Abbott Implementation Resource Guide

Special Education Opportunities Provided by Abbott

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Giving our kids a fighting chance

About the Authors

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About Education Law Center

ELC was established in 1973 to advocate on behalf of New Jersey's public school children for access to an equal and adequate education under state and federal laws through litigation, policy initiatives, constituency building, and action research.

ELC serves as counsel to the plaintiffs in the Abbott v. Burke case – more than 350,000 preschool and school-age children in 30 urban school districts across the state. The *NY Times* (2002) said that Abbott "may be the most significant education case" since *Brown v. Board of Education. Abbott* has also been called the most important NJ court ruling in the 20th century (*NJ Lawyer*, 2000).

The landmark Abbott IV (1997) and Abbott V (1998) rulings directed the State to implement a comprehensive set of remedies to improve education in the Abbott districts, including universal preschool, standards-based education, adequate foundational funding and facilities, whole school reform, and supplemental or "at risk" programs. ELC is now working to hold the State and districts accountable for effective, and timely implementation of these remedies.

About the Abbott Implementation Resource Guides

With generous support from the Victoria Foundation and the Schumann Fund for New Jersey, ELC commissioned a set of resource guides designed to facilitate the effective implementation of the Abbott programs and reforms at the school and district levels. The purpose of the guides is to provide school management teams, central office staff, and others with information on the legal requirements, latest research, and effective strategies for implementation of the Abbott remedies. The topics covered include: Standards Based Reform, Parent and Community Involvement, Special Education, and Bilingual Education. All of the guides are available on ELC's website: www.edlawcenter.org.

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INTRODUCTION

On the surface, the Abbott decisions are not about special education. In fact, a close reading of the hundreds of pages generated by the courts in dealing with the case yields only a handful of references to special education. Why then, include a chapter about special education in a handbook about the Abbott cases? The answer to this question is twofold.

First, at its essence, Abbott is about fairness. Once the legal phraseology and complex court remedies are deciphered, the Court's message is clear. The school conditions for students and teachers in Abbott districts is simply not fair, and must be addressed at the state level. Students with special education needs and their advocates have a long history of making similar equity arguments. And, while the Abbott decisions were not crafted specifically with special education students in mind, they are consistent with earlier special education decisions.

Second, Abbott provides districts with an unprecedented opportunity to remedy longstanding problems in special education as it addresses issues within the system as a whole. Abbott asks schools to rethink such key issues in service delivery as facilities; learning environments; curriculum; transition and vocational planning; and the role of technology in education. For example, Abbott requires that districts significantly upgrade their school facilities. This mandate provides the districts with an opportunity to make accessibility improvements that might include ramp access at the buildings' main entrance rather than a secondary entrance; elevators within multi-story buildings; accessible stalls in every bathroom; moveable/adjustable furniture and shelves in rooms such as science and computer labs, and libraries where fixed or otherwise inaccessible furniture is often the norm; assistive listening systems in large auditoriums; and Braille lettering and/or textured walls or floors at doorways and key junctions in hallways.

Similarly, Abbott requires that districts expand their kindergarten and preschool programs. Since early intervention is key to effective intervention for children with disabilities, this requirement helps districts address the needs of these students before the students fall significantly behind their peers with no identified disability. In some cases, disabilities may be addressed before they become disabling.

The remainder of this chapter will explore practices and resources in three key special education topic areas: inclusive practices, assistive technology, and transition planning. These three areas are

included in this chapter because they fit three basic criteria. First, they are consistent with the Abbott findings. Second, the remedies mandated by Abbott provide clear opportunities for gains in these areas. Third, and foremost, these areas are considered by many in the field to represent the current and future trends in special education's best practices. In addition, this chapter addresses the question of how these reforms can be implemented in a context of standards-based reform in which all students are expected to achieve based on high expectations. The topics raised in this chapter are intended to address this issue through concrete suggestions and resources to help practitioners create classroom environments in which all students can learn.

INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

THE LAW: ABBOTT AND BEYOND

The Abbott remedies offer the potential for many children who are currently served in special education classes to continue their education in general education classrooms. The premise is simple. If standards-based reforms are successful, then the conditions in the classrooms will improve, leading to improved educational outcomes as more students meet or exceed minimum standards. This means that fewer students will be in need of remedial services. And, some of those who are in need of these types of services will be able to attend regular classes through tutoring and other supports that are likely to be included in reform and improvement planning. This improvement would also be facilitated by smaller class sizes, which are an Abbott requirement.

Unfortunately, as many seasoned educators know from experience, few reform plans work exactly as they are laid out on paper. Indeed, to expect perfection in school reform is as unfair as expecting perfection in school children. In the case of schools, when programs don't completely meet expectations, it is often the at-risk students who exhibit the greatest decline. Just as the weakest connections fail first as the pressure is increased in a hose, the most fragile students are likely to show stress under the pressure of imperfect school reform. Given this, and the fact that school reform is no cure-all for the multitude of organic, environmental, and traumatic factors that can cause disability, it is likely that students will continue to be classified. In addition, even if reform were to stop all referrals to

special education today, there would remain thousands of students who are already classified. So, the dilemma of where and how to serve these students within standards based reform remains.

Clearly, the notion of teaching all or most students with disabilities in the general education classroom has not been greeted with universal acclaim. Frankly speaking, there are many teachers and administrators who would prefer the inclusion discussion to go away. General education teachers did not sign on to teach children at the extreme end of the ability continuum, many argue. Regular education teachers point out that they have not been trained to work with pupils with disabilities and that sufficient training has not been made available to them. Others, facing increasingly larger class sizes, more diverse students and fewer support services for their pupils, rightfully fear that students with disabilities will be lost in the name of a policy trend.

Likewise, some special educators fear that they will be marginalized in inclusive schools. Without their own classrooms and clear instructional responsibilities, they may feel they at risk of becoming assistants to the regular education program. Even when teachers in a "pull-in" model are actively engaged in teaching, they may raise questions as to how to teach substantively different curriculum within the regular class while other instruction is taking place.

At face value there is validity to these arguments. Many educators entered the field when the dual system of special and general education was thriving. Each group had a niche where they were comfortable. Changing the "rules" mid-game may seem unfair. In some ways, this is a compelling position. However, once one scratches the surface, this argument weakens because it is based on the false assumption that professional "rules" typically remain static. Indeed, the notion that a surgeon should not have to learn a new technique simply because it was not part of the package when she graduated medical school is ludicrous. Failure to use the most effective technique would most likely result in a malpractice suit. Similarly, an aeronautics engineer who continued to design jumbo jets with outmoded technology would be seen as negligent even if his designs would have been considered state-of-the-art years earlier when he entered the field. Simply put, while the overarching standards of a given profession, including teaching, may be relatively stable, over time, the specifics, such as methods that are employed and working conditions, are necessarily quite fluid.

Even with the movement towards inclusion in schools, few people argue that specialized placements should be completely banned. Rather, most inclusion advocates believe that children have a

basic right to be educated in a general education classroom in their home school, even if they have a handicapping condition, unless there is a compelling reason to limit this right. These limitations were outlined for New Jersey by the Federal Third Circuit Courts in a reasonably well-known case involving the placement of a child with special needs, *Oberti v. Board of Education of the Borough of Clemonton School District.* In it's ruling the court adopted the standards laid out in an earlier case that took place in El Paso, Texas (*Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education).* Basically, the court allowed for segregated placements for students with special needs, but ruled that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that districts presume the general education classroom will be the setting for all students unless it can be demonstrated that a segregated setting is appropriate (Underwood & Mead, 1995).[1] The standards set by the court indicate that a child may be placed in a more restrictive environment as long as the district follows the following guidelines:

1. To the maximum extent appropriate, a student with a disability is educated with children who are not disabled; and
2. Special classes, separate schooling or other removal of a student with disabilities from the student's regular class occurs only when the nature or severity of the educational disability is such that education in the student's regular class with the use of appropriate supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Schools are, therefore, required to consider whether a student can be educated appropriately in a regular education classroom with supplementary aids and services and are to compare the benefits provided in the regular class, the benefits provided in the special education class, and the potential beneficial or harmful effects such a placement might have on the other students within those classes. Supplementary aids and services have been broadly defined as any support provided to a student with disabilities including specialized materials, additional time for tasks, instructional assistants, related

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[1] While these standards are current in New Jersey (and have been written into the New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:14), they are subject to change if federal courts in the Third Circuit change them (which is unlikely since courts tend to respect their own precedents) or if the United States Supreme Court, which has never ruled on an inclusion case, makes such a ruling and sets new standards. This latter scenario is possible since federal courts in other regions have recognized inclusive placements as preferable, but have set different standards that the Supreme Court is free to adopt or alter as it sees fit.

services and curricular modifications. While this consideration of placement does not require the actual placement of a student with disabilities within the regular education class, the law and court decisions make clear a preference to do so if such placement could result in an appropriate education for that student.

The federal Department of Education is pushing state governments towards inclusion. New Jersey, with its well-developed network of special-services districts and specialized schools, is often cited by federal auditors as depending too much on segregated placements for students with disabilities. This pressure, along with the very real threat of continued lawsuits in light of the *Oberti* decision, has nudged virtually all districts in the state towards inclusive practices. Thus, the situation for educators and school systems has changed as the legal and social climates have changed. This is natural given the social and political context of schools. Abbott offers the opportunity to address this change within the context of standards-based reform.

In particular, the smaller class sizes and tutoring programs that are part of many reform plans make conditions ripe for inclusion since a primary benefit of self-contained special education classes and resource rooms is a decreased student-teacher ratio. Many whole school reform models also include smaller classes and tutoring. So, where whole school reform models are in use, schools may find added benefits for special education. For example, the *Success for All* (SFA) program employs one-on-one reading tutors to support student success in the early grades. These tutoring positions are expressly designed to replace the need for Chapter/Title One tutors and special education resource teachers (Slavin, Karweit & Madden, 1989). In addition, in SFA the heterogeneously grouped reading classes of about fifteen students provide a smaller class size and more concentrated direct teaching – both hallmarks of effective special education programs. These reading classes include regular assessment that allows for the consistent monitoring of students while problems are still minimal. In other words, small problems are fixed before they become big ones. Finally, SFA recommends the use of family support teams.

The special education system has offered support to families for more than two decades, although most of this support is limited to preschool-aged children. Family support for all children who need it will likely make inclusion more successful since educational impediments that stem from the home are more likely to be addressed. These sorts of reforms are not limited to schools that adopt the SFA

model. Indeed the NJ Supreme Court expressly stated that any Abbott district has the right, based on demonstrated need, to request and obtain on-site social services that are not readily available in the surrounding community.

MAKING INCLUSION WORK WITH OR WITHOUT A WHOLE SCHOOL REFORM MODEL

The structures of effective education (small classes, tutoring and the like) discussed in the whole school reform models are only one piece of the puzzle. In order for inclusion, or reform, to work, we must look at what goes on within these structures. Again, the sorts of activities likely to occur within the reform models are consistent with those considered to be best practices in special education. Let's review some potential questions about how to serve students with special education needs and where they might fit in a reforming school.

Question 1: What educational practices are consistent with school reform and have been shown to meet the needs of children with special education needs?

1. Professional Development for District and School Administrators

Leadership in any school must begin at the administrative level, yet building principals and district supervisors typically have little to no training in the issues facing special education today, including research supported best practices. Any system change within the school organization should begin by educating these school leaders. In-service for administrators should focus on two primary issues:

- ▪ The legal background of special education placement and practice decisions; and
- ▪ Effective programming options.

The training in the legal background of special education placement and practice decisions is essential given that many activities of special services are legally, not necessarily (intuitively) logically driven. Principals must understand the legal concept of least restrictive environment and the process by which placement and practice decisions are to be made. Special education regulations can seem

onerous. Therefore, administrators need to understand the origin and purpose of the regulations if they are to support and implement the correct policies and practices. They need to understand that special education, perhaps more than any other area of education, is driven by regulation and case law. They need to understand that the movement to more inclusive educational practices is not a local "mood" but rather the result of years of litigation and subsequent law changes. Such training helps administrators better understand why their districts are undertaking change and also helps gain their support in the efforts.

Once administrators understand the framework and impetus for this change effort, they also need information on promising practices and research-supported interventions to share with their staffs. Information at the administrative level need not be in depth, but sufficient enough to help them to direct and encourage staff in making change.

Information on promising practices can be provided to administrators through a variety of resources:

- The Learning Resource Centers (LRCs), in New Jersey, are a training branch of the NJ Department of Education. These centers provide up to the date training on educational interventions and do so at low cost to districts. (http://www.state.nj.us/njded/lrc/genfo)

- The NJ Department of Education provides an on-line resource, NJPEP. This website provides up to date information on on-line and in person training sessions available for educators. (http://www.njpep.rutgers.edu)

- The NJ Department of Education provides an on-line reference system to locate in-service providers. The site provides searches by provided name, geographical area, core content standards addressed in training, and instructional content. (www.state.nj.us/njded/profdev/providers/search)

- Many in-service offerings are also made available by other organizations or agencies throughout the state, such as the Morris Union Consortium or the Newgrange School.

Colleges and universities with programs in special education can provided speakers or help identify national experts in areas of interest.

- Many professional organizations offer national and local conferences. Consult their web sites for further information. For example: the National Center for Learning Disabilities, the Council for Exceptional Children, the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities and the International Dyslexia Association.

- And finally, web searches can often yield experts in areas of interest. Searching http://www.ideapractices.org for example, provides links to information (and potential trainers) on topics including inclusion, assistive technology, early childhood, and specific resources for various disabilities.

2. Providing Staff Development

Once administrators have received preliminary training, it is time to activate the staff. To do this, we suggest that each administrator identify a core of interested staff members to form the building-level change support and guidance team. This group should be differentiated from other school reform teams in that those groups have other pressing duties. The new team should be made up of staff members who have shown initiative, leadership, interest in innovation and high-level professional behavior in your school. This group will help motivate and "sell" new ideas to all other staff. They can also help ensure that new ideas become integrated into the fabric of everyday life in the school.

The support and guidance team members should be provided an overview of their role (to help support best practices in the schools) and then work together to identify the areas in which further training is needed. Typical areas of further training will include promising approaches in reading instruction, behavioral management techniques, differentiating instruction in the regular classroom, co-teaching techniques, and instructional strategies that work with pupils with disabilities. Again, the LRCs can be helpful in providing or planning such training.

Each school will need to identify ways to encourage all staff to participate in on-going training in new techniques for working with pupils with educational disabilities. Options include the following:

- Traditional district in-service days may be used for topical training.
- Teachers can earn credit hours (toward required hours of training) for work done with specific in-services, or attendance at on-going training sessions can be "traded" for participation at daylong district in-services held at other times.
- Schools can provide "academies" on relevant topics. Courses can be offered after school or on weekends and credit given (such as CEUs) toward raises on the pay scale.
- Staff members who have demonstrated expertise in an area can be used to provide training for others. Often, for example, the related services staff (speech-language specialists, occupational therapists, physical therapists) can offer excellent advice to classroom teachers on simple techniques for better management and instruction of pupils with disabilities.
- Some districts have also chosen to pay teachers to participate in training on weekends, evenings or in the summer.
- Other districts have established voluntary discussion groups, organized around topics of interest to the staff.
- Staff members should also be provided with reading material to support their training sessions. School libraries should include relevant journals (listed later) and texts.
- Videotapes are another way to provide training. Some schools have established "video lunches" for staff where training videos are shown and discussed at lunch times. Possible videos include:
  - Special Needs Students in the Regular Classrooms? (http://www.films.com)
  - How Difficult Can This Be? The F.A.T. City Workshop (http://www.ldonline.org/ld_store/ldproject.html)
  - Nobody's Perfect: A Beginners Guide to Learning Disabilities (http://www.amazon.com)
  - Meeting the Needs of Students of ALL Abilities: How Leaders Go Beyond Inclusion (http://www.pdkintl.org/profdev/videos/vhome.htm#spec)

- o Inclusion: Policy and Practice
  (http://www.pdkintl.org/profdev/videos/vhome.htm#spec)
- o Facing Inclusion Together (http://edrs.com)
- o Look What You've Done! Learning Disabilities and Self-Esteem with Robert Brooks Stories of Hope and Resilience
  (http://www.ldonline.org/ld_store/ldproject.html)
- o The Inclusion Series (http://www.comforty.com)
- Opportunities for peer observation can be provided to help teachers share expertise.
- Opportunities for observation of programs in other schools, other districts or in private programs can be encouraged.
- Cooperative arrangements can be made with colleges or universities to offer related courses on site in the district for graduate credits.

Regardless of the training mode and venue chosen, the change process for inclusion requires time and nurturing. Training needs to be on going, pinpointed to the staff member's needs and motivating. The effort itself will need support as time passes and the initial energy wanes. Committed, energetic leadership can help carry the day when the initial excitement of the change process wears off!

While decisions about specific topics for in-service in a district should be driven by that district's particular identified needs, the following questions are typically of interest:

- Why inclusion? How did this happen? Why are these pupils here?
- What are the expectations for these pupils? Are we modifying or remediating?
- How can we differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all pupils in our classes?
- What are the characteristics of pupils with educational disabilities and how can those characteristics be addressed in the classroom?
- What are some easy ways to implement behavior management techniques?
- How can we help these pupils read? Write? Spell?
- How can we help these pupils succeed within the content areas?
- What is transition and how should it affect the curriculum and instruction?

- How can I modify for some of the pupils in my class and be perceived as "fair?"

- How do I avoid "watering down" the curriculum?

- How can I implement these changes within the structure of our reform plan?

- How do these changes fit with our whole school reform model (if applicable) and what adaptations might be possible or necessary to improve the fit?

3. Employing Best Practices for Child Study Teams

The IDEA mandates that eligibility and IEP decisions be made by a multidisciplinary group. New Jersey schools use a model called the child study team (CST) as the evaluators and school representatives in the IEP meeting (with the required teacher and other staff, as appropriate). The CST consists of a school social worker, a school psychologist and a learning disabilities teacher consultant (LDTC). The LDTC position is unique to New Jersey. LDTCs have completed a minimum of three years of teaching and have completed the required graduate course of study focusing on assessment and remediation of pupils with educational disabilities. Typically, the LDTC would focus on the educational/achievement evaluation of the pupil while the school psychologist would focus on the psychological/ability/behavioral aspects. The school social worker would focus on behavioral/social issues as well as family and developmental concerns. All would be responsible to case manage students and all would be responsible for developing IEPs.

New Jersey has not provided any standards for required or optimum caseloads for CST members. The determination of appropriate caseload for a given team member should be based upon the following:

- The age of pupils to be served (with preschoolers typically requiring more time from CSTs than older pupils);

- The severity of the disabilities of the pupils to be served (with pupils with more severe disabilities typically requiring more time);

- The number of pupils in the caseload who are placed out of district. Out of district placements, while taking more time to reach, typically take less time overall than the case management of pupils on site;

- The location of pupils in the caseload within the district. CSTs with more travel time should have a lower caseload than those who work within one building;

- The demands of the parents within your setting. More demanding parents suggest a need for a lower caseload while non-involved parents suggest a higher caseload;

- The "age" of the programs within the CSTs' caseload. Newer programs require more time and attention from the CST than older, more established programs;

- The acceptance of the CST by the schools in which they work. Where CSTs are welcomed and have a positive relationship with the principals, they can manage somewhat higher caseloads;

- The other demands placed upon the CSTs by your district. Some districts give CSTs responsibilities for guidance, PAC or attendance related activities; The greater the number of "other" responsibilities, the lower the caseload should be;

- The amount of secretarial support available to the CSTs. The work of the CST is "paper heavy." CSTs who must type, send and file their own materials will be unable to manage higher caseloads competently;

- The types of programs with which the CSTs will work. Typically, self-contained classes take somewhat more time to case manage than do resource programs;

- The "successfulness" of the programs within the CSTs' caseloads. Troubled programs should be given more time and attention from the CST in order to address their issues; and

- The intention of the district to implement change within the schools served by the CST. Change requires time and attention from CST members who will only be able to devote that time if their caseloads are otherwise manageable.

CSTs with appropriately sized caseloads can devote time to affecting change in the district. They can support teachers with instructional and behavioral challenges and work more closely with parents to develop support for programs. The CST members can serve as the "front line" in developing effective special education programming.

NJAC 6A:14 also requires the identification of a case manager for each pupil with an educational disability. This person is typically a member of the CST and assumes primary responsibility

for ensuring that the student's IEP is implemented and appropriate. The case manager should be available to staff members for informal consultation on issues as they arise within the classroom. Staff members will need to be kept aware of the existence and identity of the case manager for each pupil with an educational disability whom they serve. This person should also be responsible for maintaining communication and coordination between service providers and the home.

4.   Coordinating with Early Intervention Providers

The Court mandates preschool intervention for all children in Abbott districts. The IDEA mandates that intervention services for all children with identified disabilities be available from birth and focus on the needs of the whole family through an individualized family service plan. In New Jersey, the Department of Health and Senior Services administers these services. As a child enters public preschool, a "seamless" transfer of administrative duties from the Department of Health and Senior Services to the school will facilitate inclusion. In fact, current New Jersey Administrative Code mandates that a CST member from the child's school district participate in a transition conference designed to facilitate the child's movement into public school. Optimally, CST members should get to know the incoming preschoolers prior to this meeting. This can be accomplished through an observation and dialogue with the early intervention provider. CST members may also find it helpful to invite early intervention staff members to see the district's program. This exchange of information can help ensure a positive exchange of information at the eligibility/IEP meeting.

This transfer should be facilitated by the Court's mandate to bring appropriate social services into the school. Whenever possible, appropriate school personnel (e.g., school social workers, counselors, nurses therapists, or CST members) should follow up with the parents of preschool children early in the child's first year of school, if not before enrollment, to ensure that all appropriate educational, health and social services are available to the students and their families.

5.   Coordinating the Instruction of Included Pupils

Programs for included pupils can be complex and involve many members of the staff including general and special education classroom teachers, instructional assistants, related services providers, the school nurse, related arts teachers and others. To ensure that all of these people are working in concert

to meet the needs of the pupil and to share the knowledge and insights each gains as the program progresses, we highly recommend that program planning meetings be held on a regular basis. Each staff member with responsibilities to implement the pupil's IEP should attend these meetings. These staff members should identify topics for each meeting or the group may address a question from the home. The case manager can coordinate and run these meetings, although we suggest that the principal of the school attend the first few meetings to convey the sense of importance this group should have.

Questions brought to similar groups in the past have varied from "How can we help the student to be better involved socially?" to "How can we arrange for better seating in all classes?" Issues of behavior management, positioning, communication goals and motor skills, which cut across the curriculum, are important to address with this group.

6. Practicing Differentiated Instruction

One of the key benefits of a resource room and, to a lesser extent, self-contained placements, at least in theory, is that in these smaller groups the teacher is able to individualize instruction. Tutoring, smaller class sizes, and strategic homogeneous regrouping should help teachers attain differentiated instruction while maintaining an inclusive placement (see King-Sears, 1997, for a complete review differentiated instruction techniques).

a. Use of explicit strategy instruction

Students with special education needs tend to have weak metacognitive skills. That is, they tend to poorly regulate their own learning. For example, competent readers automatically check their comprehension as they read. Occasionally, good readers will read a paragraph only to realize at the end of the paragraph that they cannot recall what was just read. Typically, they will reread the lost passage. In contrast poor readers are not as likely to pause and check comprehension. They will simply plod on, decoding each word with little attention to meaning. Once the final word is decoded, these readers will declare the passage as "read" despite the fact that they have made no meaningful interpretation of the decoded words. Small groups and tutoring allow ample opportunity to introduce and practice such comprehension techniques as KWL (know, want to know, learned), reciprocal teaching, and text mapping. One-on-one tutoring and small group instruction also provide opportunities

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to teach such recall and organizational strategies as concept mapping, or mnemonics. More information on these and other topics can be acquired through organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children (http://www.cec.sped.org/), the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (http://www.nichcy.org.), the International Dyslexia Organization (http://www.interdys.org/) and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (http://www.ascd.org) all of which offer inexpensive, readable resources on a variety of curricular and methodological topics.

b. Employing direct skill instruction

Most modern linguists agree that, in general, humans are "wired" for language. However, this natural predilection towards language is mitigated by experience and debated with regards to literacy (e.g., Molfese, Molfese & Modgline, 2001). Some students come from language rich environments and seem to pick up reading and the rules of grammar "naturally." Others come from less rich environments. Still others come from rich environments but seem to lack an "organic" facility with language. Research on students in these two latter groups who do not "naturally" excel in literacy skills shows that they tend to benefit significantly from direct instruction of these skills. In particular, direct instruction of phonics and phonemic awareness seem to be promising. Whatever the skill being taught, systematic, clear and predictably structured presentation that is linked to prior knowledge is necessary to maximize student achievement (McDonnell, 1998).

c. Establishing cooperative learning situations in content areas

While heterogeneous groups are useful in skill building (and are employed in areas like reading in many WSR models), working in structured small group situations during content area lessons (e.g., science, social studies, and sometimes mathematics) creates additional benefits for children with special needs (McDonnell, 1998). First, children who feel less competent in school often will not actively participate in large group activities. These students are more likely to participate in smaller groups. Second, structured small group work tends to focus on developing problem solving, self regulation, and metacognitive skills – areas of particular weakness for most children with high-incidence disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, mild mental retardation, and emotional disturbance). In addition, well-structured cooperative learning teaches children timeliness, responsibility, manners and conflict

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resolution skills. These so-called, "soft skills" are valued by employers who seek a stable, well-mannered workforce. (Murnane 1994) Teachers interested in small group methodology might consider exploring the work of Elliot Aronson, Robert Slavin, or Annemarie Palincsar.

d. Using manipulatives to make lessons concrete

Many children with learning disabilities or mild mental retardation have difficulty with abstraction and in generalizing symbolic representation with real world experience. Therefore it is useful to incorporate manipulatives and or computer technology into lessons. This is particularly useful in math and science. Generally speaking, the more closely a manipulative resembles the real-life object (the actual real-life object is ideal), and the more similar the learning context to the context in which the skill will be applied, the better the generalization of the skill will likely be. For example, when learning to count money in a shopping situation, a classroom exercise using plastic money is preferable to a worksheet. Using real money beats fake money. And using real money at a school store, or better yet, at a real store (perhaps in the museum gift shop during a field trip) is even more preferable since it allows the student to employ a real object in a real situation.

Question 2: What can be done to ensure that inclusion does not impede the progress of the children with no identified disabilities?

Research has shown that students who are functioning at or above grade level are not necessarily "held back" by less facile students (see Slavin (1991) for a review). In fact, as they help their less able peers, many students gain a more robust knowledge of the subject at hand. Manset and Semmel (1995) conducted a review of eight different inclusive models for elementary students with disabilities (including the ALEM and SFA models used in some Abbott schools) and found "the impact of the changes on the achievement of nondisabled students was positive." They report that inclusive programs with these types of positive results for all students typically have the following components:

- Students with disabilities were not returned to typical, traditional classrooms, but rather to classes which were incorporating highly structured teaching techniques which focused on individualized basic skills instruction and frequent testing;

- A redistribution of resources through reduced class size, increased staffing or peer-supported instruction;

- Specialized instruction required for all students, rather than suggested for some;

- Special education services that were re-conceptualized; and

- A commitment that special education services, when needed, will still be available.

These criteria appear to be compatible with reforms underway in Abbott districts. Below are some ways to ensure that inclusion does not impede the progress of the children with no identified disabilities.

1. Maintain Standards and Provide Help Reaching Them

High standards and expectations are critical to the success of all students. Clear performance standards help teachers set realistic expectations for each of their students and the schools must work to continually identify and refine such performance standards. Standards without supports however, will simply lead to failure. Schools must carefully consider the needs of each pupil in identifying any necessary additional supports and services. Therefore, a standards-based program of instruction that maintains appropriate standards and supports for all students will likely benefit all types of students in a given classroom. The School Leadership Councils (SLCs) should work with all teachers to identify those common services that might be built into regular education to ensure the success of all.

2. Maintain a Continuum of Services

As highlighted in the Manset and Semmel study above, it is important to remember that very few people argue that a general education placement is appropriate for all students. In fact, most special educators argue that inclusive placements are just part of the continuum of services. Broadly accepted views of inclusion (and current interpretations of the law) simply state that the general education classroom should be attempted (or at least seriously considered), for all students before placement in a

more restrictive environment. In other words, general education, not a special class, should be the "default" placement for students, not the only potential placement. Clearly, students who cannot benefit from general education or who provide a significant disruption can be placed elsewhere. Maintaining the full continuum of options may also help to reduce due process appeals and/or potentially costly private placements since a self-contained setting is available if the CST, the student or his or her guardians believe it is necessary.

3. Maintain Alternative Programs

The Abbott Court mandates alternative programs in secondary schools. The maintenance of these programs serves two purposes from an inclusion perspective. First, it prevents the classification (or dropping out) of students who are not successful in a traditional program. Second, alternative programs provide a more suitable place for students who are likely to be disruptive in a typical program.

4. Maintain Positive Behavior Supports

Positive behavior supports allow teachers to address challenging behaviors by focusing on broad lifestyle issues such as maintaining friendships with others and gaining independence, not simply excess behaviors. Teachers are encouraged, among other things, to explore why the student acts out (functional assessment) and address these issues based on the individual needs of the child. For example, a student who acts out to receive attention from his peers could be given opportunities for positive attention rather than simply being punished for misbehaving.

Question 3: What are some alternative ways to provide related services to included students?

1. Consider providing integrated therapies in the classroom

Integrated therapies involve tying in goals and objectives the child has in his/her IEP with typical classroom curricula, often through "pull-in" programs where the specialist enters the general education classroom (i.e., working on fine motor skills with the Occupational Therapist in the art room while completing a regular art project).

2. <u>Consider indirect delivery of services</u>

    In this model the therapist provides some direct services, but also models, and consults with the teachers who deliver part of the services. The therapist monitors the child's progress.

3. <u>Consider small group therapies instead of one-on-one</u>

    When appropriate, the therapist can block a period of time, and provide therapy in a small group situation for several children.

4. <u>Be certain the child needs the service</u>

    In traditional special education situations, we often provide a constellation of services based on the child's label. For example, children with behavior problems are routinely provided with in-school counseling on a regular basis. This is often appropriate. However, for some students whose behavior problems are linked to school failure, intense academic tutoring may be more appropriate for reducing unwanted behavior. While short-term or acute counseling may be necessary, for some students in this example, long-term counseling may not be necessary as academic achievement improves.

5. <u>Coordinate with local or on-site social service agencies</u>

    Communication and coordination with social service agencies is likely to improve as more of these organizations are brought into the school. This may allow for certain services to be provided on school grounds just before, or just after the regular school day. It will also likely lead to better attendance, which should lead to improved student achievement.

Question 4: How do we avoid legal pitfalls?

    Special education is a highly litigious field, especially in New Jersey where hundreds of requests for hearings are made to the state department each year. The cost of these cases in time, energy and money is high. Schools will be best served by carefully considering the following:

1. <u>Actively involve parents and students in the IEP process</u>

While it is often difficult and sometimes impossible to do so, drawing guardians and students into the process, and assuring that they understand and are comfortable with the placement is one of the best ways of minimizing problems down the road. Districts must work cooperatively with parents in reaching placement decisions. While there is a clear legal preference for inclusive placements, parents often have strong feelings regarding these decisions and their feelings must be considered. Determining the least restrictive placement requires consideration of many facets of the student's life and parents can provide critical guidance in many of the areas including the need for interactions with non-disabled pupils, physical and behavioral ability to move about the school setting, and positive adaptive techniques. Parents should be fully informed of the district's plans and be full participants in the IEP process. Obtaining parental participation in low-income school districts can be especially arduous since parents of these students typically have less free time to attend school activities and may also encounter childcare and transportation problems. Efforts to increase parent participation can include:

- Scheduling meetings in coordination with the parents, not assigning times;
- Helping parents understand the importance of their participation prior to the meeting through phone conversations or letters;
- Contacting parents for "good news" meetings as well as the typical "something is wrong" meetings that they must attend;
- Seeking parental participation through phone conference calls;
- Considering "flex" hours for CST and hourly pay for teachers to participate in IEP meetings after school hours if necessary;
- Offering parents an "advocate" through the school social worker who will support them in the IEP process; or
- Providing babysitting services during meetings.

When parents are actively sought out to participate in educational decision-making and listened to during the decision-making, litigation is likely to decrease.

2. Make sure each placement conforms to the *Oberti* decision and subsequent regulation

Following the decision-making process set out in *Oberti* and NJAC 6A:14 will help protect the district against litigation. Careful consideration of the issue, rather than superficial discussion is essential. Documentation of the decision-making process must be completed in writing.

3. Maintain your paperwork and evaluation schedules

Inclusion does not remove any of the meeting, notice or IEP requirements districts face. It is simply one way of addressing least-restrictive environment issues. No matter what the placement, a child with a classification must be evaluated triennially and must have a regularly updated IEP. Due process timelines and stay-put requirements must also be maintained. While due process cases are not typically initiated because of poor completion of paperwork or failure to conduct required meetings, such procedural failures can cause a district to lose the case.

4. Identify those cases, which appear to be headed toward due process hearings.

Work to resolve the difficulties before they escalate. CSTs should be trained in identifying potential due process matters and know that such cases are to be immediately reported to their supervisor or special education administrator. At this time, the group should review the case for any procedural or educational errors that may exist. A careful review of the student's file should be conducted to determine:

- Were the right people invited to the right meetings at the right times?
- Were the right written documents kept as a record of this?
- Has the student made progress, both academic and social, in the district's program? If not, changes must be made!
- Was the decision in question a reasonable and supportable one?
- Should additional evaluations be conducted to help determine a course of action?
- Should the school consider alternatives that the parent has requested?
- How will the district explain its point of view and document that view to an administrative law judge?

- Are staff members prepared to testify in a hearing?

- What weaknesses are there in the school's case?

- If a service is requested with which the district is unfamiliar, who will do the necessary research before making a final determination as to whether or not that service is appropriate.

Any weaknesses identified can often be addressed by convening an IEP review meeting and revising the IEP. Services should be added as appropriate. Outside evaluations can be obtained and outside experts consulted. Action taken prior to the initiation of a due process hearing can often stave off the actual filing of the request.

It is critical to recall that, in special education hearings, costs and difficulty in implementing any program are usually irrelevant to the outcome decision. Explore all options fully and seriously before refusing a service or program.

Question 5: How do we help teachers adapt to inclusion?

1. Explore different collaborative models including:
   - *Technical assistance* – where the special education teacher is available on an as needed basis to help the general education teacher troubleshoot difficult situations
   - *Consultation* – where the special education teacher meets regularly with the general education teacher to discuss the needs of included children. The special education teacher acts as a resource for the general educator.
   - *Teaming* – where the general educator and the special educator co-teach. Many experts see this as the preferable model. And, given the reduced student-teacher ratio required by Abbott, it is likely to be a viable model for special needs schools. When teachers co-teach,

it is important that they communicate well with each other and have a shared vision of what the children are capable of and how they should be taught. (Langrock, 2000)

2. Provide coordinated planning time

It is virtually unanimous among teachers who try any form of collaboration that regular, sustained planning time is a necessity.

3. Provide professional developments

Collaboration is a skill that must be taught to many practitioners. Teaching is not "naturally" collaborative. Teachers must be taught and practice ways in which they can give up "control" of their classroom and shed rigidly defined roles. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (http://www.ascd.org/) is an excellent resource to begin exploring topics for professional development.

Voices From the Field – Co-teaching an Inclusive Classroom

Dianne Wade is a special educator; Jennifer Gibson is a general educator. Both have been teachers for more than twenty years. Dianne and Jen have been co-teaching for about a decade. They currently teach an inclusive class of fourth graders, about a third of whom are classified as having a disability.

When they began co-teaching, they were given little guidance and were placed in a classroom that could not accommodate two teachers and a full class. They also had little time scheduled together to plan. According to the pair, it was an advantage, in some ways, to begin this way. They were experienced teachers creating something from the ground up. No one planned it for them, which allowed them to create something that worked to their strengths.

As the program evolved in their school, more teachers began to work together. According to Dianne and Jen, the most successful pairs share some common traits:

1. Their philosophies must match. "This is like a marriage, " says the pair, who are known for finishing each other's sentences. When teachers who don't share similar educational perspectives attempt to co-teach, they often fail even if they are good friends.

2. Co-teachers must share some planning time each day. If teachers are not permitted to plan together on a regular basis, they will be unable to sustain a meaningful collaboration. Jen and Diane now have overlapping planning times. When they first began this wasn't the case, which hindered their success early on.

3. Space must be adequate. Dianne and Jen share an oversized classroom. This is important because it gives them the space necessary to work in small groups around the classroom.

4. Co-teachers must remain flexible. Even with similar philosophies, proper space and planning time, teaching is rarely predictable. Therefore, co-teachers must remain open to change as it occurs.

Jen and Dianne have noticed over the years that they are often given students who are at the lower-end of the ability spectrum. It seems that it is natural for the third-grade teachers to place their most at-risk students in a class with well-functioning co-teachers for fourth grade. Still, the pair must make an effort to keep their class heterogeneous. To that end, they seek out third-grade teachers around placement time and remind them that heterogeneity is good. Indeed, in Jen and Dianne's class, group work combined with targeted individualization benefits stronger and weaker students alike.

In the end though, the pair works with whoever is in the class. If the students are unable to model proper academic behavior for each other, there are two teachers to model how to work together appropriately. This is particularly useful when the students are engaged in small group work. "One last advantage of co-teaching is that it is very nice to have another adult in the classroom. It keeps us sane," they agree, "and its great when we sit down to talk to parents."

THE ABBOTT DECISION AND EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

As we begin a discussion of educational technology, it is important to remember that not all technology is necessarily "high-tech." Yes, expensive computer systems and optical devices are technology, but so are crutches, pencil grips, and even glasses. In short, any device that aids us is, at its root, a technological innovation. Both the Abbott decisions and the IDEA address technology issues. The IDEA allows for technology to be stipulated as a related service just as speech therapy, counseling, or physical therapy might be. The Abbott decisions stipulate that the Commissioner of Education must implement technology programs at the request of the school or district.

Technology can be used in the classroom to assist students in completing everyday tasks such as conversing, note taking and moving about. Other devices are used in accessing information from text, video or speech. In any case, there is a dual use for technology in a standards-based curriculum. First, technology can maximize the students' opportunity to acquire the required skills and knowledge. Second, technology can help teachers assess students more accurately. For example, a social studies teacher who is working with a student with reading difficulty may have trouble assessing him or her through a traditional paper and pencil test (failure on such a test may be a better reflection of the students reading ability than his or her content knowledge), and may not have the time to give an oral exam. Technology may make the written test accessible to the student and allow the teacher to more accurately gauge how well the student has met the social studies content standards.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO HELP STUDENTS AT RISK FOR FAILURE

Reading

1. What devices or software can help students who have difficulty reading?

   - Books on tape – Students with reading difficulties pose a real dilemma for teachers. Yes, reading is an important skill, perhaps the most important skill, a student can learn. However, it is not the only important skill or content that is taught in school. A dilemma occurs when students who cannot read cannot access other information because this access depends on being able to read texts or other source material. Books on tape are one way to allow students access to source material so that their reading impairments do not block

their access to other information while they are still learning to read. Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic (http://www.rfbd.org) and The New Jersey Library for the Blind and Handicapped (http://www2.njstatelib.org/njlib/njlbh.htm) are excellent resources for recorded materials.

- Scan/read software – When recordings are not available, practical reading software may be a viable alternative. This software can be run on most up-to-date computer systems. Some textbook companies offer their texts on CD-ROMs, which are read aloud by the software. If the computer is hooked up to a monitor, the text will appear on the screen. The software is then able to highlight the text that is being read – creating a read-along tutorial system. If the material to be read is not available in digital form, most systems allow the student to scan in material to be read. Popular brands include Kurzweil 3000 by Kurzweil, WordSmith by textHelp and WYNN by Arkenstone.

Writing

2. What technological devices or software can help students who have difficulty writing?

- Speech recognition software –There are essentially two reasons a student will have difficulty writing. First the student may have a physical impairment that precludes using a writing implement or keyboard. Second, a student may have such a severe language difficulty that he or she may not be able to spell well enough for a computer spell check to be useful. In the case of a cognitively strong student with physical impairments, speech recognition software can be useful in helping a student commit his or her thoughts to text. While this type of software has limitations, which are likely to be addressed as the technology improves, essentially, it works like a word processor or other software but through voice commands. For students with language difficulties, the scan/read software described above combined with the word prediction software described below would probably be more effective.

- Intellikeys keyboards – Inellikeys is a versatile keyboard that can change based on the needs of the student and the task at hand. The keyboard comes with a series of overlays that allow students to complete a variety of tasks. One overlay, for example, is a typical computer keyboard. Another is a keyboard with the letters in alphabetical order, making typing easier for students who have mastered the alphabet in order, but are confused by the traditional, or QWERTY, keyboard. Other overlays provide numeric keyboards for math or keyboards with larger keys for students with physical or visual impairments. Overlays can be customized to meet virtually any curriculum need

- Modified keyboards and switches – In addition to Intellikeys, there are a variety of other modified keyboards designed for people with all sorts of disabilities. For example, there are mini keyboards for people who have impaired gross motor skills such as those in the arms, but intact fine motor coordination in their fingers. These keyboards are about the size of a Game Boy and are designed to be controlled with the thumbs or one or two other fingers. In addition, there are a variety of switches and modified computer mice and trackballs that make computers more accessible for individuals with physical disabilities.

- Word prediction software – Some students are reasonably facile with keyboarding and other computer skills, but lack the phonemic skills to spell well. In this case, writing is so dominated by mechanics that ideas are often lost or become secondary to the student. In addition, writing becomes so difficult that the student becomes discouraged and gives up. Word prediction software helps by "guessing" the student's word as he or she begins to type. For example if the student types "Th" the software would offer a menu of common such common words as "The," "Three," "There," and "Their." Some programs will read these words aloud to the student to further help him or her choose the correct word. Some programs will also "remember" the words that are popular with the student and offer them first. Many of the reading software products mentioned earlier have word prediction features in their word processors.

- Alpha Smart keyboards – Alpha Smarts are a less expensive alternative to computers. They are about the size of a small laptop. They offer a full size keyboard and a small LCD screen and are limited to basic word processing. Text typed on these can be uploaded to a computer for printing and further editing. They are much less expensive and more durable than full computers, and very portable. Some students with reading and writing difficulties find these useful for note-taking and basic composition work. Many schools purchase class sets of these devices and create rolling writing labs at a fraction of the cost of a full computer lab. This allows virtually all students to actively engage in a writing process that fosters creativity through multiple revisions of work.

Speaking

3. What technological devices can help people who have difficulty speaking?

- Augmentative communication devices – Augmentative communication devices range from simple picture boards to highly complex voice synthesizers. For some students with speech difficulty, a basic communication board with pictures of everyday objects and needs is all that is necessary to establish basic communication. The student points to pictures on the board in order to let the teacher know his or her needs. While this is clearly not optimal communication, it can be useful for a student with limited cognitive abilities or as a back up to a more advanced communication system that is currently out of order. Some students with autism use a similar system as they learn to communicate effectively. This Picture Exchange Communication System, or PECS, employs a variety of small pictures that are carried in a binder. The student attaches the pictures with Velcro to the front of the binder in order to communicate with others. More advanced augmentative communication devices involve voice synthesizers and allow students to communicate complex ideas in full sentences. These are often used by students with poor muscle control, and subsequently have difficulty forming words with their mouths. They can be controlled using keyboards, switchers or with a laser pointer attached to the student's eyeglasses or a cap.

Visual Impairments

4. What technological devices can help people with visual impairments?

- Closed circuit television – For students with some residual sight, closed circuit television system can be useful. These systems employ a camera focused on the text or object to be viewed. An image of the object or text is magnified and projected to a television screen where it is more easily viewed. These systems can be adapted for use with microscopes, telescopes, and other viewing devices.

- Magnification and screen reading software – For some students with visual impairments, the text and images on a computer screen can be enlarged through magnification software, or the contrast can be changed (white print on a black screen sometimes helps) so that the image is viewable. However, some students have impairments that are not helped by this. Screen reading software is useful for students whose sight is not useful for viewing a computer monitor. Like the character recognition software described above, which is useful for visually impaired students when accessing specific text, screen-reading software reads the contents of a computer screen to the user, but it can be more versatile when looking at text outside of a written document (such as items on a cluttered computer desktop). For users with severe visual impairments, this software can be combined with voice recognition software in order to help navigate the screen. Computer training can be obtained by the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, a branch of the State Department of Human Services (http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/)

- Second audio tracks – Second audio tracks on video recordings provide narration during parts of films with little dialogue. This can be particularly useful during film watching when the images on the screen set the tone for the coming screen or provide other information that is integral to the story. The New Jersey Library for the Blind and Handicapped (http://www2.njstatelib.org/njlib/njlbh.htm) offers a variety of films with a second audio track.

- Portable Braille keyboards -- Years ago, blind students would often depend on clunky manual Braille writers to take notes or prepare homework. The machines resembled and sounded like old-fashioned portable typewriters. They produced Braille text that would have to be translated by an interpreter for the teacher. While manual Braille writers still exist, there are quieter, more convenient electronic alternatives; popular among these are products called Braille Lite and Braille n' Speak. These products are about the size of a midlength hardcover novel. They contain the six keys necessary to produce the Braille alphabet. Some also have a refreshable Braille strip that a student can read to check the accuracy of what he or she has been typing. Also, this type of device typically contains a voice synthesizer that can read the input back to the student. It is very handy for note taking and record keeping. Its contents can be uploaded to a computer where it can be printed in Braille for the student and regular text for a sighted reader. This removes the need for a human translator, making it easier for the teacher to receive printed work from the student. In fact, if the teacher typed his or her comments to the student's work, the student could scan the document into a computer and either print it out in Braille or listen to it through reading software or the portable device.

Hearing

5. What technological devices can help people who are deaf or hard of hearing?

- Assistive listening systems – These systems amplify the speaker's voice for the listener. Advanced systems use infrared signals to a headset from a transmitter connected to a microphone. Simpler systems work on radio frequencies. The teacher wears a small microphone and the student wears a walkman-like headset.

- Closed captions – Closed captioning is available on all modern televisions and many films. It provides a written transcript of any spoken dialogue, which allows hearing impaired students to gain information from in-class video recordings.

Technology Resources

6.   Since technology is always changing, where can I go to learn more about what is currently available for my students and me?

- Educational Technology Training Centers (ETTC)– Each of New Jersey's 21 counties has an ETTC to help teachers integrate education technology into their classrooms. The state maintains a website that can link teachers to the site in their county. (http://www.state.nj.us/njded/techno/techtran.htm)

- Center for Enabling Technology (CET) – CET is dedicated to helping individuals with disabilities find technology tools to improve their lives – including their school experience. This is a useful resource for teachers to direct students and their parents to in order to help identify potentially helpful devices. (http://cetnj.ataccess.org)

- Technology, Educators & Children with disabilities – New Jersey (TECH-NJ) – TECH-NJ is a publication produced at The College of New Jersey. It contains discussions of best practices from the field, application of technology in the classroom, product reviews, and updates of related events around the state and in the region. (http://www.tcnj.edu/~technj)

TRANSITION PLANNING IN THE ABBOTT CONTEXT

School-to-work or college and transition planning for all secondary students are mandated remedies in the Abbott districts. The IDEA and, therefore, the New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC), require that transition planning for special-education students begin at or before age 14. By age 16, all students are required to have a transition plan. Generally speaking, transition plans explore three domains in the young adults' life: independent living, higher education/vocational training, and work. When writing a transition plan, the NJAC identifies five areas that must be addressed in order to maximize the chances of student success after the child leaves school. These areas are: instruction,

community experiences, daily living skills, employment, and related services. A solid transition plan is particularly important for students who are at-risk for school failure.

Research has shown that students who have special education needs are very likely to be under employed, have a limited social circle, and have few survival skills (such as being able to open and maintain a bank account) upon leaving high school (Wagner & Valdes, 1990). They are also more likely to end up in the criminal justice system. Programs that are specifically designed to give these students skills and direction for life beyond high school are likely to improve the currently dismal outcomes for low achieving students. The importance of these life skills is reflected in the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards of New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards, which include such issues as career planning, information technology, self-management, and safety skills.

As you work with students in planning their transition out of secondary school, it is important to remember that effective transition planning focuses on long-term goals and includes significant input from the students and, where appropriate, their families. Transition plans outline the nature of instruction and experiences a student will need to best prepare him or her for postsecondary life. For example, a child with a disability who plans to attend college would likely focus on attaining strong academic skills, clarifying career goals, and identifying colleges that have appropriate courses of study. Depending on the nature of the student's disability, he or she may want to contact prospective colleges' office for students with differing abilities (or a similar name) in order to determine the nature of support the schools offer.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504, colleges must provide reasonable accommodations for all students. However, accommodations and accessibility vary from institution to institution. Therefore, guided exploration must take place for the student to make an informed choice. For example, a student with a mobility impairment might want to visit the campuses of potential schools to determine the ease of movement within and between key buildings. A student with a learning disability may want to check the availability of tutors or the types of accommodations that have been offered by the college to students with similar disabilities.

Whether or not students plan to attend college, many will likely need assistance in planning a transition to independent living and employment. Some key steps to this sort of transition are the development of life skills (e.g., driving or taking public transportation, maintaining a home, or managing

money) as well as vocational programs. The development of these skills can often be embedded into other academic studies such as language arts, health and math, while others will need direct instruction within a specialized offering.

Students with even mild disabilities from economically challenged urban school districts face an even more difficult situation. Every aspect of life, education and work is affected by the urban experience. School to work and other transition programs in Abbott districts must address these unique difficulties as well as the basic transitional design.

DEVELOPING AN APPROPRIATE TRANSITION PLAN

Determining Goals

1. How do we help the student determine his or her goals?

- Create an awareness of opportunities – Pupils with disabilities within urban schools often have little awareness of the educational and work opportunities available in the region. They may not have exposure to diverse work settings and know only persons working in the schools or in blue-collar level jobs within the immediate community. Pupils need to visit a variety of work sites (hospitals, airports, restaurants, large businesses) and meet individuals with an array of careers within each setting. This experience should be initiated in the younger grades and accelerated within the secondary setting if pupils are to be self-directed in any choices they might make. Visits should not be limited to the immediate area but include surrounding more affluent communities.

- Clarify interests, skills and talents – While assessment of vocational interests can provide some insight into the student, practice has demonstrated that through regular discussions, members of the IEP team (including the teachers and parents) can best help the student determine his or her interests, skills and talents. They should also discuss the student's needs and preferences. How does the student prefer to spend his or her time now? What are the student's hobbies? Answers to these two questions can help identify the student's career goals. Once initial career goals are set, do these seem realistic given his or her current level of achievement? Are there steps that

can be taken to address any deficiencies so that the student might be successful? Or, are there related jobs that seem more appropriate given the student's current level of functioning. What education, if any, will be necessary in the remainder of high school (or in postsecondary study) and where can this be found?

- Provide on-the-job experiences – Beginning at the secondary level, students need real work experiences, which can be provided within the school setting and in the community. Work experiences must, of course, be carefully supervised and should include a classroom component so that students can process the experiences that happen in the field. These work experiences can be used to document and evaluate the student's employability skills and to help identify areas in need of further growth before employment will be successful. In-school employment can be provided in the library, offices, lunchrooms and in other settings. Some students have been given opportunities to be "teacher assistants" in arts and shop classes, assisting with younger students. Simple "businesses" can be set up to offer some students work experience. One school, for example, set up a small printing business, serving teachers in the building with teaching materials, invitations, letterhead and so forth. Profits from the business were used to expand the services available. Students were able to learn business management skills, general employability skills and graphic design.

- Clarify life needs – What will the student's housing needs be? Does he or she wish or need to live independently right after graduation? Will there be transportation issues? Does the student have the self-help and survival skills to live independently and take part in leisure activities? Does the student have the means to support him or herself through employment or other sources? If not, which of these skills can be taught in high school?

The New Jersey Developmental Disabilities Council (http://www.njddc.org), the State Parents Advocacy Network (http://www.spannj.org), The Department of Human Services (http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/index.html) and the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (http://www.nichcy.org.) maintain websites that have information about

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services to help individuals with disabilities live independently in the community. In addition, the New Jersey Partnership for Transition from School to Adult Life for Youth with Disabilities have produced a useful student-center handbook entitled *It's Your Life – Live it to the Max.*

Getting Students Involved

2. How do we get students involved in their own transition planning (Thoma, 1999)?

    - Maintain high expectations – Consistent with the standards-based model of reform, transition works best if students are expected to work productively at goals that are meaningful to them.

    - Teach students to take an active role – Students will not take an active part in their transition planning if they are not taught the advocacy skills necessary to do so. Role play with students and let them take part in gathering the materials that will inform their plans. Teach the students about the language used in Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and individualized transition plans.

    - Give students important input about the process – Students are more likely to benefit from the transition process if they have some input as to who will work with them on their plan. It is helpful to encourage the student to involve meaningful community members in the process.

    - Focus on supports, not programs – Avoid looking at preexisting programs and trying to match them with students. Rather, decide on the students' needs first and then attempt to find resources. By focusing on needs rather than programs, new and unexpected opportunities for support may emerge.

Assessing Job Readiness Skills

3. How do we help students assess their job-readiness skills (Knight & Aucoin,1999)?

- Look at life skills – Can the student communicate well? Does he or she take proper care of personal hygiene? Could he or she get to and from work in a timely fashion? For lower-functioning students whose focus is on life skills for independent living, it may be appropriate to concentrate on this area. The New Jersey Department of Human Services website (http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/index.html) is a good starting point for information about independent living. In addition, local chapters of disability-specific organizations such as United Cerebral Palsy, The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and the ARC (formally the Association for Retarded Citizens) can be invaluable sources of information about local independent or assisted living opportunities. They can also be useful in helping the student and his or her family to develop a network of social supports.

- Look at affective skills – Does the student get along with others? Can he or she participate with a team of workers? How are the student's conflict resolution skills? Many employers stress that these types of "soft skills" are as important, if not more important, than specific job skills. Prospective employers are often willing to teach employees job-specific skills if they exhibit well-developed soft skills. Structure behavior management systems with employability in mind as the outcome.

- Look at employability skills – Does the student problem solve? Is he or she able to adapt and willing to work hard? Does the student have appropriate skills for a beginner in the employment area? Students can obtain skills in a variety of ways.   Some districts have well-developed vocational education programs. Others look to community-based employment opportunities.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Check related websites on transition for pupils with disabilities:

- **Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE)** (http://www.avaonline.org)A professional organization of 38,000 teachers, counselors, school administrators, teacher educators and business/industry partners.

- **HEATH Resource Center (**http://www.heath-resource-center.org) Offers an information exchange about educational support services, policies, and procedures at postsecondary learning institutions.

- **National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET)** (http://ici.umn.edu/ncset/)Seeks to increase the capacity of national, state and local agencies and organizations to improve secondary education and transition results for youth with disabilities and their families.

- **National Transition Alliance for Youth with Disabilities (NTA)** (http://www.dssc.org/nta) Promotes the transition of youth with disabilities toward desired post-school experiences.

- **Transition Link (**http://www.transitionlink.com) An interactive web resource that contains practical information, up-to-date references, useful strategies, and links to a multitude of transition resources.

For resources on employment and job readiness in New Jersey check:

- **The New Jersey Department of Education** (http://www.state.nj.us/njded/voc)
- **The Workforce New Jersey Public Information Network** (http://www.wnjpin.com/index.html)
- The New Jersey Department of Labor (http://www.state.nj.us/labor/index.html)
- In addition, local disability-specific groups such as United Cerebral Palsy, The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and the ARC (formally the Association for Retarded Citizens) can be good resources for finding disability-friendly and/or supported workplaces.

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