

research brief

Evaluating the Implementation and Outcomes of Secondary Supported Employment Programs for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

A 16-item School Based Supported Employment Fidelity Scale will be used in 40 secondary schools across Virginia for a self-assessment of the policies and practices of supported employment services offered. The scale includes detailed guidelines for data collection and scoring to ensure consistency across supported employment programs participating in the study.

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outline of research methods

The purpose of this study is to generate new knowledge regarding the effectiveness of school-based supported employment as an employment-focused transition practice for youth with intellectual or other developmental disabilities. An empirical investigation will be conducted of the implementation of school-based supported employment, the factors that affect program implementation and

the effectiveness of supported employment programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in secondary schools throughout Virginia.

Four research questions guide the design and implementation of the study: 1) To what extent do secondary schools in Virginia operate supported employment programs



for transition age youth with disabilities? 2) What are the critical components and key performance indicators of school-based supported employment programs for transition age youth with disabilities? 3) To what extent are secondary schools in Virginia delivering quality supported employment services to transition age youth with disabilities? What factors (size of district, geographic location, types of students served) affect implementation of supported employment programs? 4) To what extent do scores on a school-based supported employment fidelity scale correlate with post-school employment outcomes as measured by Indicator 14 follow-up surveys?

A sampling plan was devised to identify the number of schools needed for the study. The target population consisted of 123 high

schools. The sample of 123 high schools was stratified by locales. The number of high schools sampled for each division was computed using the following formula: $n_k = (N_k/N)n$. Where n_k is the number of high schools to be sampled in locale k , N_k is the total number of high schools in locale k , N is the total number high schools in the target population ($N = 123$), and n is the total number of school division that will be sampled from all locales ($n = 40$). The sample was pulled with representation from eight rural schools, 22 in suburban localities, and ten city schools.

Data collection protocols include training participating schools on implementing the School Based Supported Employment Fidelity Scale and onsite visits by project staff to verify data.

findings

The conceptual framework developed by Century, Rudnick, and Freeman (2010) was used to guide the development of a comprehensive School Based Supported Employment Fidelity Scale. Based on the feedback obtained through the project's technical workgroup, who reviewed a preliminary draft for relevance, thoroughness, and ease of completion, the fidelity scale was refined to include 16 Critical Structural Components (see Table 1).

Each of these critical structural components was further operationalized to include a set of specific key performance indicators of school based supported employment programs, and a list of specific data sources for each component, which will ultimately be used to systematically assess service delivery in different schools. For each of the 16 components, a detailed five point scoring system has also been developed to maximize both the reliability and validity of the scale.

implications for the field

Prior research documents the effectiveness of individual school-based supported employment programs, yet little rigorous empirical research has been done on the extent to which these programs are currently used in secondary transition programs, the actual supported employment practices in use,

and the effectiveness of these programs. The present study will greatly contribute to filling this knowledge gap about the efficacy of employment-focused practice, by providing a comprehensive examination of supported employment interventions as implemented by a diverse sample of school districts.

Furthermore, once the School Based Supported Employment Fidelity Scale has been validated in real-world settings, transition personnel will ultimately be able to use it to conduct self-assessments of their supported employment service programs, and also as a technical assistance and training tool to assist in targeted evaluation and program development activities based on specific practices used in high schools across Virginia.

The fidelity scale will therefore become a valuable instrument for understanding and increasing the success of supported employment programs as a transition practice for youth with intellectual or other developmental disabilities, with far reaching implications for both further research and practical application in the field.

further research

The study is currently entering the exploratory research phase working with 40 schools that are across a geographically and demographically diverse state to identify promising factors that enable schools to effectively serve youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities

preparing for and transitioning to on-going supported employment. Results of the study will likely generate interest in particular areas with practical implications that further research could explore or clarify.

table 1

Critical Structural Component	Description
1 Self Directed Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Transition and Vocational Goal Setting Creation of a self-directed individualized education plan (IEP) with direct input from student and family.	Creation of a self-directed individualized education plan (IEP) with direct input from student and family.
2 Student Access to Career Exploration	Student access to career exploration activities to further vocational transition planning and creation of transition goals.
3 Administrative Support	Local school division administrative support for vocational/employment services.
4 School Personnel/Employment Supports Organization (ESO) Contract	Dedicated school staff or access to employment specialists through a certified Employment Supports Organization (ESO).
5 Qualified and Dedicated School Personnel	Dedicated school staff with appropriate training for school based supported employment, or access to a certified ESO.
6 Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Partnership Agreement	Active collaboration from local school system, state vocational rehabilitation, employment supports organization, and long term supports provider.
7 School/ESO Partnership Agreement	Active collaboration from local school system, state vocational rehabilitation, employment supports organization, and long term supports provider.

8	Age Appropriate Transition Assessment	Agency partners (e.g., School, VR, ESO) provide opportunities for students to assess various vocational interests, skills, abilities and potential support needs in a variety of settings and businesses.
9	Age Appropriate Job Development	Agency partners (e.g., School, VR, ESO) develop a formalized career search guide for the student after vocational assessments.
10	Age Appropriate Job Development – Organizational Marketing Plan	School staff or ESO will develop and implement an organizational marketing plan to assist with student job development.
11	Age Appropriate Job Site Training – Job Analysis	School staff or ESO staff develops a job analysis for employed student worksite. Analysis should include: immediate work area, size and layout of the company, coworkers, availability of onsite support, and worksite culture.
12	Age Appropriate Job Site Training – Job Duty Analysis	School staff or ESO develops a sequence of all major job duties to be completed and analyzes the skills required to perform each major duty.
13	Age Appropriate Job Site Training – Systematic Instruction	School staff or ESO develops a plan for systematic instruction including a task analysis for each job task that the student will be performing at their place of employment, and instructional strategies. Instructional strategies will include self-management and compensatory strategies.
14	Transportation	Students should utilize public transportation or other modes of transportation independent of the school system when reporting for work.
15	Competitive Employment Outcome	Students are employed in the community for a minimum of 20 hours per week, and earning commensurate pay and benefits as coworkers performing the same or similar work.
16	Long Term Supports	A long term supports plan is developed and includes the identification of a formal agreement with the long term support service organization, method for tracking services, and funding of support service options.

references

Century, J., Rudnick, M., & Freeman, C. (2010). A framework for measuring fidelity of implementation: A foundation for shared language and accumulation of knowledge. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 31(2), 199-218.

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