

Research Question:

How can we help students with disabilities understand and reach their career or college goals?

Rationale:

Over the years of working with special education students and my personal experience of being in special education classes as a student, I have seen many students and teachers use the special education label as an excuse for why they can't do something. I had firsthand experience of teachers telling my parents I was lazy, and that I would never make it to college; I also had wonderful teachers who pushed me and made sure I had the skills and positive attitude to do what I wanted to do and be just like the other students. I had a teacher in high school who showed me I could go to college and helped me understand the services that are available to help me be successful in college. The main thing I had to learn was I had to work hard to get what I wanted and it was and is worth it.

Literature Review:

Career and Technical Education is a standard for all students 7th grade through 12th grade in general education and special education in the state of New Mexico. The objective of this standard, according to the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED), is to assist students in preparing for high skill, high wage or high demand occupations in current and up-and-coming professions. To do so our schools must offer courses to prepare students in paid and unpaid employment. The courses must provide content in technical knowledge and skills that will educate the student and follow the state standards. (NMPED Title 6, Chapter 29, Part 3) The student needs to receive guidance and support to go on their career path. Special Education students have a transition plan to help support them as they leave middle school and enter high school. This plan supports them and changes as they progress through high school.

Career readiness focus does not get much attention until high school for special education students. Parents, teachers and their students need to identify a path that will lead to great success for the student in middle, high school and college or technical school. Psychologists say that the middle grades are the time adolescents build visions of their future. Their teachers can change the "no-way" attitudes to "nevertheless" attitudes.

(College and Career Readiness for Special Needs Students) We need to understand students' differences and plant the seed of success.

Labels on special education students are a powerful language. Our goal as educators is to not focus on them. Author Rebecca Branstetter tells of a time she had to tell an eight year old girl she had a learning disability which was dyslexia. The young girl was excited and did a little dance. Branstetter was a bit confused. She was informed by the young girl Branstetter had tested her brother a few years before and he too had dyslexia, he had told his sister that knowing he had dyslexia made him not feel stupid. That "label" helped his teachers, his family and himself understand how his brain worked and what they needed to do to support him. How to help Students with Learning Disabilities Focus on their Strengths)

Study Design:

I designed a Google Form with questions about the Career Readiness/Transition Plan that is in the students' IEPs. The form asked for their role in education, how aware they are of the plan, how it informs teachers' instruction, what can be improved in the IEP for career readiness, and how we can help the students understand and make progress through the steps to reach their career goal. The Google Form was sent out to the staff at my middle school, staff at one of our feeder high schools, and some staff in other parts of the special education field. I was also able to talk with the head of the special education department at my school, and review some IEP's including my personal IEP from many years ago.

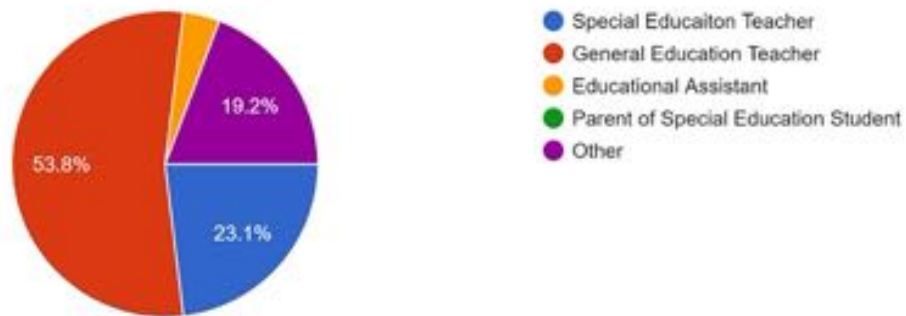
Data Analysis:

I received 26 responses. Here is the breakdown of the roles of the respondents: 53.8% General Education Teacher, 23.1% Special Education teacher, 19.2% Other, and 3.9% Educational Assistant. The "other" category covers administration, data coaches, IEP specialist, Special education resource teacher and any other education related employee. I also had a "parent of a special education student" category, but I was not able to get any parents to complete my form. Of those educators who completed the form, the breakdown of how aware they are of the plan is: 42.3% very aware, 15.4% somewhat aware, 19.2% aware, 15.4% have heard of it and 7.7% no clue. The responses to "how does the career readiness plan inform the teachers' instruction" were all along the same lines of helping students to start thinking about how their classes and lessons can be applied to the outside world. It shows which functional skills students can work on to prepare themselves. The next question was "what can be improved in the students' IEP for career readiness". The feedback was "make sure the goal is specific to the student, make sure the student understands their goal and that it is there to help them". Another improvement suggested was to provide training to teachers to align the IEP goals with the career readiness pathway. Responses to "How can a Career readiness plan help students to take ownership of their education" were "it could help them to have a goal in mind of what they are

working towards in school", "it needs to be something they are interested in and can be proud of their education", "students should be able to track their progress so they can be more motivated to learn and show what they have accomplished". The last question was "How can we help students understand that they need to progress through steps to reach career readiness goals?" Most educators felt that "the goals need to be addressed more often than just in the IEPs, the students can have it in their agendas, have the students research projects to all them to explore what they are good at and interested, help them to find programs and classes that can help build on their goal". We can help the students by showing them our goals and the progress we have made for them, be open about our careers, and the choices we made to get there.

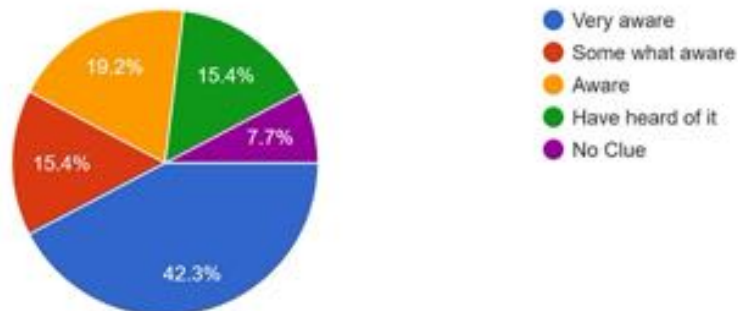
What is your Role? (Please Chose One)

26 responses



How aware are you of the students' Career Readiness Plan ?

26 responses



Recommendations and Next Steps:

Career Readiness for special education students needs to be a major focus so more educators are aware of the students' plans and how they can help the student achieve their goals. Most people say middle school aged students aren't really thinking of college or a career, but research shows that this age is when they start to build their vision for the future. A solid career assessment would help students to find a career that better suits their interest and they would be more inclined to work hard to reach that career goal. We need to work with our special education students to look at their goals and set short term objectives that are easier to obtain. First steps might include working with the local community college's special services department to be more successful in college class. For some students college is not their "thing". We can help them to explore and find more information about trade schools and programs. We need to make sure students are connected to services like New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation or other agencies that will support them along their way to successfully reaching their career goal. The most important step I would like to recommend is to show our students in special education that they have strengths and that they should never give up on themselves. They may learn differently, but that just means they have to work that much harder to achieve the goals that they have. We can change the "you can't do that" attitude into the "Oh, yes I can" belief.

Sources:

New Mexico Public Education Department

<https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/instructional-materials/new-mexico-content-standards/>

<http://164.64.110.134/parts/title06/06.029.0003.html>

New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

<http://www.dvr.state.nm.us/>

College and Career Readiness for Special Needs Students; by Linda K. Schlosser

<https://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/WhatsNew/WNDet/TabId/270/ArtMID/888/ArticleID/645/College-and-Career-Readiness-for-Special-Needs-Students.aspx>

How to Help Students with Learning Disabilities Focus on Their Strengths; by Rebecca Branstetter

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_help_students_with_learning_disabilities_focus_on_their_strengths