

Community College: A Pathway to Success for Youth with Learning, Cognitive, and Intellectual Disabilities in Secondary Settings

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Abstract: Traditionally, youth with learning, cognitive, and intellectual disabilities (LCID) have not been given the option of participating in and thus benefiting from a postsecondary education. There are school districts and community colleges across the country, however, that are creating opportunities for these youth to have the option of meaningful participation in a postsecondary education while still in secondary school (i.e., Dual Enrollment). The present study involved a national survey of 25 postsecondary education options that support youth with LCID in postsecondary education while still enrolled in secondary school as an empirical foundation for future research on these service models. The main findings indicate that although most programs provide some combination of “life-skills” training and community-based instruction combined with employment training, some innovative service models (i.e., Inclusive Programs) focus primarily on inclusive postsecondary educational services for students with LCID. Inclusive programs tend to be relatively new, to serve fewer individuals than other service models, and are more collaborative (i.e., high schools, colleges and adult service agencies support students). Main survey findings are presented and discussed, followed by detailed profiles of six programs, and recommendations for future research are presented.

There is a dearth of information on postsecondary programs and services for youth with learning, cognitive, and intellectual disabili-

ties (LCID) and minimal data on the effectiveness of the options that do exist, in relationship to postsecondary outcomes (Neubert, Moon, Grigal, & Redd, 2001). Practitioners and family members who have developed programs and services typically have done so in isolation, on a case-by-case basis, and without the benefit of lessons learned from evidence-based practices that support students. Thus, there is a need to identify programs and services on a national level that support youth with LCID in postsecondary education settings. A true test of any educational system is how well its students fare—not only in classrooms, but also in employment and community life, long after they have left school. Community College offers students from diverse stations in life the opportunity to begin careers in their chosen fields by helping them identify and achieve their individual goals and in making a difference in their lives. This paper describes preliminary results of a na-

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tionwide survey of 25 programs for students with LCID that allow them to earn high school credits as they simultaneously earn community college credits to secure a high school diploma, using funds allowed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The need for creative options for youth with LCID is evident when examining the large number of individuals experiencing poor postsecondary outcomes. In the 2000-01 school year, 8.8% of the population (approximately 6 million 6- through 21-year olds) received special education services under IDEA, Part B (Office of Special Education Programs, OSEP, 2002). The 24th Annual Report to Congress cited that 29.4% of students with disabilities dropped out of high school in the 1999-2000 school year (OSEP), as opposed to 10.9% of all 16- through 24-year olds (National Center for Educational Statistics, NCES, 2001). In terms of postsecondary outcomes, individuals with disabilities aged 18-64, experience an employment rate of 32%, compared with a rate of 81% for their non-disabled peers (National Organization on Disability, 2000). As for wages earned, the second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS2, 2003) revealed that, over the last ten years, youth with mental retardation exiting secondary school "were the only disability category not to experience a significant increase in earning more than minimum wage." This same study found that youth with disabilities from higher-income households are more likely to work than those from lower-income households and, furthermore, that "improvements in employment outcomes over time were least apparent for lower-income youth with disabilities" (NLTS2). Thus is perpetuated a cycle of low employment, reduced independence and a lower standard of living, especially for lower-income youth with disabilities, in comparison to peers without disabilities.

On February 1, 2001, President George W. Bush announced the New Freedom Initiative—a comprehensive program to promote the full participation of people with disabilities in all areas of society by increasing access to assistive and universally designed technologies, expanding educational and employment opportunities, and promoting increased access into daily community life. The purpose of this initiative is to improve opportunities for

individuals with disabilities so that they can live, work and learn in their communities. Creatively designed postsecondary education is one way that people with LCID can improve their ultimate employability.

Postsecondary education is one of the best ways for individuals in general to enhance their employability (U.S. Department of Labor, 1999; NCES, 1999). Increasingly in the information age, postsecondary education is a necessity (McGrath & Van Buskirk, 1999), a vital part of preparing for a career (Stodden & Dowrick, 2000), and is closely related to overall lifetime earnings and economic self-sufficiency, two hallmarks of successful employment (Henderson, 1999; Kaye, 1998). Traditionally, individuals with LCID have been excluded from postsecondary education, despite the fact that persons who do participate are more likely to become competitively employed in the community (Gilmore, Schuster, Zafft, & Hart, 2001; Hart, Zafft, & Zimbrich, 2001). In fact, completion of any type of postsecondary education (e.g., one college course or a certificate program) significantly improves the chance of an individual securing meaningful employment (Zafft, Hart, & Zimbrich, 2004).

Only 37% of all students with a disability who have graduated from high school enter into some type of postsecondary education, compared to 78% of all high school graduates (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Typically, students with LCID either drop out of school or remain in special education programs beyond their eighteenth birthday, while their non-disabled peers graduate and go on to college, technical school, or full time employment. Given the importance of postsecondary education in today's economy, the limited participation of students with LCID in postsecondary education and the lack of opportunities to gain requisite technical skills, the need to improve access to postsecondary education and to enhance the level of interaction between young adults with disabilities and their peers without disabilities is evident. This need has prompted a growing interest in the development of relevant programs and services at the college level for youth with LCID who remain in high school beyond their eighteenth birthday.

Provision of educational services and supports in age-appropriate settings for youth in

their latter years of secondary school (i.e., ages 18–21) may be accomplished through dual enrollment in a community college. This approach provides opportunities for youth to earn a high school diploma while pursuing postsecondary education, to develop employment skills and career connections, to improve access to peers without disabilities—thereby expanding their social networks, and to improve chances to transfer to four-year colleges.

Throughout the United States, youth without disabilities, usually considered academically able, take advantage of dual enrollment options. However, youth with disabilities who struggle to earn their high school diplomas are not afforded the same opportunities. Statistics indicate graduation rates for youth with disabilities lag behind their non-disabled peers (OSEP, 2001). Graduation rates are lowest for students with mental retardation (41.7%) and students with emotional disturbance (41.9%).

Lack of a high school diploma obviously restricts opportunities to pursue postsecondary education, whether programs are academic or vocational. Additionally, without a high school diploma, youth with disabilities are not able to take advantage of federal aid programs offered to youth that have earned *traditional* high school diplomas (e.g., Pell grants). Students who earn a GED or who do not have a high school diploma can qualify for federal student aid if they pass approved “ability to benefit” tests, such as the COMPASS series (Free Application for Federal Student Aid, nd). These exams are standard paper and pencil-type tests, however, and thus inaccessible to many students with a disability.

Thus, dual enrollment, a relatively new phenomenon for students with LCID, allows them to complete high school while attending community college with same-aged peers and pursuing an academic or vocational curriculum in an inclusive setting. Dual enrollment permits students with disabilities to remain eligible for services under the IDEA to age 21, if deemed appropriate by their Individual Education Program (IEP) team. Under IDEA, students with disabilities are no longer eligible for special education services when they graduate from high school or, if the state allows, when they reach the age of 21, whichever comes first. Dual enrollment not only facilitates high

school graduation to postsecondary education settings, but also has the potential to encourage collaboration among various service systems, such as Vocational Rehabilitation, One-Stop Career Centers, the Social Security Administration and other human services agencies.

This paper describes initial findings of a nationwide survey of 25 dual enrollment programs for students with LCID that incorporate the use of educational services and supports. For this paper, the phrase, “students with significant learning, cognitive, and intellectual disabilities” refers to those students whose disability significantly impacts ability to access the general curriculum without a strong system of educational supports and services. Students with developmental disabilities such as autism are included in this definition as are students with mental illnesses and emotional disturbances.

Method

Participants

Programs across the United States ($N = 25$) that use innovative strategies to support the dual enrollment of high school students with disabilities in academic or vocational college courses were surveyed. These programs serve students who have been labeled by their school systems as having LCID (e.g., significant learning disability, cognitive disability or a developmental disability, such as mental retardation or autism), and who range in age from 18 to 21 years old. The programs represent a variety of geographic areas (e.g., California, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Kentucky, and New York).

Initially, a telephone survey of 40 college programs was conducted to identify those that served youth with LCID, ages 18–21, still enrolled in public school but receiving services on a college campus (i.e., students dually enrolled in high school and college). The selected programs were identified through postings on two national listservs related to youth with disabilities in higher education (A Choice for Everyone, and Disabled Student Services in Higher Education), a database of programs from the University of Kansas Graduate College of Education, and the National

Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Although 40 support programs were initially identified, only 25 of these programs met selection criteria for this survey of serving dual enrolled students with LCID, ages 18 to 21.

Results

Programs surveyed typically fell into one of three categories of postsecondary education models: *substantially separate*, *mixed*, and *inclusive*.

Substantially separate program. Frequently, these programs are referred to as “life skills” or transition programs. This report is only reporting on those programs that are based on the college campus but it should be noted that they are also found in community-based settings. Students who attend these programs typically do not have ongoing sustained interaction with the general student body and they do not have the option of taking standard college courses with peers that do not have disabilities. The curriculum is primarily focused on “life skills,” community-based instruction, and rotation through a limited number of employment slots (e.g., maintenance, food preparation, filing), either on or off campus, which provide some semblance of work experience for participants.

Mixed program. These are transition programs that are housed on college campuses. The difference between this kind of program and the substantially separate category is that students have some interaction with typical students (e.g., in the cafeteria, at sporting events). Most importantly, students have the option of taking typical classes and being supported in inclusive college courses, even though most of the curriculum is focused on “life skills,” community-based instruction, and rotation through a limited number of employment or work experience slots (e.g., maintenance, food preparation, filing).

Inclusive, individual support model. Students are provided with individualized services and supports (e.g., educational coach, assistive technology), which are needed to ensure access to and progress in college courses, certificate programs, internships, and/or degree programs. All services are student centered, based on student choices and preferences,

and inclusive of those available to the general student body. Some programs also offer internships and employment related supports.

Of the 25 programs surveyed, 13 were mixed programs, eight were inclusive programs, and four were substantially separate programs. Services provided in mixed programs were most frequently offered in a separate setting or class, but students were permitted and supported to take standard college academic courses and participate in campus-wide recreational and social activities. Overall, the mixed program curricula tended to focus on functional “life skills.”

On average, substantially separate programs had been around longer (between 4 and 5 years) than either mixed programs (between 3 and 4 years) or inclusive programs (i.e., about 4 years). Of the combined number of mixed and separate programs, 62.5% had been in existence for more than 5 years (the oldest being 16, 13, 12, and 10 years) and 37.5% had been around for fewer than 5 years, while 43.5% of inclusive programs had been in operation for fewer than 5 years.

Substantially separate programs tended to be larger than either mixed or inclusive programs, with 60% having over 21 students and some as many as 70 students, across multiple classes. Mixed programs served an average of between 11 and 15 students, and inclusive programs served an average of between six to 10 students. All of the inclusive programs surveyed had fewer than 15 students at any one time.

Figure 1 identifies types of disability served by the 25 community college programs. Although most commonly served were students with cognitive disabilities, programs overall served students with a wide range of disabilities.

Use of LEA funds is represented in Figure 2. The most frequent use of school district/IDEA funds was for transportation, at 95%. Instructional assistants and vocational assessment were identified as provided by 65% of the school districts. There was a fairly even distribution in the way funds were used by the 25 colleges programs.

Overall, 75% of the programs indicated that they were involved in cost or resource-sharing; 78.6% of these costs were shared with their Vocational Rehabilitation agency, 50% with

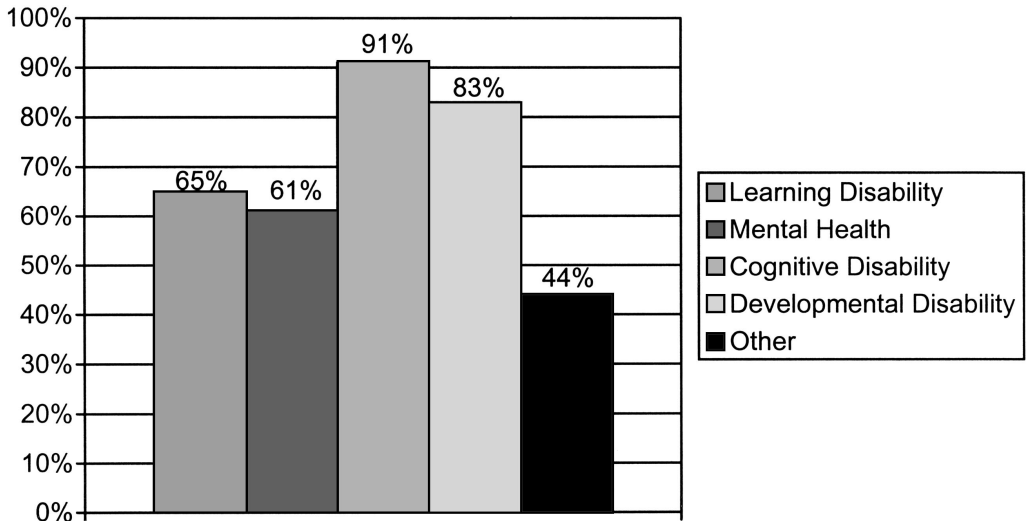


Figure 1. Types of disability of students served by postsecondary education programs.

their college’s Disability Services Office, and 42.9% with their Department of Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities.

Figure 3 presents survey responses on barriers. Overall, 61.1% of the 25 postsecondary programs identified “attitude” as the most significant barrier to overcome (e.g., students

with LCID do not belong in college; the curriculum will be ‘watered down’). Barriers listed under “other,” the second biggest category, included: transportation, entrance standards, and a lack of transition planning. IEP meetings were the most frequently cited (68.18%) vehicle for determining if a college

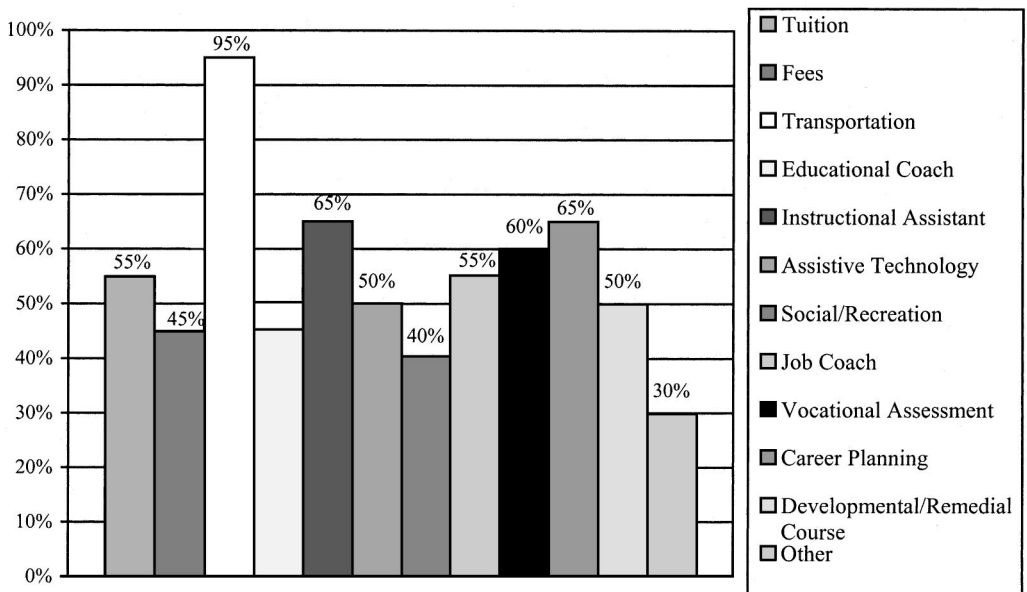


Figure 2. Use of LEA funds by postsecondary education programs.

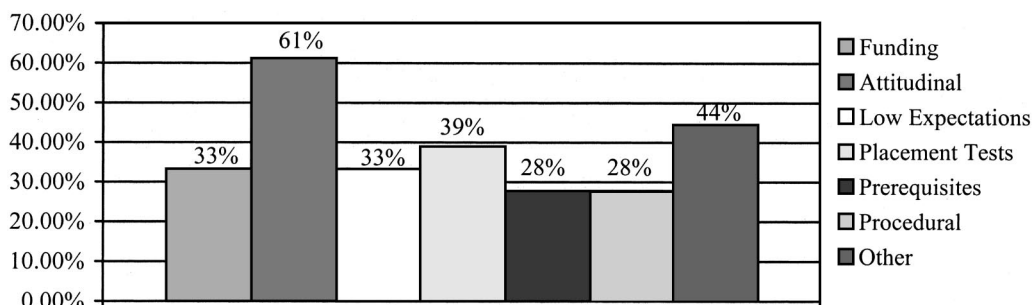


Figure 3. Barriers to postsecondary education.

program is appropriate for a particular student.

Discussion of Survey Results

Study results provide an initial data set on postsecondary education programs as a relatively new model of transition services for high school youth, age 18-21, with LCID. What is most innovative about these programs is they expand the traditional concept of “transition” from a one-dimensional employment model, to a multi-dimensional model that includes inclusive postsecondary education as an option for this student population. Dual enrollment is not a new concept. What is new and exciting is the application of dual enrollment for students with LCID who historically have not been afforded the option of a postsecondary education. Moreover, access to postsecondary education expands the opportunities of students who have LCID to become involved in the larger society, as an innovative outcome of emerging social and public policy (e.g., President Bush’s New Freedom Initiative), and may increase employment opportunities for these students. Further study is needed to test this hypothesis.

Given that postsecondary education programs for youth with LCID are relatively recent innovations, it is not surprising that only 25 programs were identified and qualified for the present study. The number of programs does not provide a sufficient sample size to allow for detailed statistical analysis of differences in programmatic outcomes.

Program Profiles

Tables 1-6 highlight key features and promising practices of six programs that were reviewed. A representation of the mixed programs and inclusive, individual support models is provided. Each review contains the program name and structure, and a brief summary including type and age of students, overall program goals, funding information and generic program data.

General Discussion

Given that postsecondary education options for students with LCID are a relatively new occurrence and are still far too rare, the present survey provides foundation for future research and provides examples of innovative service models for practitioners and advocates. First of all, as postsecondary education programs develop, they must be identified and surveyed, and similar efforts in Canada, Australia, and Europe may be surveyed and added to the discussion, both by way of comparison to national trends in the US and as a resource for additional evidence-based practices from which to learn. This information then needs to be compiled and made available to educators and the general public through linkage with national clearinghouses, associations, and relevant national centers (e.g., RRTC on the Study of Postsecondary Education Supports, National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, National Center for Workforce Development).

Second, research on effectiveness of current approaches must be undertaken, to determine the relative success of each in assist-

TABLE 1
Structure: Mixed*
College Based Transition Program, Buffalo State College, Buffalo, NY

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Eligibility Criteria</i>	<i>Individuals Served</i>	<i>Overview</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
The overall program goal is to assist students with significant disabilities in learning the skills needed to live, learn, work, and play in their community as adults. The College Based Transition Program allows them to continue their learning with age-appropriate peers without disabilities.	Students must be able to be alone safely for short periods of time in order to be eligible for the program. Overall, information about the program is shared with parents and special education teachers who jointly decide at the students IEP team meeting if they would like to apply to the program.	Students with learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and pervasive developmental disabilities (such as autism).	The program is a partnership of Buffalo State College, Buffalo Public Schools and People, Inc. Currently, the program supports 12 students, 6 of whom are students also enrolled in the public high school and 6 of whom are enrolled through People, Inc., an adult service agency. Students with disabilities participate in courses or other college offerings that include college students without disabilities. Program students are typically involved in a wide range of activities, including auditing classes, working at paid jobs or internships, and participating in overall college life. Public school funds thus far have been used to pay for items such as transportation, teachers, educational or instructional coaches, job coaching, vocational assessment, and career planning. Public funds for adult services are used for items such as rent, telephone, equipment, program manager and community-based instructor. Additionally, each student is paired with another college student, through chapter of "Best Buddies, International" program.	The program is too new to have any data but is tracking student outcomes, as determined by attainment of IEP goals, as well as surveys of professors and student buddies

* All services are provided on a college campus and/or in the community with supports provided by staff from the Buffalo Public Schools, People, Inc., an adult service agency, and matriculated students from Buffalo State College.

TABLE 2

**Structure: Mixed
Jessamine Connection, Asbury College, Wilmore, KY**

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Eligibility Criteria</i>	<i>Individuals Served</i>	<i>Overview</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
<p>The overall goal of the program is to provide the same options, such as attending college and working, to students with significant disabilities as to those without disabilities.</p>	<p>Students must be from a non-diploma program and have a completed alternate assessment portfolio in order to be eligible for the program. Overall, information about the program is shared with parents, the student, special and general education teachers, and service providers, who decide about attending the program at the student's IEP team meeting.</p>	<p>The program serves students between the ages of 18–21, with moderate and significant cognitive and pervasive developmental disabilities (such as autism).</p>	<p>The Jessamine Connection is a collaborative contract between Jessamine County Board of Education and Asbury College. Through this program, students with intellectual disabilities are integrated into all aspects of college life. Students leave high school with a certificate, but technically remain enrolled in their public schools. The program serves students from two different high schools. The program usually supports up to five students at any one time. Students may audit up to three courses based on their interest and the availability of classes. Examples of courses that students have chosen to take include Introduction to Social Work, Education Technology, Radio Production, and various physical education courses. Students also have a college activity card. They work on campus, receive community-based instruction, work out in the weight room, and have an opportunity to work with other Asbury College students at the equestrian farm, learning to ride and groom horses. The LEA primarily pays for transportation, staff including instructional assistants and vocational trainers, materials, and liability insurance (because students legally considered Jessamine County school students need to be covered by the school district's insurance policy).</p>	<p>The program tracks student outcomes as determined by attainment of IEP goals. The program ensures that each student is linked to the appropriate adult service agency prior to exiting the program to ensure that the student gets the needed support.</p>

TABLE 3

**Structure: Mixed
Transition Program, Shasta College, Redding, CA**

Goal	Eligibility Criteria	Individuals Served	Overview	Outcomes
<p>The primary purpose of the services is to provide an integrated and inclusive educational option structured to equip students for more meaningful styles of participation in vocational, recreational, and independent community living.</p>	<p>Students with intellectual disabilities who are aged 18+ who are still enrolled in high school or who have exited</p>	<p>Students with learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and pervasive developmental disabilities (such as autism).</p>	<p>Transition Services on the Shasta College campus serve as one model among many possibilities for including the growing numbers of youth with intellectual disabilities who are finding opportunities for growth and maturity in post-secondary educational settings. Students may select regular college course offerings but the core content and training relevant to their lives resides within the Adaptive Education Curricula targeted specifically for youth with intellectual disabilities. Consequently, an AA degree or a transfer path may not be ideally suited for their college educational pursuits. Rather, a regimen of supported educational alternatives designed for their present and future life demands and pursuits can better fulfill their educational needs.</p> <p>Currently, students have a number of adaptive educational options to choose from. These include life skills reading and math, computer training, career development and human awareness. Human awareness itself covers several related areas over the course of four semesters: 1) self-awareness/self-esteem, 2) health and hygiene, 3) self-protection, and 4) relationships. Self-advocacy and self-determination are infused within the framework of all the courses available; however, specific curricula dealing with these areas are now being developed. Transition students are encouraged to use the counseling services available at the college in order to help them choose the most appropriate courses. The Disability Resource Center has a counselor specifically prepared to assist students with intellectual disabilities to have a successful college experience. Students who enroll for <i>Transition Services</i> attend their classes during the mornings and afternoons in classrooms throughout the campus. There is no dedicated classroom as such. When the students are not in their <i>Transition Classes</i>, they may be found throughout the campus attending regular education classes with supports or just hanging out with other students. In essence, the campus itself amounts to a classroom. Enrollment in the <i>Transition Classes</i> numbers around sixty students. Students commute to campus independently by using the Redding area buses, rides from support people, or their own vehicles. Additional supports under the aegis of The Disability Resource Center include, tutors, note takers, liaison with instructional staff, assistive technology, specialized, regular, and academic counseling, adaptive art, and adaptive physical education. And, as is the case with all students, Transition Students are governed by the Student Code of Conduct and are responsible for the consequences of their actions.</p>	<p>Student outcomes are not formally tracked. It is estimated that approximately 50% of participants exit into some type of supported or competitive employment</p>

TABLE 4

Structure: Inclusive Worcester Youth College Career Connection, Worcester Public Schools and Quinsigamond Community College, Worcester, MA

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Eligibility Criteria</i>	<i>Individuals Served</i>	<i>Overview</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
<p>Overall, the WYCCC assists WPS and adult service systems to unite around a common goal, the development of an array of individual supports and services, which support youth with disabilities, including those from diverse cultures, to become their own advocates for their futures, to take on the many challenges of adult life, and to become contributing members of their community. Specifically, all youth with intellectual disabilities will achieve outcomes typical of peers without disabilities in inclusive postsecondary and/or employment options.</p>	<p>Any youth with intellectual disabilities that express an interest in pursuing postsecondary education.</p>	<p>Youth with intellectual disabilities including learning disabilities, cognitive and pervasive developmental disabilities (such as autism).</p>	<p>Over the last four years, WPS has been working on implementing an individual support model, entitled the WYCCC, to ensure that Worcester youth with intellectual disabilities exit school into meaningful adult life choices. The WYCCC formed a district-wide, interagency, collaborative team made up of WPS, Quinsigamond Community College, one-stop career center, adult service agencies, service providers, and advocacy organizations. The team conducted resource mapping and alignment, along with identification of service gaps across all participating agencies and organizations. The team then developed an annual action plan detailing strategies to link transition related resources to individual needs for services and supports. This resulted in a menu of flexible services and supports from which youth and their families may choose, versatile cost-sharing mechanisms representing shared responsibility across agencies, and continuous evaluation for improvement of services. The project typically supports up to ten youth with intellectual disabilities, ages 18–22, in postsecondary education and/or employment options that are based on their individual career choices. They participate along with other students, ages 17+ with disabilities who take a career planning and self-determination course (Jobs for Bay State Youth). At the community college, students attend classes that relate to their career goals through auditing, entering a certificate program, or taking a course for full college credit. Due to the individualized and flexible nature of this model, it is difficult to identify definitively what the LEA pays for and what other organizations cover. In the past, the LEA has paid for tuition, fees, and transportation (emphasizing teaching students how to travel independently within their community using public transportation). The LEA has also provided educational/job coaching, assistive technology (e.g., alpha smarts for note taking, e-reader software or books on tape to assist with reading course materials), career planning, and person-centered planning. Additionally, through the interagency team, each student is linked to the appropriate adult service agency, which commonly assumes fiscal responsibility for students prior to their exiting high school.</p>	<p>Evaluation of the efficacy of the WYCCC model is in process and is based on outcomes for youth (e.g., integrated competitive employment and postsecondary education options that match individual student choices with individual choices reflected in the vision statement on the IEP/ITPs). This evaluation is being accomplished through the implementation of a matched cohort study of youth who do and do not participate in the program, student and family focus groups, and semi-structured interviews with professional staff</p>

TABLE 5

**Structure: Inclusive
Young Adult Project, Ann Arbor, MI**

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Eligibility Criteria</i>	<i>Individuals Served</i>	<i>Overview</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
<p>To provide students with the supports they need to ultimately find employment, participate in social activities, and live as contributing members of their local community.</p>	<p>Students with intellectual disabilities age 18+.</p>	<p>Students with any disability including significant learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and pervasive developmental disabilities (such as autism). Students and families often are self-referred and include this program in the student IEP. Overall, information about the program is shared with parents, student, the special and general education teachers, and service providers through brochure, word of mouth, and presentations.</p>	<p>Currently, there are between 11 and 15 students who are supported by the program. Students with disabilities may choose to participate in a course or other college offering that includes students without disabilities. Public school funds have been used to pay for items such as transportation, educational or instructional coaches, career planning, and social or recreational activities. Additional cost sharing is done by other entities, including the college Office of Disability Supports, vocational rehabilitation agency, departments of developmental disabilities and mental health, and families. Each student has a person-centered plan that directs what the different services and options for each student will be. All training is delivered in the natural setting where the student would use the skill (e.g., class, work, internship). All services are provided by adult service organizations, rather than by teachers, which assists with the transition of services to the adult system.</p>	<p>The program primarily tracks student employment outcomes but does not have current data.</p>

TABLE 6

**Structure: Inclusive
Diploma Plus, Champion Charter School, Brockton, MA**

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Eligibility Criteria</i>	<i>Individuals Served</i>	<i>Overview</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
Provide a new route to a high school diploma for youth who have left school or who are not succeeding in traditional high schools, including youth with intellectual disabilities.	Youth who need a different route to a high school diploma. Youth must commit to earning a high school diploma, rather than a GED, through a challenging academic program that requires students to pass a community college course(s) and meet other final year requirements before they graduate.	Youth at risk of or who have dropped out of school. Many students are economically disadvantaged and have financial and family responsibilities. In the 2001 year, 65% of students were 17 years of age or older and 26% were 18 years of age or older. Twenty-seven percent spoke a language other than English at home (e.g., Spanish, French, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Chinese). The ethnic composition of student body is African American at 38%, Latino at 23%, White at 26% and other Non-White at 12%.	Diploma Plus (DP) is a youth development model that was designed by the Center for Youth Development and Education, a division of Commonwealth Corporation. DP challenges students to meet high performance standards while providing support and guidance along the way. The program includes a transitional senior-year experience that involves students in community service, work internships, and for-credit courses on a college campus. Many DP students have had difficult and frustrating experiences in a traditional high school setting. Over half (56%) have dropped out of school prior to enrolling at a DP site. Also, many students are economically disadvantaged and have financial and family responsibilities. In spite of all this, DP students have made the commitment to earn a high school diploma, rather than a GED, and to do so through a challenging academic program with college level work as a requirement of high school graduation. The Champion Charter School (CCS) is being highlighted because it also has students with intellectual disabilities and IEPs. The CCS was the first brand new school based on the DP model. It was founded by MY TURN, a community-based organization in Brockton, MA offering school-to-career and college transition programs. The CCS operates as a “Horace Mann” Charter School, meaning that it operates under a state-granted charter, but within the local school district. The school was established in January 1999 for the specific purpose of serving young people in Brockton who have left school without a diploma, and consequently, all of CCS’s approximately 100 students had previously dropped out of high school. All are enrolled in DP and complete all elements of the Presentation Level and the Plus Phase, including competencies, portfolios, major projects, and internships. Plus Phase students at the CCS successfully complete two credit-level college courses at Massasoit Community College en route to earning their diploma.	The program does not have disaggregated data. It should be noted that the data presented regards all (N = 514) DP sites. 75% of students earn a C or better in the college courses they take during the Plus Phase. 70% of DP graduates go on to further education or training after completing the program. 96% of students surveyed during the Plus Phase report that they are better prepared for the future because of their participation in DP.

ing youth with a wide range of LCID (e.g., emotional or psychiatric disabilities, mental retardation, significant learning disability), youth at-risk, and second language learners, to accomplish any (or all) of the following; graduate from high school, complete a certificate program, graduate from a two-year college, matriculate into a four-year college, identify and develop a preferred career path, secure meaningful, competitive and integrated employment of their own choosing, have friends, become self-determined, and actively participate in a fulfilling life in the community at large.

Third, identification and research on effectiveness of strategies, such as resource mapping, that support restructuring and reallocation of existing resources to develop a systemic infrastructure that supports all youth in transition to postsecondary education and employment must occur.

Finally, there is the need to identify policies and practices that create barriers for youth with LCID in gaining access to postsecondary education (e.g., requirement for a diploma in order to be eligible for financial aid, prerequisite course requirements, and low expectations).). Dual enrollment for students with LCID promises to be a creative educational option to improve graduation rates and attainment of meaningful, competitive and integrated employment.

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