

Appendix 9: Implications for the Education System

The goal of our special education system for people with disabilities, including those with the most severe disabilities, should be to offer them the greatest potential to be fully employed in the community, working forty hours/week with benefits, at a wage level per hour that allows them to live a high quality life (above the poverty level) and reach for their full potential. This will take a different approach and significant partnering between the medical, school and adult service delivery communities.

In order for the employment situation to improve in Washington, people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) must be better identified and the school to work transition approach individualized.

Implications

Due to education's primary role in the lives of children with autism, the following points are critical:

- a. Improved timelines of identification services at an early age of individuals with ASD in Washington.
- b. The employment focus starts at the earliest stages of special education and have that be reflected by the development of vocational skills and an employment outcome emphasis.
- c. Ensure that parent, guardian, care givers, educators-administrators, and adult service provider agencies have ongoing training in the process of vocational transition from school to work.
- d. Schools, Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, and Social Security Administration should collaborate to assist families in the understanding and utilization of work incentives such as, but not limited to, Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)/Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE)/Individual Earned Income Exclusion.
- e. Recognize that successful ongoing retention of a job in the community, particularly for people with ASD, will require ongoing supports, not the typical "time limited" ones.
- f. Realize that the school to work transition planning process time for people with ASD is intensive and intentional.
- g. The school to work transition planning process should begin, by law, no later than age sixteen. With that said, it would be advantageous to begin the process before age 16 (IDEA, 2004). It should encompass a job goal working back with objectives each year until the present time (backward planning). This should include situational assessments and active work experiences with needed supports. This process should lead toward paid work at the end of the school years when the entitlement to supports ends.

- h. Special education programs should be evaluated on the effectiveness of individual post school employment outcomes in terms of:
 - Hours worked per week in the community (not sheltered setting).
 - Average hourly earnings.
 - Monthly earnings versus the Substantial Gainful Activity Level (SGA).
 - The retention time of the job.
 - The ability to get benefits as well as earnings to reduce government dependency.
 - Their ability to integrate choices of the person with disabilities into the employment outcome.
 - The number of individuals who are actually employed upon graduation.
 - The level of financial/social/residential independence e.g., full integration into the community with needed supports.
- i. Schools collaborate with partners in this process including adult services agencies who will engage in the “hand off” process as well as government and funding agencies who will provide fiscal or resource supports.
- j. Ensure the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team concept is comprehensive to include these other groups at appropriate times.
- k. Recognize that individuals with ASD will require particular help with, but not limited to:
 - Behavior support and self regulation of behavior
 - Socialization skills
 - Communication skills
 - Ongoing supports to reflect the individual needs