

Running Project

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SPED 856: Transition Education and Services

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Having no connection to a school district and early June being the end of the school year in my area, I chose to turn to the Director of Student Services in my son's private school for this project. The ensuing interview regarding transition services was enlightening, highlighting many trouble areas we have learned about and aspects of the system that I was thus far unaware of.

As mentioned, Dr. Karen Sosa is the Director of Student Services for Rolling Hills Preparatory (RHP). RHP is a small urban prep school with around 250 6th—12th grade students. Though I do not have the exact breakdown, according to their website, they have 54% of students of color, students from 37 zip codes, and 45% of students receiving financial aid. Rolling Hills deliberately strives to be a deeply diverse community with children from dozens of zip codes and cultural, economic, and religious backgrounds. They are also the product of a recent merger of two separate programs: a more typically modeled preparatory program with an add-on support “café” and a program designed specifically for neurodiverse students. This was the first year of the official merger. The ramifications of that act can be seen in the percentage of students receiving some accommodations, which is 70%. The private nature of the program and its orientation as a college prep program also means that it has traditionally not had a population of children with high special needs. However, along with this merger, they have also incorporated an elementary program, REACH, built for students who need far more support and services than the middle and high schools have traditionally been prepared for. The first of the students from REACH are now entering middle school.

Dr. Sosa's job began as the director and navigator of all things “support” in the program. This included ensuring students got the accommodations they needed, the support teachers provided the hands-on support they needed, and the general education teachers were in the

loop about their students' needs. She is invited to IEP meetings and creates alternative programs for those in need. Until this point, nearly 100% of their students went on to college regardless of their accommodations. With the incorporation of the REACH program, she is now in the early stages of developing and deepening their transition services to include far more breadth and depth in their support system and offerings. Dr. Sosa is responsible for all middle and high school students who require accommodations.

RHP is strongest in Transition Planning, where they receive a 3.75. The majority of quality indicators in this domain are graded at 4. Planning begins in ninth grade, within an individualized student plan, school-wide college prep, and parent education series. The student's goals and plans are based on their strengths and interests, evaluated through personal connections with the staff and personality and strength surveys. These goals are used to determine their course of study. Where RHP is lacking in this domain is in the collection of data. This is a process they are only now embarking on. The critical thing to note, once again, is that this area is strong because their current student body comprises self-selecting college-bound students. As mentioned above, the current services are not built with students who need broader aid or community involvement in mind.

On the heels of Transition Planning is Transition Assessment, scoring a 3.33. Here, RHP once again tailors their assessments to the student, assuring that their plans and curriculum effectively prepare them to meet their goals. They use multiple methods to assess the students so they match their learning and response needs. They include numerous methods and ongoing activities. However, again, they are all oriented toward college-bound students. It is also important to note that the student's home school district holds all IEP meetings, related

assessments, and connected transition meetings (not the college planning or curriculum planning). This is a complicating factor that I was previously unaware of. This means that many scores, including those within this domain, are affected by the quality of the home district's services. One of these areas is the summary of recommendations for meeting postsecondary goals. At RHP, they support their students and plan with them for the time they are active students, but beyond college entrance, their planning does not extend after high school. As RHP prepares to broaden its services, much of the post-secondary communal support will be through its home district.

The following domain in the order of strength of services is Student Involvement, with a 3.29. Beginning in 6th grade, students spend time each week in their Support Block and Advisory, focusing on decision-making and other real-life skills. RHP fosters self-determination and advocacy in students' class choices, participation in activities, regular communications with staff, and regular student-led conferences. Students are active in their learning and post-secondary plans. Students are given an opportunity for direct experience through a senior year internship program, where they choose their interests and spend time within the community exploring the chosen vocation, followed by a community presentation on that experience. However, as stated before, since the students' home districts hold the students' IEP meetings, they are always invited to the meetings (as required by law) but rarely attend, and they only lead when they are already 18 years old.

The domain of Systems-Level Infrastructure is graded at 3.25. As we move through the domains, we see more effects of the home district overseeing the students' IEPs. At RHP, the internal infrastructure of including students in the general education course and participation in

school offerings is on target. Students are given appropriate accommodations so they can participate in state-wide testing. However, the teachers have little interaction with or say in the students' IEPs as they are run off campus. Dr. Sosa is "invited" to the meetings but does not run them. The IEP is a resource but does not dictate onsite assessments or conversations. This discordance limits the ability to revisit and adjust throughout the year.

The domain of Curriculum Instruction is at a flat 3. RHP excels at preparing students for post-secondary education and focuses on developing interpersonal and social skills in many formal and informal settings. Courses are adapted to include the needs of neurodiverse students; however, no vocational courses are offered. RHP will work on these in the future. Finally, no post-secondary offerings exist for students still needing special education services.

The domain of Family Involvement has the second lowest score at 2.75. While RHP involves the parents with programs on college prep and mental health, the quality indicators in this section are deeply affected by the home district's IEP team. While in RHP conferences and transition plan meetings, families and whoever the families would like to invite are invited; they may not be included in the district's IEP meetings. RHP is not involved in bringing the family into the IEP process since it is not their process. This seems counterintuitive to me, as the staff at RHP are so close to the students and their families, but given the law and the reality that the public school's records will protect the student in the long term, it is a frustrating reality.

The final domain is the domain that needs the most work. The domain of Interagency Collaboration and Community Services is to be seen as a work in progress at RHP. While there is more than one person in charge of the Transition Services (Dr. Sosa being one of them), she is only currently overseeing the avenue of college prep. They are looking into building the

connections and services they will need for interagency collaboration, but they currently rely on the school district's relationships. While they can determine the needs of a student who is intent on heading to two or four years of college, they also do not yet have the infrastructure to address the needs of those transitioning to community services. Finally, while they are prepared to empower their current students with connections to disability services within the college framework, they are not yet armed with the information for those who need community services.

Overall, while Rolling Hills Prep is on a good path, it has a long way to go to achieve high marks across the domains and their quality indicators. It is heartening to note that they are aware of them and working toward that end.



Rabbi Selilah Klev <rabbiselilah@shalempreschool.org>

Transition Coalition QI2 Needs Assessment

1 message

transition@ku.edu <noreply@qemailserver.com>
Reply-To: "transition@ku.edu" <trigger@qemailserver.com>
To: rabbiselilah@shalempreschool.org

Thu, May 30, 2024 at 9:20 AM

rabbiselilah@shalempreschool.org

Dear Selilah,

Thank you for taking the **Transition Coalition QI2 Needs Assessment**. The QI2 is designed to help determine the strengths and critical needs within school transition programs.

The score for each domain is an average of your responses to the statement in that domain. The highest average for each domain is 4 (completely achieved), and lowest is 1 (not achieved).

- The higher the overall domain score, the more quality indicators have been achieved.
- The low domain scores are the domains to consider for targeted change or improvement.
- Domain averages can help identify critical areas for improvement.

Your domain scores were:

Transition Planning: 3.75
Transition Assessment: 3.33
Family Involvement: 2.75
Student Involvement: 3.29
Curriculum Instruction: 3
Interagency Collaboration & Community Services: 2.71
Systems Level Infrastructure: 3.25

Good luck on your program improvement! Contact us at transition@ku.edu if you need next steps or resources, or have questions.

Literature Review

APA Citation	Purpose of Study	Key Findings	Implications for Practice
Noonan, P. M., Morningstar, M. E., & Gaumer Erickson, A. (2008). Improving interagency collaboration: Effective strategies used by high-performing local districts and communities. <i>Career Development for Exceptional Individuals</i>, (31)3, 132-143.	The purpose of this study was to identify effective strategies used by high-performing local districts and communities.	<p>The study identifies eleven key strategies for the enhancement of interagency collaboration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Flexible Scheduling and Staffing · Follow-Up After Transition · Administrative Support for Transition · Using a Variety of Funding Sources · State-Supported Technical Assistance · Ability to Build Relationships · Agency Meetings with Students and Families · Training Students and Families · Joint Training of Staff · Meetings with Agency Staff and Transition Councils · Dissemination of Information to a Broad Audience 	The eleven different strategies create a checklist for a school to use as a guide to better their transition program with a multi-factorial approach.
Michaels, C. A., & Ferrara, D. L. (2006). Promoting Post-School Success for All: The Role of Collaboration in Person-Centered Transition Planning. <i>Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation</i>, 16(4), 287-313. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532768Xjepc1604_4	The purpose of this article is to examine a best-practice approach, person-centered planning, and its implication for collaboration and transition planning.	This study draws the parallels in goals and implementation between person-centered planning and collaboration. The authors clearly illustrate the vital nature of interweaving the two aspects of transition planning for either to truly be effective. After this illustration, the authors delineate the multiple challenges within this approach and the definitive need for more and, specifically, alternative research to be done.	For transition teams, it illustrates strengthening collaboration by utilizing a person-centered approach. Listing a multitude of previously designed strategies it gives the team a place to start, with caveats laid out the pitfalls of following the letter of the process rather than the spirit.
Wilson, L. & David, L. L. (2023) Transition Requires Collaboration. <i>Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling</i>, 54(4), 277-286. https://doi.org/10.1891/JARC-2023-0016	To establish the necessity of collaboration as a part of the transition process.	This article illustrates the need for collaboration between multiple parties (educators, VR councilors, parents etc.) for the success of the transition process for the student.	Capitalizing on the information given in this article from the outset, one should approach the transition process through a thoroughly collaborative process.

Website Abstracts

Website	Website Description	How does it relate?
The IRIS Center. (2024). Secondary Transition: Interagency Collaboration. https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/transition/	The IRIS Center is a national center that provides training in using effective evidence-based practices and interventions to improve education outcomes for all children, especially those with disabilities from birth through age twenty-one. This site is designed for college students, professional development practicing professionals, and independent learners.	The center has a training module in interagency collaboration for post-secondary transition services. It also has a module on diversity
NTACT The Collaborative. (2024). Interagency Collaboration. https://transitionta.org/interagency-collaboration/	The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition offers information, tools, and support to assist multiple stakeholders in delivering effective services and instruction for secondary students and out-of-school youth with disabilities. It is designed for all professional parties within the interagency team, college students, and professional development.	This website houses numerous trainings, strategies, information on laws and regulations, guides, assessments, and more to empower stakeholders to provide the most effective transition services they can.
Parents Helping Parents. (2024). Connections California: Transition Planning for Teens and Tweens. https://www.php.com/transition-planning-teens-tweens/	Parents Helping Parents provides parent support for children and adults with disabilities in San Jose, CA, and beyond. Get relevant, up-to-date information and assistance for you and your family members of any age with any disability. PHP has sections addressing parents and their disabled children.	An important aspect of effective collaboration is ensuring that all parties know about the process, expectations, and opportunities. This website is designed to empower parents with resources and knowledge, both background and planning, to enable them to be full partners in the collaboration process.
PACER's National Paint Center on Transition and Employment. (2023). Middle and High School Transition Planning. https://www.pacer.org/transition/learning-center/planning/	PACER's website houses resources for and information about the Post Secondary Transition process. It has learning components, videos, articles, and links covering topics as broad as laws and rights to independent living, employment, and diversity. It addresses both parents and children.	This is an essential inclusion due to the breadth of its offerings. PACER's information is broader and further reaching, including resources on diversity, links to other agencies, and resources and videos on various supporting topics.

Summary of Findings

Rolling Hills Prep (RHP) has a good deal to offer a disabled child when looking at its transition services; however, it has very little, if any, interagency collaboration. When looking at articles and websites, I kept the fledgling nature of their program in mind.

Collectively, the three articles significantly contribute to our understanding of the pivotal role of collaboration in the transition process. Wilson and Davis (2023) underscore the perils of transitioning without genuine collaboration, underscoring the need for successful multifaceted collaboration as the linchpin of success. This concept is further enriched by Wilson and David (2023), who link collaboration and person-centered planning, recognizing that a deep understanding of the student-their strengths, interests, background, and values-hinges on the team's ability to collaborate. Lastly, Noonan, Morningstar, and Erickson (2008) share eleven crucial strategies that can significantly contribute to post-secondary success. While each article individually emphasizes the value of collaboration, their collective insights help shape a more

profound understanding of what it takes to build a successful post-secondary transition program.

Once again, keeping in mind the fledgling nature of RHP's Interagency Collaboration, the most relevant websites provide education and resources for their educators and parents. The IRIS Center's training module is an excellent way for educators to gain basic knowledge regarding interagency collaboration. It is easy to work through and straightforward to understand. NTACT, the Collaborative, can build on that knowledge with additional resources and training; it is more complicated to navigate but workable once you have basic knowledge. Finally, addressing the reality that it is not only the professionals who need to understand the transition process but also the parents and students who need to be educated is a vital step toward success. Parents Helping Parents and PACER's do just that. PHP breaks down the process, their rights, and their choices clearly and succinctly. It then gives them a whole host of resources to empower their collaboration with the professionals. PACER'S practically inundates them with resources that cover a multitude of topics that may be relevant to their journey. A final note about the value of this website is that it is a California-specific organization that provides RHP families with area-specific insight and information.

As a new initiative, RHP must build its interagency collaboration plan from the ground up. The information gathered needs to be the basis for designing a person-centered, profoundly collaborative approach. Using the training sessions found in the above sights, the process should begin with staff training. Then, using the Noonan, Morningstar, and Erickson (2008) article as a checklist, the team should work together to implement a program that targets each of the eleven key strategies. The person-centered approach they already use should be grown to look at the student's interests for their future. Roles and responsibilities should be delineated; agencies should be identified, relationships built, and resources like PHP and PACERs should be gathered and listed for the incoming families. Given that the program does not yet exist, it is easy to list the steps one might need to take – however, at RHP, the transition coordinator is also the head of student services and works with students in the classroom. We should note that one of the eleven key strategies is ensuring enough planning and coordination time. This would mean that the current staff will very likely have to grow if the goals are to be met effectively.