

Transition Bulletin—Fall Issue 343

October 2015

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

Michigan Rehabilitation Services

Executes the Project SEARCH Contract

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Please Forward the Bulletin

The Mental Health and Wellness Commission report of 2012 recommended that Michigan expand Project SEARCH sites serving Students with Disabilities. A contract between MRS and Project SEARCH/Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center has been signed to ensure that this recommendation is fulfilled.

What does this mean?

Project SEARCH staff, specifically Susie Rutkowski, will be coming to Michigan to provide training and technical assistance to new and existing Project SEARCH teams.


Susie Rutkowski, BS, MEd Bio:



Susie is the Co-Director and Educational Specialist for Project SEARCH. She is a nationally recognized transition expert with specific experience in program development to foster career technical education and employment outcomes for young adults with disabilities. She served as the Manager for Disability Education at Great Oaks Career Campuses for over twelve years. During that tenure she,

with Erin Riehle, co-founded Project SEARCH. Susie has been instrumental in designing the Project SEARCH Training Institute modules and leading replication efforts for new Project SEARCH sites. She speaks and writes on transition-related topics.

Susie's degree in Special Education is from Bowling Green State University, and her Masters in Educational Administration is from the University of Dayton. In addition, she has done post-graduate work at Wright State University



and Xavier University. Before working with Project SEARCH, she taught young students with multi-handicaps for eight years and worked for 10 years as a Job Placement Coordinator at Great Oaks working with students and graduates with disabilities.

Susie lives in Loveland, Ohio with her husband, Joe, and is the proud mother of five children: Sharon, Noah, Kurt, Kevin, and Lucas. Most importantly, she is the proudest grandmother ever to Gallagher, Sophia and Jack. In her spare time, Susie dotes on her grandchildren, runs, and creates beautiful handmade greeting cards.

Training for New Sites that Started this Fall

On October 27 and 28th Calhoun County and Dearborn Public Schools will engage in PS Training with Susie Rutkowski at Washtenaw ISD in Ann Arbor. The training will be a fantastic opportunity for **new sites** that just launched this past August to make sure that they are on solid footing.

Trainings for Teams Interested in Developing New PS Sites

On October 29th, PS training will be offered at Washtenaw ISD, in Ann Arbor, for potential sites that are considering launching this coming August. The training allows new teams to learn about the model and consider all the steps that need to be taken to prepare their students, families, host business and communities for a PS program. Information will also be provided on the process to apply to MRS for PS funds. If you are interested in attending this training, contact Cathy Schmidt's support person at gary.holden@oakland.k12.mi.us.

Fidelity Audits and Performance Reviews

Fidelity Audits and Performance Reviews will also be conducted for existing sites with the goal of continuous improvement and increasing employment outcomes. The audit is a two day process that includes interviews with the various partners and participants, observations of the class and the internships along with a small amount of document review. The second day incorporates a steering committee/team meeting to discuss program commendations, suggestions and recommendations. A written report is also provided. Using the audit results, PS will work with local teams to develop a strategic plan that addresses the suggestions and recommendations from the review.

Technical Assistance

Project SEARCH-related questions can be directed to Susie Rutkowski at Susie.Rutkowski@cchmc.org

Education-related questions can be directed to Cathy Schmidt cathy.schmidt@oakland.k12.mi.us

MRS-related question can be directed to Cynthia Wright at wrightc1@michigan.gov

9th Annual Project SEARCH Conference – Glendale, AZ

By: Becky Hill, Counselor in the Kalamazoo MRS District Office

My experience at my first Project SEARCH conference was unforgettable. I had heard how amazing it was to attend, but nothing could have prepared me for the experience in Glendale, Arizona.

I was surrounded by special education teachers, job coaches, VR counselors, Business Liaisons, Statewide Coordinators, and even Erin Riehle and Susie Rutkowski, the Co-Founders of Project SEARCH. We all had one thing in common; we believe in the Project SEARCH model, and we all want to improve what we do for our youth with disabilities.

The conference session selection was incredible, I often found myself having to choose between 3 sessions all at the same time, wishing there were 3 of me to see them all.

Kalamazoo Project SEARCH at Bronson Hospital is starting its 4th year in fall 2015. We have come a long way since our start up. We do a lot of things well (for one, our outcomes are SUPER!) and yet we can still improve on other things. For this reason, I chose sessions that I could bring some viable take-home strategies to my Kalamazoo team.

Highlights:

Business Led Skills Assessment Day at LeBonheur Children’s Hospital, Memphis, TN. In this session I learned about simulation stations offered at the PS host site created to aide in the intern selection process.

Reaching the Goal of 100% Employment Outcomes: Intern Selection and Internship Development. In this session Susie Rutkowski gave some tricks of the trade in quality intern selection, marketing of PS and strategies for developing robust internship rotations.

Leave No Stone Unturned: Evaluating Potential Barriers to Fading and Employment. Long term follow along is a make-or-break piece to PS graduates. I learned crucial information through an OT model how modifications and accommodations can help a newly employed intern retain employment.



Top: Becky Hill (middle) accepts her Project SEARCH award with Susie Rutkowski (left) and Erin Riehle (right).



After the Party: Finding a Pathway to Post Hire Success or I just Got a Job, Now What? This was my favorite session at the PS conference! In Kalamazoo we are already starting to develop ways to implement a similar long-term “job club” for those individuals who are hired and still need some support, check-in, cheerleading, etc. Year after year the group can meet on their own, stay connected, reach out for help with the intent of retaining their jobs when other support isn’t available.



I was honored to accept the Placement Outcome Award for Kalamazoo Project SEARCH and honored to be one of the attendees representing Michigan Project SEARCH. It rejuvenated me to continue to do better in our Project SEARCH with some exciting new strategies learned from around the world.

Pathways to Potential and MRS Connect to

Provide Supports and Services

Because of the promising outcomes of the model, The State of Michigan Mental Health and Wellness Commission 2013 Report recommended that Michigan Expand the number of sites incorporating the Pathways to Potential model.

The Governor’s Commission on Mental Health and Wellness recommended that funding be provided to Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to expand Pathways to Potential (P2P). P2P is collaborating with MRS at P2P high schools to join forces to provide supports and services to customers that are eligible for both programs.

P2P was implemented in Michigan in 2012 and is a MDHHS human services business model which focuses on three critical elements:

- 1) Going into the community where the individual is located;
- 2) Working one on one with families to identify barriers, remove those barriers and to serve as connectors to a network of services; and
- 3) Engaging community partners and school personnel in efforts to help families find their pathway to success.

The P2P model embraces the understanding that accessing public benefits is just one piece of a long pathway that people must take to reach their healthiest and fullest potential. To help families on this path, Pathways to Potential places a qualified DHS worker, called a *success coach*, into the schools to address the families’ barriers to self-sufficiency in five key outcome areas: safety, health, education, attendance, and self-sufficiency.

Early Success

In the 2012-2013 school year, the 21 school pilot showed an approximately 9% decrease in chronic absenteeism (chronic absenteeism is considered more than ten absences). As of May 2014, our uncertified statewide figure for 169 schools is a



68.5% decrease in chronic absenteeism.

Because of the promising outcomes of the model, The State of Michigan Mental Health and Wellness Commission 2013 Report recommended that Michigan:

Expand the number of sites incorporating the Pathways to Potential model and ensure that each site includes access to employment and training services for students with a mental illness, substance use disorder, or developmental disability. The Pathways to Potential program places the Department of Human Services case-workers in schools to help families overcome barriers to academic success. Additional partners in the school include health clinics, mental health organizations, employment agencies that offer training in job skills, resume writing and entrepreneurship; and educational organizations that offer classes or programs such as GED, literacy, English as a second language, financial planning, tutoring, and mentoring.

A YouTube video about P2P can be viewed by following this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjYFZilpMag>

Expansion

Presently the P2P program is in 30 Michigan counties including Bay, Berrien, Calhoun, Clare, Genesee, Gladwin, Gogebic, Grand Traverse, Huron, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Kalkaska, Kent, Lapeer, Macomb, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Midland, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oakland, Ogemaw, Ottawa, Roscommon, Saginaw, St. Clair, Tuscola, Washtenaw and Wayne.

Counties with P2P High Schools

P2P is currently implemented in the following twelve counties: Clare, Gogebic, Huron, Kalamazoo, Kent, Macomb, Mason, Muskegon, Oakland, Saginaw, Tuscola, and Wayne. Consistent with the model, P2P service providers are housed in the High Schools.

MRS and P2P Staff Partner

MRS and P2P staff are connecting to create a partnership in the high schools where the model is being implemented. Training is being provided this fall to inform MRS and P2P staff about each program and establish relationships and processes to work together. Both programs are able to refer Students with Disabilities and their family members between the two agencies. MRS has dedicated funding to provide vocational rehabilitation services to this population.

Ongoing Success

In the 2014-2015 school year, P2P expanded to 22 counties and 219 schools. Students at these schools saw an overall decrease in chronic absenteeism of approximately 37%. A partnership was formed with the Kellogg Foundation and Grand Valley State University's Community Research Institute to begin a 3-year Pathways evaluation, in conjunction with the development of the new web-based Client Log. Through a partnership with the Children's Aid Society of New York, P2P was able to bring all the Pathways workers together for an all-day training in Lansing.

Transition

By: Janel Frost

I have been thinking about the word “Transition” a lot lately and how it applies to my son who is Hard of Hearing and the many other children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. There is a buzz in special education around what transition means and when to start working on skills related to transition. As a parent of a child with special needs in the school system, I was made aware of the word probably earlier than most. I was asked to sit on a committee in my home state as the parent voice. This committee was going to work on transition, mostly from when a student transitions from high school or college and into post school years. My son was 12 when they asked me to join so I really didn’t know what the word meant, let alone, what transition would mean to my son moving forward in life, but I was excited to learn more.

What is transition? The dictionary defines transition as: the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another, i.e. "students **in transition** from one program to another". Easy enough, right? Well after sitting in on our first working conference regarding the topic of transition, my mind began thinking more of what the word meant and how understanding and applying some basic tactics may help my son in his post school life. Professionals at the conference specializing in transition presented data collected that showed how different variables in a child’s life determined a more successful outcome than others. They went on to explain that transition practices research has illustrated that post-school outcomes of students with disabilities improve when educators, families, students, community members, and community organizations work together to implement a broad perspective of transition planning.

What is transition planning and why should we apply it to our child’s life? Transition planning looks at helping our children from an early stage and to master skills needed to be successful later in life in a way that traditional educational planning doesn’t. It’s an approach directed toward adult outcomes and consists of academic, career, and extracurricular instruction and activities, delivered through a variety of instructional and transition approaches. Transition planning helps the student move forward on skills that go beyond being successful in school or employment, while looking at the students’ learning and support needs. Typically, transition isn’t discussed in the educational system until the student reaches high school. Professionals in the field are looking at the importance of starting much earlier in order to really cement these skills.

How to apply to your child’s educational plan? After learning the importance of transition planning, I was anxious to apply this approach to my son’s school planning. I first started with a guide that the committee I was on from Michigan made with regards to transition. The Clerc Center of Gallaudet University also has a transition skills guide that can be used for reference. The Michigan Secondary Transition Guide, similar to the Clerc Center Guide looks at different objectives which the student should be working on at certain grade levels. It starts in the 7th grade and ends in 12th grade and is specific to children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. These objectives are self-advocacy, career skill development, academic development/educational goals, independent living skills, social skills and community involvement/extracurricular activities. Then within each objective is a specific skill the student works on to master. For example in the 7th grade objective, under self



-advocacy is understands personal hearing levels. This was a good skill to start with for my son. I then took the information along with others skills he did not master yet to my son’s IEP team, and we then applied to his IEP goals. My son’s speech teacher was willing to apply the goal of understanding personal hearing levels as one of her goals for my son. We looked at several of these skills and fit them in where possible. My husband and I went home with a list of the items we were to work on with him. As the year progressed, our son was not only reaching his educational goals, but also, reaching goals to help him transition into post school life.

When are public schools required to include Transition planning into the student’s IEP? Transition services must be included in all IEPs when the student reaches age 16 and may be included for younger students **if** deemed appropriate by the IEP team (OSEP Letter to Anonymous, 17 EFLR 842). If deemed appropriate, the IEP meeting must then include a representative of the public agency providing and supervising the transition activities and, if appropriate, representatives of other participating agencies. These agencies are often referred to as Vocational Rehabilitation agencies. Consent from the legal guardians **must** be offered and accepted before the IEP team may add an outside agency specializing in transition to attend the IEP meeting. Building a relationship with a vocational rehabilitation services earlier than the age of 16 may help the student and the IEP team when the requirement is needed. Attending a “Transition” fair or workshop may help students, parents and professionals to build the relationships needed to provide a good working team.

How early should we start transitioning planning? There is something wonderful that takes place when we work on specific skills needed to succeed after school life and apply them to our children at an early stage of development. We start to see children equipped to manage the different transitions in their lives better even before reaching post school life. I mentioned earlier that I believe I learned what transition was before most parents. Now I wish I would have learned about it even earlier. Every opportunity we have as parents and professionals to work on real life skills that our children need later in life is an opportunity worth taken. Practice, practice, practice is what our children need. Some children more than others which seems to be the case with our Deaf and Hard of Hearing children because of a lack of incidental learning due to the hearing loss. Combining our efforts as parents with the educational team and other community members involved with our children will enhance learning and provide more opportunities for success for our children. It is my hope that the earlier we start teaching and practicing real life and transitional skills, the better our children will be prepared for the future.

To receive a free copy of the Laurent Clerc Center’s Transition Skills Guidelines go to:

<http://clerccenter2.gallaudet.edu/products/?id=216>

To find a copy of the Michigan Secondary Transition Plan, go to:

www.mdello.org Click on **Service Delivery Tools** under **DHH** on right side of page, Scroll to and click on **Secondary Transition Guide PDF**

New Guidance on the Partial Restoration of the ‘Ability to Benefit’ Provision for Title IV Federal Financial Aid

The Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015 helped reopen the door to opportunity in postsecondary education by changing the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA), to partially restore what is known as the “**ability to benefit** (ATB) alternatives”. The new law went into effect on December 16, 2014. It changed the HEA to allow a student who did not receive a high school diploma (or its recognized equivalent), or who did not complete a secondary school education in a home-school setting, to be eligible for Title IV financial aid. This can now be done through a combination of ATB alternatives and enrollment in an eligible career pathway program (as determined by the Title IV eligible institutions' staff).

This ATB provision has the potential to help many students. Consider the following example.

At age 21, Tony is the oldest of five children in a single parent household. He had to drop out of high school at age 17 to work full-time in order to help support his younger brothers and sisters. For the next four years he had a succession of minimum wage jobs to help his family make ends meet. This experience reinforced what he had always heard—that in today’s job market there is a need for postsecondary education and training in order to land a good job. So Tony met with an advisor at a local community college to explore his education options. To his dismay, Tony found that he would not be able to receive federal financial aid because he did not have a high school diploma or other high school credential, such as a GED. Discouraged by this news, Tony gave up hope of being able to help his family better its circumstances.

While Tony is only a fictional character, many individuals share his circumstances due to a lack of high school credentials.

A new [Dear Colleague letter](#) from the U.S. Department of Education provides helpful information on the ATB alternatives. Key areas highlighted in the letter include:

- the definition of an eligible career pathway program that a student must be enrolled in to qualify for the ability to benefit alternative;
- ATB alternatives requirements that students must meet;
- information regarding the retroactive provisions of the new law; and

the alternative Pell disbursement schedule for students who first qualify for this provision on or after July 1, 2015.

Now imagine a scenario in which Tony has access to ATB alternatives:

Tony went back to the community college and was told he could enroll in a career pathways program and receive Title IV federal financial aid if he met certain prerequisites. He had the option of taking a U.S. Department of Education-approved, independently administered test, or he could pay for and complete at least six

credits (or 225 clock hours) counting toward a degree or certificate at the community college. Tony decided to take the test and scored high enough to meet ATB alternatives requirements. He then completed the financial aid application process and was found to be eligible to receive aid. Finally, Tony enrolled in an eligible career pathways program, which included counseling and support services to help him identify and attain his academic and career goals. The program also provided articulated, contextualized (i.e. relevant to his field of study) course sequences that allowed Tony to consistently advance to higher levels of education and employment. It was structured very efficiently—everything Tony studied prepared him to be successful in his new field, as well as to earn industry-recognized credentials and an associate degree. The program was developed in collaboration with local employers in Tony’s field, as well as workforce and economic development partners, and was filling a vital need in Tony’s region. As part of his career pathway, Tony enrolled in and completed an adult education program that helped him prepare to be successful in work and in life.

The fictional story above is only an illustrative example of how the new ATB alternatives might benefit students. The partial restoration of ATB alternatives can increase opportunities for many individuals. Because there are several important factors not mentioned in this example, such as the possible impact of the timing of a student’s entry into an eligible career pathways program on the amount of funding that students may be able to receive, it is very important to read the entire Dear Colleague letter. It is also recommended that a student contact his or her college’s financial aid office for more information on these issues.

For additional information on this topic, please contact Federal Student Aid's Research and Customer Care Center Monday through Friday, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. EDT, at 1-800-433-7327, or anytime via email at fsa.customer.support@ed.gov.



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**Transition Bulletin–Fall
Issue 343 October 2015**

