

Adult Transition Program Review  
San Dieguito Union High School District  
February 1-2, 2017

A review of the San Dieguito Union High School District's (SDUHSD) Adult Transition Program (ATP) was conducted by Gary Greene, Ph.D., Special Education Consultant in Transition Services. The purpose of the review was to advise the SDUHSD special education administrative staff and ATP teachers of the strengths of the program and recommendations as to where the program can be improved. Information gathered in the review was obtained from the following sources: classroom observations, review of classroom transition curriculum and assessment materials, review of ITP documents, interviews with teachers, parents, and administrators, observation of community-based instruction (CBI) and recreation and leisure activities, visits to paid job sites, written surveys completed by ATP teachers, and a meeting with SDUHSD special education program administrative staff. A summary of findings from these data sources is presented below:

**Classroom Observations:** All ATP classrooms had adequate staff (i.e., teachers and instructional aides) to student ratios. Direct instruction was delivered in most classrooms, with the exception of one afternoon classroom period where students were working individually on laptop computers completing Read 180 activities. One classroom lesson involving the News2You curriculum was observed during a morning period. The News2You curriculum focused on current events and information typically found in printed newspapers. Students completed worksheets requiring written responses to vocabulary and reading comprehension questions based on this information. Reading grade level of the worksheets varied from below basic (e.g., pictures) to 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade level. Another observed classroom lesson involved preparing students to go to lunch at a local pizza restaurant. Students were provided menus, selected food items they wished to order, determined if they had sufficient money to pay for their order, and wrote all of this information on a worksheet.

**Transition Curriculum Materials and Assessments:** The transition curriculum materials and assessments were located in binders stored on shelves in the ATP classroom. The binders contained numerous transition skill lessons well matched to the needs of the ATP students. It is unknown the degree to which these materials were part of the current classroom instructional program versus being stored and no longer used. The Enderle-Severson Transition Assessment instrument was also located on the classroom shelves. This particular assessment is considered a valid and reliable instrument for determining a student's transition interests, strengths, preferences, and needs and can be utilized for transition planning. A shortcoming of this assessment instrument however is its banked transition goals, which are somewhat limited with respect to being "results oriented" in the areas of postsecondary education/training, employment, and independent living. For example, Enderle-Severson transition goals use words such as "attend" or "participate" rather than specify long-term adult transition outcomes for individuals with

disabilities (i.e., obtain an undergraduate degree, obtain paid employment in a career area of interest, competently perform independent living activities in the home).

Student portfolios containing completed classroom work were stored on classroom shelves and appeared to be up to date. Bins were also present in the classroom containing student work to be graded and filed.

**Review of ITP Documents:** Nine randomly selected ITP documents from the ATP were reviewed for their quality and compliance with IDEA transition services language requirements. The Indicator 13 criteria from the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) were used to assess compliance, along with qualitative methods. Results from the ITP document review were as follows: all required items on ITPs were present but the quality of transition-related written information on the documents varied from extensive to poor with respect to (a) identification and specification of age-appropriate transition assessment instruments, methods, and results, (b) transition assessment results summaries in the Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance section of the IEP, and (c) written ITP goals, many of which were not “results oriented”, vaguely written, or lacking specification and clarity. It is highly recommended that these aspects of the ITP be improved.

**ATP Interviews: Teachers:** The following information about the ATP was obtained from interviews with [REDACTED], ATP teachers: students are grouped by developmental and academic ability levels within the three separate ATP classrooms (e.g., low, middle, and high functioning); students do not interact with non-disabled peers during the day; paid employment opportunities (e.g., Workability) exist for some but not all ATP students, however in consultation with DOR and SDRC, development and in-servicing on a well-defined continuum for transitioning from Voc Ed to paid Work Experience is a process which is currently under way; several ATP students attend basic academic skills, elective, and college credit classes at Mira Costa College two days per week for no cost; CBI occurs one day per week for most ATP students, with the exception of a few students whose parents do not want them to be off campus; the ATP classroom curriculum focuses on development of life skills, behavior skills, social skills, community access, mobility, and safety training; the ATP has been located over the years in several areas in the SDUHSD; students of different developmental ability levels attended separate classrooms in either the north or south part of the school district; moving the ATP to a middle school site is a relatively recent occurrence; one teacher stated a preference for the program to be located in a community-based or community college setting in order for ATP students to have access to non-disabled peers, employment, and age appropriate recreation and leisure activities; some parents and ATP teachers consider the current middle school site to be inappropriate for students ages 18-22; a new facility is being built next to the public library to house the ATP next year; the current ATP does not conduct formal follow-up and evaluation designed to promote program improvement.

**Parent Interviews:** Parent concerns centered around: vocational opportunities, updated curriculum and technology, a structured pathway toward paid employment, transition planning and assessment, lack of opportunity for parent feedback, and IA training

The following information was obtained from interviews with parents of ATP students: behavior challenges interfering with learning led one parent to change placements for their child multiple times from the ATP to a high school Special Day Class (SDC) and eventually back to the ATP; the ATP does not offer paid employment for all students and has a very limited set of vocational options for students not participating in paid work; it is unknown to parents why the circumstances for paid employment for students with more moderate-severe disabilities changed from what was offered in prior years. Additional concerns were expressed about the ATP classroom curriculum, materials and methodology being outdated (e.g., making phone calls on a landline, telling time on an analogue watch), not individualized, nor based on thorough transition assessment results. It was shared that students are not being taught use of modern technology (e.g., cell phones, texting, email) and that classroom instruction often focuses on students completing “busy work” through whole group instruction (e.g., one size fits all instructional planning and delivery). Some parents felt that the transition planning process lacks specificity, reporting of quality transition assessment results, and creation of quality individualized transition goals, services, and supports; written ITP goals lack a long range focus, are very limited, and not challenging for students; IEP Team meetings do not offer adequate time and opportunity for parent input, tend to be adversarial versus collaborative, and often present predetermined information to parents. In addition, it was stated that training and resources about postsecondary adult transition programs and services is not provided to parents, particularly for students with more moderate to severe disabilities; communication with parents is limited to monthly classroom calendars, is not individualized, and does not use modern technology (e.g., blogs, texting, email, Facebook). Parents felt that no active evaluation and feedback mechanism exists for ATP parents to give input as to the quality of the program, outcomes achieved by their child during or after completing the program, or suggest program improvements. It was felt that the current ATP lacks creativity, “thinking outside of the box”, or implementation of new and different approaches to teaching transition skills. Parents also expressed concern about substitute aides lacking training and capability to perform some of the more challenging aspects of the job (e.g., toileting and diaper changing students).

**Observation of Community-Based Instruction (CBI), Recreation and Leisure Activities, and Paid Employment:** ATP students were observed on a CBI outing to a pizza parlor for lunch. Some of the students walked from the school campus to a park nearby the restaurant to meet up with other ATP students who were transported to the park by a school van or had attended morning classes and activities at Mira Costa College. There was adequate adult supervision for all ATP students participating in the CBI activity. Once all of the students and adult supervisors were gathered at the park, everyone walked to a nearby restaurant, entered, and lined up to order lunch. All students appeared capable of ordering their food, paying, receiving change, taking their receipt, and waiting for their name to be called to pick up their order. After eating lunch and

disposing of trash, everyone exited the pizza parlor and returned to school via the same means of transportation previously used. The CBI activity was well organized, implemented, and appeared to be enjoyable for the students

During afternoon time, students participated in a Zumba class taught at the nearby public library. The class was conducted by a trained teacher (unknown if she was employed by the city or school district) who modeled various dance movements for the students to follow. A large group of students located in an open corner of the library mirrored the teacher's moves and appeared to be enjoying the recreation and leisure activity. Adequate support and supervision was available. Students who did not want to participate sat quietly nearby. The activity lasted about an hour and the students subsequently returned to their classes at the middle school.

A third observation was of ATP students involved in Workability paid employment. Two sites were visited: CVS Pharmacy and Marshalls retail store. [REDACTED], Job Placement Assistant, supervised the students at their jobs. Two male students working at CVS Pharmacy were observed dusting and cleaning shelves in the store. They both wore uniforms and had nametags. They were friendly and helpful to customers and performed their jobs efficiently without direct supervision. When asked about their jobs, including job application, interview, training, and independent performance, these students capably explained all aspects of their employment. [REDACTED] said their wages are paid by check and mailed to their individual homes. When asked about job development, Ms. Shoecraft said that she has performed this role since 2005. She indicated that most employers whom she approaches are open and willing to hire her students. Two other ATP female students in the Workability program were subsequently observed at Marshalls. These students were working in the back room unpacking shoes and putting hangers on them for display on the main floor. Both of the girls were well dressed, groomed, and wore appropriate make up. They were friendly, appeared well trained, and worked productively at their job. They were supervised by an ATP instructional aid holding a checklist to monitor their correct performance of the required steps of the job. A brief interview with this aid took place, and she reported that the ATP students were doing very well at their jobs.

**ATP Teacher Written Survey:** This survey assessed the following information about each ATP teacher: background and training, current classroom setting, classroom curriculum and instruction utilized, transition follow-up procedures, and transition services expertise. Much of the information obtained by the teachers from their survey responses has been previously reported in interviews. All of the ATP teachers possessed appropriate background and training and had been teaching in the program for many years. The curriculum and instruction they reported using with their students focused on acquisition of independent living, mobility, recreation and leisure, money skills, functional reading, writing, math, community, vocational, and employment skills needed for adulthood. The teachers shared information about the history and evolution of the ATP and the advantages/disadvantages of various locations of the program throughout the years. Strengths of the program mentioned by the teachers included the following:

community access, community college participation, use of public transportation, tours of adult transition agencies, interagency collaboration, student participation in age appropriate activities, student choice-making and self-advocacy opportunities, futures planning, student portfolios, vocational training and paid employment opportunities, and teacher/aide supervision. Specific aspects of desired program improvement mentioned by the teachers included the following: more opportunities for students to interact with non-disabled peers, need for more individualized transition assessments such as MAPs procedure, opportunities for more students to take community college credit classes, need for more training and collaboration for instructional aides, revisiting the notion of grouping students by developmental level, better transitioning planning for students (i.e., use of person-centered planning techniques), opportunity for students with high school diplomas to participate in the ATP, and the need to provide more information to incoming ATP parents. All of the teachers reported that follow-up evaluation data was being gathered from former ATP students, but primarily only from students who had participated in the Workability program. Phone calls, questionnaires, and in-person contact were the methods being utilized to gather follow-up information. Finally, a 1-4 point Likert-type survey (1=very limited to 4=very strong) was completed by the ATP teachers to assess their transition services expertise in important aspects of their jobs. Teacher responses to most survey items were either 3 or 4, thereby demonstrating strong teacher confidence in their transition knowledge and skill. Exceptions were teachers who rated themselves a 2 on the following survey items: conducting formal transition assessments, teaching students skills needed for success in postsecondary education settings (e.g., college, trade schools), and interagency collaboration; two teachers rated themselves a 1 on gathering follow-up data from students who have exited the program.

All ATP teachers reported participating in school district supported transition staff development activities they considered beneficial to them (e.g., NCSSE trainings). Examples of additional training and support they would like to receive were in the following areas: transition curriculum, assessment, data collection, collaboration with Regional Center, creation of a written ATP brochure describing all aspects of the program to parents, and clarification of expected outcomes of ATP students.

**SDUHSD Special Education Program Administrative Staff Meeting:** Participants in this meeting included the Director of Special Education, Coordinator of Special Education, Program Specialist, and Workability Coordinator. The purpose of the meeting was to present program review findings and discuss potential areas for program improvement. Overall this district offers a program with many quality components for preparing transition-aged youth with disabilities for adulthood. Positive aspects of the ATP were as follows: the ATP is similar to adult transition classrooms implemented in other school districts throughout the southern California region; ATP students have access to multiple businesses in the community, opportunities to participate in CBI, recreation and leisure activities, and transportation and mobility training; a large number of 1:1 aides are working with ATP students; the ATP is compliant with most IDEA requirements and offers FAPE to the majority of program participants; the ATP is managed and implemented by well trained, experienced teachers with appropriate

background for running the program; meaningful, paid employment is offered to some ATP students. Areas where the ATP program can be improved were as follows: transition assessment materials, process, and methodology needs to be significantly improved in order to comply with IDEA transition services language requirements; written ITP goals need to be “results-oriented” and represent long-term adult outcomes for students rather than “place-oriented” goals which are short-term in nature; the ITP should drive the IEP and be the primary document from which curriculum and instruction is designed and delivered to ATP students; several aspects of the ATP need to be updated to reflect functional skills needed in today’s society (e.g., competency and use of current technology such as laptop computers, cell phones, web searches, text and email communication, Facebook, Twitter, I-Chat, Instant Messaging, and reading time digitally); a continuum of meaningful, vocational options needs to be offered to all ATP students as opposed to only those students with more mild-moderate disabilities however in consultation with DOR and SDRC, development and in-servicing on a well-defined continuum for transitioning from Voc Ed to paid Work Experience is a process which is currently under way.; heavy reliance on 1:1 instructional aides reduces opportunities for ATP students to become functionally independent; efforts should be made to fade and reduce the amount of 1:1 aide instructional support to ATP students.

**Summary and Final Recommendations:** After completing a thorough and comprehensive review of the SDUHSD Adult Transition Program, the following recommendations are made regarding how to improve the program:

1. Engage in a strategic planning process involving all ATP constituents (e.g., parents, teachers, support staff, job coaches, administrators, adult transition agency representatives, community representatives) to create a new mission statement, program goals, short and long-term plan, and evaluation procedure for the ATP. Doing so will help update the program and create a common set of core principles and roadmap to the future of the ATP, as well as create the potential for greater buy-in from all constituents involved in the program.
2. Provide opportunities for ATP teachers to visit and observe other model adult transition programs in the southern California region that are different than the SDUHSD ATP. These include adult transition programs offered on college campuses, in community-based settings, or other more inclusive environments with access to non-disabled peers.
3. Provide professional development training to ATP teachers specifically aimed at promoting program improvement. Potential training venues include district staff development days and attendance at state and national transition conferences sponsored by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and Division of Career Development and Transition. Recommended training priorities include (a) improving the age-appropriate transition assessment process and reporting of transition assessment results on ITPs, (b) writing better, “results-oriented” transition goals on ITPs, (c) learning how make the ITP drive the IEP and

instruction provided to ATP students, and (d) improving the curriculum and instruction offered to ATP students to facilitate optimal adult post-school outcomes in IDEA-required areas of transition.

4. Consider adopting an updated transition curriculum for teachers to use with ATP students in the classroom. The Life Centered Career Education (LCCE) curriculum published by CEC is highly recommended. Adoption of new and different transition assessment instruments and methods is also recommended. Consider purchasing *Demystifying Transition Assessment* (Thoma and Tamura, 2013) from Brookes Publishing Company as a resource for all ATP teachers to help them improve their transition assessment competencies.
5. Expand the opportunities for all ATP students to participate in vocational opportunities, including those with more moderate-severe disabilities. Consult with Regional Center and Department of Rehabilitation personnel on how to potentially design and deliver paid, integrated employment to all ATP students. Explore the possibility of job enclaves as one means for accomplishing this objective.
6. Create an ATP parent advisory committee consisting of parents of current and past ATP students. Utilize this committee to provide ongoing input into all aspects of the ATP, including program strengths and needed improvements. This will facilitate a greater sense of ownership and feeling that parent input matters to the ATP.
7. Consider having weekly or monthly meetings of all ATP teachers to discuss all aspects of the program. Create an annual set of goals for all teachers to collaborate on, along with ongoing monitoring and evaluation of these goals. This can be part of the overall ATP strategic plan.
8. Create a formal follow-up and evaluation procedure to gather data from students who have completed and exited the ATP. Assess the quality and outcomes of their adult lives for up to three years after completing the ATP. Use this information to guide program improvement efforts.

It is hoped that the contents of this report is helpful at highlighting the strengths and areas where the ATP can improve. The program has many positive aspects aimed at serving the transition needs of its students, but there are certain aspects of the ATP that can be updated and improved. Constituents of the program appear to be open and willing to commit to helping the program grow and get better, particularly the administrative staff. Everyone needs to “be pulling on the same rope and in the same direction” in order for this to occur. Thank you for the opportunity to review the ATP and offer suggestions about how to maximize the program services and supports offered to its students and parents. If further consultation is needed, please do not hesitate to ask for my input and assistance.

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