abreast of these changes. • Staff believe that meaningful postsecondary pathways can include alternatives to 2- and 4-year colleges, such as workforce entry, vocational training/apprenticeships, the military, occupational certifications, or community living. • Staff value student and family voices as the foundation for transition planning. • Staff that support transition systems and students' milestone progress hold a deep commitment to ongoing problem-solving and take the initiative to connect the student and family to any and all available resources. • All students have transition plans with a goal for each of the following: postsecondary education, employment, and independent living.
Recommended Materials	• Clear meeting protocol or agenda • A tracking tool to use during transition planning meetings to track student progress toward postsecondary goals (See Implementing Routine Data Cycles to Rapidly Address Student Needs.) • Communication systems and templates (where appropriate) for family, student, and staff communication
Staff Commitment	• Dedicated team lead to manage meeting agendas, oversee documentation of meetings, and follow up on action items • Dedicated team of up to 6–8 staff members to sit on the transition team and regularly engage in team meetings

Recommended Time Allocation

Meeting facilitator/lead:

- Time between meetings to evaluate progress, support staff, and support student action steps (up to 10 hours weekly)
- Time between meetings to update programmatic and student information and document completed action items (1 hour biweekly)

Teachers and specialists:

- About an hour biweekly of pre-work for transition team members to:
  - identify any students or external programs that have needs for the team to address, and
  - complete action steps from prior meeting
- Protected time and space for 6–8 team members to meet (1 hour biweekly)
- Staff time to enact action steps and provide individualized support to students and families (30–60 minutes per student for follow-up)

Steps to Implement

AT THE START OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

- ☐ Create a student tracking system
- ☐ Input initial student data
- ☐ Form and launch the transition team
- ☐ Determine meeting cadence and protocols

BEFORE THE MEETING

- ☐ Collect and update data

DURING THE MEETING

- ☐ Review data
- ☐ Plan action steps
- ☐ Assign next steps

AFTER THE MEETING

- ☐ Include families in action steps





Bringing this Practice to Life

USING DATA REGULARLY TO ENSURE SUCCESSFUL POSTSECONDARY TRANSITIONS AT MASTERY SCHOOLS

Mastery Schools' Simon Gratz High School, a college preparatory public charter school in Philadelphia, PA, wanted to do a better job at keeping track of student progress on transition activities. They saw tracking this data as essential for improving postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities at their school. An interdisciplinary team focused on postsecondary transitions began meeting every two weeks to review student progress using a data tracker to help guide student-focused conversations. The case study below describes Gratz's process and the encouraging results of the practice.

Mastery Gratz's Biweekly Transition Milestone Meetings

Every two weeks, the conference room table on the second floor of Simon Gratz High School is surrounded by a team of the school's veteran staff. College counselors, social workers, the transition coordinator, and special education case managers all sit with their laptops open in sight of a large TV screen. The screen displays a spreadsheet with data on every senior with an IEP on a non-college pathway (e.g., workforce development, career, or military). Within the spreadsheet, red, yellow, and green highlighting clearly shows overall student progress.

Keeping Track of Every Student

These transition meetings and their follow-up actions attempt to ensure that students complete the necessary steps — "milestones" is the term Gratz uses — along the pathway to each student's postsecondary goal. The ultimate objective is that every student is engaged in a postsecondary

pathway when they graduate. The tools and protocols used during transition meetings all support these purposes. The team keeps track of every student with an IEP, taking action to support those furthest off track and regularly highlighting students' success in dual enrollment programs.

Sharing Knowledge about Students

The color-coding in the spreadsheet makes it easy for the team to zoom in and focus on individual students. The transition team focuses first on students who are furthest off track, those coded in red. Team members with deeper knowledge about a given student let the team know any pertinent information about barriers that impact the student's ability to stay on track with their postsecondary milestones. Barriers can include challenges at home, attendance issues, or that the student no longer enjoys or is not meeting the expectations of their dual enrollment program. Each type of barrier requires the team to consider the best way to support the student, whether with a phone call home, a tour of a program accepting applications, or some other action to address the obstacle.

The conversation for each student is relatively short and ends when the team agrees upon one or more action items and the team member responsible for executing the action items. The team decides the best member to address the student's needs by considering the type of relationship each member has with the student, as well as their knowledge of the selected action step.

Following the meeting, case managers meet with each student who is off track to discuss the proposed action plan. Case managers contact the student's family with the student present to ensure they are aware of the barrier(s) and can support the action plan.

Gains in Student Postsecondary Success

By using this practice over the last three years, Gratz has increased the number of students with a clearly defined postsecondary goal and ensured that students are making progress toward the goal during senior year. They also found that students remain engaged in the postsecondary pathway after graduation. Gratz's transition program efforts have increased, from 53% to 77%, the percentage of students enrolled and engaged in postsecondary pathways in education, workforce, military, or job training six months after graduation. **One year after graduation, 90% of these recent graduates with disabilities were engaged in their postsecondary pathway.**

USING SUMMER TO ENSURE SUCCESS

Gratz has a summer transition support program for students who graduate without completing their postsecondary milestones. The program, known as C3, also leverages rapid-response team actions based on milestone data. Offering this summer transition support program would not be possible without accurate milestone tracking throughout the school year. See Providing Summer Transition Programming for Postsecondary Success for details.

How to Implement this Practice

This section provides step-by-step guidance along with accompanying resources for building a school-based transition team to accelerate student progress toward postsecondary goals.

At the Start of the School Year

Step 1: Create a Student Tracking System

A postsecondary milestone tracker can be as simple as a spreadsheet that lists each student, their pathway, their current milestones, and any next steps the transition team needs to take to support the students. Color coding the tracker can make it easier to quickly identify which students are on track along their pathways and which need extra support to complete their steps.

The table below is an example of what a tracker can look like.

Student Name	Case Manager	Seminar Period	PS Pathway	Work Completion	Other Classes?	Suggested Next Step
Tegan, Emery	Rivera	T/Th — 3	Workforce Development	Job Corps, Hopeworks	Yes	Rivera will meet with Emery and discuss attendance and impact on grades
Jones, Jaden	Guenther	N/A	Competitive Employment with Support	OVR	N/A	
Quick, Naomi	Guenther	M/F — 5	Workforce Development	Careerlink	Yes	Guenther will schedule a meeting with Naomi & guardian to discuss the need for Naomi to advocate for herself.

Note: Programs listed under "Work Completion" are dual enrollment programs. For more information about how to develop these programs, see Establishing External Partnerships to Strengthen Work-Based Learning Opportunities.

Milestones for Mastery's Pathways

All students at **Mastery Schools** have increasing access to pathway options aside from just college. These pathways each have a set of milestones that students need to complete before graduation. Some of these pathways are outlined below. The pathways and milestones are the foundation for Mastery's transition planning and tracking student progress toward transition goals.

4-Year College	2-Year College	Workforce Development Program	Military
• College Essay • FSA ID • FAFSA • Submit applications • Complete financial aid analyzer	• Submit applications • FSA ID • FAFSA • Complete financial aid analyzer • Activate student portal • Complete placement test • Complete online student orientation • Register for fall semester courses	• Submit interest forms • Final resume • Submit applications • Obtain driver's license • Application documentation • Logistics planning	• Meet with recruiter • ASVAB • Confirm Bootcamp / MEPS date • Interview with recruiter

Step 2: Input Initial Student Data

Create a system so that prior-year case managers, advisors, or seminar teachers can give the new transition team information about students' postsecondary goals to populate the tracker. During the summer, transition teams can use this information in the tracker to map out milestones for the coming year.

Mapping milestones is considerably easier if the school has a clearly developed set of postsecondary pathways outlining the necessary steps that lead to successful engagement after graduation. (See Establishing External Partnerships to Strengthen Work-Based Learning Opportunities.)

The First Meeting of the School Year

At **Gratz**, all students learn about the school's available pathways in their 11th grade seminar classes and identify which pathway they are most interested in by the end of the year. Thus, transition coordinators have the information they need to start tracking seniors' milestones before school begins in the fall. If a school does not have a system like this in place, the transition teams can meet in the summer or early fall to share information about IEP transition plans, discuss milestones, and request information from college counselors about students' postsecondary plans. Teams can also use this opportunity to clarify individualized expectations for seniors with IEPs, confirm necessary modifications for specific students, and identify events or activities that students with disabilities need to attend.

Step 3: Form and Launch the Transition Team

Including a variety of general and special education staff will improve school transition teams' effectiveness. Each team member will have unique information about students, the various pathways they may choose, and the necessary resources to support them as they work toward their goals. It is helpful for the transition team to have a leader, such as the transition coordinator, the school leader, or a postsecondary advisor.

Consider including the following individuals in transition teams:



TRANSITION COORDINATOR

The transition coordinator is the special education team's postsecondary expert and will often possess more information about alternatives to 4-year college. They also often have relationships with external organizations or agencies that can support students during and after their transition out of high school.



SPECIAL EDUCATION CASE MANAGERS

Special education case managers are responsible for ensuring transition plans are updated and easily accessible for the transition team. In addition, case managers are often the primary contact for families.



COLLEGE COUNSELORS

The college counselors — who may also work with general education students in advisory or seminar classes — hold the majority of information around college application deadlines and requirements, and they can communicate that information to the transition team for students with goals to attend college. College counselors may also be responsible for follow-up with graduates to ensure they receive any additional support for their disability after graduation. While not all students will attend college, college counselors have their own contacts, networks, and resources that can also apply to non-college postsecondary education. Having college counselors present at transition team meetings is an easy way to ensure that they are informed about the needs of students with disabilities and can support them in reaching their goals with the same success as their peers.



SOCIAL WORKERS

Social workers are essential to help address student needs outside of academics or employment. At times, social workers may be the only appropriate staff to take a deeper level of support or action steps for students or families. They can add valuable input regarding services, agencies, or other resources students may need in order to reach their postsecondary goals. Social workers can help the transition team develop a plan to address housing and food insecurity, along with mental health and other social services that a student may require to be successful.



SCHOOL LEADER (OPTIONAL)

Including a school leader as part of the transition team can help ensure that the leader is knowledgeable about different types of postsecondary goals and the steps students need to take to reach those goals. School leaders may also be helpful in communicating with families, ensuring that students can leave school if necessary for transition activities, removing any barriers to implementing plans, and considering how the larger school program can support students with goals apart from a 4-year college. However, when transition team members mentioned above have been with the school for many years, they may hold enough capital and sway within the school to make the addition of the school leader less essential to the transition team.

The entire transition team is responsible for reviewing student progress toward postsecondary goals documented in each student's IEP and for identifying additional support students may need to be successful. The transition team delegates tasks to the team member most appropriate to provide support based on their expertise or relationship with the student and family.

Step 4: Determine Meeting Cadence and Protocols

A biweekly meeting cadence is recommended for transition teams. Teams can meet during common prep periods, professional development time, or before or after school.

A clear meeting protocol and agenda for each meeting ensures transition teams discuss the critical updates for each student and establish clear action steps, interventions, and ownership.

Including All Interested Parties

After several years of holding biweekly meetings to review student progress on transition milestones, **Gratz's** transition team realized that social workers were key members missing from their team. Many students needed support with aspects of transitioning out of high school that postsecondary counselors and transition coordinators didn't have the expertise to provide. Social workers added knowledge about housing, insurance, and food assistance that was essential to the transition team and student success.

Starting as Early as Possible

Transition teams will often prioritize the review of progress for seniors, yet it is important to proactively build capacity so the team can work through junior, sophomore, and freshman transition needs. The earlier students identify potential pathways and transition teams start tracking progress, the greater the impact transition planning can have on positive postsecondary outcomes for students.

Before the Meeting

Step 5: Collect and Update Data

Having up-to-date information on student progress and the action steps of students, families, or staff members is essential to the success of the transition team meetings.

There are two ways to ensure data on student progress is up-to-date:

CONTINUOUS UPDATES

Transition teams may consider their tracker to be live and update it whenever they gather new information. When updating in this manner, the transition team needs to establish a deadline for updates before each milestone meeting.

UPDATE AT MEETINGS

All transition team members bring their notes and update the tracker at the biweekly meeting for reviewing student progress. The team needs to be in agreement to spend meeting time in this way rather than using it to discuss students. Updating data at meetings can use valuable time, and teams should agree that this use of time is appropriate.

During the Meeting

Step 6: Review Data

Using the up-to-date data, the transition team reviews each student's progress toward postsecondary goals and determines whether students are on track, somewhat off track, or off track. The review will be most effective if it includes academic (e.g., grades) and non-academic (e.g., attendance and discipline) variables, as well as transition data.

To decide which students to focus on during meetings, creating a set of priority concerns can be particularly helpful. Some areas of concern may be more urgent than others, or in some cases, addressing one concern depends on first addressing another. For example, fixing a student's attendance issue is necessary to improve work completion and grades.

The following table shows how Mastery Gratz prioritized students of concern they focused on during their biweekly meetings:

Category	Who Qualifies?	Data Source
Attendance	Students missing 3+ seminar classes in a 2-week period (consider decreasing to 2+ missed classes)	Student information system
Grades	Students failing seminar and have not handed in missing work in a 2-week period	Gradebook
Work Completion	Students missing key assignments within their intended pathway	Gradebook
Credit Deficient	Students needing more than 1 additional course (in addition to current course load) to graduate this year	Student information system
Pathway Misaligned to Levels/Pathway Concerns	Students whose quantile/Lexile levels are significantly below the recommended levels for their chosen pathway Consider students with low quantile/Lexile levels enrolled in seminar to discuss the support needed	Student information system

Step 7: Plan Action Steps

For students who are not on track to meet their postsecondary milestones, the transition team collaboratively designs action steps to address student needs.

Action steps could include the following:

- The student works with a case manager to complete a resume.
- The student meets 1:1 with the college counselor to complete the FAFSA.
- An educator emails follow-up reminders for students.
- An educator holds meetings with outside agencies.
- A team member contacts the family to discuss progress and problem solve barriers.
- The student changes their dual enrollment program.
- The student changes their pathway.
- The IEP team convenes to discuss the transition plan.
- A team member supports with situation-specific interventions (e.g., community resources, advocates, legal support for families).

Step 8: Assign Next Steps

Finally, the transition team determines which adults will support students with each action step. Action steps are reviewed by the team and documented in the tracker. The transition team lead may send a summary of the meeting discussion and action items to the team following the team meeting to communicate plans to absent team members and supporting leadership. This summary can also serve as a reminder of action items, as well as confirm dates for completion and convey collaboration needs from those not in attendance.

After the Meeting

Step 9: Include Families in Action Steps

After the meeting, case managers follow up with students and families on current data, including attendance, grades, discipline, and transition activities that need to be completed. The case manager also collaborates with families on action steps the transition team recommended so that families can support current action plans.

Whether a student is on track or off track, keeping families informed about student progress toward transition goals is an important part of helping students stay motivated and focused on their long-term goals.

Summary

Ensuring that students with disabilities have a smooth transition into their life after high school is the ultimate goal for most special education programs. To ensure that students with disabilities engage in meaningful activities that help them meet their individualized postsecondary goals, schools need to convene interdisciplinary teams of special and general educators to review data on student transition progress toward transition goals and intervene when students are not on track to meet their goals. These interdisciplinary transition teams are most successful when they meet at a regular cadence and include a diverse set of educators who support students with postsecondary transitions. Students also benefit tremendously from having clear pathways with specific milestones that lead to their identified postsecondary goals. Mastery Gratz has been able to help students successfully graduate and enroll in postsecondary placements by using biweekly transition team meetings to keep students on track along their pathways and intervene during the school year and into the summer after graduation. This data-centered meeting structure is something that any transition team can put into place to help improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

FURTHER LEARNING

"Guideposts for Success: What All Youth Need to Successfully Transition into Adulthood"
US DEPARTMENT OF LABOR OFFICE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY

"Guideposts for Policy and Practice: Framework for the Future"
THE CENTER FOR ADVANCING POLICY ON EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH

"A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities"
THE US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

BUILDING SCHOOL-BASED TRANSITION TEAMS TO ACCELERATE STUDENT PROGRESS TOWARD POSTSECONDARY GOALS

Appendix

How to Measure

When building a school-based transition team, monitoring how useful, usable, and utilized the practice is by team members and across the school system can accelerate learning to improve outcomes for students. Be aware that improved process measures are usually necessary to ensure a high enough level of fidelity before outcomes will see improvement. At minimum, these measures are most essential:

PRIMARY MEASURES					
Measure Type	**Data Collection Type**	**Question Asked**	**Results**	**What does success look like?**	**Examples and Notes**
Process	Review of calendars Meeting note review	Are postsecondary milestone meetings occurring biweekly? Yes / No	Percent of scheduled meetings held	Increasing percentage of meetings held until reaching 100%	Use shared digital calendars to help keep track of meetings.
Process	Meeting note review	How often are postsecondary team members implementing action steps by their specified date?	Percent of action steps implemented by team members by their specified date	Increasing percentage of action steps that are completed by the specified date until reaching 100%	Consider analyzing whether some action steps are completed more often than others to determine if specific barriers exist for some action steps.
Outcome (short term)	Postsecondary tracker	What percentage of students are on track toward meeting their milestones?	Percent of students on track	Increasing percentage of students on track until reaching 100%	It can be helpful to disaggregate the percent of students on track by the type of pathway.
Outcome	Postsecondary tracker	What percentage of students have completed the requirements for their pathway?	Percent of students who have completed the requirements for their pathway	Increasing percentage of students who have completed all requirements until reaching 100%	Each postsecondary pathway needs to have a scope and sequence developed with the skills and activities students need to master to meet their goals.

Additional measures can guide a team to know whether the school-based transition team is leading to the desired improvements for students:

SECONDARY MEASURES					
Measure Type	**Data Collection Type**	**Question Asked**	**Results**	**What does success look like?**	**Examples and Notes**
Process	Audit of plans Postsecondary tracker	What percentage of students with IEPs have postsecondary plans?	Percent of students with a complete plan	Increasing percentage of students with complete plans until reaching 100%	All students must have a transition plan in their IEP by age 16, but IEP teams can start to develop them earlier.
Process	Postsecondary tracker	Which action steps are most effective to get students back on track?	Percent of time each action step is successful in getting students back on track	A list of 3–5 action steps that are successful at least 75% of the time	May also track the frequency that action steps are being implemented.
Outcome	Postsecondary tracker	What percentage of students who were off track are now on track on their pathways?	Percent of students who are moved from off track to on track	Increasing percentage of students who move from off track to on track until reaching 100%	Consider calculating the average number of weeks it takes for a student to move from off to on track.
Process	Postsecondary tracker	How often are students who need interventions for their postsecondary goals receiving them?	Percent of students who were identified as needing intervention and received intervention	Increasing percent of students who need intervention receiving them until reaching 100%	Consider measuring the number of minutes of intervention if frequency of intervention isn't informative enough.

Notes

1 Newman, Madaus, and Javitz, “Effect of Transition Planning”

2 Ibid.

3 Cameto, Levine, and Wagner, *Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities*

4 Frazier, Perryman, and Kucharczyk, “Transition services”

5 Kohler, et al., *Taxonomy*

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Marshall Street



Establishing External Partnerships to Strengthen Work-Based Learning Opportunities

A RESEARCH-TO-IMPACT PRACTICE DEVELOPED WITH THE NETWORKED IMPROVEMENT COMMUNITY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Establishing External Partnerships to Strengthen Work-Based Learning Opportunities

Implementation Level

- [x] District/Central Office
- [x] School
- [ ] Program/Department
- [ ] Classroom

Who Implements

- [ ] Teacher(s)
- [ ] Instructional Coach
- [x] Principal
- [x] Central Office Leadership
- [x] Other: Transition Coordinator

Practice Overview

What is the Practice?

Schools develop partnerships with external programs, enabling students to gain skills and earn credit for completing work-based learning opportunities aligned to their postsecondary goals.

What are Work-Based Learning Opportunities?

Work-based learning can come in a multitude of forms, including:

- **Internships:** paid or unpaid work experience at a business or organization
- **Apprenticeships:** on-the-job training in a specific trade
- **Workforce development:** programs to teach skills and competencies needed in the workplace
- **JROTC:** Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps teaches leadership skills that can prepare students for a future military career

Why are Dual Enrollment Opportunities Important?

Employment is an important component of adult life because it allows for independence, learning, and socializing. Unfortunately, people with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 64 are considerably less likely to be employed than people without disabilities. In 2022, only 34.8% of the population of people with disabilities were employed; the same year, of people without disabilities, 74.4% were employed.[1] Schools can play an important role in increasing the percentage of people with disabilities who are employed by helping students engage in work-based learning opportunities before they graduate from high school. Work-based learning gives students meaningful experiences, awareness of opportunities, and information about what they may or may not want to do in the future.

Dual enrollment programs offered at most high schools let students earn college credit when enrolled in college-level courses at accredited institutions. Many schools even allow students to have a shorter high school schedule to make time for these college courses. These college-focused programs let students experience college prior to graduating from high school and enrolling full-time, as well as get a head start on college requirements. While some schools in the United States offer credit-bearing vocational programming for students, many others do not provide students opportunities to experience the workforce or to get workforce training prior to graduating from high school — especially not during the school day or for credit of any type. Without these opportunities, students are not exposed to supports and learning experiences that build their skills and knowledge to successfully transition into a non-college environment. Through dual enrollment structures that include opportunities for students on alternative postsecondary pathways, students are able to access support, training, and experience in meaningful and relevant postsecondary areas of interest.

Why it Works

For students with disabilities, dual enrollment programs can be particularly useful for the following reasons:

- School staff can ensure that programs are a good fit for students and that program staff understand student needs.
- Students have the opportunity to transition into their postsecondary pathway with the support of their current teacher and school staff.
- Students can earn credit toward graduation.
- Classes and services at school can help reinforce skills or lessons needed in programs.
- Peers attending the same program can support one another.
- Students can leave high school with work experience, new skills, and a potential future career.

[1] US Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics Summary*. 2023. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm

Implementation at a Glance

The information in this section provides a high-level view of what to consider when implementing this practice. Enabling Conditions describes the minimum conditions needed for successful implementation, including resources, mindsets, staffing, and recommended time allocation. Steps to Implement presents a concise checklist of action items, which are explained in detail in How to Implement this Practice, below.

Enabling Conditions

Prerequisites	✦ Program leadership has decision-making power and support from the school leadership to build and manage external relationships. ✦ Postsecondary planning supports (advising, seminars, student conference meetings, summer support programs) are made to be inclusive of all students (not just those on a 2- or 4-year-college track).
Recommended Materials	✦ Transportation to and from school and the dual enrollment program (e.g., public transit passes) ✦ Bag lunches from the school cafeteria ✦ Program fees – Most programs are free for the school and students; the programs are funded by the city. – Mastery Schools pays for fee-based programs out of per-pupil allocations. (See the Appendix for details.) ✦ Communication systems between school and external program staff, such as enrollment trackers or communication logs
Staff Commitment	✦ One half-time school-based staff member to lead and manage the program ✦ Collaboration and coordination between school and network leaders to support needed policy changes or resource allocations ✦ Counselor or support staff time to adjust or coordinate school schedules of students participating in dual enrollment partnerships
Recommended Time Allocation	✦ Program lead's primary activities: – Maintain relationships between the school and external partners (4 hours weekly) – Conduct ongoing research into programs and potential partners — including making contact, acquiring information, visiting locations (1 hour weekly) – Develop and maintain a collaborative process for the program, and coordinate information-sharing across various stakeholder groups (e.g., students, families, classroom teachers, postsecondary teams, IEP teams) (5 hours weekly) – Check-in and advise students participating or interested in participating in the programs (10 hours weekly)

Steps to Implement

FORM PARTNERSHIPS WITH EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

- [ ] Understand student career interests
- [ ] Research new organizations
- [ ] Develop strong partnerships
- [ ] Create a communication schedule
- [ ] Develop a process for students to apply to programs

IMPLEMENT DUAL ENROLLMENT

- [ ] Enroll students in dual enrollment programs
- [ ] Support student attendance at dual enrollment programs
- [ ] Monitor student progress for long-term success





Bringing this Practice to Life

GROWING A DUAL ENROLLMENT PROGRAM AT MASTERY GRATZ HIGH SCHOOL

Mastery Schools' Simon Gratz High School in Philadelphia, PA, needed to find opportunities for their students with disabilities to engage in employment training to meet their postsecondary goals. Using a model commonly employed for students planning to attend 2- or 4-year colleges, the Gratz transition team developed a way for students to get high school credit for participating in work-based learning opportunities during the school day. Within three years, the team grew the number of spots available to students pursuing postsecondary employment from seven to ninety-one.

The following case study demonstrates how Gratz built a dual enrollment program that gives students with disabilities opportunities to gain meaningful work experience and skill development before they graduate from high school.

Mastery's History of Dual Enrollment

For almost a decade, Mastery Public Schools has offered dual enrollment opportunities for college-bound students. These programs allow students to take college courses while in high school and to earn both high school and college credit. At Gratz, postsecondary advisors and the school's transition coordinator recognized that some students wanted to gain experience in the trades rather than enroll in college. So, they partnered with Orleans Technical College (a program of

JEVS Human Services) to offer students exposure to various building and construction and health care trades. Through this exposure, students were better able to identify which specific training programs interested them. Both the school's postsecondary team and the students wanted more opportunities for this type of exposure to non-college pathways.

Understanding Student Postsecondary Needs



In 2020, Gratz conducted a root cause analysis to help them understand why only 53% of students with disabilities at Gratz were engaged in specific postsecondary pathways after graduation (e.g., education, workforce training, workforce development, or the military) — the resulting root causes could provide a focus for their work as part of the NIC.

The following factors were among the root causes they identified:

- **Tracking:** There was not a way to track student engagement in non-college pathways or to monitor progress toward completion of requirements for a non-college pathway.
- **Program:** There was not a scalable transition model for the school to utilize outside of what existed for college-bound students.
- **Advising:** Families and students did not have clear guidance on what was needed if the student was not on a 2- or 4-year college pathway.
- **Siloes:** The various teams that supported students were siloed — neither aligned nor collaborating despite working toward similar goals.
- **Summer support:** Once students with disabilities graduated from high school, they were on their own to move on to the next step in their lives.

Considering what was within their control and most likely to impact their desired outcomes for students, the Gratz team determined that dual enrollment programs for non-college pathways were one solution that could improve programming and advising for students not planning to attend a 2- or 4-year college.

Creating a Long-Term Vision of Dual Enrollment

For typical college-going dual enrollment programs, identifying partners is generally straightforward because local community colleges already have partnership programs in place. Identifying partners is far more challenging when trying to develop opportunities for students in a variety of different postsecondary pathways and with diverse interests for work-based learning.

Initially, Gratz identified students who were at risk of dropping out of high school and had an interest in going into the workforce. To support these students, Gratz partnered with Hopeworks, a nonprofit organization that trains students, provides them with internships, and then helps them find a job placement in high-demand, high-wage industries. The program was initially designed for young adults who had no more than a high school diploma, but Hopeworks was open to developing a partnership with Mastery to begin training students who were still attending high school. In the 2020–21 school year, seven students at Gratz were able to participate in dual enrollment with Hopeworks as part of their high school schedule.

In 2021–22, when students returned to school in person after COVID-19 school closures, Gratz started building from the collaboration with Hopeworks to fully develop their multiple pathways model. Gratz's transition coordinator, Carrie Stoltzfus, was able to meet in person with Hopeworks to further cement the relationship and create structures and timelines to allow students to enter the program earlier in the school year. Gratz's ultimate goal, however, went beyond the partnership with Hopeworks. They sought to have a more inclusive dual enrollment structure so that all 12th grade students who were not 2- or 4-year-college bound could be enrolled in an outside program of choice by the second semester of their senior year.

The Gratz team used career interests identified by students during transition interviews and in junior seminar coursework to determine additional types of programs to pursue. The postsecondary advisors and transition coordinators began inquiring with more outside training programs about developing partnerships to offer more pathways to students. This required several levels of outreach:

- Researching local businesses and organizations
- Calling them to ask questions and gain more information about what they did
- Visiting the program sites as needed and knocking on doors to get the right person to engage in discussions about program services and potential partnerships



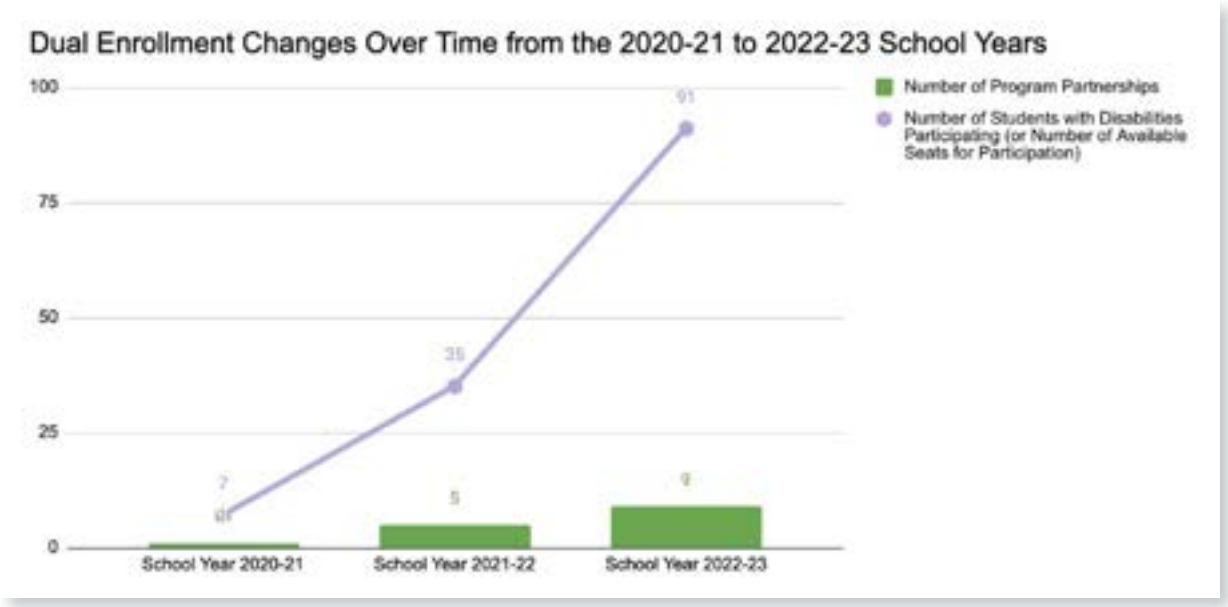
"Before JEVS, I thought I would go straight to college. Now, graduating with a CNA under my belt, it has motivated me to go straight to work — I still want to go to college but be able to do what I'm interested in."

— Mastery Gratz student

Results

The Gratz team's commitment to building their dual enrollment program allowed them to engage more students each year in non-college pathways. The seven seats at Hopeworks that first year helped Gratz improve from having only 53% of students with disabilities engaged in their postsecondary pathway after graduation to having 62%. In the next year, Gratz was able to add 28 additional spots in dual enrollment programs so that 35 students total were able to engage in their pathways. Students reported that training programs were accessible and engaging, which in turn helped them leverage hiring opportunities. **The additional partnerships between the school and the dual enrollment programs meant that 77% of students with disabilities at Gratz were engaged in their postsecondary pathway the fall after graduation.** This number increased to 90% one year after graduation.

By the end of the 2022–23 school year, Gratz was able to open up a total of 91 spots for students with and without disabilities to participate in non-college dual enrollment programs during their senior year of high school. A total of nine programs trained students in careers ranging from data management to nursing. Gratz will follow up with their most recent graduates to learn how successful these new partnerships were one year after graduation.



Dual enrollment data from 2020–21 to 2022–23 school years



Gratz's success can already be measured in student experiences like this one:

"At first, I wanted to go to community college — I knew I wanted to do nursing but I wasn't sure. By doing JEVS, I got to try it, get hands-on, and learn about it."

— Mastery Gratz student

How to Implement this Practice

This section provides step-by-step guidance for the development of external partnerships and the implementation of a dual enrollment program.

Forming Partnerships with External Partners

To create an effective and sustainable dual enrollment program, time must be dedicated to the ongoing development and maintenance of external partnerships.

Step 1: Understand Student Career Interests

An important first step in developing external partnerships for a dual enrollment program is understanding the types of careers students are seeking after high school and the skills and experiences they will need to attain jobs in those fields. Special education case managers, advisors, counselors, or transition coordinators can use career interest surveys or student interviews to learn more about the types of opportunities students want and need. These information-gathering activities are part of the IEP and transition planning process for students with disabilities, but they can also be embedded in the content of advisory programs, senior seminars, homerooms, or other opportunities in which students learn about their postsecondary options.

Step 2: Research New Organizations

Next, school staff can research organizations and external partners that match students' expressed interests and are available for students to enroll in while attending their existing high school program. Gratz discovered new potential partnerships by reaching out to programs through which their alumni found jobs after high school. By using existing relationships with programs, social service organizations, and other schools, potential partnerships can more easily be developed.

Where existing connections or relationships do not exist, exploring an organization's website can be a useful first step in researching whether a partnership will be possible. When making calls to speak directly with an employee at the organization, prepare key questions and information to share about the purpose and intent of the potential partnership. For some organizations, knocking on doors or visiting the office in person may be the only way to make early introductions and gather information.

Regardless of the method used to contact organizations, consider the **key pieces of information** that you need to know in order to determine whether to pursue a partnership. Some types of information can include:

- What ages do they work with?
- Do they offer training to current high school students, or would they be interested in expanding their services to high school students?
- Do they support work-based learning experiences?
- Where are they located, and is transportation easy to coordinate?
- What is the cost to the school for student participation?
- How many hours do students need to attend the program?
- What types of coordination are required between the school and the program?
- Does the program support students after graduation?

Step 3: Develop Strong Partnerships

In order to glean all the necessary information to determine if a new partnership is possible, it may be necessary to have several conversations, in-person meetings, and visits to the program. A primary contact person will likely become clear during this process, and it will be helpful to develop a rapport with that person to ease future communication.

Part of developing a partnership is negotiating the logistics for formalizing the relationship. Some of these logistics might include:

- funding or other resources (e.g., bus passes, lunches, or technology) the school will need to provide,
- the number of open seats the program is willing to designate for the school's students,
- the application process and/or prerequisites students need to complete to be considered for the program, and
- arrival and departure times and required frequency of student attendance.

Additionally, it is important to clarify the expectations of students, including:

- attendance policies (including notification of lateness and absences),
- course requirements,
- reasonable accommodations or modifications,
- behavior and safety, and
- dress code.

By going through the process of solidifying the details of the partnership, a strong relationship can be established between the school and the organization that will make future communication that much smoother.

Step 4: Create a Communication Schedule

It will be important to establish a system and schedule for ongoing communication and coordination between external organizations and the school, students, and families. School staff managing the dual enrollment program will need to develop a schedule for the different types of communication each organization requires. The frequency and type of communication will likely depend on factors such as the number of students enrolled in the program, students' needs, program needs, and school capacity. While some programs may receive weekly in-person visits from school staff, others will only require weekly email updates. At Gratz, the staff generally have the most interaction with programs that enroll the greatest number of students.

Maintaining some type of regular communication with programs will ensure that students receive what they need, program administrators feel supported by the school, and the partnership is productively maintained.

Step 5: Develop a Process for Students to Apply to Programs

Before enrolling students into dual enrollment programs, it is important to create a clear and transparent process for how students apply and get accepted to a dual enrollment program of interest. When devising steps for the process, consider any prerequisite skills students may need for the program, as well as how to determine whether students are committed to the program and are able to meet the program's expectations.

Not only did Mastery Gratz create their own student application for dual enrollment consideration, but they also required students to attend information sessions and/or visits to the program itself before completing their application. These requirements help make sure that students are fully informed about the program, clearly understand expectations, and are committed to seeing through their engagement with the program.

Gratz also created their own application for each program so that they could determine — before students applied to the program itself — whether students would be a good fit for the program and whether they had met the program's prerequisites. Including this preliminary step can help reduce the burden put on programs to review unqualified applications and applications for students who may not be set up for success in the program.

Gratz's full process is comprised of the following four steps:

- Students attend an information session and/or a visit to the program.
- Students complete **Gratz's application for the specific program**.
- Gratz's postsecondary team narrows down the pool of students who applied to the program, basing their decisions on which students are best fit for the program, the program's expectations, and the open number of seats in it. Students also provide input in decision-making.
- Selected students complete the program's official application.

Step 6: Enroll Students in Dual Enrollment Programs

COUNSEL STUDENTS IN IDENTIFYING INTERESTS AND PATHWAYS.

Staff and students can use transition interviews, career interest surveys, and other student interests and hobbies to identify possible dual enrollment programs that would fit each student well. The postsecondary team can counsel students who are not well-suited for a particular program to consider applying to another program. Consider having the team member with the best relationship with the student have that conversation with them, as it may be difficult for some students to process.

GROUP STUDENTS IN SIMILAR PATHWAYS.

Group students, when possible, based on the pathway or program they are interested in so that information sharing can be coordinated, timely, and relevant and so that students can support each other in the process. The students from each interest group who are accepted and eventually enrolled in a program will likely have a considerable amount of interaction together. They can start to form working relationships with one another through the application process.

Creating pathway-aligned groups also allows staff members who may have deeper knowledge or relationships with specific program partners to provide students with specialized support through the application process. Prioritizing staff focus on a subset of partnerships and programs also ensures that no one staff member is responsible for supporting all students or for knowing every program deeply.

ESTABLISH A TIMELINE TO SUPPORT THE COMPLETION OF APPLICATIONS.

Create a calendar that is backward-planned from application deadlines for each program. Due dates for each step of the application process can take into account students who need additional time as well as those who may be absent when information sessions or tours are held. To implement the application and enrollment process, set up specific times for students to apply and enroll in a program. These scheduled sessions help students meet deadlines and make sure they can successfully navigate the enrollment process.

Step 7: Support Student Attendance at Dual Enrollment Programs

Once students are enrolled in their programs, logistical support will be important to ensure their regular attendance. Consider these important questions:

- What type of transportation do students need (e.g., city bus, private car, or rideshare)?
- What impact will participation in this program have on student schedules? Specifically, will a schedule change be required, and if not, what classes, if any, will students need to be excused from at school?

- Who will write students' passes to leave school early?
- How will students make up missed assignments at school?
- Which staff members will visit programs and on what schedule?

As students begin the program intake, they will benefit from direct staff support to get started in their first days at the program. Students may need assistance in learning how to use public transportation to go from campus to the program, learning daily routines for the program, and building early relationships with program staff. School staff can also work with dual enrollment programs to identify expectations to prepare students for attendance at their programs before the first day.

Programs may require students to attend at different days, times, and frequencies. A clear schedule or calendar of all students in dual enrollment can help make this potential chaos more manageable. Strong communication with classroom teachers will also be helpful to ensure that students complete necessary assignments and do not fall behind in classes.

Step 8: Monitor Student Progress for Long-Term Success

Monitoring student progress through application, enrollment, attendance, and, finally, postsecondary success is important not only for keeping students on track but also for ensuring the effectiveness of the program.

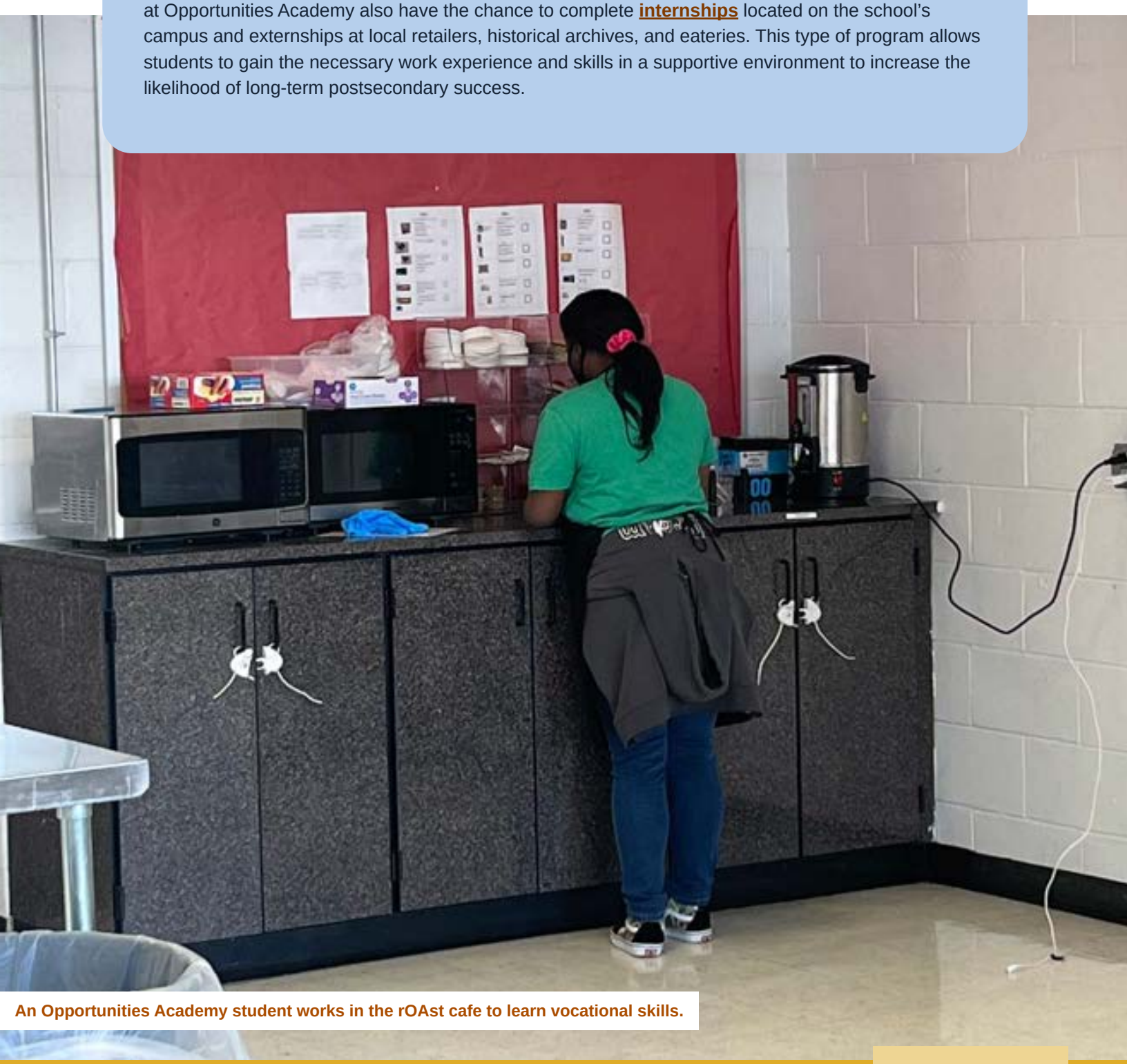
Keep track of what programs students have vocalized interest in, attended information sessions for, applied to within your school, and applied to through the program directly. Regularly scheduled meetings with a postsecondary team can help staff members determine students' needs and interests, brainstorm the types of programs that best fit students, and track engagement and participation in each program. Using information from these meetings, the team can intervene as needed to address issues that arise. (See ***Building School-Based Transition Teams to Accelerate Student Progress Toward Postsecondary Goals*** for more information.)

Students' achievement of their IEP transition plan goals is often the most useful measure of the success of their individual programs. School or postsecondary teams may also find it useful to identify key goals and outcomes that are tracked throughout the school year, as well as across years, such as the following:

- The percent of students who are offered a permanent employment position by graduation
- The percent of students who have permanent employment through the program they dually enrolled in
- The percent of students employed six months and one year after graduation
- Student attendance at their program
- Student engagement at their program (consider how to measure engagement and who is responsible for doing so)

A New Approach to Creating Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities

Collegiate Academies took a different approach to work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities. **Opportunities Academy** aims to serve students aged 17–21 with moderate to intensive disabilities by offering job training and coaching. Students spend part of the day focused on skill-building in the areas of independent living, community access, and employability. Students at Opportunities Academy also have the chance to complete **internships** located on the school's campus and externships at local retailers, historical archives, and eateries. This type of program allows students to gain the necessary work experience and skills in a supportive environment to increase the likelihood of long-term postsecondary success.



An Opportunities Academy student works in the rOAst cafe to learn vocational skills.

Summary

Dual enrollment has long applied to postsecondary educational experiences through which students get high school and college credit. Students with postsecondary interests outside of 2- or 4-year college should also have access to opportunities that expose them to and train them for the industries they want to join once they graduate. By creating relationships with local companies and organizations, as well as thinking flexibly about dual enrollment, schools can build opportunities for students to explore various careers while completing their high school education. Schools should also have internal data and monitoring systems that allow postsecondary teams to respond in a timely manner to challenges students and program providers may experience. By working to ensure successful dual enrollment programs for students, schools can increase a student's likelihood of having a job out of high school, as well as work experience or skills that can help them have sustainable employment.



FURTHER LEARNING

"Effects of Apprenticeship on the Short-Term Educational Outcomes of Vocational High-School Students"

JOSÉ DE AMESTI & SUSANA CLARO, *JOURNAL OF RESEARCH ON EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS*

High School Apprenticeships: A Guide for Starting Successful Programs

US DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Building an Apprenticeship Infrastructure for Youth Receiving SSI

DANIEL KUEHN OF THE URBAN INSTITUTE, FOR THE US DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Career Interest Survey

PRINCETON REVIEW

BigFuture Career Quiz

COLLEGE BOARD

ESTABLISHING EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS TO STRENGTHEN WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Appendix

How to Measure

When implementing dual enrollment programs, monitoring how useful, usable, and utilized the practice is by team members and across the school system can accelerate learning to improve outcomes for students. At minimum, these measures are most essential:

PRIMARY MEASURES					
Measure Type	**Data Collection Type**	**Question Asked**	**Results**	**What does success look like?**	**Examples and Notes**
Process	Enrollment tracker	Are students with disabilities enrolled in a dual enrollment program? Yes / No	Percent of students with disabilities enrolled in dual enrollment programs	Increasing percent of students enrolled until reaching 100%	College dual enrollment should also be included in this data, but consider disaggregating the various program enrollments.
Process	Enrollment tracker	What percent of students are enrolled in each dual enrollment program?	Percent of students enrolled in each dual enrollment program	There is not necessarily an ideal distribution of students across programs.	This measure can help ensure staff and resources are distributed appropriately.
Outcome	Student exit interviews Program data	What percent of students successfully completed their dual enrollment program?	Percent of students who completed their dual enrollment program	Increasing percent of students who completed their programs until reaching 100%	Disaggregate by program to make sure each one is effective in helping students successfully complete the program.
Outcome	Exit interviews	What percent of students receive a job placement as a direct result of their dual enrollment program?	Percent of students who have a job placement related to their dual enrollment program by the time they graduate	Increasing percent of students have a job placement by the time of graduation related to their program	Disaggregate by program to make sure each one is effective in helping students find job placements.

Additional measures can guide a team to know whether dual enrollment programs are leading to the desired improvements for students:

SECONDARY MEASURES					
Measure Type	**Data Collection Type**	**Question Asked**	**Results**	**What does success look like?**	**Examples and Notes**
Process	Memorandums of understanding	How many new seats in programs were acquired this school year?	Number of new seats in programs for the current school year	Programs have capacity for every student who wants to engage in a dual enrollment program.	
Process	Communication log	How often is the school communicating with each dual enrollment program?	Percent of programs communicating daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly with the school	There is no correct answer for this measure because frequency should be aligned with need.	
Process	Communication log	What are the most common barriers students and programs report for ongoing participation in the dual enrollment program?	List of barriers and frequency with which they occur within a school year	Teams can identify most common barriers and create systems or tools to proactively address and anticipate needs to remove barriers.	
Process	Meeting notes	How often are school and program staff able to remove existing barriers?	Percent of barriers solved in collaboration between school and program staff	Increasing percent barriers solved collaboratively between school and program staff	Not all barriers can and should be solved collaboratively. Staff from the school and program may still need to be in communication about these barriers regardless.

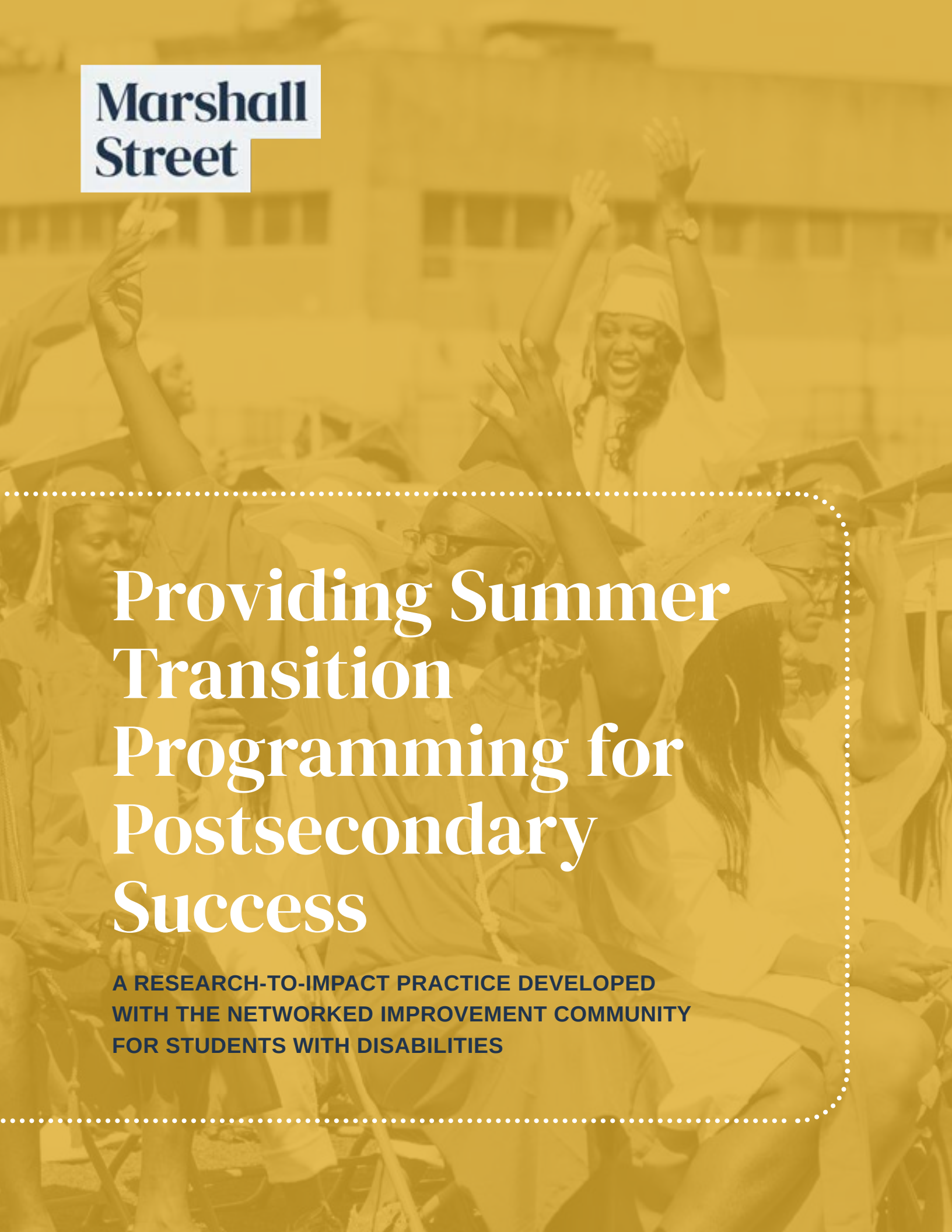
Outcome	Student survey Family survey	Did students increase their self-advocacy skills during enrollment in their program? Yes / No	Percent of students who increase their self-advocacy skills	Increasing percent of students who improved their self-advocacy skills until reaching 100%	The North Dakota Department of Education and AIR offer self-advocacy/ self-determination surveys. This could also be a process measure depending on the theory of action.
Outcome	Survey	To what extent did participating in dual enrollment help students identify what they want to do after high school?	Percent of students who report that their program helped them understand what they want to do after high school	Increasing percent of students who report that their program informed their postsecondary goals until reaching 100%	

Dual Enrollment Programs at Mastery Schools

The table below describes all of the dual enrollment programs that work in collaboration with Mastery Schools and that Mastery's students are eligible to apply for. The cost per student is borne by the school when necessary, though it is often funded by city grants or other external funding sources.

PROGRAM	FOCUS	COST PER STUDENT
Hopeworks	Paid technical training in high-demand skills such as front-end web development, geographic information systems, and data visualization	$0
JEVS Human Services	Trade industries (entry-level electrician, plumbing, carpentry, etc.)	$3,100
Mercy	Workforce development readiness	$0
TempleCares	Healthcare industry credentials in Medical Office, Nurse Aide, or Behavioral Health	$750
LaSalle University	College courses	$0
Community College of Philadelphia	College courses	$0
YOACAP	Trade program	$0
Job Corps	Variety of trades	$0
CHOP Career Path	Healthcare (funded by Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation)	$0
Temple Cecil B. Moore	College courses	$0

Marshall Street



Providing Summer Transition Programming for Postsecondary Success

A RESEARCH-TO-IMPACT PRACTICE DEVELOPED WITH THE NETWORKED IMPROVEMENT COMMUNITY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Providing Summer Transition Programming for Postsecondary Success

Implementation Level

- [x] District/Central Office
- [x] School
- [x] Program/Department
- [ ] Classroom

Who Implements

- [ ] Teacher(s)
- [ ] Instructional Coach
- [x] Principal
- [x] Central Office Leadership
- [x] Other: Transition Coordinator

Practice Overview

What is the Practice?

A summer program that provides students with targeted, 1:1 transition coaching to support them in completing the final steps needed to meet their transition goals when they have not met them at the time of graduation.

Why is Summer Transition Support Important?

Students with disabilities do not just need to graduate from high school. They also need to successfully complete their transition plans so that they can follow their chosen path after graduation. Recent government statistics showed that within the first eight years after graduation from high school, people with disabilities made a dollar less per hour ($10.40 vs. $11.40), were less likely to both enroll in (60% vs. 67%) and complete (41% vs. 52%) postsecondary education programs, and were less likely to live independently (45% vs. 59%) than people without disabilities.[1] This practice addresses the need to support students, even after graduation, to finish essential steps for postsecondary success in college, careers, and the community. Without this focus on transition plan completion, schools will struggle to close the gap in labor force participation for individuals with disabilities, which is only about 38%, compared to 77% for the general population. These outcome differences have tremendous effects on individual earnings, as well as independence in society.[2]

Why it Works

STUDENTS SEEKING ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS NEED CONTINUED SUPPORT.

Continuing targeted transition planning and programming support beyond graduation — particularly for students with disabilities who are Black, Latinx, and experiencing poverty — ensures that students who are not choosing 4-year college paths have the same support as their peers. Students choosing an alternative non-college pathway are often left out of summer interventions that focus on ensuring students have completed the necessary steps to start college. Students interested in advancing directly into careers also need support in the summer to complete the steps necessary to start their post-high school lives.

SIMILAR MODELS OF SUPPORT SHOW PROMISING RESULTS.

Research on postsecondary coaching programs that were location-specific to support students attending 2- and 4-year colleges found that they have moderate positive effects on college enrollment and persistence.[3] Using this same strategy to support students on career, military, or community living pathways could similarly help ensure that all students are successful after their high school experience.



Implementation at a Glance

The information in this section provides a high-level view of what to consider when implementing this practice. Enabling Conditions describes the minimum conditions needed for successful implementation, including resources, mindsets, staffing, and recommended time allocation. Steps to Implement presents a concise checklist of action items, which are explained in detail in How to Implement this Practice, below.

Enabling Conditions

Prerequisites	School-level support to ensure that pathway progress is documented for all students, budgets are allocated, and the importance of non-college pathways is understood Coaches who know and care about students and their individual needs, circumstances, interests, and disability-specific needs Data system that allows staff to collect, track, and display students' postsecondary goals and specific milestones Documented postsecondary goals for all students
Recommended Materials	Postsecondary data tracking system Stipend for coaches supporting about 25 students each (Mastery provided coaches $1,500–$2,000 per summer.) Funding for transportation, meetings, food, etc.
Staff Commitment	School or network staff member who oversees the program Postsecondary personnel to work over the summer, about one per every 25 students A postsecondary team that meets regularly
Recommended Time Allocation	**Coaches** 5–10 hours of training before the end of the school year 5 weeks of coaching **Network Program Lead** 5 hours to create caseloads, set up logistics, and design training 2–3 hours of program management weekly

Steps to Implement

BEFORE THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR, THE SCHOOL'S *POSTSECONDARY TEAM* WILL*:*

- ☐ Identify students to participate in the program
- ☐ Create caseloads for coaches
- ☐ Onboard coaches

AT THE BEGINNING OF SUMMER, THE *COACHES* WILL*:*

- ☐ Hold orientation with families
- ☐ Hold initial meetings with students and create a plan
- ☐ Develop a coaching schedule

TO EXECUTE THE SUMMER TRANSITION PROGRAM, *COACHES* WILL*:*

- ☐ Review summer plans with students
- ☐ Follow up with students weekly
- ☐ Meet as a team to review data and troubleshoot

AT THE END OF THE SUMMER, THE *POSTSECONDARY TEAM* WILL*:*

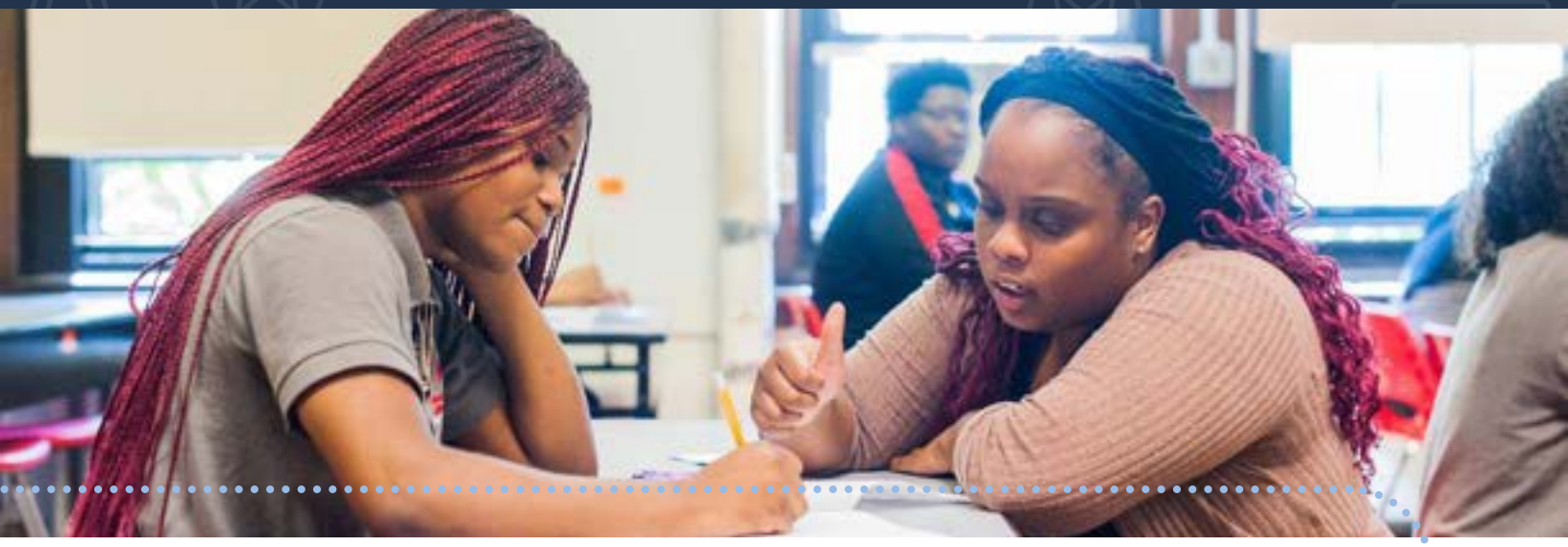
- ☐ Debrief summer with team and plan for next school year

Optional Step: "Summer Boot Camp"

During the 2020–21 school year, a time when students were transitioning between virtual and in-person learning, **Gratz** launched this practice with a different set of steps. The original summer programming included a one-week intensive "boot camp" followed by 1:1 coaching sessions. In this model, Mastery's team frontloaded one week of in-person days for students to complete orientation to the program, receive an overview of the transition pathway options available, complete interest surveys or transition planning assessment tools if needed, and confirm goals and priorities for their summer transition coaching within their existing College and Career Coaches (C3) model. This approach allowed the team to form or strengthen relationships with students who they may not have worked with closely due to the interruptions from COVID, and to establish expectations between students and their coaches for goals, priorities, and routines to successfully complete the program.

The Gratz team has integrated much of the initial orientation and intensive-week content into activities with students in the spring before they graduate from high school. By establishing strong data routines to identify students in need of the C3 program — particularly those not on track to enroll in and begin their non-college pathway — the Gratz team is able to complete training and assessment activities with students while they are still enrolled in their high school classes. This early identification and engagement has resulted in the discontinuation of the boot camp intensive-week model at the start of summer.

For schools that do not have the opportunity to complete activities with students in advance of the summer program, an intensive week of summer transition programming may be a useful addition to this practice.



Bringing this Practice to Life

ENSURING ALL STUDENTS START SUCCESSFUL LIVES AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

The COVID-19 pandemic threw schools across the country into chaos, and many of their students were cast adrift. The postsecondary team at Mastery Schools' Simon Gratz High School could not sit by when, in the spring of 2021, they realized that few of their students were ready for life after high school. Their quick planning that first year to create a summer boot camp for their seniors eventually spread into a network-wide summer program to ensure that all students were ready to start the pathway of their choice when they left high school.

Getting Students Back on Track in a Hurry

In March of 2021, students at Mastery Schools returned to in-person learning for the first time since March of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The postsecondary team at Gratz realized immediately that their seniors were off track in completing postsecondary activities, such as financial aid, college applications, resumes, job applications, and cover letters. By May, the Gratz postsecondary team identified the need to implement more intensive interventions to ensure their senior class — particularly the students with disabilities — reached their postsecondary goals.

The Gratz postsecondary team launched a three-day "boot camp" to provide an intensive learning opportunity for students. All seniors who were off track with postsecondary tasks, including students with disabilities, attended the boot camp on campus to try to quickly complete as many postsecondary tasks as possible. With the help of three of the postsecondary team members, students worked on resumes, searched for jobs, completed enrollment documents for colleges, completed job applications, and practiced for interviews.

Creating Summer Structures for the Success of Students with Disabilities

The boot camp worked well for some, but not all, students. For the students who needed additional support, the Gratz postsecondary and special education teams tried an intervention of individualized coaching. The model for this intervention came from Mastery's College and Career Coaches (C3) program — an existing summer intervention program providing individualized coaching, which was previously available only for Mastery students planning to enroll in 2- or 4-year colleges. C3 attempts to increase matriculation to these postsecondary pathways and to reduce "summer melt."

The Gratz teams adapted the C3 program for the students with disabilities who were pursuing non-college pathways. Over the course of nearly five weeks of summer, after the boot camp, three Gratz postsecondary team members worked as coaches to support about 60 students with disabilities in-person and remotely by phone, text, and email. Individualized coaching included breaking down steps to complete transition goals, setting up regular deadlines with students to meet transition checkpoints, and following up with students to ensure they met those deadlines. The effort was a great success. **By the end of summer 2021, 87% of Gratz students had engaged in summer touchpoints with their coach, and 80% of students had enrolled in their postsecondary pathway.**

WHAT IS SUMMER MELT?

Summer melt is a term used to describe students who were accepted into college and intended to enroll but did not complete the steps necessary to actually attend college in the fall. A host of interventions are used to mitigate this issue and support students through the summer to complete the necessary steps for enrollment. Groups working to reduce summer melt, such as nonprofit organizations, colleges, and high schools, use tools like text messaging, coaching, mentoring, and summer bridge programs to make sure students enroll in college each fall.

Expanding to Support All Students

Using the learnings and success of the first summer, the Gratz team enacted and formalized two structures:

1. They strategically built the content from the boot camp into the existing 12th grade seminar to ensure learning and progress monitoring were in place throughout the school year.
2. The C3 program adaptations were formalized and spread to other schools in the Mastery network. By summer 2022, all Mastery students who were interested in non-college pathways — regardless of whether they were in special education or not — could engage in C3 coaching.

During the 2022–23 school year, Gratz increased their team to include eight coaches — including a social worker to support students and families with needs such as food and housing insecurity — who worked with 184 students. The coaches spent about three days per week doing direct outreach

to students via text messages and phone calls. The outreach focused on topics such as goal setting, resume updates, job searches, and transportation planning for interviews. One day per week, coaches set up postsecondary exposure experiences for students, including postsecondary program visits, hands-on information sessions, job shadowing opportunities, and guest speakers. Coaches also set up weekly small-group sessions for students who were at similar milestones in the same pathway. These sessions were a chance to work on submitting applications, practicing interview skills, and engaging in other interview preparation. Additionally, every Friday, all the coaches met to discuss students' progress and specific challenges and to solve problems together, mirroring the **biweekly transition milestone meetings** the postsecondary team had already conducted.

The summary below describes the various coaching activities and their impacts:

Goal	Activities Supporting Goal	Impact
Direct engagement with 90% of caseload	1:1 meetings via phone, email, text, social media outreach Goal setting Resume updates Transportation planning for interviews	Increases direct enrollment by supporting the completion of necessary activities to reach the next step of securing a job or enrolling in a workforce development program
Host 3–4 small group meetings	Application submission Interviewing skills Interview prep	Increases direct enrollment by ensuring that students have support in completing required tasks for their postsecondary pathway enrollment process
Host 2–3 exposure experiences	Program visits Hands-on info sessions Shadow days Guest speakers	Provides students with practical information about programs/jobs of interest Provides students with mini-celebrations and food during group activities

Lessons Learned for the Future

Within Mastery's expanded coaching staff, not everyone had the original three coaches' depth of knowledge about the different pathways, requirements, and paperwork necessary to support students easily. The addition of coaches taught the postsecondary team that they needed to increase coaches' training in the summer of 2023, leading them to provide additional training for coaches prior to the summer of 2024.

The success of Gratz's C3 program for students in non-college pathways is a result of their adaptation of an existing model and the creation of an inclusive program that focused on helping all students achieve the goals they set for themselves. In addition, Mastery's willingness to use extended school year funding and other financial resources for this program demonstrates the network's commitment to ensuring postsecondary success for every student regardless of pathway.

How to Implement this Practice

This section provides step-by-step guidance for implementation of summer transition supports specific to a school and community context, along with accompanying resources to get started.

Before the End of the School Year

Step 1: Identify Students to Participate in the Program

Determine which students need or will likely need additional summer transition support to complete their transition goals.

Potential factors could include:

- students with disabilities who are not in a self-contained program (as such programs often provide their own transition support),
- students with a non-college postsecondary goal,
- students interested in transitioning into the workforce who are not currently working or who have unstable employment, or
- students with low attendance.

The use of a postsecondary data tracking system during the school year can help inform which students will be a good fit for summer transition support.

Step 2: Create Caseloads for Coaches

Build coaches' caseloads by grouping students by pathway (e.g., workforce development, employment, community living, or military) and then, if possible, by existing relationships between students and coaches. Ideally, each coach can support 10–25 students on their caseload, with the exact number depending on the number of milestones their students still have to complete, the level of support the students need to be successful, and the type of pathway. For example, a workforce pathway can be particularly time-consuming because the coach has to work with a student to find open positions, to complete a number of applications, and to prepare for multiple interviews before the student is hired for a position. Other pathways, such as the military, have a defined process that requires one application, screening, and interview before the student is accepted. All of these factors should be considered when creating a caseload for a coach.

It is especially helpful to both coach and student when the coach already knows the details of the pathways assigned to them, such as the required paperwork, the primary points of contact at related organizations or institutions, and the steps necessary for the student to enroll successfully. If possible, coaches should have the opportunity to specialize in specific pathways and to become experts in what students need to do to be successful when enrolling in those pathways. There can be nuance

in pathway requirements and details that are not always explicit in the information that organizations or institutions provide online. Allowing coaches to build expertise in these pathways will improve efficiency and benefit students in time.

Step 3: Onboard Coaches

The school's postsecondary team — which may include a school counselor and special education case manager, or may include additional individuals like transition coordinators, alumni counselors, and program directors or school leaders — should all meet with coaches to review the process, expectations, schedule, and student needs for the summer. This initial meeting should be an opportunity for coaches to ask questions about specific students, as well as learn about larger program structures. To support conversations about specific students, it is useful to have a system that enables coaches to easily learn about a student and their family situation, their needs, and postsecondary transition goals and milestones still to complete. Such a system may be part of the schoolwide student information system, or it could simply be a summary sheet on each student.

Choosing the Right Coach for Each Student

Often, **Gratz** case managers work as summer coaches for the C3 program because of their long-standing relationships with many students and families. Case managers typically are not as well versed in transition activities as transition staff or college and career advisors. Gratz also has seminar teachers who serve as coaches. Seminar teachers may not know all students as well as case managers, but they are typically very familiar with student pathways. Gratz uses each coach's strengths and weaknesses to determine which students should be on the coach's caseload. In other words, the pairing of a particular student and coach depends on whether the student would benefit from having a coach they have an existing relationship with or the student would be better off with a coach who knows the ins and outs of their pathway.

Training prior to the summer should include opportunities for coaches to learn deeply about the pathways in which they will be supporting students, helping them to develop the specialization mentioned above. Such opportunities may include talking to postsecondary team members who already work with students on a pathway, collecting documents and resources, and visiting program locations to develop relationships with the individuals who will work with students. By providing time and resources for coaches to become experts in a particular pathway, schools improve the effectiveness of their coaches, who can better help students to meet their goals during the summer.

Beginning of the Summer

Step 4: Hold Orientation with Families

Schedule an orientation for families to meet and engage with coaches and learn about the summer program. This is a key opportunity for coaches to get contact information for families while also forming relationships with them so that students and families are more likely to be responsive and supportive of activities throughout the summer.

Step 5: Hold Initial Meetings with Students and Create a Plan

After orienting families to the summer transition supports that will occur, coaches need to meet with students individually. The purpose of individual meetings is to:

- learn the best method of communication for the student,
- gather information needed for scheduling activities,
- make sure the student understands the purpose and activities for the summer, and
- ensure the coach and student are aligned around the student's transition goals.

After these initial meetings with students, coaches should use the pertinent information they gathered to map out student-specific plans for the milestones each student still needs to achieve on the path toward their goal. These plans for the summer will also need to allow for flexibility and anticipate that some activities may be delayed by extenuating circumstances.

Making Orientation Fun

At **Gratz**, the postsecondary team makes the family orientation for C3 an informal social event with refreshments and conversation. The casual atmosphere helps families feel comfortable and welcomes them into the process of helping students achieve their postsecondary goals. Families have the opportunity to meet and talk to coaches informally, which paves the way for smoother communication over the summer. Coaches are also able to gain insight about students and their families that can make it easier for them to relate to the students and support the students in meeting their goals.

Create Clear Steps for Students to Complete

Mastery Schools has developed a set of **pathways with milestones** that guide students toward achieving their individual postsecondary goals over the course of their high school careers. Most milestones can be completed during students' seminar courses each year, but some students may need additional support.

Step 6: Develop a Coaching Schedule

Each coach will have to create their own schedule for the students in their caseload, considering students' needs and progress along their pathways. Even students working on the same pathway will likely start summer coaching at different milestones. However, when a coach's caseload does contain students with similar milestones completed, it can be easier for the coach to schedule group activities with students together, and because of that, as previously mentioned, the coach may be able to support more students within their caseload.

A framework schedule, like the one shown in the template below, provides coaches with some structure to their week but does not dictate the specific activities, which will have to be individualized for each pathway and student.

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	1:1 outreach	1:1 outreach	1:1 outreach	Small group mtg #1	Weekly update to team
2	1:1 outreach	1:1 outreach	1:1 outreach	Exposure experience #1	Weekly update to team
3	1:1 outreach	1:1 outreach	1:1 outreach	Small group mtg #2	Weekly update to team
4	1:1 outreach	Exposure experience #2	1:1 outreach	1:1 outreach	Weekly update to team
5	1:1 outreach	1:1 outreach	1:1 outreach	Small group mtg #3	Weekly update to team
6	Administrative tasks/closeout No student meetings Final update to team				

A sample schedule based on Gratz's template

Execute the Program

Step 7: Review Summer Plans with Students

At the first meeting of the summer, coaches review the final, individualized summer plans with the students on their caseload. The plans should include:

- dates for when milestones should be completed,
- a specific schedule of 1:1 check-ins,
- dates and details of planned exposure experiences, and
- the schedule of small group meetings with other students working on the same pathway.

The review includes discussion of remaining questions, confirmation that students have the necessary materials for the plan, and problem-solving for adjustments that may need to be made to the plan in order to get started. With their plans in place, students can begin working on the steps indicated in their plans.

Step 8: Follow Up with Students Weekly

Using a meeting agenda, coaches conduct 1:1 check-ins with students on their caseload at least weekly. Structured meetings support students' progress towards specific milestones and completion of key activities related to those milestones. These meetings are a regular opportunity to hold students accountable for tasks they said they would do over the past week, reflect on the progress they have made on their plan, adapt the plan if necessary, and set new tasks and deadlines.

Students who execute their plan independently may only need quick check-ins via text, while students who struggle to complete the steps of their plan will likely need regular in-person support. In every instance, it is important that coaches document successes, setbacks, and actions taken with students so that the coach can keep the rest of the team informed.

As students complete milestones, coaches track their progress in a data tool. If the students are off track according to the planned dates, coaches can determine whether students need additional support, such as more time for specific milestones or more frequent check-ins, to achieve the targets. Though sometimes the team will be able to predict before summer where a student will flourish and succeed independently based on past performance or interactions, it may not always be possible to anticipate which of the student's tasks will be easier or harder for them to complete. For this reason, coaching schedules should have flexibility so that the plan and schedules can be adapted at various points throughout the summer in response to each student's progress.

If a coach cannot get in touch with a student weekly, they can try to leverage other staff members who have existing relationships with the student to help facilitate contact. It is best to try other methods for contacting the student before reaching out to the family using the contact information provided at orientation.

Step 9: Meet as a Team to Review Data and Troubleshoot

All coaches and members of the postsecondary and special education teams should meet regularly throughout the summer to review data on student progress along pathways. An optimal cadence is weekly or biweekly so that the team can help coaches problem-solve issues that are occurring for individuals or groups of students in a timely manner (see ***Building School-Based Transition Teams to Accelerate Student Progress Toward Postsecondary Goals***). These meetings are also an opportunity to adapt student plans or determine whether other staff members can be helpful points of contact for students, families, or outside agencies.

The team can consider posing the following questions for discussion:

- What common barriers are students experiencing?
- What types of support seem to be most beneficial to students (e.g., text check-ins, small group meetings, field trips)?
- How can the team meet the needs of students who are experiencing the greatest challenges to make progress?

End of the Summer

Step 10: Debrief Summer with Team and Plan for Next School Year

Set aside time at the end of summer to discuss the program's implementation and effectiveness. See **How to Measure** in the Appendix for different ways to measure program implementation and effectiveness. It is important to use the documentation and learnings from coaches, students, and regular summer team meetings to make needed changes for the coming school year and the following summer.

Summary

Individuals with disabilities are half as likely to participate in the workforce as individuals without disabilities. They need additional support to ensure that they have the skills and resources needed to be successful once they leave high school. Schools can and should provide support to all students the summer after graduation to ensure students achieve their postsecondary goals. This support can come in many forms, such as 1:1 coaching, text message reminders, or field trips. Students with disabilities may need more targeted support from 1:1 coaching in order to complete the steps necessary to start their lives successfully after high school. Gratz used their C3 program to ensure that all of their students with disabilities were enrolled in a postsecondary program, in the military, or working. Like Gratz, schools can increase the likelihood that students will participate in the workforce regardless of their disability status by creating similar programs to support the critical transition to life after high school.



FURTHER LEARNING

"Summer Melt Tools"

THE HARVARD UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH STRATEGIC DATA PROJECT

"Summer Melt Resources"

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE ATTAINMENT NETWORK

PROVIDING SUMMER TRANSITION PROGRAMMING FOR POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

Appendix

How to Measure

When implementing summer transition supports, monitoring how useful, usable, and utilized the practice is by team members and across the school system can accelerate learning to improve outcomes for students. Be aware that improved process measures are usually necessary to ensure a high enough level of fidelity before outcomes will see improvement. At minimum, these measures are most essential:

PRIMARY MEASURES					
Measure Type	**Data Collection Type**	**Question Asked**	**Results**	**What does success look like?**	**Examples and Notes**
Process	Program tracker Postsecondary plans	How many activities do students need to complete over the summer to meet their transition goal?	The average number of activities students need to complete over the summer to meet their transition goal	Decreasing average number of activities that need to be completed over the summer	Look deeper into the types of activities students still need to complete as these may need more support during the school year than they currently receive. Ideally, students complete most of their activities during the school year and need to complete few over the summer.
Process	Program tracker	How many students require support over the summer to complete their postsecondary pathways?	Number of students enrolling in summer program out of total number of students	Reducing the number of students requiring summer support until reaching zero	
Process	Contact logs	What percent of students have weekly contact with their coach?	Percent of students who have weekly contact with their coach	Increasing percent until 100% of students have weekly contact with their coach	Social media, texts, emails, two-way audio messages, and phone calls are all forms of contact. Ensure contact is happening in both directions, not just coach outreach without responses from students.

Outcome	Program tracker	What percent of students are attending their postsecondary placement?	Percent of students who are attending their postsecondary placement	Increasing percent until 100% of students are attending a postsecondary placement	

The table below provides examples of other measures you could use to know whether summer transition supports are leading to the improvements you want to see for students:

SECONDARY MEASURES					
Measure Type	**Data Collection Type**	**Question Asked**	**Results**	**What does success look like?**	**Examples and Notes**
Process	Contact log	Do students respond after one outreach attempt from coaches? Yes / No	Percent of students who respond after one attempt from their coach	Increasing percent of students who respond to their coach after one attempt until reaching 100%	Analyze the data to determine what is different about students who do and do not respond to determine if certain factors impede responses.
Process	Student survey	Do students feel supported by their summer transition coach? Yes / No	Percent of students who feel supported by their coach	Increasing percent of students who feel supported by their coach until reaching 100%	Include a follow-up question on a survey to understand better what makes students feel supported.
Process	Program tracker	How long does it take students to complete their remaining activities during the summer?	The average number of days into the summer until students complete all their activities and enroll in a program or get hired at a job	Decreasing number of days during the summer until students enroll in a program or get hired at a job	

Notes

1 Newman et al., *The Post-High School Outcomes*

2 US Department of Labor, “Disability Employment Statistics”

3 Avery, Howell, and Page, *A Review of the Role*

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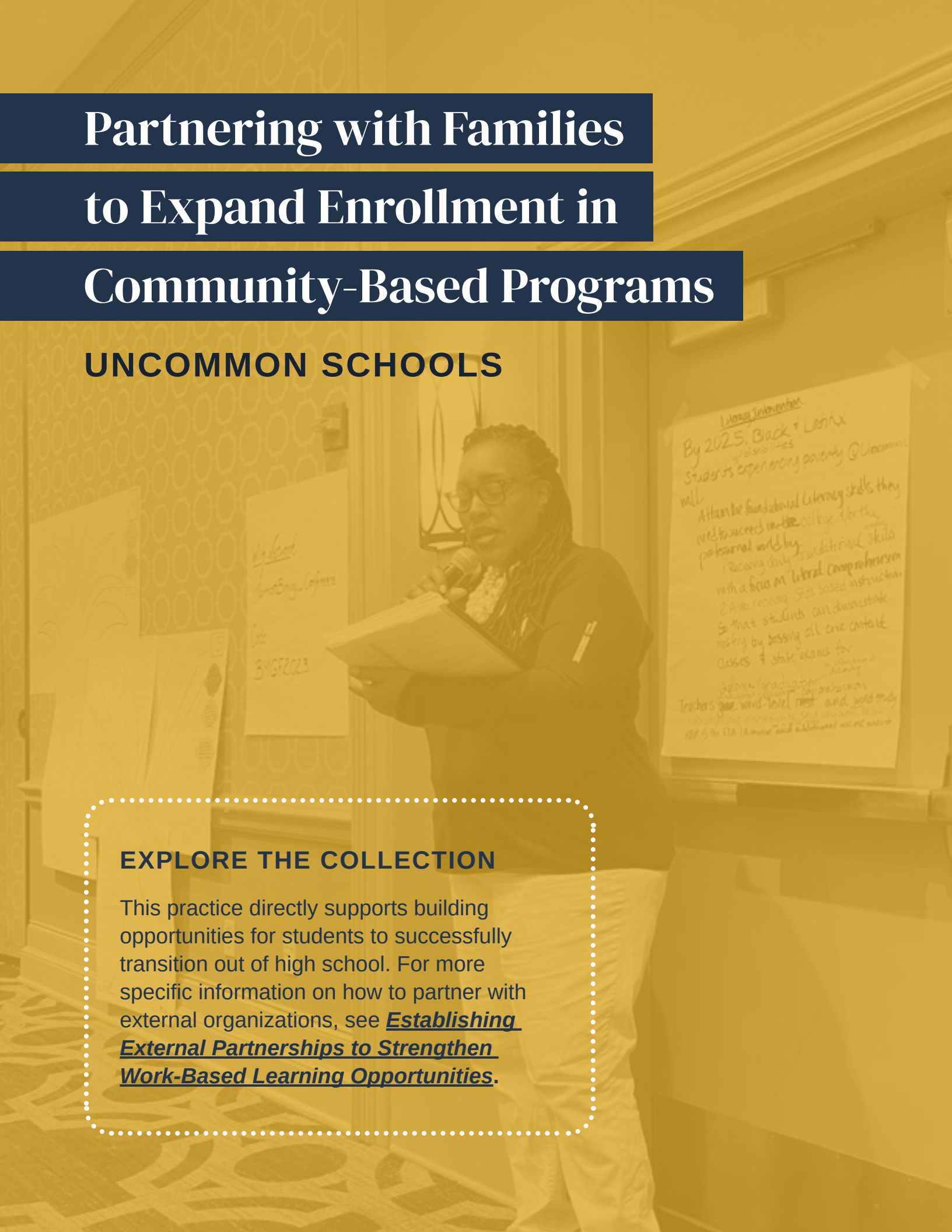
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Partnering with Families to Expand Enrollment in Community-Based Programs

UNCOMMON SCHOOLS



EXPLORE THE COLLECTION

This practice directly supports building opportunities for students to successfully transition out of high school. For more specific information on how to partner with external organizations, see ***Establishing External Partnerships to Strengthen Work-Based Learning Opportunities***.

Snapshot

WHAT IS THE PRACTICE?

Educators develop strategic relationships with students, families, and local organizations that provide postsecondary resources to students. Educators can then support and progress-monitor families' submission and completion of applications to the organizations.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Families need opportunities to learn more about the different supports and resources available for their students after high school.
- Nationally, only about 14% of IEP meetings for students with disabilities who are 14 years and older include a vocational rehabilitation counselor. Another 17% of IEP meetings include someone from a different outside organization.[1]
- Only eight percent of individuals with disabilities in the US who were 16–24 years old applied for vocational rehabilitation services, even though an average of 56% of applicants received services.[2]
- Many families experience significant barriers when applying for and accessing services. By acting as intermediaries, educators can better ensure that students who need and qualify for services receive those services.



"My goal is just to be the person who is the bridge."

— TONYA BALLARD, UNCOMMON SPECIAL EDUCATOR AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER

The Challenge

Families need guidance to navigate student enrollment in community-based organizations.

Many students with disabilities need transition services to help them reach their goals after high school. Community-based organizations offer students with disabilities services, including educational day programs, job training programs, and support for instructional accommodations for college students. For many students, these services are essential for their successful transition out of high school. Families do not always have the time to get all the information they need about community-based organizations and make the connections themselves. Unfortunately, these organizations can also be mired in bureaucracy and difficult to navigate. Families can struggle with different steps required for enrollment in a program:

- Understanding program eligibility criteria (e.g., income level, disability type, or service needs)
- Completing initial applications
- Submitting required documentation (e.g., income verification, documentation of disability, or IEP)
- Participating in intake interviews
- Attending meetings to develop a service plan for the individual student

For North Star Academy Lincoln Park High School (LPHS) in Newark, NJ, connecting students with disabilities and their families with these organizations is key to helping students reach their postsecondary goals. Uncommon Schools has always worked to connect students and families with community-based organizations that provide services to students after high school, but they did not have a clear process and set of resources to support case managers and college and career counselors in making these connections.

Tonya Ballard, in her roles as special education instructional leader and part-time career and college readiness teacher, worked with a diverse set of stakeholders from the network: Joe Frick, Uncommon's career and technical education manager; Alex Walker, college counselor; Roydon Pellew, alumni success counselor; Meghan Fitzgerald, cross-regional manager of special education; and other members of the Uncommon team. Together, the group brainstormed solutions and identified a clear starting point — enrollment in the Division of Vocational and Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) — to develop a process that could be replicated across schools and programs in the network to strategically use resources to meet the needs of students and families.



Uncommon's Continuum of Postsecondary Readiness Supports for All Students

Enabling Conditions

Enabling Conditions describes the minimum conditions needed for successful implementation, including resources, mindsets, staffing, and recommended time allocation.

Prerequisites	★ Systemwide commitment to alternative pathways ★ Network-level support for the exploration and systematization of resources for postsecondary transition
Recommended Materials	★ Data systems that help track student goals and progress for postsecondary transition that are integrated into existing platforms ★ Guidance for postsecondary and special educators on transition for students with disabilities
Staff Commitment	★ Staffing for seminar classes for all students ★ Postsecondary staff with special education knowledge
Recommended Time Allocation	★ Training of postsecondary staff on transition for students with disabilities (1–2 hr. per year) ★ Collaborative meetings between school-based special education case managers (1 hr. per month) ★ Meetings between network-level postsecondary and special education teams (1 hr. per month)



The Practice

Working Directly with Community-Based Organizations To Support Families

After bringing the team together to unpack the challenge and consider solutions, Tonya set out to create a process that could be the bridge between community organizations, like DVRS, and the students they aimed to serve. Tonya's first step was to research local organizations in order to connect students and their families with services that could help them long after they graduate. Being the link between families and external organizations meant that Tonya, as the students' case manager and college and career counselor, was responsible for making these connections and functioned as the families' point person at school.

To better support students and families with the application process, Tonya knew she would need to fully understand DVRS and the steps to apply. She reviewed their website, reached out to Joe and other colleagues who had experience working with DVRS or similar organizations, and made a list of questions she could not easily answer through research. Next, Tonya established contact with a point person at DVRS, from whom she was able to gather information about the program and a **host of services** they provide, including:

- vocational counseling and guidance;
- adaptive driver training;
- work readiness;
- training, including tuition, related fees, and required textbooks, for vocations and college;
- tutor, reader, and note-taker services;
- job development and placement; and
- job coaching.

Tonya's contact directed her to DVRS's online enrollment information. She then sent the **application** to all her students' families with a message emphasizing the importance of applying while students are still in high school. By applying, students could find out more about what DVRS provides, learn how to fully enroll in the program, and even begin receiving services.

At least one student's family began applying to DVRS in response to Tonya's email. When the family hit a roadblock in understanding how to complete their application process, they reached out to Tonya for help. Together, Tonya and the family finished the application, which allowed Tonya the opportunity to develop stronger bonds with the family and learn the process deeply.

Regional Service Organizations that Provide Postsecondary Services

Every state has its own programs that provide **vocational rehabilitation services** to individuals with disabilities using federal funding authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Uncommon's **transition handbook** explains that "the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) works with students who have disabilities, including those with a 504 Plan or other documented disability that impedes a student's ability to succeed in competitive employment." Uncommon also works with **Acces-VR** to connect their students attending schools in New York State with these same services. These state-run programs are essential service providers for individuals with disabilities after high school.

As soon as the student and their family started having meetings with staff from DVRS, Tonya asked to join. As a result of Tonya's strong relationship with the student and their family, everyone was eager to have Tonya join as an important member of the team. By joining the student's meetings with DVRS, Tonya strengthened her connection with the DVRS support provider and deepened her understanding of what families experience when they enroll in DVRS programming.

Inspired by her success with the first family, Tonya asked to be included in meetings with all of the other students from her school to whom she had recommended DVRS, so that she could similarly support their transitions from high school to life after high school. Fortunately, the application for vocational rehabilitation services in New Jersey provides a location for the name and contact information of the applicant's special education teacher. Providing this information gave DVRS authorization to communicate with students' special educators and removed the need to have families sign an additional form to consent to this contact.

Tonya also had families add her as a contact in all their email communications with DVRS. This allowed Tonya to reach out to the assigned DVRS counselors, give them background on her role, and ask for any paperwork she could support students to complete. In this way, Tonya could track the documents and steps each student and their family needed to complete and help make sure all the materials were submitted. Acting in this role further fostered Tonya's trusted relationships, allowing her to continue supporting families. The importance of Uncommon's investment in Tonya's role as a career and college counselor and point of contact for her students' families cannot be understated.



How Uncommon Implemented the Practice

Over time, Tonya devised a set of steps to use throughout the year to increase the impact of the practice.

Step 1: Develop Relationships with Families

- Better understand families by inviting them to school events that allow for personal interactions.
- Start building trust with families as their point person by providing them with information through workshops.

Step 2: Connect with Community-Based Organizations

- Research community-based organizations, both public and private.
- Use existing relationships to build new connections with organizations and individuals at the organizations.
- Determine whether there are opportunities for students to receive community-based supports on campus.
- Confer with established internal supports about community-based organizations.

Step 3: Coordinate Materials

- Understand the steps and requirements that families will need to satisfy to complete applications.
- Identify barriers families may encounter when completing requirements.
- Ensure families provide consent for communication between the school and the organization.

Step 4: Support Students and Families with Requirements

- Assign the completion of applications to students as homework.
- Hold in-person workshops for families to get support completing applications.
- Create a way of tracking the completion of steps and applications (e.g., application complete, application submitted, intake meeting held, services offered).

Step 5: Follow Up After Application

- Regularly follow up with families who do not submit materials.
- Connect with organizations to maintain relationships.
- Document successful strategies and useful materials.

At the same time Tonya was gaining knowledge about DVRS, she was also collaborating with the special education and college and career readiness teams to create quarterly workshops for families. These sessions let families learn about specific programs that support students with disabilities and meet Uncommon staff members and outside organizations who are resources to them and their students. These activities strengthened families' trust in their students' teacher, taught them new information, and helped facilitate future interactions with key personnel.

"Unlike in primary school where students have a main teacher parents can contact, there are several departments, teachers, and supports in high school, so parents may not know who to address. I was their one-stop shop to what our school and community has to offer."

— TONYA BALLARD, UNCOMMON SPECIAL EDUCATOR AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER

A Sample of Quarterly Family Workshops

Tonya and the college and career readiness team developed a sequence of four workshops that counselors or case managers can host throughout the school year.

QUARTER 1: SEPTEMBER

Topics include collaborating with my young adult in finalizing their transition plan; an explanation of the curriculum/transition process for each quarter; documentation that families should gather; and key online systems, including PowerSchool, YouScience, Overgrad, Common App, and FAFSA.

QUARTER 2: NOVEMBER

Topics include completing the FAFSA; making early decisions for the college process; finding a mentorship, internship, job, or portfolio, depending on the transition plan; financing college; updating Overgrad.

QUARTER 3: MARCH

Topics include summer program applications, scholarships, preparing for the next grade/retention conversations, spring break ideas, and DVRS sign-up.

QUARTER 4: MAY

Topics include preparing for end-of-year activities (e.g., graduation, field trips, ceremonies, meetings) and scholarships.

The Impact

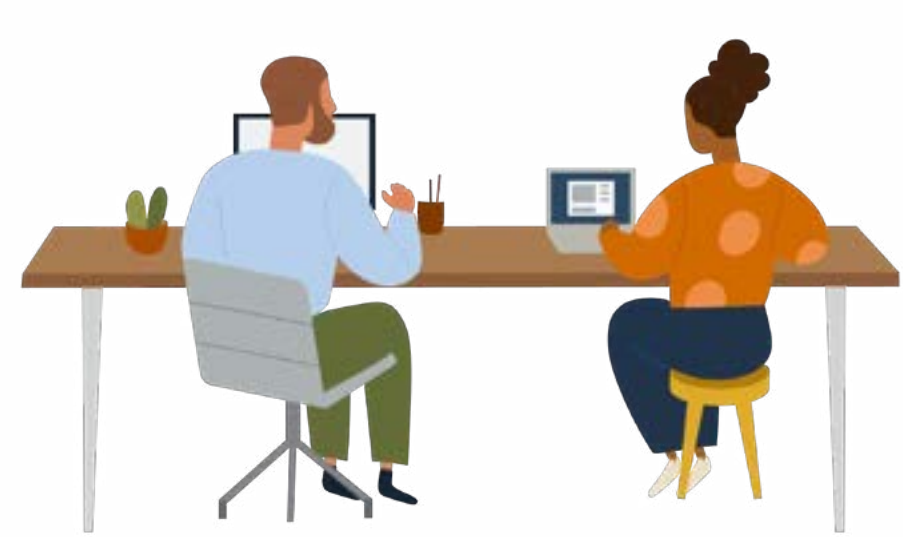
Learning and Codifying Lessons to Expand this Practice

As Tonya has continued to work to connect families to community-based organizations, she has discovered strategies to increase the number of students applying to programs. One strategy she has employed is making applications into homework assignments for students to complete. She uploads the applications to a Google Classroom that students and families can access. She has also found that it is very important to continue to follow up with families who do not at first complete applications. By keeping track of these families and connecting with them repeatedly, Tonya is able to build a more trusting relationship with them as they see how reliable and supportive she is. Her persistent follow-up also helps her discover the barriers that arise for families, which she can work to mitigate in future years.

Tonya has been able to use her knowledge and experience with this practice to create a guide for special educators and college and career counselors throughout the Uncommon Schools network. In the guide, educators can access information, structures, and materials from the work that Tonya, the special education team, and the college and career readiness team developed and expanded upon during the team's engagement in the NIC, so all Uncommon families of students with disabilities can be connected with organizations that provide important resources for their students. As a result, Uncommon has been able to increase the capacity of special educators and college and career readiness counselors and build partnerships with local organizations and guest speakers to broaden the array of career opportunities students can access.

Common Barriers and Solutions

Barrier	Solution
Students and families do not understand the student's disability and services needed.	Lessons provided on disability- and self-awareness
Students and families do not have access to a printer at home.	Applications printed at school
Students lose the applications.	Applications remain at school unless taken home to complete a specific task. Completed applications are mailed directly from school.
Students do not have important information (e.g., social security number, home address, parent information).	Case managers have families provide all necessary information for applications at family workshops.



To learn more about how external transition services can help you improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities, see *Establishing External Partnerships to Strengthen Work-Based Learning Opportunities*.

***Uncommon Schools** serves approximately 19,000 students in grades K–12 across New York City, Rochester, NY, Camden, NJ, Newark, NJ, and Roxbury, MA. Focal schools participating in the Networked Improvement Community included Uncommon Charter High School in Brooklyn, NY, and North Star Academy Lincoln Park High School (LPHS) in Newark, NJ.*

*Uncommon Schools is a part of the **Marshall Street Networked Improvement Community,** a three-year intentional community of 10 public charter school networks nationwide aiming to make dramatic gains for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty. Collectively, the 10 networks identified over 20 best practices that improve learning outcomes and school culture for students positioned furthest from opportunity. Learn more here.*

Notes

1 Cameto et al., *Transition Planning*

2 Honeycutt et al., “State Differences”

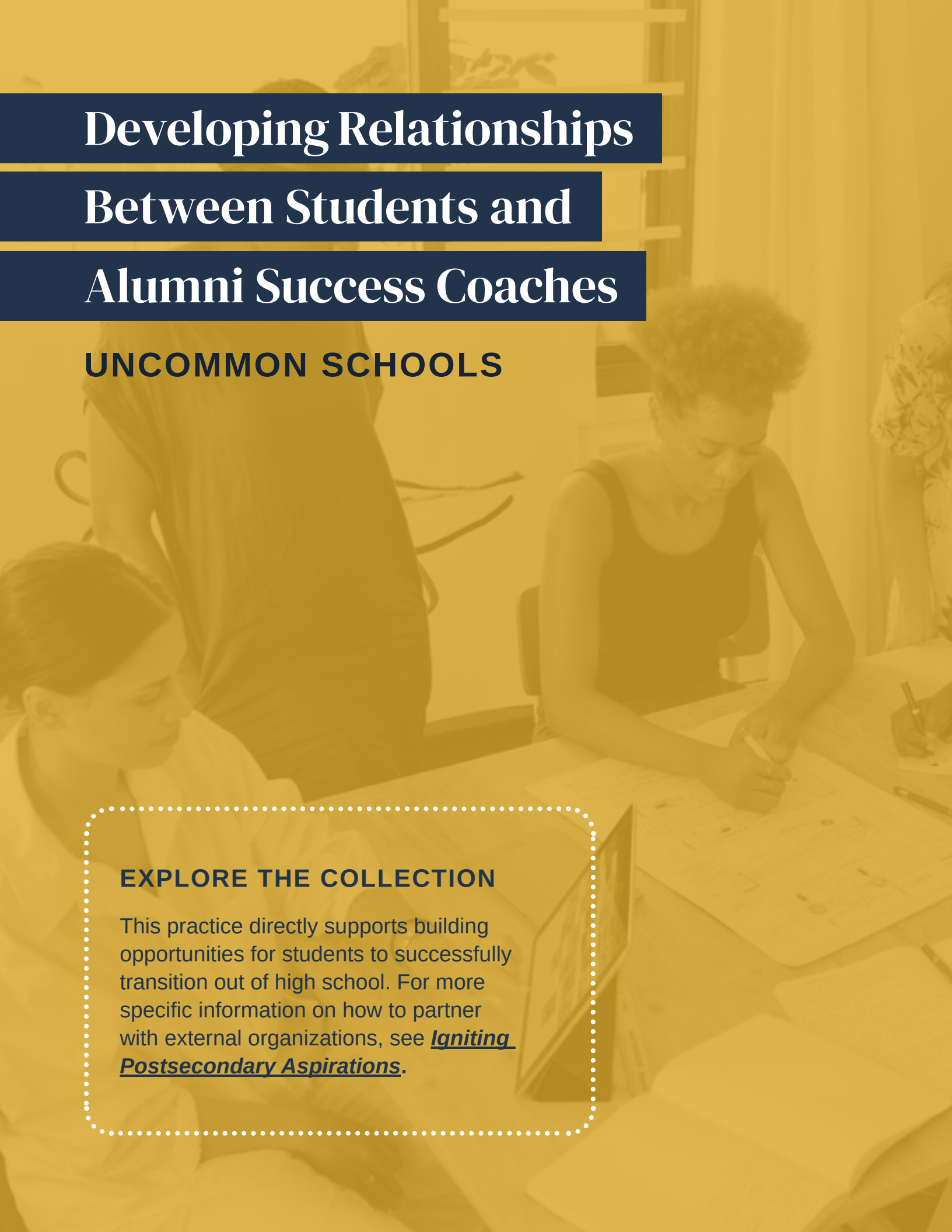
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Developing Relationships Between Students and Alumni Success Coaches

UNCOMMON SCHOOLS



EXPLORE THE COLLECTION

This practice directly supports building opportunities for students to successfully transition out of high school. For more specific information on how to partner with external organizations, see ***Igniting Postsecondary Aspirations***.

Snapshot

WHAT IS THE PRACTICE?

To effectively support students with disabilities during their high school-to-postsecondary transition, special education teams partner with postsecondary teams to facilitate relationships between alumni support staff and students. This proactive effort is concentrated in students' senior year, ensuring both students and alumni support staff understand each other's roles, needs, and ways of working together to achieve individualized postsecondary goals. Special education case managers guide the process, facilitating the establishment of effective relationships and collaboration methods to achieve students' individualized postsecondary goals upon graduation.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Research suggests that when students with disabilities feel a sense of connection and support from school staff, they are more likely to actively engage in educational services and interventions.[1]
- Establishing these connections between students and alumni counselors before graduation ensures students leverage the team's resources and guidance for postgraduation programs and services.
- Many charter school networks have transition-focused programs and staff, yet they traditionally emphasize college enrollment and persistence. Awareness among students with disabilities and their families about these available programs and their broader postsecondary benefits is often lacking.
- Engaging with students over their years in high school helps staff members understand the varied learning profiles and postsecondary transition goals of students with disabilities. This common understanding allows staff to productively partner with students, and families as appropriate, so students enroll in and persist with one or more college, career, or community programs aligned to their individualized transition plans and goals.



> **"Students who don't complete their exit interview are less likely to engage with us."**
>
> **— ROY PELLEW, UNCOMMON ALUMNI SUCCESS COACH**

[1] Martin, Andrew J., and Rebecca J. Collie. "Teacher-Student Relationships and Students' Engagement in High School: Does the Number of Negative and Positive Relationships with Teachers Matter?" *Journal of Educational Psychology* 111, no. 5 (2019): 861–876. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000317

The Challenge

Traditionally, postsecondary support teams do not collaborate and coordinate with special educators to address the individualized transition needs of students with disabilities.

Remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic made it challenging for school staff across the United States to regularly interact with students. This made forming relationships with students difficult, particularly for new teachers and staff. For graduating seniors, these difficulties sometimes meant that they did not have strong connections with school staff, to whom they would normally turn for support with the transition out of high school. This absence was felt even more acutely by students with disabilities, for whom transition support is essential to connect with necessary services or to pursue less traditional postsecondary goals, such as those in workforce development or community living.

At Uncommon Schools, the challenges of remote learning were particularly difficult for the Office of College Access and Success (OCAS) team as they endeavored to facilitate relationship-building between students and their alumni success coaches. These coaches support students after graduation to ensure they achieve their individual postsecondary goals. Tonya Ballard, a special education teacher and the college and career readiness coach for North Star Academy Lincoln Park High School's self-contained class — the Impact Program — realized that only about 60% of her students were responding to their alumni success coach, Roy Pellew. The OCAS team recognized that they needed to develop solutions so that Uncommon staff like Roy and Tonya could collaborate to increase students' engagement in working toward their postsecondary goals.

Before working with alumni success coaches like Roy, Uncommon students attend seminar classes from freshman to junior year to explore postsecondary opportunities and to prepare for the transition out of high school. In their senior year, students learn more about the support that alumni success coaches can provide once students leave high school. During the pandemic, students' initial interactions with their alumni success coaches had to take place remotely via Zoom, phone, or email. This remote set-up made it more difficult for students to form trusting relationships with their coaches and understand the coach's role. They were also unaware of the type of help the coach could provide them after they graduated. Ultimately, students had little reason to pick up the phone or answer a text from their alumni success coach after graduation because they did not know how the coach could help them.



Furthermore, the social disconnection students experienced during the pandemic made it difficult for them to reach out for help from their coach or from Uncommon once they left high school.

In light of these circumstances, Roy faced a disadvantage with the Impact Program students. He did not get the chance to foster connections with students in the Impact Program before they graduated. Students in the Impact Program were also accustomed to having Tonya as their primary point of contact during high school because she taught almost all of their classes, including their college and career readiness class. In addition, many of the students in the Impact Program wanted to attend a 2-year college or immediately enter employment, pathways that were less familiar to Roy, as he had previously focused on Uncommon's mission that their students attend 4-year college. Roy understood the importance of familiarizing himself with the diverse postsecondary aspirations of students in the Impact Program, beyond the traditional 4-year college route, to better support them in achieving their postsecondary goals.



Uncommon's Continuum of Postsecondary Readiness Supports for All Students

Enabling Conditions

Enabling Conditions describes the minimum conditions needed for successful implementation, including resources, mindsets, staffing, and recommended time allocation.

Prerequisites	★ Systemwide commitment to alternative pathways in addition to 2- and 4-year college ★ Network-level support for developing clear structures and easy-to-use resources for postsecondary transition ★ Dedicated time for high school seniors to engage in postsecondary transition planning, such as seminar classes for all students
Recommended Materials	★ Data systems that track student goals and progress for postsecondary transition that are integrated into existing platforms ★ Guidance for postsecondary and special educators on transition for students with disabilities
Staff Commitment	★ Dedicated alumni support staff with special education knowledge ★ Special educators to collaborate with postsecondary teams
Recommended Time Allocation	★ Meetings between network-level postsecondary and special education teams (1 hr/monthly) ★ **Case Managers and Alumni Success Coach** – Collaborative meetings between school-based special education case managers (1 hr/monthly) • Review the student roster • Plan the schedule of sessions with students • Adapt lessons and activities to complete whole group and 1:1 – Family engagement and education • Develop and deliver 1–2 family training sessions (2–3 hours per training) to help them understand the goals and focus of the course, the roles of various staff, and the ways staff will work with students and families this year to support them – Transition IEP meetings (1–2 hours per student) ★ **Alumni Success Coach** – Training on transition planning for students with disabilities (1–2 hrs per year) – Two 1:1 sessions per semester for each student (1 hour per session) – 30 min. exit interview with every senior, typically in spring

The Practice

Proactively Introducing Postsecondary Transition Support Systems

To create a game plan for how to better engage students in the Impact Program with their alumni success coach, Tonya and Roy knew they needed to work together more than ever before. With the support of their special education and OCAS teams, Tonya and Roy devised a plan to foster working relationships between Tonya's students and Roy throughout the school year. In doing so, they believed students would be more open to Roy's outreach attempts and Roy could learn more about students' postsecondary goals long before their graduation.

In September, to start off the school year, Roy and Tonya delivered to all students in the Impact Program a presentation about Roy and his role. Roy explained that he would be meeting with students throughout the year and working with them on their postsecondary plans. Tonya then held an evening workshop specifically for the Impact Program families at which she introduced Roy and the Uncommon alumni services that he could provide. The workshop was an important opportunity to emphasize that, though the overwhelming message is often "college, college, college," Roy would support students in achieving their goals regardless of the pathway they chose.

After the first workshop, Roy and Tonya scheduled specific times for Roy to visit Tonya's classroom. The visit would enhance students' awareness of Roy's role on their postsecondary team and his availability as a resource. At the visit, Roy actively participated in a JobCorps workshop with Tonya's students to gain insights into their career and community interests beyond college. Furthermore, Roy collaborated with Tonya throughout the school year to deepen his understanding of the transition process and the special education support available to students.

In the first stage of their collaboration efforts, Tonya and Roy experienced a number of barriers that required them to adapt their approach. For instance, after the initial meeting with Roy at the start of the school year, a sample of students was surveyed on their understanding of Roy's role and their plans to work with him. Five out of six students reported a clear understanding of the alumni success coach's role, and two-thirds already planned to work with their coach after graduation. The remaining students were uncertain about future collaboration with him. Because they had started early in the school year, Roy and Tonya were able to work together to alleviate some of this uncertainty among Tonya's students.

Tonya and Roy created opportunities to clarify to both students and families how Roy could support students before graduation, as well as how the alumni success coach role continues to work with students after high school. Roy taught lessons specifically for students in the Impact Program to learn about the different options they have available to them after high school. Roy and Tonya met to create materials that could help students and families understand what students' accommodations might look like in postsecondary life and how to use their accommodations in college. Just as he would have done before the pandemic, Roy met with each student individually to make sure they had a plan in place and knew the resources available to help them reach their postsecondary goals. These personal interactions helped Roy understand that many students needed help staying motivated as they finished high school and feeling like they had agency over their future goals.

By starting at the beginning of the school year, Roy was able to build students' knowledge slowly and in small bites throughout the year. As students learned what they needed to do in their final year of high school and how Roy could support them, they were able to build the agency they needed to be successful and knew to reach out to Roy when they encountered obstacles. Tonya also continually reinforced Roy's role with students and families when they reached out to her for issues related to postsecondary planning by encouraging them to contact Roy instead. Tonya and Roy's continued collaboration also helped them both stay aligned and able to communicate students' needs as they arose.

How Uncommon Implemented the Practice

The process Uncommon's team designed includes the following steps:

Step 1: Hold the First Collaboration Meeting Before School Starts

Special education teachers, case managers, or transition coordinators need to meet with alumni success coaches before school starts or near the start of the school year (i.e., within the first quarter). This meeting is a chance to align on students' transition goals, resources available, and anticipated student needs. Special education coaches and/or OCAS leaders may join where needed to support the team in their planning and remove barriers to its implementation.

Step 2: Schedule Dates for Collaborative Activities During the School Year

Alumni success coaches and special education teachers create a calendar of joint activities that happen at least quarterly. Some of these can be informal, like meet and greets, which help students and families build trust and get comfortable with their alumni success coach. Other activities can be more formal opportunities for alumni success coaches to teach lessons about certain postsecondary topics (e.g., navigating the FAFSA, writing personal statements, or interviewing).

Step 3: Hold the First Meet and Greet Activity (1st Quarter)

This first meet and greet can be with students or students and their families. The activity has several purposes:

- Learn who the alumni success coach is
- Understand what the alumni success coach does
- Provide students an opportunity to ask questions and share about themselves
- Begin building relationships

If this activity does not include families, another family engagement event should be planned early in the year so families also know their alumni success coach and the coach's role in helping students meet their postsecondary goals. Use the time with families to collect additional contact information in case students change phone numbers, emails, or home addresses. At least one of these should stay constant.

Step 4: Alumni Success Coach Attends Other Transition-Related Events

Throughout the school year, alumni success coaches should periodically engage with students and staff for major transition-related events, such as college and career fairs or special education specific transition events. As the coaches learn about other organizations and disability specific topics, they can assist students and staff in making connections with community and college resources and provide information to guide postsecondary transition efforts.

Step 5: Winter and Spring Meetings with Students

The team establishes meetings during the school day for students to meet with their alumni success coach in both winter and spring. At these meetings, the coach shares **resources** developed by the OCAS team with students and families to provide proactive support for working on postsecondary pathways. Meetings and content should align with students' chosen postsecondary goals and pathways. When appropriate, meetings may also include other support staff who are working with the student on their plan for life after graduation.

Step 6: Alumni Success Coach Attends Students' Exit IEPs (End of Year)

As the end of the school year approaches, case managers and alumni success coaches meet to discuss each senior student, their goals, and their needs for coaching support upon graduation. They also set up times for alumni success coaches to hold an **exit meetings** or to attend students' exit IEPs to discuss a plan for support directly with students. Attending these exit meetings allows alumni success coaches to align with students on the postsecondary support they will receive based on their goals and priorities postgraduation. It also allows coaches to have a better understanding of students' disability-specific needs (e.g., accommodations, services, or social-emotional needs). Coaches utilize the information gathered from this exit meeting to guide their future interactions with students.

Step 7: Establish Follow-Up Communication Channels

Alumni success coaches confirm or revise the best communication methods for connecting with students and families, as well as with school staff to monitor postsecondary transition progress. Alumni success coaches may need to coordinate with their OCAS team and other site or network leadership to leverage shared resources or address unique needs for student transition progress.

The Impact

Collaboration at All Levels Helped Uncommon Build Robust Supports for Student Postsecondary Transition

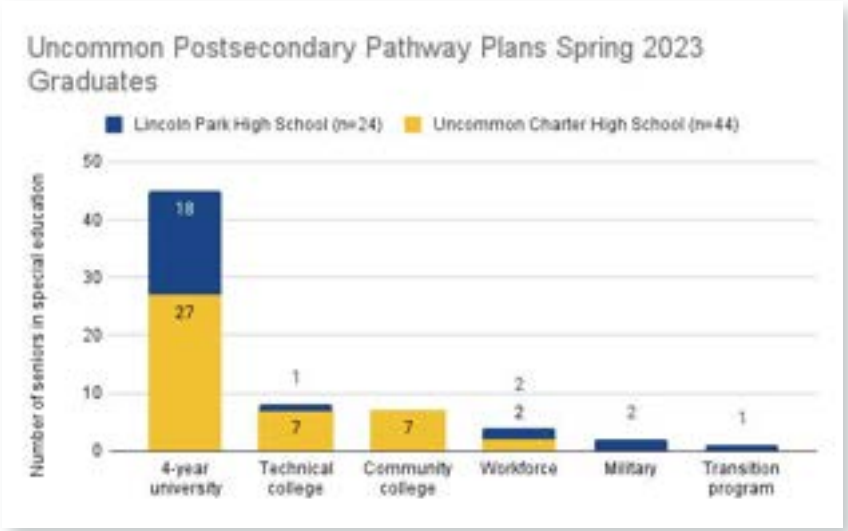
Facilitating collaboration between special education and postsecondary teams across Uncommon has enabled the network-level teams, including OCAS, to develop strong partnerships with school teams, directly contributing to positive student postsecondary outcomes. In the case of Tonya and Roy's collaboration, they put the OCAS guidance on proactive relationship building between coaches and students into action and refined the activities by regularly monitoring student milestone completion

and perception data. This allowed them to adapt their approaches for the LPHS students in the Impact Program and improve the process for future cohorts of students.

As a result of their small-scale learning, Roy and Tonya were able to solidify their systems and routines for introducing students to Roy's role as the alumni success coach during students' senior year. They made those systems and routines transferable by developing a transition handbook for the entire special education program and OCAS. This work helped bridge students' learning in college seminar classes with the continued support of the alumni support team. While Roy's collaboration with Tonya helped him gain additional knowledge about how to best support and relate to students in the Impact Program, Uncommon recognized that everyone in the OCAS would benefit from annual training before school started each year to learn how to support students in special education with their transition out of high school.

Importantly, as Tonya and Roy made progress creating resources and building relationships with students and families, students at both of Uncommon's schools participating in the NIC chose a diverse set of postsecondary pathways to pursue when they graduated from high school. With the support of special education and postsecondary staff, students at Uncommon were able to choose a pathway that was right for them.

While a part of the NIC, Uncommon also hired Joe Frick as their career and technical education manager. Joe brought deep knowledge of special education to the work of the OCAS, and particularly to the alumni success coaches, to further strengthen their support for students with disabilities seeking alternative postsecondary pathways. Regular collaborative meetings between special education and OCAS at the school and network levels have helped Uncommon build more opportunities for students and help them achieve success in reaching their postsecondary goals.



To learn more about how you can ensure that students with disabilities succeed no matter their preferred postsecondary pathway, see *Igniting Postsecondary Aspirations*.

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Marshall Street

Conclusion

IGNITING POSTSECONDARY ASPIRATIONS

A collection of research-to-impact practices developed with the Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities

Conclusion

Preparing students with the necessary skills to transition successfully into adulthood after high school — whether they're entering 2- or 4-year colleges, workforce development programs, employment, the military, or community living — is a critical objective for schools. Unfortunately, to date, individuals with disabilities aged 14 to 64 are significantly less likely than those without disabilities to secure employment, enroll in and complete postsecondary education, and live independently.[1] While high schools traditionally emphasize college enrollment post-graduation, it is equally vital for schools to explicitly teach postsecondary skills to ensure that students with disabilities succeed no matter their preferred postsecondary pathway. Research indicates that participation in career and technical education programs increases the likelihood of high school graduation, attainment of industry certifications, and post-graduation employment for students with disabilities.[2] Aligning postsecondary pathways with student goals and providing real-world opportunities within these pathways enhances students' readiness for life after high school.[3]

Over the course of three years, the Marshall Street Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities (NIC) saw teachers and leaders from 10 participating public charter networks implement, study, and adjust various best practices for improving outcomes for Black and Latinx students with disabilities who are experiencing poverty. This collection — itself an outcome of the work these schools have done — describes some of the strongest of these practices, focusing specifically on how participating schools improved choice-filled transition planning and programming. It highlights three best practices: **school-based transition teams, external partnerships for work-based learning,** and **summer transition programming**. There are also two case studies, one focusing on how educators at Uncommon Schools use strategic relationships with families to expand enrollment in community-based programs and another on how Uncommon Schools focused on building relationships between special education staff and college and career readiness teams to improve alumni success coaches' understanding of students' individual postsecondary needs, allowing them to support students after graduation more effectively.



The practices that the participating schools utilized over the lifespan of the NIC significantly improved postsecondary outcomes for the population of students they were targeting. For example, **Mastery School's Simon Gratz High School** developed and expanded dual enrollment programming to allow students to gain work experience and learn life skills with local organizations while also earning credit. Mastery Gratz also created school-based transition teams to monitor and support students as they met milestones toward postsecondary pathway enrollment. This combination of practices increased the percentage of students with disabilities who were engaged in their chosen postsecondary pathway after graduation between 2019 and 2022 from 53% to 77% — a number that increased to 95% one year after graduation in 2023. Two years earlier, the summer after returning to in-person learning following the pandemic, the Gratz team implemented structured summer programming to support transitions out of high school, including a three-day boot camp and individualized student coaching. These actions led to 80% of students enrolling in their postsecondary pathway in what otherwise would have been a very challenging year.

Key Takeaways

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO PURSUE A CHOICE-FILLED PATHWAY AFTER HIGH SCHOOL.

While college has traditionally been seen as the ideal postsecondary pathway, this assumption has evolved over the last decade.[4] More and more young people are electing to pursue diverse postsecondary next steps across college, career, and community pathways. High schools need to prepare students to achieve their secondary goals by implementing outcomes-oriented transition programs that reflect high expectations for students with disabilities regardless of the pathway students may choose. To shift mindsets about successful postsecondary transition, schools must embrace inclusivity, recognizing that success extends beyond traditional college routes. This includes developing tools, resources, and cross-functional teams to proactively support transition planning for all students, particularly those with disabilities.

RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION PROGRAM REQUIRES DEDICATED STAFF TO LEAD AND OVERSEE THIS WORK.

Schools with the most successful transition programs in the NIC recognize that effective support requires a comprehensive approach that plans for the needs of all students, including those with disabilities. These schools made a significant financial investment in staffing to ensure that someone could devote most or all of their time to focusing on students' success after high school. This investment allowed dedicated staff to develop meaningful relationships with students, understand their goals and unique needs, manage program logistics, and forge external connections with community organizations, resulting in successful postsecondary outcomes for students. To streamline the process, both Mastery and Uncommon utilized existing structures and expanded them to accommodate students with disabilities. This integration ensured that transition support for students with disabilities became part of the school's overall framework.

CHOICE-FILLED TRANSITION PATHWAYS REQUIRE PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS STAKEHOLDERS.

For students to access the postsecondary pathway of their choosing, stakeholders must collaborate to fill in gaps in the system and to educate students and families about the options available to them. Students and their families are often navigating these transitions for the first time and need schools to serve as a bridge between them and external partners (e.g., 2- and 4-year colleges, apprenticeship programs, or community agencies) to learn about, apply to, and complete enrollment in these pathway programs. Partnerships among students and their families, school and district staff and teams, and relevant community organizations facilitate information sharing, the navigation of bureaucracies, and essential progress monitoring to enhance student postsecondary prospects. Both Mastery and Uncommon had cross-departmental transition teams that included counselors, transition coordinators, and other key school-based staff, as well as thoughtful communication strategies to engage regularly with students, families, and outside organization.

THE FREQUENT AND CONSISTENT USE OF DATA IS ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION PROGRAMMING.

Regularly reviewing student progress data towards postsecondary goals, along with timely interventions, significantly increases the likelihood of students successfully completing their chosen postsecondary pathways. A proactive data-driven approach allows educators to track student progress, identify challenges early on, and provide targeted support, ultimately maximizing students' chances of achieving their postsecondary aspirations.

All students, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or ability, deserve to choose the life they want to lead.

Schools are responsible for doing everything in their power to give their students that choice, especially their students positioned furthest from opportunity, at the intersection of race, class, and ability. Simply creating an IEP that includes a transition goal is not enough. If it were, we would not see the gaps in college and career attainment that currently exist in the United States. The practices laid out in this collection highlight some of the ways that schools in the NIC changed the landscape of possibilities for their students with disabilities. Schools must ensure they are not creating two realities: one for white, non-disabled students and one for marginalized students. Establishing a strong system of support for postsecondary transitions is one way to do so.

Appendix

Notes

1 Postsecondary National Policy Institute, “Students with Disabilities in Higher Education”

2 Mazzotti et al. “Secondary Transition Predictors”

3 Cease-Cook, Fowler, and Test, “Strategies for Creating Work-Based Learning Experiences”

4 National Center for Education Statistics, “Total Undergraduate Fall Enrollment”

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Networked Improvement Community

FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities (NIC), a group of 10 public charter school networks serving more than 75,000 students nationwide, identified the best practices through their work between 2019 and 2023.

Led by **Marshall Street** at Summit Public Schools, in partnership with technical assistance providers NIRN, RTI International, SRI International, and SWIFT Education Center, the purpose of the three-year NIC was to systematically improve the way our education system serves Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty and share these solutions with school systems everywhere.

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