

# An Evaluation of Transition Planning for High School Students with Emotional and/or Behavioral Disorders (EBD)

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## Abstract

This study examined the views of high school students with Emotional and/or Behavioral Disorders (EBD) regarding the effectiveness of services provided by their school to help them prepare to transition from the school environment to post-school life, and their self-reported readiness for this transition. Thirty-four participants completed the Transition Planning Inventory (Clark & Patton, 1997) and answered questions about school services and plans after high school. Students reported high levels of competency across nine skill areas. Two-thirds of students reported plans to attend college after high school. One in five students indicated that more college preparation and greater class selection to match with individual interests would improve school transitioning services.

## Review of Literature

Past research indicates that children and adolescents diagnosed with EBD tend to be male; often display disruptive behaviors; and tend to be noncompliant, aggressive, and verbally abusive. Youths with EBD often have difficulty forming and maintaining social relationships (Reid, Gonzales, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004). School dropout rates for youths with EBD are higher than 50% (Armstrong, Dedrick, & Greenbaum, 2003; Boreson, 2006), and after leaving school most find themselves restricted to unstable, low wage, unskilled jobs (Zigmond, 2006). They are also likely to demonstrate higher rates of risky behaviors than the general population, and tend to become involved in the criminal justice system at an earlier age, and with considerably higher frequency (Armstrong, Dedrick, & Greenbaum, 2003).

## Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to obtain the perspectives of high school students with EBD regarding the following three questions:

1. How effective is transition programming in addressing students' needs?
2. In what transitioning areas do students perceive themselves as lacking skills or competence?
3. In what transitioning areas do students perceive themselves as skilled or competent?

## Method

### ❖ Participants

- Convenience sample of 34 students with EBD, receiving special education services from a public high school in the Midwest

### ❖ Instruments

- Transition Planning Inventory (Clark & Patton, 1997)
- Five additional questions about school transitioning services and students' plans after high school

### ❖ Procedure

- Students were individually invited to participate in this study
- Students rated their degree of agreement or disagreement regarding their skills in nine transitioning areas
- Students responded to five questions about school transitioning services and their post-high school plans

## Results

### Mean Response Rates of Students' Self-Reported Transitioning Skills

Transition Planning Inventory (Clark & Patton, 1997)

RATINGS INDICATED STUDENTS' DEGREE OF AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT AND WERE BASED ON THE FOLLOWING RATINGS:

5 = STRONGLY AGREE

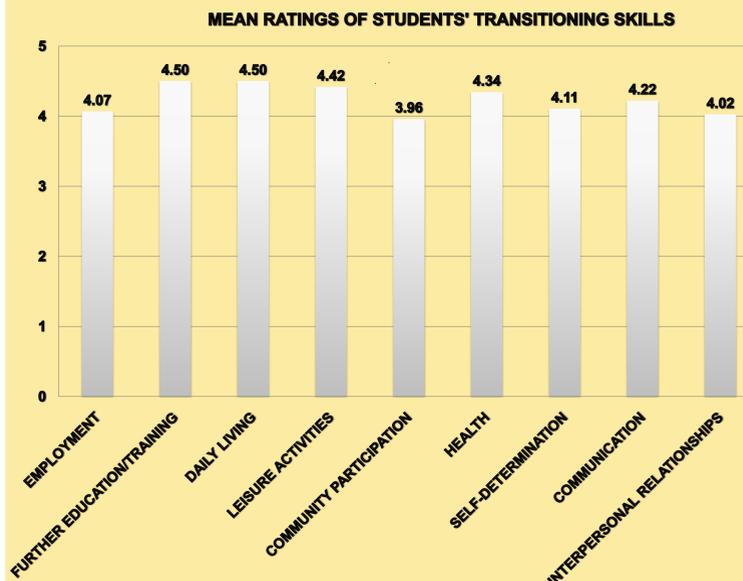
4 = AGREE

3 = SLIGHTLY AGREE

2 = SLIGHTLY DISAGREE

1 = DISAGREE

0 = STRONGLY DISAGREE



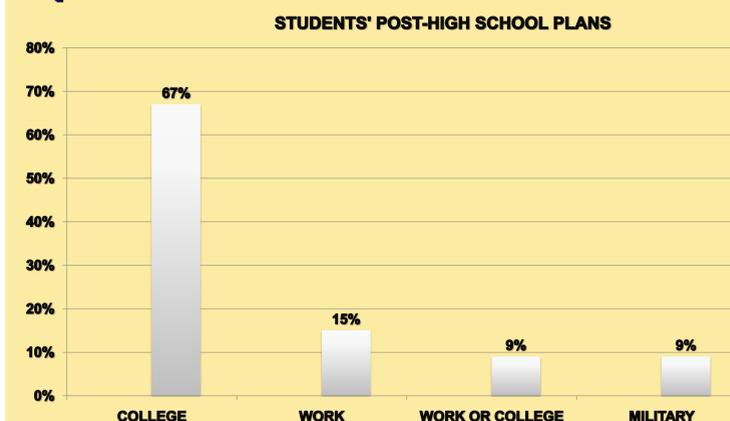
Despite the issues of questionable reliability and risks of overanalyzing the data due to a small sample size, it does seem interesting to note several findings.

- As students with EBD get older (grade), they perceived themselves as having more trouble getting along well with their family ( $r = -.402^*$ ).
- Students perceived that they could do well in a program after high school that meets their needs if they can find needed community services and resources ( $r = .557^{**}$ )

\*Significance at .05 level

\*\*Significance at .01 level

## Open-Ended Questions



What services provided by your school do you feel have been helpful in preparing you for life after high school?

- ❖ Over half of the students (N=19) identified school classes
- ❖ Eighteen percent (N=6) identified the work program
- ❖ Eighteen percent (N=6) identified special education program and related services

What suggestions do you have for improving school transitioning services?

- ❖ One-fifth (N=7) said greater class selection to match their interests and more college preparation services
- ❖ Twelve percent (N=4) said greater autonomy/involvement in placement decisions and school rules
- ❖ Nine percent (N=3) said specific career classes pertaining to jobs and planning their future
- ❖ Forty-four percent (N=15) responded they had no suggestions or that no improvements were needed

## Discussion

- ❖ Students perceived themselves as having most of the skills necessary to make an effective transition from school to post-school life.
  - Further research should assess the accuracy of students' perceptions.
  - Research shows that less than half of students with EBD graduate from high school, and 52% of young adults with EBD are unemployed four years after completing or leaving high school (this is the highest unemployment rate of any disability group) (Boreson, 2006).
- ❖ Two-thirds expressed plans to attend college as compared to a national rate of 25.6% of students in EBD programs that usually attend post-secondary vocational schools or colleges (Boreson, 2006).
  - Students may need a more accurate understanding of what college entails to make realistic decisions about their post-high school plans.
  - For students where college is a realistic expectation, they may need further assistance with accessing college resources.
  - For students where college is not a realistic expectation, they may need further assistance with job coaching and related services.

## Implications of Research

- ❖ The accuracy of students' perceptions on their readiness for this transition to post-school life is questionable.
- ❖ Further research is needed to assess students' readiness to transition to post-school life (teachers' perceptions and parents' perceptions should supplement students' self-reported ratings).
- ❖ Students with EBD need assistance to help them make reasonable decisions regarding their "next step" after school.

## References

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