Smooth transitions : increasing support for students with disabilities and special needs to meet their post-secondary goals

Traci Lynn Alger

California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes

Recommended Citation
Alger, Traci Lynn, "Smooth transitions : increasing support for students with disabilities and special needs to meet their post-secondary goals" (2012). Capstone Projects and Master's Theses. 288.
https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes/288

This Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. Unless otherwise indicated, this project was conducted as practicum not subject to IRB review but conducted in keeping with applicable regulatory guidance for training purposes. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.
Smooth Transitions: Increasing Support for Students with Disabilities
and Special Needs to Meet Their Post-Secondary Goals

Traci Lynn Alger

California State University, Monterey Bay

Author’s Note: Traci L Alger, Liberal Studies Department, CSU Monterey Bay. Senior Capstone Project, Spring 2012, Instructor: Professor Patricia Whang, Ph.D.

I would like to dedicate this project to my brother James, and to my Nana Dorothy Peck, she passed away in January. I would additionally like to thank with all my heart the following individuals: Mike Sarmiento, Michelle & Steve Alger, Mickey Roman and Rochelle Goitia, Denise McClain, Diane Latini, Amanda Flores, Giovanna Piumarta, Camille Sarmiento, Nancy Neiss, Carol Carolla, Ellie Dolan, Dennis Verzosa, and all the rest of my family and friends who were rooting for me throughout my many years at CSUMB, I love you guys and couldn’t have done it without your support and encouragement.

Please address any correspondence concerning this study to: TAlger@CSUMB.edu
Abstract

Transitioning from high school into their adult lives can be tumultuous for students with disabilities and special needs. Graduation causes a loss of some services where necessary adult programs may be inaccessible. Through written survey and personal communication with valid local stakeholders, opinions revealed a need for better connections to local educational resources to help students and their caregivers create realistic post-secondary educational goals. The action of this project is important because there are students with disabilities unable to access services for themselves as they are required to function more independently. Each student has different needs and unique goals, requiring different kinds of aid. Providing students first-hand accounts of local educational institutions services from currently enrolled students, plus additional information on a handout and a website, I was able to inform high school students the local college options, so they may choose with their caregivers and teachers what would work best to successfully meet their individual goals.

Living in the dorms was my first exposure to successful transition of students with disabilities into college. I lived on the first floor near “the handicapped room” as we sometimes called it. Those individuals with movement impairments were housed on the first floor for ease of exit if there was an emergency, showing the school’s provision of all accommodations necessary and additional attention to safety measures necessary to accommodate such individuals. It shows their effort to fully include those with disabilities in the community. I liked that there was the possibility for students with disabilities to become fully a part of the school community this way. This is not the case everywhere, but ideally can change to understanding and acceptance as time goes on. In the past individuals were not so lucky, before Civil Rights for individuals with disabilities, there was potential for many more roadblocks to higher education. Today there are many programs and services within and outside of educational institutions to promote ease of education for individuals with disabilities.

The best experience I had involving the education and transition of a disabled individual was attending a friend’s graduation from community college. This is an extra inspiring story because he was not only graduating, but he was also the ceremonial speech reader. Being a strong, outspoken person goes far whether you have disabilities or not. This boy was a very determined and intelligent individual, held back only by his limited mobility. He rolled up the stage in his electric wheelchair (it gets him places the quickest) to present his speech, and was engulfed in family and friends after the ceremony. He had the support, funding, and ability to begin living on his own around the same time. He has such an upbeat, outgoing personality that
people see him for the person that he is, instead of as just a dude in a wheelchair. He has been invited to attend universities, and has held a job at a radio station as a DJ. He will go far with the aid that he gets; his brain works much faster and better than his body allows for his movement.

On the other hand, the most disheartening experience I had was providing transportation for a friend of mine with limited mobility to her temporary housing at a nursing home. Her roommate was the best they could match her with, a woman that thought she was a young girl. The woman’s half of the room was covered in stuffed animals in any extra display space. With only the ability to draw a sheet across the middle of the room for privacy, this should not have been considered reasonable housing for a healthy young woman as she is becoming independent. A foster child with disabilities, at 18 she needed to get out of her foster home and find work immediately. She was not happy living with her foster parent and was ready to get out. The programs that helped her to find her housing and transportation did do her justice by finding her a place to go, but it was no place to live and thrive in. Upon coming in the door of this nursing home there was a stench that could not be ignored. You could hear some patients moaning from their rooms, and some were still sitting in the hallway even at the late hour I brought my friend home. The lights seemed too bright for evening time and though it did not appear dirty, the strong smell you could almost taste must have permeated everything the residents owned. My friend was not afforded all the help she should have been given, or maybe she did not have the time or knowledge to fight for something better for herself. Unfortunately, she passed away a year or so after that. I was so saddened by the news that she died, that I was afraid to find out the reason for her demise. The cause was probably not only the environment she was living in, but it must have had an influence. Without proper self care, or aid in self care, any one of us could depreciate and expire as she did.
These stories I have just brought to light are important because they are all examples of individuals with severe disabilities becoming adults. Those with disabilities, including those that use a wheelchair on a daily basis have limitations imposed on them that most of society does not think about or care about. Restricted by their own bodies, those with disabilities have an unfair disadvantage. They not only battle their disabilities physically every day to manage activities of living, but also have to fight against the negative view society holds over individuals with disabilities. Even with additional programs that promote smoother transition from high school to college or a career, and laws that protect these individuals from being discriminated against, there continues to be many obstacles for those with disabilities to cross before they can succeed. Issues with finding transportation, housing, employment, or nourishment, among other things, can cause much more difficulty in functioning for the individual with disabilities, more so than with their more able peers, those who have no disabilities. Becoming an independent adult requires more responsibility and organization as requirements. Without support, whether it be financial, self-care, or even just moral support, reaching a goal may seem impossible.

The life change of becoming an adult for individuals with disabilities is an issue close to my heart because my brother has disabilities and recently became an adult; he will turn 19 this year. I am very comfortable around individuals with severe disabilities since living with my brother since I was six years old, until I left for CSUMB. It always makes me happy to see individuals with disabilities able to function in society, and enjoy to the fullest extent their education. With multiple disabilities including Cerebral Palsy and his movement restricted to being pushed in a wheelchair, I have only love and empathy for those individuals in my brother’s situation. James will not go to college because the many complications from his disabilities prevent him from benefitting from a traditional education. However he will continue to live with
my parents for now, and will continue to join in classes elsewhere in the community offered by other organizations after he graduates from Greengate School when he turns 22. If there is anything I have learned from my brother’s schooling, it is that education is essential for the average student, but it can be life changing to those individuals with disabilities. Moving on to take any post-secondary can be helpful not only for future careers, but also in having a better quality of life and knowledge of the world.

**Issue**

There can be a multitude of barriers for individuals with disabilities to becoming independently responsible for themselves as an emerging adult, including for their education. Transitioning to independence and adulthood is a complex life change that can be stressful and seem torturous at times. It is hard enough to become independent for someone with full abilities. An individual with disabilities generally has to struggle harder than the average person to transition into college or a career. Especially in the case of those individuals who are expected to be independent immediately at eighteen. Deeper understanding of what is required to meet post-secondary goals by the student, and greater specific assistance from community and family members can effectively create smoother transitions to adulthood for students with disabilities. Students with and without disabilities often plan to attend college or a university after graduation from high school. However, far less students with disabilities than the general population of students actually attend college. The National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2) found that only 19% of students with disabilities attend post-secondary school, compared to the 40% of general education students (Cameto, N., Garza, N., Levine, P., Newman, L., Wagner, M., 2005). From this statistic it is clear that more encouragement and assistance is needed to get individuals with disabilities into college as often as their peers who have no special needs. Since transition
programs in many areas are scarce; there should be more effort from communities to create a more smooth transition into college for students with disabilities. A stronger connection between service providers, educators, caregivers, and community members is necessary for helping a student transition into post-secondary education. It may be as easy as a phone call to organize a student tour that could motivate a student to seriously consider post-secondary education. As a future teacher, I would like to motivate students to want to go on to higher education, no matter what grade they are in at the time.

Need For Post-Secondary Education

A college education is becoming increasingly important to more transition age (about 14 to 25) students in recent years. However, even for those without disabilities, the road from matriculation to commencement can be a tough one. Transitioning has become a longer and more complex life change for everyone, the impact of this on students with disabilities needs to be realized by community members (Fletcher, 2010). Though there is increased difficulty in achievement for their population, individuals with disabilities are just as motivated to go to college as their peers. According to Deetz out of thirty students surveyed, 83.3% of previous high school students were enrolled in college, and 66.2% of students were enrolled in college at some time (personal communication, 2009). Many students with disabilities attend two year programs, and enrollment in four year colleges is also increasing, however “…retention and degree completion rates…have not followed the same trajectory” (Orr & Hammig, 2009, p.181). The style of a college education is difficult to get used to in comparison to high school education, but more students are seeing the necessity to try for it nevertheless.

There is a growing need for a degree or at least some college to become even a moderate wage earner in the current economy (Fletcher, 2010). The U.S. Department of Education,
National Center for Education Statistics found young adults with a bachelors degree were making a median earnings of $45,000 whereas those who only had a high school degree were making only $30,000, and those with an associates made about $6,000 more than high school graduates (Nachazel, 2011). Students can see the future economy is going to require citizens to be more highly educated. For the purpose of obtaining a job that will provide enough for individuals to become financially independent, and to have the ability to provide for their future ventures in life. Education beyond high school, even for those without a degree has been known to increase potential to make a higher wage (Shaw, 2009). Schools could be doing a better job at informing students of their weaknesses and strengths to succeed in their future educational goals.

Unprepared Students

High school education for a student with disabilities is very structured. Laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) fully support the education of students with disabilities until graduation. There can be a large range, from lack of life skills because they are not regularly provided in a traditional public education, to not having refined proficiency in other school subjects causing barriers to education after high school. As found by Jesien & Walker (2010), “…under IDEA the child is afforded, as a right, a free and appropriate education regardless of the type or severity of a disability. The young adult only has the legal protection of nondiscrimination for entry into postsecondary education…” (p.15). If a student is not prepared to independently arrange for the necessary assistance for their own success, they will need help from other members of their community to reach their goals. Both the student and caregivers need to be provided more information and preparation for the legal changes that will be experienced during transition (Jesien & Walker, 2010). Parents have the best connections to
students, but may not be the most influential, or able to help their child. The educational system and expectations in college compared to high school are very different and parents may not have all the tools and knowledge their aspiring college students require (Bruyere, Golden, VonShrader, & Swenson, 2010). Students who are further disadvantaged economically or otherwise will have even more trouble accessing the information they need. Students who leave special education or foster care systems are at even higher risk for failure in their adult ventures (Hill, 2009). To counteract obstacles caused by disability, students should be provided with extra, even too much information to consider. The earlier they begin to think about their options and the more extensive the options, the better the outcome may be.

Teachers and other school staff can be helpful in supporting a student where their parents or caregivers may not be able to help. Working with students to better prepare them for independence and higher education teachers have the opportunity to change lives. If students are never provided skills and strategies for success, many students with disabilities will have fewer options after high school (Helfer, 2010). The earlier caring community members surrounding the student begin to help the student think about life after high school, the earlier the student can begin to make plans and goals. Having the ability to gradually obtain skills for adult life is much more beneficial to student development (Bauman, Essner, Holmbeck, Kelly & Zebracki, 2010). Rather than waiting until the latter half of high school to learn skills necessary for post-secondary education, transition planning should begin much earlier. One study reveals that students feel an earlier start in planning, and parent involvement and support could have created a more helpful transition experience (Britto & Tuchman, 2008). More introductions earlier to different options gives an individual with disabilities time to decide and make plans. Teachers
have the ability and resources to use “…careful planning to assure that coursework, supports, and accommodations are provided…” for their students future benefit (Shaw, 2009).

Getting Assistance and Support

Although about 80% or more of students with disabilities have the goal or intention to go to college, not all students are academically or economically inclined to pursue such undertakings without assistance (Baer, Daviso, Denney, & Flexer, 2011; Shaw, 2009). Most adult services assume young adults are prepared to be independent, which may not be the case for individuals with severe or multiple disabilities (Bauman et.al., 2010). After obtaining a diploma, students are expected to have the support in place, or be ready to take care of business on their own to reach college just like any other adult. Some students are not ready or unable to take on applying, getting financial aid for, or even choosing a college for themselves. Even transportation can cause additional barriers. As found by Helfer (2010), a lack of knowledge on local transportation options can create difficulties in finding employment and getting to school.

Everyone needs some support to get into and through college, ranging from verbal encouragement to the extent of needing many services just for daily functioning. Schools should have transition planning programs for every student, benefitting students with disabilities and special needs as well. (Bauman et.al., 2010) College is not only about education, it is also about changing life position “…in work, play, continued learning, personal health care, social interaction, and community participation” (Jesien & Walker, 2010, p.5). If students are unaware of services that can assist them in funding college, meeting educational requirements, and completing their education, life in college may seem more difficult than it should be. Getting the right assistance can make the difference- from thinking you are not going to attend college, to being able to achieve all of your goals. Higher education will benefit the individual not only
economically but also intellectually. There is no good reason not to go to college, with all the resources that exist today to help students succeed. Community members working in cooperation assisting a student is necessary for a successful transition process (DeFur, 1999) Working together to get the student on the right track is good, but they will eventually have to take over themselves. Helfer (2010) says “…the key challenge is helping youth build the necessary skills so that they can utilize the options available” (p.112). It is important for students to begin making independent choices and decisions earlier in school, especially for students with disabilities. The more mistakes made early can be remedied before the student is really on their own solving issues for themselves in the real world.

Methods

Context

To keep the name of each school I worked with anonymous, I chose the pseudonyms “Alpha High” and “Delta High.” Alpha High is the larger school of the two, with about 1300 students. The teachers at Alpha High have had prior contact with the local community college to help students get a college experience. By doing tours through campus and being introduced to services as well as their potential future teachers students at Alpha High Special Education students have some advantage over Delta High. Delta High is located further from the local community college main campus, and has a lack communication with local post-secondary institutions. They were able to tour a community college out of the area with their students, but have not yet made connections with any of the more local campuses. Delta high is also a newer, smaller school with about half the population of Alpha High, they are at about 600 students this year. Neither one of the schools contacts the local university to tour there, even though there are
arranged tours every day except for Sunday and have even started offering tours in Spanish once a month.

**Participants**

The 50 students that participated in my survey at Delta and Alpha High all attended their respective school’s Special Education programs, and were enrolled in classes for students with mild to moderate disabilities. Students with moderate to severe disabilities were either not able to answer the survey, or were unable to get assistance to have them completed on the students behalf. The survey was meant to be completely anonymous so their age, gender, disabilities, or grade were also not requested. I requested all students do the survey, seniors about to graduate, but also juniors, sophomores and possibly a few freshmen were surveyed as well. For all of these students, being in Special Education means they have an IEP, which at the age of 16 should begin to include post-secondary transition plans, so all students that participated in the survey may have benefitted by being required to think about future planning for college or other goals they have.

Participating survey takers also included teachers of special education classes and their classroom paraprofessionals or other aids. The school employee survey was provided to anyone who had time to complete the form; those that did not have time were interviewed in person instead. At each school I contacted all of their Special Education teachers, four at Alpha High and five at Delta High.

Caregivers and parents of the student population was a third group surveyed. The surveys were sent home from one classroom of each school. Overall, about 20 caregiver surveys were sent home.

**Researcher**
I am the single researcher for this project, a 25 year old female. I previously attended school in the Yolo County school district before coming to Monterey County for my post-secondary education at CSUMB. I intend to become a Special Education teacher in the future. Meeting the educational goals of students with special needs is important and should be important to not only teachers and parents. Everyone deserves to accomplish their goals, even if they have overwhelming barriers or impairments to impede attaining goals, dreams, and success.

I identify myself as a straight white woman, and realize that I may have societal biases from being a privileged middle class citizen. However, in my post-secondary education of other cultures has further opened my mind to people with differences from myself. I feel that I am able to communicate with anyone that is open minded too. I am not afraid to ask questions about sensitive subjects and relate to others as fellow human beings while also recognizing social differences and inequalities that are at play. The stakeholders I work with may have higher or lower social class than I, they may identify as a different sexual orientation than I, and though I may take note of these characteristics they do not make the opinion of any person any more or less valid.

The research and project are personally meaningful because my brother James has severe handicaps including Cerebral Palsy that prevent him from benefiting from post-secondary education. When James leaves his school for exceptional children in Yolo County at the age of 22 his conservator, our mom, will have to find alternative daytime activities that will keep him active, healthy, and happy. Knowledge of what programs are available for individuals with disabilities is important to have access to. I would like other students in the same situation as my brother to have lots of opportunities to learn and grow in their own way, and be able to find the places that will enrich their lives most.
I have experience living with an individual with special needs in my household, and have also been a volunteer in special education and regular education classrooms in recent years. When I was young I went to school with James if I did not have school on a day he did. I have been planning to be a teacher my whole college career, and once I started working with children with disabilities and doing service learning in special education classes I knew that was where I felt most comfortable. I believe students with special needs should get all the aid they require to reach their educational and life goals with the ease that their peers without disabilities have.

**Materials**

I created paper and pen surveys of focused questions for each of the three types of stakeholders: students, school employees and caregivers. As research showed, caregivers and teachers usually can make the biggest impact on a student’s education. School Employee surveys were given to educators, faculty members, school nurses, school psychologists, paraprofessionals, and any other school related employees. Working with the teachers, I was able to send home caregiver surveys with students the teachers thought might get a reply. Caregiver surveys were requested to be filled out by for anyone connected to students as a parent figure such as parents, siblings, caregivers, foster parents, or any other individual responsible for a dependent student. I kept student surveys completely anonymous so age, grade, gender and disability were not requested. I asked questions so I could focus my stakeholders’ responses into data that I could use to determine what kind of services students in this area wanted success in post-secondary education.

**Student Survey:**
1. What kinds of activities do you enjoy most at school and in your spare time?
2. What would be your ideal career? Why?
3. Would you like to attend college after high school? Check off the option that most closely reflects your opinion; feel free to add comments under “other”

- [ ] Definitely, yes
- [ ] Most likely
- [ ] Probably not
- [ ] Maybe
- [ ] Probably not
- [ ] Other:
4. Have you considered financial aid to fund college? Why or why not?
5. What kinds of services would be the most helpful to you in reaching your post high school goals? Check off next to all that apply:
   - Financial
   - Housing
   - Educational
   - Tutorial
   - Vocational
   - Other:
   - Life skills
   - Transportation
   - Other:
6. Are there any programs or services for transitioning you would like to see that you cannot find or access?
7. Is there anything else you would like to say about your post high school plans? You can include: How easy or hard it has been to plan, if you are exited or stressed about it, or include a story if possible.

School Employee Survey:
1. In your opinion, how is the quality of Monterey's services for transition aged students? Check off the choice that most accurately applies, include your opinion in the "other" section.
   - Outstanding
   - Helpful
   - Average
   - Needs work
   - Terrible
   - Other:
2. Do you have any concerns about students transitioning from high school? Please Explain.
3. Are you aware of anything being done now to improve/advance transition services for individuals with disabilities?
4. What do you think should or could be done (ideally) to improve transition services?
5. How do you feel like you can help alleviate disadvantages of changing availability of services for transitioning students? (For Example: helping 18 year old students obtaining adult services before losing their child services)
6. How important do you think transition services are to individuals with disabilities? Check off the choice that most accurately applies; include your opinion in the “other” section.
   - Extremely
   - Very
   - Moderately
   - Somewhat
   - Not important
   - Other:
7. Is there anything else you would like to say about transition services? All suggestions, ideas, insights to services, inclusion, or aid for transitioning students are welcome.

Caregiver Survey:
1. How many services have you been able to access for your student's transitioning goals? Please check off the best choice; include any comments in the "other” section.
   - 10+
   - 7-9
   - 4-6
   - 1-3
   - 0
   - Other:
2. How useful, effective, or helpful are the services you were able to access? Please include any stories you can provide in the “other” section.
   - Extremely
   - Very
   - Moderately
   - Somewhat
   - Not Helpful
   - Other:
3. Why were the available services helpful, or not? Please describe an experience you have had if possible.
4. What do you think about the amount of services available in the Monterey area for transitioning students?
   - Outstanding
   - Helpful
   - Average
   - Needs work
   - Terrible
   - Other:
5. Will the transition services help your student as an adult to get the same services as were accessed as a minor?
6. What kinds of adult services are missing for your student? Or, have there been any obstacles to accessing certain transition services needed?
7. Could you provide an example of where your student's needs will be harder to meet in the future based on lack of services?
8. Is there anything else you would like to say about transition services? Any suggestions, ideas, insights to services, inclusion or aid for transitioning students are welcomed.

Procedure

Initially, in early February I e-mailed all of the principals at each of the high schools, one adult school, and one other institutional contact, 11 people total to ask if they would be able or interested in helping me with my project by being a community contact. One principal forwarded the email to two of his teachers, but they never got back to me. Two other principals told me one specific teacher to contact, but actual contact was not officially with those teachers until the next month after I had created the surveys. The Delta High principal immediately forwarded my email to his Special Education teachers, and one of the teachers contacted me later that day.

In early April I took the short surveys to the high schools to obtain stakeholders’ opinions. It took several hours to formulate questions, format them so they fit with room for answers on a form, create many copies, staple them together, and transport them to their respective schools. Hoping that online capabilities were available to most individuals surveyed, and therefore may make the survey more accessible I also created online surveys for the three surveys. The schools allowed the student and school employee survey seeing that they were anonymous, but also informed me that parent surveys were going to be tough to get returned, but that we could try.

Analysis

Analysis of the survey and interview results proved that students with disabilities and their parents are provided little or no information informing them of post-secondary options. Schools in the area that have programs that are better funded are more effective in providing
more resources and experiences students need to get them interested and self-motivated toward attending college. Most school employees agreed that students who have a disability and additional issues like learning English as a second language, or those that have multiple disabilities may need extra attention to meet their goals. Earlier provision of information to students was also suggested.

After receiving and analyzing the results from the surveys, I decided on creating a handout for students with all of the services from the two local colleges have. The handout I created can be provided to counselors and teachers for future students to use in their college search, or to help them begin to think about the kinds of services they might need for success. Including information under the headings of: support services, food on campus, safety, transportation, $$ for college, career development, housing search, health, and activities/sports, I included about 20 different services from each school. All of this information and a few other additional resources are listed on a free website I created for ease of access to the compiled information.

I additionally created a PowerPoint presentation for an intro, and arranged to have a question and answer session with Sylvia Luna, a fellow college student who is physically disabled, and organizes the Student Awareness for Disability Empowerment club for students on our campus. I arranged for the presentation to be during the Delta High Special Education students’ study period, starting at 9:40AM on May 10th.

**Results**

I received back 25 student surveys from Alpha High and 25 from Delta High. More boys than girls were surveyed, but they were not asked to indicate gender so the exact amount cannot be calculated. A total of six school employees- four teachers and two paraprofessionals
completed my school employee survey at Alpha High. I was only able to get back three school employee surveys from Delta High, from one teacher, one aid, and one paraprofessional. Two parents from Delta high replied, but gave little information. There was a paraprofessional at each school that spoke to me about their school and students beyond what the survey asked, revealing more clearly what the issues were for their students. One of the paraprofessionals also had a son in Special Education within the district, so she also answered most of the questions I had for caregivers. Additionally, two teachers at each school were enticed by my efforts and asked me questions about my project as well as answering further questions I had beyond the survey.

Overall, 56% of the students I surveyed do want to attend college, answering “Definitely, yes” to the survey question “Would you like to attend college after high school?” I was excited to see 84% students answered positively to the question, indicating “Definitely, yes,” “Most likely,” or “Maybe.” Only three students at Delta High and one student at Alpha High answered “Probably not” to wanting to attend college. Those that answered no planned to do things like “open my own bar and grill” or “play professional soccer in Mexico.”

Students indicated services in almost all areas suggested on the survey would help them to reach their post-secondary goals. “Financial” was indicated as the most helpful service, with 52% of students signifying it would be helpful to them. Followed by “Educational” and “Life skills” as the second most voted options, 48% of students would like help in these sectors. Also important were “Tutorial” and “Transportation” assistance, 36% of students wanted help with these. Lastly, 30% of students wanted “Vocational” or “Housing” services to meet their goals. Two students indicated “other,” for example, “Exposure to the community” and “Spanish services” as kinds of services that would help them to reach their goals.
The only two caregiver surveys I was able to get back from Delta High parents I would call limited in their responses. I am glad I was able to get any caregiver surveys back, but this shows the difficulty that already exists with the communication between even just the educator and parent of a student with disabilities. Unless the high school student cares enough the information they are provided may not make it home to parents. The caregiver surveys not only took the longest to be returned, but also were the fewest to be returned.

On the day of the presentation 20 mild-to-moderately disabled students, their teachers and aides watched my presentation. Three questions asked of students on a half sheet of paper about the presentation proved that 65% of students learned something from the PowerPoint or the question and answer session. Two other students liked the presentation, but did not learn anything new. Two did not reply, and three said they did not learn anything. One student said they learned “…they have a good college here and they will help you.” Another said “I learned you can get a degree in physical education.” A third replied they did learn something new, replying “Yes, I did not know about some of the degrees you can take.” Overall the students seemed to enjoy the presentation, one said “I believe the presentation was fabulous and I enjoyed it,” they were quiet and attentive during the session. Assured by one of the teachers a week later, she agreed and told me the students learned a lot and really liked the presentation.

**Description & Justification**

My action responded to what was found to be most lacking for students in the area, connection and provision of resources, promoting greater community connections, and greater chance of accessing services. I noticed a lack of information dissemination about the local colleges at Delta High. An imbalance that I knew needed to be remedied. I felt it was unfair to
the students at Delta High that just because their school location is less accessible, that they should be denied the information that other students within the same school district are afforded.

The presentation slides included an introduction of myself, and of my brother James, who initially sparked my interest in wanting to become a Special Education teacher. I included statistics that shows how much more you can make by going to college. I spoke about a man named Ed Roberts, who was known as “The Father of Independent Living.” He was the first student with disabilities to be admitted at Cal Berkeley. I brought his story to light make students realize that it was not always easy to get into college. I wanted them to see that it is easy to get into college, and if they have the motivation it is definitely possible. I introduced what I thought were the most important buildings from each local college campus, and gave them some information about the majors offered at each location. A slide showed them the website I created, the website address was also listed on top of the resource handout they had already been provided. The website will continue to be updated, and has more resources and information than on the handout. The website is at montereycollegeresources.weebly.com.

I believe it was important to introduce the idea of transitioning to college to all students in high school, not only to the seniors. My action was meant to bring information to the more disadvantaged group of students at “Delta High” who do not have good connections to the colleges to bring their students information. Unlike “Alpha High” who have better connections and better running programs that have time to arrange things like tours and awareness of programs. “When students exit the school system, they should be prepared for and have the support to be successful in the world beyond the school doors” (Morningstar, Lattin, Sarkesian, 1995, p.13).
Introduction to life skills needed for adulthood only later in their educational careers decreases the chances of an individual with disabilities to effectively and smoothly become independent. Having to become independent on many levels including education, vocation, housing, financial, and medical can be a lot to handle. By having many more supports than the average individual, it is possible for an individual with disabilities to become more, or completely independent, or at least have a more adult oriented position in life, rather than continuing to live like a child into adulthood. Even someone with severe disabilities that must have a conservator to make their decisions, a medical team to treat symptoms of their disabilities, and a wheelchair to transport them can still live independent from their family and attend adult classes. The range of existent disabilities makes it hard to improve one specific service that can improve the chances for all students. Therefore, creation of a more effective community around each individual necessary for reaching their goals. Support and aid from community members, friends, advocates, school staff including administrators, service providers, family members and self-avocation from the students themselves are all needed to support the continued success of someone with (intellectual, physical, cognitive, any kind of) disabilities.

**Action Documentation**

Resource Handout:

Website, located at montereycollegeresources.weebly.com:
Pictures of question and answer session:
PowerPoint Presentation for Students:
Meeting Your Goals
After High School

Traci Alger
Sylvia Luna

Make your dreams a reality

- 2008 median earnings by level of education were:
  - No high school diploma or equivalent: $23,500
  - High school diploma or equivalent: $30,000
  - Associate’s Degree: $36,000
  - Bachelor’s Degree: $46,000
  - Master’s Degree: $55,000

Ed Roberts
Overcame all obstacles

California State University
Monterey Bay

ASAP Tutoring
Public Internet Use
Study Rooms
Center for Student Success

WORLD THEATER
Critical Analysis

The greatest need indicated by the surveys was ease of accessing information and knowledge of what kind of services are available. All of my action- the handout, website, and
presentation to the students were meant to address these issues. To directly address the student’s motivation and self-avocation for college, I arranged the presentation/question and answer session to allow the students to get a realistic idea of what college is about, and what the colleges have to offer them. They were able to ask anything they wanted. Ideally, some of them may also tell their parents what they learned; they may give their parents the handout, or possibly be able to access the information online at a later time. The teachers also were very important to provide these handouts to; extras were given out, and in the future will be provided to the office and to the counselors at the local high schools, not only for Alpha and Delta High.

In reflection providing the short answer survey questions on a paper form was a simple and effective way to survey students and teachers. Many teachers allowed students to complete the survey the same day it was brought into class. Student survey takers were the quickest to produce results. In only a few minutes they generally produced answers to all but one or two questions on the survey. School employee survey takers produced the most useful information and were also very quick to return their surveys if they had time to do them right away. When left with a blank survey to do later, they were easily forgotten by student, caregiver, and school employee alike. Caregiver surveys were by far the hardest to get returned. Since there was further transfer- from myself to school, then home from school, it was not a fast process to get them back. Short interviews were also very informative, but sometimes were harder to have documentation for, for later analysis.

Providing the handout I created in more than one language, I feel that I was effective in not only providing valid and useful information to the students in the most need of it, but also in being culturally sensitive to student’s families that may not be able to benefit from the information created online, or information provided in English. Ideally the information provided
will benefit student futures in lifelong learning, helping them to want to continue their education to the post-secondary level. By being connected to the services offered at the local college institutions, and the resources I created with my recently learned technology skills hopefully benefitted at least some of the students. Since all of the students were already interested in college, ideally the resources provided will increase their interest and improve their chances of deciding to go to, and even continue past community college.

If anyone else re-creates this study, I recommend communication through interview questions rather than survey; it proved in my experience to give the best information. The insights written on the forms returned were helpful in guiding my choice of action, but the reality that a comfortable conversation can insight has greater possibility to be much more helpful. A voice recorder during short interviews would be beneficial. Creating online surveys turned out to be a pointless venture in my experience. Future similar studies may benefit from this if there is wider availability of internet access to the public. With many low income communities in the area, there may be a lack of internet access at home. Parents could provide the most useful help, being so closely connected to their students in many aspects of their lives, but valid caregiver opinion and thorough understanding of caregiver point of view can be difficult to obtain. Teachers may not see a parent more than once a year during an IEP meeting, and be unable to contact them further. Parents may be more accessible if they were provided information translated into Spanish as well as being in English.

All in all, this was an exciting project that helped me to see how I am going to have to work in the future to make these kinds of connections for my students. Some of the teachers inquired as to what I was going to do with my future during the study, and I was already planning to be a moderate to severe Special Education teacher before. Now that I have done this
study I am also thinking about becoming a Special Education Resource teacher. I have seen how easy it could be for teachers to make a difference, but many times teachers claim they have “no time” to provide for their students like they should. Even though it was not indicated it was supposed to be, I attempted to include a social justice aspect in my ventures through the study. I was trying to raise awareness of, and solve some of the issues of an extra disadvantaged community within the school system. I now feel an even deeper connection with Special Education students after doing this study, and as a teacher in the future I will be increasingly attentive to the needs of this community of students. I already feel responsible for them as a community member, as a teacher their futures will be reliant on the provision of a quality education and provision of quality resources for success. As a teacher of Special Education students in the future I plan to continue to do everything I can to continue the collaboration between institutions to promote smoother transitions for students with special needs and disabilities.
References


