

Improving Transition Outcomes

An Innovative State Alignment Grant for Improving Transition Outcomes
for Youth with Disabilities Through the Use of Intermediaries

CASE (Career and Self Exploration) Curriculum Facilitates Transition and Improves Career Outcomes

Vision

Each youth will make an empowered and well-informed career choice by engaging in and directing a personal career search that results in employment consistent with their vocational goals and values. As a result, students will be successful in their chosen career due to an increase in self-awareness and gained knowledge of the needed skills and resources needed to perform their selected vocational career. In addition, students will be able to identify any future resources needed to improve their vocational outcomes.

Target Population

Youth with disabilities who are juniors and seniors in high school was our target population but we learned that the curriculum is adaptable to various populations.

Governance Group

Iowa Department
for the Blind

Iowa Department
of Education

Iowa Department
of Human Services

Iowa Division
of Persons with
Disabilities

Iowa Vocational
Rehabilitation
Services

Iowa Governor's
Developmental
Disabilities Council

Iowa Workforce
Development

Team

West Sioux Community Schools

Hope Haven, Inc

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Workforce Development Center

Hawarden Area Partnership for Progress

Youth

Parents

Northwest Area Education Agency

Northwest Transition Advisory Board

Demographics

Hawarden is a small, rural community of 2,478. Hawarden continues to grow as a community and has welcomed a growing in the Hispanic population the last several years. Hawarden boasts as impressive amount of businesses in a variety of fields including manufacturing, medical, restaurant, welding, auto mechanics, construction, financial, telecommunications and retail. Hawarden has over 85 potential employers including 16 manufacturing and agricultural businesses, 12 retail businesses and 10 eating establishments. Hawarden's largest employers include the West Sioux Community Schools, Iowa Lamb and the Hawarden Hospital. Hawarden recreation options include a golf course, bowling alley, swimming pools, and parks with hiking trails and camping.

Strengths

Hope Haven, Inc., a community rehabilitation provider, established in 1964 began offering psychiatric rehabilitation services in 1988. They are a leader in Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitation services in Iowa. Their solid reputation in northwest Iowa and history of collaborative partnerships has been a significant factor in their ability to secure funding from various grants and agency programs. They are seen as a community team player and as such easily attract partners to the table.

The West School School Board, Superintendent, Principal, Special Education Teacher and para-educator are exemplary. Their willingness to implement and partner in perfecting the CASE curriculum, in addition to their regular duties, speaks volumes about their commitment to providing a solid education that not only educates but prepares youth for life beyond the classroom. Having researched and weighed the pros and cons, they chose to devote significant staff time to CASE and enthusiastically accepted the responsibilities that accompany partnership.

The Hawarden Area Partnership for Progress (HAPP) stepped up to the table with valuable resources. CASE would not have been as successful without their continual support. A curriculum such as CASE needs business partners. Only those in the business world can provide students that unique perspective. While one might be able to duplicate in a textbook the information they bring to the classroom, it is impossible to duplicate the connection that results from these professionals sharing their knowledge with and fielding questions from the youth. We must note the local media and their interest in and support of CASE and Falcon Joe's. Surely every community member was aware of West Sioux's CASE class and Falcon Joe's.

The accolades given these partners do not diminish the others who valiantly worked to develop, implement, perfect, sustain, and replicate CASE. Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Workforce Development Center, Northwest Area Education Agency and Transition Advisory Board, and most especially the youth and parents who devoted time and resources to CASE were instrumental in moving it from a good idea to reality.

Note from Improving Transition Outcomes:

If your community does not have a history of successful collaboration among team partners, we strongly suggest that you refer to the Transition Partners Replication Template. A solid foundation, where team members trust one another and openly collaborate, is essential to successfully implementing and sustaining an intervention such as CASE.

Challenge

A spring 2004 school district survey of community members, parents and students indicated that West Sioux students were not receiving adequate career guidance. As is the case in many communities, students with disabilities require additional and more focused supports in transitioning than their peers without disabilities. Additionally, the youth were leaving high school without work experience, negatively impacting their confidence in themselves and their ability to move into employment upon graduation.

Solution

Hope Haven, Inc. had been using a curriculum based on the person-centered model of service known as Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitation (IPR) for adults with mental illness to obtain satisfying jobs, living situations and education environments in the community. The IPR curriculum, based on Boston University's Psychiatric Rehabilitation model, had been successfully implemented by Hope Haven since 1988. Hope Haven believed this model for successful community transition could also be used as a career development curriculum for students with disabilities. The local IVRS counselor, a strong supporter of the IPR model, agreed. Hope Haven offered to assist West Sioux in implementing the curriculum in the classroom setting with the expectation of determining the usefulness of the curriculum. West Sioux accepted Hope Haven's offer and a lasting partnership was born.

Hope Haven took the initiative to form the Consortium for Improving Transition Outcomes (CITO) to support implementation of the curriculum and the entrepreneurship component. A history of successful collaboration in the community facilitated team development. CITO team members went to work. They established the goal of increasing the percentage of youth transitioning from high school into successful employment, designated students in the Resource Room at West Sioux High School as the target population, and decided to provide a work experience component.

Acutely aware of the importance of maintaining a good partnership with the local business community, CITO team members didn't want to compete with an established business. Therefore, they decided it would be best to develop their own business and agreed on an in-school coffee shop. Thus the students would have the opportunity to benefit from CASE in and outside the classroom by:

- Researching the skills and education necessary for the career of their choice
- Participating in job shadows and business tours
- Learning from local business leaders speaking to their CASE class
- Gaining real life work experience through the coffee shop
- Interacting with community members who purchased their products

Plan

Hope Haven would train the West Sioux Special Education teacher to use the curriculum and in turn would assist with modifying and perfecting the curriculum according to classroom interaction and student need. West Sioux students and staff would be responsible for gathering information for the entrepreneurship component, the in-school coffee shop. CITO team members would be a resource for individual youth, facilitate connecting with the local business community, problem solve as issues arose, and plan for sustainability without grant funds.

Implementation

CASE Curriculum: Using a train-the-trainer model, implementation started with Hope Haven providing an overview of the CASE curriculum for key West Sioux and Area Education Agency staff members. The first semester, a Hope Haven practitioner taught the first two phases of the CASE curriculum to the resource room students while the Special Education teacher and para-educator observed. The following semester, the teacher, with consultation and technical assistance from the Hope Haven practitioner, taught Phase 1 and 2 to a new group of students and observed the Hope Haven practitioner teaching Phase 3 with the original group of students. In this manner the teacher came to independently teach the curriculum with consultation as needed available from the Hope Haven practitioner.

Originally the CASE class met every other day during study hall time. There were several reasons for this. One was that the class was still on probationary status with the school board, awaiting verification that it met their curriculum standards. This on-off schedule posed several problems. The two most significant of which were slow progress in completing the curriculum and the lack of daily continuity. Beginning with the second semester, the CASE class met every day.

Drawing on classroom experiences, West Sioux and Hope Haven staff revised the CASE curriculum in the summer of 2006. With the curriculum ready for publication and replication, team partners began marketing CASE at key educational conferences in the state. Awareness of the innovative curriculum grew and their marketing efforts were enhanced with three national conferences.

Entrepreneurship Component: The West Sioux School principal assisted and supported students in researching coffee shops, coffee shop equipment and the supplies needed. Students were required to work at Falcon Joe's and were responsible for daily operation of the coffee shop, including ordering supplies, marketing their products, and financial transactions as well as customer service issues. Originally working in the coffee shop was a part of the youth's CASE grade. Youth who regularly failed to show up for work in the coffee shop, failed and then repeated the class. Working in the coffee shop is still a critical piece of their CASE grade but now the youth working each shift equally divide the tips and also receive a nominal wage of one dollar. Initially open to the community every morning from 7:30 to 8:30 am, in response to successful business the coffee shop now remains open until 9:30 am. Coffee shop revenues allowed the school to hire an community member to assist with managing the coffee shop. Originally this responsibility was assigned to the para-educator.

Vocational Exploration & Community Involvement

Vocational exploration is a key component of the CASE curriculum. As a part of curriculum work, they research career fields that interest them. Activities outside the classroom include business tours and job shadow experiences that allow students to gather first hand information on the skills needed to perform specific jobs. They learn from guest speakers the fine points operating a business and what employers look for in new employees. All of this in addition to gaining first hand work experience by logging the required hours at Falcon Joe's.

The Hawarden Community has been critical to the success of CASE at West Sioux. Lead by the Hawarden Area Partnership for Progress (HAPP), community members have served as guest speakers, provided job shadowing experiences, and purchased products from Falcon Joe's! HAPP members have also helped CASE students with securing employment and assisted with resource mapping the Hawarden area.

Results

CASE was implemented during the 2004-2005 school year and has 3 years of operational data. The students who enrolled in the first CASE cohort graduated in 2005 and 2006, but only the 2006 graduates completed the entire curriculum. Because West Sioux School is small, the number of special education participants is insufficient for any meaningful data analysis.

The special education students in the graduating class of 2004 (N=7) were among the students included in the comparison group. The special education students in the graduating classes of 2005 and 2006 who did not participate in CASE (N=3 and N=1) also were used for comparison. Among the 7 students from the graduating class of 2004, all graduated and all obtained full-time employment. None pursued post-secondary training and all were engaged in minimum wage jobs. Four of the seven were still living with parents.

Data from the West Sioux High School graduating classes of 2005, 2006, and 2007:

- 22 students have completed CASE
- 7 students have graduated and are using their CASE career plans and 1 will graduate December, 2007
- 14 students will graduate with CASE career plans this school year
- None of the comparison group pursued post-secondary education while all participants either have begun or have plans through VR to begin post-secondary education
- Comparison group members are earning an average of \$8.25 per hour and 7 of 11 are working full-time CASE participants, once they complete post-secondary education will earn between \$9.00 and \$22.00 per hour as starting wages with most scheduled to earn over \$12.00 per hour

Anecdotal findings regarding individual youth and employers:

- Local employers were informed of CASE purpose and curriculum, became involved in school, and supported entrepreneurial project
- Employers sought to hire youth with disabilities
- Employers recognized participating in school-based programs for youth with disabilities was profitable investment in their future workforce
- Youth bonded with employers, saw a future after school, and were more engaged in academics
- Youth saw post-secondary education as possible and were more active in their IEP/IPE planning
- Youth became more engaged in community activities
- Reciprocal interactions of youth, employers, and other community members created greater sense among youth of self-worth and value to community
- Youth invested in the community by purchasing a house

Students' response to working in the coffee shop includes "Sometimes you have to get up early to be at work on time" and "A business takes time and is hard work." Obviously the youth are gaining real work world experiences. West Sioux opened up CASE as an elective to every student in the 2006-2007 school year; one general education student enrolled. The stigma regarding special education classes within the school was reduced.

The Maurice, Orange City, Floyd Valley (MOC/FV) High School is currently using CASE in their special education room. Nine MOC/FV students were enrolled in the first class. They are operating an in-school smoothie shop.

CASE success stories

One student initially planned to complete the nursing program at the local community college. Through CASE she had learned that she was interested in the nursing profession. However, the rigorous requirements that nursing students need to meet in order to graduate became a concern. Drawing on her CASE experience, she investigated other health care industry careers and decided to instead pursue a career as a Certified Nurses Aide. As she had learned in CASE, she contacted her local IVRS counselor and sought assistance. She successfully completed the course and is currently working as a Certified Nurses Aide. In addition, using tools she learned in CASE, she evaluated her housing options and recently purchased a home. When asked what she would do if she ever wanted to change her career, she said, "I still have my Voc Rehab counselor's number so I would call him for help."

Another CASE student shared that she lacked the self-confidence to seek after-school or summer employment until she started the CASE class. Through her work experience at the coffee shop and self-esteem building activities in CASE class, she pursued and secured a job working at a local restaurant! She said that she learned how to deal with and communicate with the public through CASE, which boosted her self-confidence. Today she is a high school graduate and is working as a Certified Nurses Aide at a local nursing home.

Yet another CASE student wanted to work in refrigeration. He struggled with whether to study refrigeration at a community college or to seek employment in the refrigeration department at the local ice cream plant. After completing the CASE class, he decided to attend college. Certification in refrigeration would increase his employment options. With certification he would be able to pursue a job with another company and wouldn't be limited to the local ice cream plant.

Bonus

Students have had opportunities to speak about CASE and share their success stories through presentations in the local community as well as at the state level. In November 2005, two students shared their success stories at the Iowa School Board Association Conference. In March 2006, Falcon Joe's hosted Hawarden's Red Hat Society with students providing a short program on CASE. In May 2007, two students joined West Sioux and Hope Haven staff in a CASE presentation for the State Board of Education. Opportunities such as these are confidence boosters. As one student commented at the State Board of Education presentation, "if it weren't for CASE I wouldn't do things like coming here to speak to you today."

Challenges

Among the challenges of rewriting the curriculum were:

- Determining which elements were essential and which were optional
- Shortening the curriculum to fit into one semester
- Making the language student friendly

One challenge that has been difficult to resolve is dedicating time during the school day for business tours and job shadow opportunities. Even tours and job shadows in the local community do not fit into the typical classroom schedule. Another challenge has been devoting sufficient time to securing and completing vocational exploration activities within the school semester. This can be a daunting task for the teacher and the youth. It takes time to develop business relationships that are adequate for generating guest speakers, business tours, and job shadow experiences.

Lessons Learned

- The CASE curriculum is valuable for Special Education and general education students.
- The amount of time to complete the CASE curriculum may vary from one semester to an entire school year depending on the student. Allow for flexibility as needed.

Recommendations

- Develop a good relationship with the local Chamber of Commerce or business group. Rather than arranging the vocational exploration activities yourself, share your parameters with them and let them suggest the appropriate activities.
- Never stop resource mapping your community. Resource mapping is an on-going activity; think of it as a verb rather than a noun. We recommend that you start prior to implementing the CASE curriculum.
- A good way to start resource mapping is by attending local Chamber of Commerce meetings and sharing information on the purpose of the CASE class. At these meetings you can assess the willingness of members to serve as a guest speaker, allow business tours, or provide job shadow opportunities.
- If you can, conduct resource mapping as a group activity, the momentum created a few volunteering may spur others to do the same. Be sure to note all who are interested in helping with vocational exploration activities.
- Develop and nurture a contact within the Chamber. This individual can be invaluable in setting up vocational exploration activities and guest speakers for the CASE class. A strong partnership with the local business community is good for everyone involved.
- Include key school staff, i.e. counselors, in CASE career planning. By including these key staff members, the career development process can include the expertise of these professionals in not only planning but in tackling any barriers that may arise.
- Whether its supplies or equipment that you need for your entrepreneurship component, negotiate free marketing in exchange for purchasing “at cost” from a local business. This creates a win-win situation for all.

Restrictions

- CASE cannot be implemented without the 2-day training provided with purchase of the curriculum.
- CASE does not use traditional teaching methods; it is student-driven with the teacher serving as a guide.
- Students must have the freedom to explore careers that interest them even though their choices may initially seem unrealistic. The curriculum, if presented correctly, will guide the student to careers that are more realistic for their values, interests, and abilities.

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