



Transition Bulletin - Winter Issue

To Coordinate... To Enhance... To Serve... Through Communication

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Question & Answer with Dave Mallot About the LearnPort Assessment Module

Dave Malott has been leading the way to launch the new LearnPort Module titled "Measuring the Possible". This module is being released later this year. Dave has been serving on the MI TOP Core Planning team for 5 years. He worked as a Transition Coordinator for Branch Intermediate school District. In this article, Cynthia Wright Transition Consultant from MRS interviews Dave about his views on transition assessments and why quality assessments are so critical to transition students.

Q: Cynthia: Hi Dave. It is a pleasure getting this chance to talk with you in depth about assessment. I know you have been spending a lot of time developing the content for the LearnPort class. Why is Transition Assessment an area of interest for you?

A: One of the best experiences an educator can have is to see a student who is struggling in school become engaged in their education process. The process of transition assessment can be an important tool for educators to develop a positive relationship with students and help them view education as an important step in reaching their life goals.

Q: I know I'm asking you to think back many years to when you were a teenager, but in your own life can you think of any assessments or experiences that helped you learn about your interests and strengths that guided you in what you wanted to do with your life?

A: I don't recall any transition related assessments while in school. The experiences that most impacted what I wanted to do in life probably centered on family activities and discussions. It was small comments my parents made that showed that they valued the work of an individual in a particular profession. I was also influenced by teachers who pointed out relative strengths.

That is, in part, why I believe it is critical that transition assessment include family input and be strength based. Research shows that nearly 60% of working young adults are in jobs that are related to what their parents do or value.

Q: What have you learned about Transition Assessment in the development of the LearnPort Module, "Measuring the Possible"?

A: Most importantly, Transition Assessment is a process of gathering information on which students can base their transition related decisions, not just a point in time assessment of where a student is at. It is about helping students understand in a formative way what steps or learning progressions they need to take to move toward achievement of their post secondary vision or goals. That is why it is so important to find ways to engage students in this process. They are the ones that must take the steps to reach **their** goals (not ours). It is our job to give them the support and opportunity to understand these progressions and move forward one step at a time.

Q: How would you describe the difference between a Transition Assessment and a Vocational Assessment?

A: The Transition Assessment process is about helping students discover and understand the steps they need to take to achieve a successful and fulfilling life. There are three basic "foundation blocks" for success in life. They are education (life-long learning), community involvement (including mobility, social skills and self determination), and employment. Vocational assessment is about understanding the employment piece and thus is an important part of transition assessment.

Q: With the pressures of the Michigan Merit Curriculum encroaching on time for vocational activities and training in high school, what do you suggest to educators, rehabilitation counselors, families and students regarding making time for quality assessment activities?

"... helping students discover and understand the steps they need to take to achieve a successful and fulfilling life."

A: If we understand Transition Assessment as a process designed to help students understand the learning progressions which will move them toward their post secondary vision, and believe this is important, it is relatively easy to build elements of needed information gathering into the core curriculum. For example, there are several on line sites such as ONET where students can research occupations and the skills or training needed to succeed in them. Casey Life Skills is another site that provides information on preparing for community involvement and adult life. These could provide resources for research projects in an English or Social Studies class.

It is also necessary to engage students and their families in the “storing” or developing a cumulative record of this information. The use of student logs, Portfolios, and transition note-books can be helpful in this effort.

I also believe that the use of other required documents such as the EDP and SOP when used as living documents (continuously updated) could involve students, families and support staff in the transition assessment process while combining some of the many demands placed on teachers.

“...necessary to engage students and their families...”

Q: Have you discovered any specific assessment tools that you feel are the most state of the art for transition students?

A: There are several good transition inventories which are which are useful in the transition assessment process. We must be careful to use them to gather information about student strengths and not just to point out deficits. The assessment tools selected need to match the information we are trying to gather. An excellent web site to help in tool selection can be found in Connecticut’s transition assessment handbook at: http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Special/Transition_Assessment_Manual.pdf . This site contains valuable information about a broad range of transition related assessment tools including purpose, age appropriateness, administration factors and area of information gathered.

Jim Martin is doing some work on an assessment based on documented indicators of post school success. I think this tool could be very helpful when it is available. I know the TPI (Transition Planning Inventory) by Martin and Patton is being revised and will be out sometime this spring but am not sure if the indicators of post school success will be included in it.

Q: I know this is not an ideal situation but unfortunately it happens frequently - how would you advise a young person who is approaching graduation and has no idea what he/she wants to do?

A: First I would encourage them to get involved in some volunteer activities that might help develop some awareness of career and community involvement opportunities that interest them. Then, assuming they are a student with an IEP, I would help them connect with a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

As you said this is far from ideal. Based on past experience I strongly believe that a Counselor has a much better chance of success in working with a young person who comes to them with some sense of what they want to do.

Q: How would you counsel families who are worried that their child may never be able to be totally independent?

A: This is where I think community based situational assessments are especially important. Parents and professionals are often surprised at the level of independence young people can achieve when given the opportunity and expectation.

The transition to post secondary life is basically the same for all youth in that you need to start with a vision or general direction for life based on strengths and interests. Then establish attainable goals based on objective assessment. These goals should be designed so that when obtained they will provide a basis for new goals with each step moving the individual toward their vision.

Q: Any final thoughts or words of wisdom regarding assessment for those working with transition students?

A: Young people must be engaged in the Transition Assessment process. Too often professionals view assessment as gathering information to help them set goals for the student. We forget the basic rule of goal achievement. No one is likely to put a lot of effort into achieving a goal if it is not *their* goal.

“No one is likely to put a lot of effort into achieving a goal if it is not *their* goal.”

Transition assessment must be planned in a way that allows the student to gather and understand information about their self and the way the world works, so they can use it to guide the decisions they make and the goals they set.

Pictured from left to right: Lisa Panetta-Sawaya PVI, Sandy Maxim PVI, June Newsome LSD, Lindy Daman IISD, Kate Mackie MRS, Aaron Holland PVI, not pictured Maureen Webster MRS



LINKS: Inter-Agency Collaboration, Evidence-Based Practices, and a Focus on Relationships Equate to Successful Transition Out-Comes for Students

By: Lindy Daman, Ingham Intermediate School District

What LINKS is:

The LINKS (not an acronym – Really!) program of Ingham County, a model transition program, is a partnership between Ingham Intermediate School District, Peckham, Inc., and Michigan Rehabilitation Services, in affiliation with MiConnections. LINKS helps students with mild to moderate disabilities, who are at risk of dropping out of school, achieve their post-secondary vision, by providing access to preparatory experiences, a comprehensive career assessment, work-based learning activities, youth development and leadership experiences, and connecting activities. The program has aligned to MiConnection’s Michigan Guideposts for Success, which is research and evidence based practice.

LINKS is also a demonstration project with the intention of local school districts adopting these activities, building capacity, and ultimately bringing about a systemic change. It is important to understand that a parallel/separate program was not created. LINKS was infused into existing systems, utilizing existing staff.

How LINKS began:

It all began in the 2003-04 school year as Jeanne Tomlinson, the Transition Consultant at Ingham Intermediate School District, responded to current state data regarding drop-out rates of students with mild disabilities, the population showing the highest drop-out rate nationwide. Tomlinson contacted Rick Ballentine, then the Coordinator of Ingham Intermediate School District’s Career Assessment program, which is part of the Center for Career Preparation and Assessment. It was determined that the first step for students of the LINKS program would be a comprehensive career assessment, including skill and ability testing, interest assessment, determining work values, learning styles, and personality, all in regards to career choices and transition planning. The next step was to provide students with a work based learning experience and a mentor, with the logical partner being Peckham, Inc., which has a proven history of providing work-based learning and mentoring experience, as well as established relations with an extensive number of area employers. Peckham, Inc. also assists the LINKS students in developing a power point document to present at their Individual Education Plan (IEP). During 2004, the LINKS program affiliated with MiConnections and aligned to the Michigan Guideposts for Success. Later that year, Lindy Daman of Ingham Intermediate School District’s Career Assessment Program, joined the team as the Program Coordinator. Although MRS has been a strong partner from the beginning, a formal partnership was established during the 2008-09 school year. Through this additional partnership, a job placement component is now available to students enrolled in both LINKS and MRS during or after their senior year of high school.

“...first step for students of the LINKS program would be a comprehensive career assessment, including skill and ability testing.....”

What LINKS is today:

“The LINKS program is currently in its seventh year...?”

The LINKS program is currently in its seventh year and serves students from 13 Ingham County school districts within the Ingham Intermediate School District service area and Lansing School District. The students are identified by the local school districts as students who meet the eligibility guidelines and are at risk for dropping out. Each district has an allotted number of slots, based on a formula.

Currently in the sixth year of data collection, the LINKS program has proven to be successful in decreasing the drop-out rate and increasing the graduation rate for participating students. Here are program results to date:

Total number of students served: 273

	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Total number to graduate with standard H.S. diploma:	102	37%
Total number to have dropped-out of high school:	20	7%

Please note the 7% drop-out rate in comparison with 2005 -06 Ingham Intermediate School District SRSD data at 33.85% and the state target of 13%.

The Future of LINKS in Ingham County:

Daman recently stated, “I feel that I have spent the last six years selling this program. I no longer have to do that. We have the data, and it speaks strongly. The LINKS program to this point has been designed as a demonstration project, serving 45 students annually and was not designed to make the “big picture” impact. But now it’s time to make the “big picture” impact, as we take the next logical step toward building capacity.”

Isolated Greatness. This has been the case for several years in terms of the transition practices within the Ingham Intermediate School District service area and Lansing School District. There are many examples of individuals doing wonderful things in terms of transition. Now it’s time to make these uniformed practices throughout the region.

June Newsome, Lansing School District’s Transition Coordinator/Work Study Coordinator, has taken the lead in becoming the first Ingham district to begin building capacity. The Lansing School District receives services for 18 students through the LINKS program, but now has significantly increased that number served by infusing these practices into their services by offering a MiConnections Guidepost based program to additional students in Lansing’s Sexton High School. Newsome reports having students approach her frequently asking to be part of the Sexton based MiConnections program. As a result, the Link’s Project was replicated at J.W. Sexton High School to include 25 general education students and students with disabilities. Many of the general education students take honor and AP classes. They all look forward to meeting and have exhibited tremendous leadership skills and actively seek a forum to express these skills. June states, “MiConnection has been a great way for all students to interact and explore and experience different things. Thank you to Jeanne Tomlinson and Marcie Alling for making these opportunities available to J.W. Sexton High School.”

From utilizing evidence-based practices and an incredibly dedicated team, have come many transition success stories for our students. As we take our next steps in building capacity and sustainability, we know the best is yet to come.

“It’s like ‘whoa, this is what I want to do with my life’ and you realize what you have to do to reach your goals.”
- Student of the LINKS program

“We were really the driver of the bus in the assessment process.”
-Parent of a LINKS student

“The staff helped me understand the options I have in my future and they were great!”
- Student of a LINKS program

“The staff really care about their job. There are people who could do this job and not care, but they do a good job. It’s a good program, and I recommend it.”
-Student of the LINKS program

“The staff treats you with a good amount of respect and if you have questions they have answers.”
-Student of the LINKS program

“The staff helped me understand the options in my future...”

MRS Collaborates with the LINKS Program for the Benefit of Students

By: Maureen Webster, MRS Counselor, Ingham County

“When students are involved in LINKS, they seem to be more motivated to participate with MRS.....”

My involvement with the LINKS program has been very beneficial to MRS customers over the past year and a half. Students usually are referred to me from the LINKS program when they are Juniors. When students are involved in LINKS, they seem to be more motivated to participate with MRS and have realistic job goals.

Last year MRS and the LINKS program have worked together to add a placement component to better serve students. Since beginning this venture in the spring of 2009 we have been able to place a number of LINKS students in jobs related to their ultimate career goals. Two individuals in particular were interested in careers that would require extensive training. Both students have significant learning disabilities and required a number of remedial courses to raise their academic skills in order to qualify for college level classes. While MRS was not able to support the extensive remedial coursework that the students needed, LINKS and MRS in partnership were able to place these individuals in jobs related to their careers. This has helped both of them to gain positive work skills and hands on experience that they would not be able to get in the classroom. One student was offered full time employment with her employer and the other student's employer has stated that he is one of his best workers at his facility. Both have maintained employment for over 90 days and are continuing their education to reach their ultimate goals. The employers have been a wonderful resource for the students providing a mentorship role during this journey.

It is my hope for MRS and LINKS to continue to work together to identify, encourage, and place youth in meaningful employment opportunities. We are currently examining our placement efforts in the spirit of continuous improvement to add more activities to keep students engaged in school, connected to the work place and aware of job possibilities in their community. By partnering with each other effectively and meeting the needs of each student we have been able to make a difference in their ability to obtain and maintain meaningful employment.

Peckham Vocational Industries LINKS Program

By: Lisa Panetta-Sawaya

As Peckham's School Assessment and Transition Specialist, it is my job to provide a comprehensive career assessment for the Lansing LINKS participants, as well as career exploration activities for both Lansing and Ingham LINKS participants. Helping the LINKS students learn about their future career and life potential through the LINKS Model has been extremely rewarding.

As part of the LINKS process, some of Peckham's focus and "Best Practices" include:

- 1) Relationship building with the School Assessment & Transition Specialist,
- 2) Creation of an individualized Career "Action Plan" and Power Point to be shared by the student at his or her IEP,
- 3) The opportunity to purchase and keep an interview outfit through Peckham's Dress-For-Success Mini-Grant,
- 4) The opportunity to attend two job shadows in the student's Career Interest Areas.

It is a privilege to be a part of such an important School Transition effort.

Student Testimonial about LINKS

I am 21 years old, and a senior attending a major university, pursuing a degree in Aviation Flight Science. As part of my degree I have also received my private & commercial pilot licenses and instrument rating.

When I was in Middle School I had issues with organization and follow through. I became the kid who was at the back of the room with my head on the desk, not interested in what was being taught. My family and teachers recognized that something was not right and I was referred for testing.

When I learned that I had a learning disability it was very hard for me to accept it. I didn't know what it was, or what it meant for me, and I especially did not like the label it gave me. I started to learn about accommodations and how they can limit the problems my learning disability was causing me.

“...a senior attending a major university, pursuing a degree in Aviation Flight Science.”

While attending high school I was motivated to do well so I could get into a good college. My other motivation for doing well was so I could participate in sports and other extra curricular activities. I didn't know what I wanted to do for sure but knew a college degree was important for any career.

I worked with a special education teacher who encouraged me and referred me to participate in the LINKS program. The thing I remember the most of about the LINKS program was the career interviews. I also remember thinking that I could see myself working in the aviation industry after the interviews. A career interview I thought I would be interested in, but wasn't, helped narrow my options down to careers I still wanted to pursue. All of the job shadows I went to were important even when I found one I wasn't interested in.

When I visited the Lansing Flight Service Station and Airport I could see myself in the future working in that type of atmosphere almost immediately. Even though I did not have an interview with an actual Pilot I knew that I could see myself working with people such as a Flight Briefer at flight services or Air Traffic Controllers in the tower at an airport. Further exploration helped me decide that I wanted to be a Pilot.

The LINKS program helped me feel more connected to school because I was working directly towards my final goal of being a Pilot. After the LINKS program I knew exactly what I needed to get into a college that offers aviation degrees and in the meantime continue to do well in high school.

One of the most challenging things for me to achieve my goal of getting my college degree has been learning to manage my time. For example, being flight student it is not the typical college life by any means. I can have a flight scheduled anytime of the week including weekends. Being a student in the college of aviation also forces me to be a responsible student at all times, and to rise above the pressures of going out and live the classic college life. Although very challenging at times, I know the choices I have made now have helped me manage my time more efficiently and will help me live above other life pressures in the future.

After college I plan doing one of two things. The first is to apply to an entry-level flight job such as Banner Towing, Pipeline Patrol or some other aerial pilot job. If there are none of these jobs available then I will work on becoming a Certified Flight Instructor (CFI).

I would love to work for a charter company or some kind of air taxi service. These types of pilot jobs are typically not looked at as "dream jobs" to most, but I look at these jobs differently because they offer a more flexible and regular schedule compared to the airlines. I know that this will be very important when I have a family and other responsibilities.

I believe the LINKS program is a great start for anyone who is uncertain about what career they want to pursue but there are many other important things that need to happen as well. Special educators should support and encourage students to take a strong interest in their own future. For example if a student is interested in touring a college, they should be part of setting up the tour date and time, instead of allowing someone to take care of it for them. Being proactive and invested in my future has been very important to my success.

"The LINKS program helped me feel more connected to school..."

Monroe County Intermediate School District (MCISD) Kicks off Project SEARCH at Mercy Memorial Hospital

By: Jim Samsel, Transition Coordinator

Through collaborative efforts with Hope Network, Michigan Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth (MRS), and Monroe Community Mental Health Authority, MCISD has partnered with the Mercy Memorial Hospital System to begin a unique educational opportunity for students with significant disabilities.

"...has been replicated at 140 sites in thirty-two states throughout the country."

The Project SEARCH model was developed at Cincinnati Children's Hospital in 1995 and has been replicated at 140 sites in thirty-two states throughout the country. It received President Bush's 2004 Secretary of Labor's New Freedom Initiative Award.

Project SEARCH uses a business model to provide meaningful employment and education opportunities for individuals with significant barriers to employment through immersion in the workplace. Project SEARCH is a one-year internship program that takes place in a real world business (in this case, Mercy Memorial Hospital) that is designed to provide students in their last year of school an opportunity to gain competitive work skills to obtain meaningful employment and lead productive lives.

Throughout this career preparation experience, continuous feedback and application of new skills occurs at the job setting and in the classroom.

MCISD's first Project SEARCH group consists of eleven students from throughout Monroe County. Employment-oriented skills such as dress for the workplace, attendance, safety, taking direction, resumes and interviews are just some of the things addressed through classroom time at the beginning and end of the day. The classroom that is used is located on the hospital work site.

Student interns participate in three ten-week unpaid rotations that are designed to develop employment skills and are housed at several departments throughout the main hospital, the nursing and rehabilitation centers, and the warehouse. In the process, emphasis is placed on matching student interests and abilities to internship positions and building transferable, marketable and competitive skills leading to future employment. Job coaches are employed to support interns as they learn their job duties and to access accommodations with the ultimate goal of independence.

One of the main components of the success of the Project SEARCH model is community collaboration and braided funding to support the program. Monroe County Project SEARCH community partners include Hope Network, Mercy Memorial Hospital System, Michigan Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth (MRS), Monroe Community Mental Health Authority, and Monroe County Intermediate School District. Michigan Commission for the Blind has expressed interest in partnering should the program have the opportunity to include students with vision impairments.

Additional information about Project SEARCH is available at www.cincinnatichildrens.org.

For more information about this program, contact:

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SAVE THE DATES

MI TOP Workshop
Ramada Inn, Lansing, MI
January 28-29, 2010

MI TOP Workshop
Ramada Inn, Lansing, MI
March 22-23, 2010

MI TOP Workshop
Ramada Inn, Lansing, MI
April 22 – 23, 2010

MTSA Conference
“Re-Imagining Transition”
Bavarian Inn, Frankenmuth, MI
March 17 – 19, 2010

Michigan Developmental Education Consortium
“Then & Now, 25 Years of Developmental Education”
Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center, East Lansing, MI
April 8-9, 2010