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Editorial

This issue is devoted to systematic instruction and good teaching. For persons with disabilities, especially those with cognitive disabilities, to maximize their potential effective teaching strategies are essential. Parents and other family members must be aware of the role of systematic instruction in the education and transition process. This editorial focuses on the role of parents and families in the education, transition and rehabilitation process.

Students with disabilities and their families must be the focal point for planning transition and implementation. Student and family input in planning instructional objectives, career goals, and where the student wishes to live in the community is the critical missing link in most transition programs in the United States. In too many cases, professionals meet to review student progress and generally decide what they think students and families need or want. While most professionals are very well-intentioned, the reality is that the specific views of the student and the family are not well represented. Unfortunately, the school program and the long-term transition plan used in the community after school becomes a function of what the professionals think is required, as opposed to what the student and family want the plan to do.

There is an incumbent responsibility on families to exercise their rights. Many professionals become quite frustrated when they are unable to involve families in the process, as such apathy clearly hampers the development of truly responsive transition plans. Students and their families must be willing to determine their career choices and preparatory life experiences by indicating what they want and taking responsibility for their own planning.

There are many roles that parents and other family members can play in planning for transitions: however, four that emerge as key ones for consideration are:

1. The role of a parent or other family member who provides support and care for a young adult, but who may not consistently attend or provide input during individualized education program (IEP) team meetings.
2. A more active role as an IEP team member; someone who consistently attends IEP meetings, provides input to other team members, and advocates for quality services.
3. A member of a personal futures planning team.
4. A membership or leadership role in a local- or state-level interagency team whose mission is to address transition and/or other education services.

Many countries have laws which law require that the student and parents or other family members be allowed to participate as members of education planning teams. However, if the goals and concerns of the family and student are to be fully addressed, then participation is not enough. They must assume the leadership role in planning, including determining appropriate post-school goals, environments, and support services. This may produce some skepticism or resistance from the school staff members, and will likely be difficult for parents.

For example, consider the parent of a child who has been labeled as having a 'mild disability', such as: 'learning disability', 'educationable mental retardation', and what the options might be in

transition planning. There will be much planning time required with guidance counselors, psychologists, and the teacher. Specifically, the first point involves involving local community colleges, their course offerings, and certificate programs into the high school planning process. Teenagers with disabilities should have a coordinated on-site program in local community or 4-year colleges so that they have a sense of what the college experience is like. College can be a very overwhelming experience for students without disabilities and those with some impairment will need some extra help to level the playing field. There are, however, some 4-year colleges and 2-year colleges that are specifically more 'friendly' to those with disabilities than others. Parents and school personnel need to work closely to identify which college is optimal, and, at the same time, develop close working relationships with senior higher education personnel at local colleges in the area. Many students with mild impairments never move ahead because they have received no additional post-secondary education training.

A second major point is that students need to enter the world of work and demonstrate good competitive employment skills. This should be a key prerequisite for students before leaving their school program.

Finally, many of these students have been unfairly taken advantage of or teased by other classmates or community members; one way to overcome this lack of self-esteem is to encourage them to participate in school/community volunteer experiences and extra-curricular activities. These students will not succeed without having a better feeling about themselves, and many do when they leave school. The combination of targeting school community work experiences, employment, and targeted post-secondary internships and experiences as part of an education plan for 15–19 year-olds is an excellent prescription for success after they leave school.

Paul Wehman, Ph.D
Editor, JVR