

Chapter 7

Optimizing Transition Outcomes for DHH Students: A Case Study Analysis

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transition planning for many students with disabilities is not achieving the desired outcomes, nor is it meeting national mandates. Yet, the purpose of all educational programming is to produce well-educated adults who are prepared to meet society expectations for work and engagement in their communities. Students with disabilities who do not receive needed transition services often experience barriers and are not able to achieve equitable employment or community participation. A number of systematic and teacher preparation issues contribute to this gap in outcomes achievement. This chapter presents a case study of a transition-age deaf and hard of hearing student whose transition plan lacks important interagency collaboration, and appropriate postsecondary, employment, and independent living goals based on her preferences. This provides an opportunity for readers, through a series of guided questions and access to resources, to create an improved and high-quality transition plan.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite federal mandates for transition services beginning in 1990 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, 1990), students with disabilities are still not consistently receiving high quality and appropriately ambitious transition services (Grigal et al., 1997; Shearin et al., 1999; Shogren & Plotner, 2012). This leaves them less likely to become fully participating and employed adult members of society (Newman et al., 2011; Mazzotti et al., 2021; Trainor et al., 2020). In practical terms, this means that their families may need to provide ongoing services and supports during their adult years. Importantly, these students are unlikely to earn salaries and have lives that are appropriate for their strengths and abilities that would allow them to become independent (Newman et al., 2011).

For deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) students and their families, the challenges to receiving high quality, student-centered transition services are often greater than faced by their other peers with disabilities (Newman et al., 2011). Transition service professionals in school districts may not be knowledgeable about the range of learning, language, and communication issues or appropriate accommodations for DHH students. For example, the Ohio Transition-to-Work Endorsement (TTW, Ohio Department of Education, n.d.) requires either an introductory course in special education or a course for students with moderate/intensive disabilities. Other coursework provides transition knowledge and skill competencies but no coursework addresses students who have sensory disabilities.

Without DHH-specific training, transition professionals may assume that typical academic, career interest, vocational, and independent living assessments are appropriate for DHH students. As a result, these students may be channeled into inappropriate coursework or post-school activities without recognition of the testing and scoring biases present in most formal and informal assessments (Johnson & Mitchell, 2008; Martin & Mounty, 2005; Weinstock & Mounty, 2005). Misinformed and misguided transition goals based on these assessments can mean a substantial waste of financial supports and professional energies during high school, and a substantial loss in tax revenues when these young adults do not achieve desired employment outcomes commensurate with their abilities (Emmett & Francis, 2015).

The lack of access to appropriate transition services also poses a significant challenge to teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students (TODHHs). School districts may consider these teachers to be the “expert” for all issues related to DHH students: As a low-incidence disability with unique language, communication, and learning needs, most districts have minimal district-wide or administrative expertise to optimize DHH student learning. Coincidentally, Shogren and Plotner (2012) found that special education teachers overall, had the primary transition responsibilities. More recently, Plotner et al., (2020) reported that special education teachers often

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