

Supporting Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Higher Education through Mentoring

Abstract

Federal legislation is now making it possible for students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) to enroll in university programs through inclusive transition models. The need for more knowledge in the workplace, in addition to newly acquired opportunities, draws students with ID to college campuses. With this increase of student in postsecondary education settings, it is necessary to examine the types of supports needed to ensure their success. Peer mentorship has been identified as a crucial aspect of support for academic and social development. This paper identifies the skills mentors use during their sessions and outlines challenges with mentoring partnerships in postsecondary transition programs. Data analysis revealed major themes related to inclusion, self-determination, and adaptive behavior skills.

The American job market has become more knowledge-based, increasing the need for a postsecondary education (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003). Federal legislation such as The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) (2008) have made it possible for students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) to enroll in university programs through inclusive transition models. The increased need of knowledge in the everyday workplace, in addition to newly acquired opportunities, draws students with ID to college campuses. With this increase of students with ID in postsecondary education settings, it is necessary to examine the types of supports needed to ensure for successful postsecondary transitions and experiences.

Peer mentorship has been identified as a crucial aspect of support and practical solution for academic and social dilemmas (Campbell-Whatley, 2001). The literature regarding mentorship practices has been limited to mostly theoretical research. Nevertheless, one of the few studies conducted in a postsecondary transition program was Jones and Goble (2012). Although it provided a thorough examination of mentorship practices within a context, limitations of the study included a small research sample (only including one university) and a homogeneous group of mentors. Additionally, Jones and Goble (2012) stated that further in depth analysis was needed regarding what skills mentors expended time on with their mentees. The purpose of this paper is to determine what skills that mentors of students with ID primarily focus on during mentoring sessions as well as to identify potential struggles with mentoring partnerships in postsecondary transition programs.

Literature Review

An individual with ID is a person with a cognitive impairment with specific limitations in the areas of intellectual and cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior (HEOA, 2008). The most recent reauthorization of the HEOA (2008) outlines a series of provisions that focus attention and federal resources on the postsecondary goals of these students as outlined on their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). In addition to the HEOA (2008) provisions for this population of students, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) defines the transition for students with disabilities as a coordinated set of activities designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities are guided by the student's preferences and interests, and include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990, Public Law 101-476, section 602 (a)).

According to Hart, Grigal, Sax, Martinez, and Will (2006), students with ID have the poorest post-school outcomes compared to other students with disabilities especially when it comes to attending college/university and particularly participating in coursework. A comparison study conducted on 20 students with ID with some type of Postsecondary Education (PSE) experience (e.g., noncredit audit, certificate course) and 20 with no PSE experience revealed that students with PSE experience were much more likely to obtain competitive employment, required fewer supports, and earned higher wages. Furthermore, these same students had increased self-esteem and expanded social networks (Zafft, Hart, & Zimbrich, 2004). The need for students with disabilities to become independent and economically self-sufficient is directly

linked to attaining increased levels of knowledge and skills gained through access and participation in postsecondary education. This need is the same for all individuals—those with and without disabilities—to be a part of a workforce and engaged members of society.

In the US, there are approximately 110 PSE programs in 28 states and most are collaborative partnerships between institutes of higher education (IHEs) and the local public school system. There are approximately 2,000-3,000 students with ID annually who meet eligibility for PSE programs. Seventy-four percent of these programs support students who are dually enrolled in both high school and college/university (18-22 years of age) while 33% are programs designed for adult students with ID beyond the age of 22 (Think College, 2013). A survey conducted with 13 PSE programs in one state revealed that 87% of the 163 students participating in these programs were involved in employment training, 36% were enrolled in a typical college course, and over half participated in campus life activities. All exiting students were linked to an adult service agency or community rehabilitation program as they exited. Seventy-nine percent qualified for Social Security benefits, 84% had a job for the summer, and 65% exited with a paid job (Hart, Zafft, & Zimbrich, 2001; Zafft, Hart, & Zimbrich, 2004).

Providing access to postsecondary education for students with ID is only the beginning, while ensuring their active participation, full involvement, and completion is also critically important. While more students with disabilities enroll in 2-year community and technical colleges than in other type of postsecondary schools, currently there is no information available on their rate of postsecondary education completion. But given the additional barriers (e.g., lack of acceptance, full accessibility/inclusion) individuals with disabilities often encounter in our society and within our learning systems, their opportunities may be limited and oftentimes in jeopardy unless the needed resources and supports are put in place.

Program Description

Project Panther LIFE: Panther Learning Is For Everyone was conceptualized and guided by the regulations of the HEOA (2008) of a comprehensive transition and postsecondary program to support students with ID in the areas of academics and instruction, social activities, employment, and independent living, and through an ongoing Person-Centered Planning (PCP) process of exploration and discovery of interests and strengths. The PCP process, in collaboration with the student's family and other professionals and support personnel (e.g., education support specialist), is used to develop a vision statement to assist the student with ID to plan his/her role in the program and begin to plan for life after program completion. This process allows for the formation of a circle of support for the student (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2011) by valuing and respecting the student's preferences for his/her future planning.

Florida International University (FIU) has partnered with the local public school system and with a parent resource center to design, implement, and sustain a postsecondary transition program for students with ID in the Miami-Dade community. *Project Panther LIFE* has served as a model demonstration site at the University campus for three (3) years. The primary goal of the program is to provide a comprehensive postsecondary program and system of supports (e.g., academic mentors) through partnerships to eligible students through a well-planned, structured, and individualized curriculum and related program and community experiences leading to paid employment at program completion.

An array of supports is provided to students to ensure successful completion of the program and potential for paid employability. Supports include transition services, ongoing academic advising, and instructional programming from project coordinators and interdisciplinary

university faculty advisors; ongoing and consistent academic mentoring and peer coaching from trained university graduate and undergraduate students during the academic year; access and participation in University activities and events (e.g., clubs/organizations, sporting events), technology training and support, and family/student seminars.

This certificate, non-degree program of study allows students with ID the flexibility to select University courses of interest to them in a variety of program areas (e.g., leisure and recreation, computers, music, communication) and access and participate in University campus life (e.g., clubs/organizations, sporting events). Besides access and participation in university courses, students also participate in a series of job shadowing experiences, complete a community employment internship, and attend other required program activities (e.g., transition curricula, seminars and workshops). Refer to Table 1 for a list of program activities and descriptions.

Program Design

Project Panther LIFE's curriculum framework includes the ten (10) critical areas of independent living as proposed by Wehman and Kregel (1997) (e.g., self-determination, functional academics and technology, financial planning and money management, etc.) and a detailed curriculum map was developed aligning each domain with the activities and supports provided by each member of the partnership (Florida International University, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Parent to Parent of Miami, and Vocational Rehab). Each planned activity and support leads students to increased levels of knowledge and skills gained through access and meaningful participation in postsecondary education and related experiences.

Academic advising and social support is ongoing throughout the program and provided by a program coordinator, faculty advisors, academic mentors, and peer coaches. The role of an academic mentor is to assist their assigned *Panther LIFE* student in accessing their university coursework while helping to foster the student becoming more academically independent and responsible for their own learning. Mentors are provided with trainings and one-on-one consultations with a mentor coordinator throughout the academic year in order to better understand the needs of students with ID and how to implement a variety of instructional strategies to improve their student's academic outcomes. On a weekly basis, mentors are asked to schedule three (3) sessions lasting one (1) hour each and complete an activity log and questionnaire at the end of each academic semester. Typical mentoring activities have included re-explaining and/or clarifying content/information, checking assignment due dates, proof reading assignments and providing editing suggestions, and creating graphic organizers for studying key concepts. The role of the peer coach varies only in that the focus of the work centers on assisting the *Panther LIFE* student in understanding and acclimating to University campus and social life. Examples of peer coach social support have included eating lunch together, introducing mentee to others, addressing social skill needs through modeling and discussion, and attending on-campus and off-campus events. Providing this structured system of support ensures that students experience a high level of success during their program tenure.

Methods

Description of participants/setting. Academic Mentors and Peer Coaches (all referred to as "mentors" in this publication) consisted of 31 university students ages 18-42 of which 25 were females and 6 males. University class standing of the group consisted of 11 seniors, 9 sophomores, 4 juniors, 1 freshman, and 6 graduate level students with an average cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.25. The group's racial/ethnic diversity consisted of 21 Hispanic (67%), 4 White (14%), 4 Black (14%), and 2 Asian (5%) students. Twenty-two students were bilingual speaking Spanish and English, one student speaking Arabic, one student speaking

Hebrew, one student speaking Jamaican Patois, one student speaking Chinese, and one student speaking French. The group had a variety of majors including Special Education (5; 15%), Biology (6; 20%), Hospitality and Tourism Management (4; 12%) Nursing (3; 10%), Psychology (2; 5%), and Advertising, Architecture, Pre-Medical Studies, Physical Education, History, Business Administration, Adult Education and Human Resource Development, and Social Work (1; 5% respectively). Ninety percent of mentors indicated that they had had previous experience working with individuals with disabilities. Participants were selected through an application and interview process at the beginning of each semester and worked with the students for at least one full semester. Seven students (22%) worked with the program for the entire duration of the study (Fall 2012 to Fall 2013). All students were paid a stipend for their work.

Data collection/instruments. All mentors agreed to complete an online questionnaire regarding their overall perceptions of the program and a log tracking activities and reflecting on their sessions with their assigned student. The questionnaire was a summative evaluation tool compiled of quantitative and qualitative data regarding the performance of their assigned student and their reflective thoughts about the semester. For this particular study, only the qualitative data from the questionnaire was used in the coding process. The log was an open-ended data collection instrument that served as a journal in which students kept track of activities completed during sessions, pending items, and any thoughts about the session. The log was used to collect formative data as students were instructed to fill out the log after each mentoring session. The mentors were trained during an initial orientation meeting on what type of information should be entered in the log, but no further probes were used during the process.

Analysis process. Data from the logs and questionnaires were collected in December 2012, May 2013, August 2013, and again in early December 2013. In total 58 logs and 55 questionnaires were collected over the course of a one (1) year period. A total of 31 students completed logs and questionnaires during this time. To assess the data and identify important aspects of the mentorship program along with potential areas of improvement, the researchers used the process of moving from open coding to axial coding (Gilbert, 2008). Open coding was used after each set of logs and questionnaires were collected to determine emerging themes in each log. Axial coding was then used with all sets of open coding data to determine relationships in themes across the data sets. Emerging themes were then narrowed into sub-themes and categories were developed.

Results

Three major themes were originally discovered from the goals and activities described in the data collected: Inclusion, Self-Determination, and Adaptive Behavior Skills. Refer to Table 2 for a breakdown of major themes and sub-themes recorded from the data. Within the Inclusion category were found two (2) subcategories of On-Campus Involvement and Off-Campus Involvement. Within the Self-Determination category was found one (1) subcategory of Self-Advocacy. Finally, within the Adaptive Behavior Skills category were found five (5) subcategories: Career Development, Social and Communication Skills, Physical Development/Health and Wellness, and Academic Skills.

Inclusion

On-campus involvement. The most common occurrence in the results included increased campus involvement. Nearly all mentors stated a goal of having students become more involved on campus especially in terms of joining clubs and groups. A few examples of mentors assisting students in joining clubs included intramural sports teams and political volunteer groups on campus. Mentors reported that joining a social club or group on campus was beneficial during

the college experience for social aspects. One mentor stated, *“I want her to join a club that she can be actively involved on campus. Being involved in the club will help her open up.”* Another mentor indicated, *“She needs to work on interacting with people and being less intimidated and more social. We will volunteer next week and this will be a great opportunity for her.”*

It was also reported that engaging in on-campus activities together helped to create a bond and rapport with the students as they immediately had something in common. One mentor reported that taking salsa dancing classes on campus with the student was her favorite part of the program. Taking salsa lessons eventually led to the mentor and mentee taking weekly Zumba classes on campus together as well. She reported, *“It was a great bonding experience. She really enjoyed it and I loved dancing with my student each week!”* Other mentors also agreed that having common interests outside of academics made for a more enjoyable time for both mentors and mentees.

On-campus involvement also included attending events around campus such as sorority and fraternity events, football games, featured speakers, and holiday campus events. During these events mentors shared that the students had the chance to meet new people and practice appropriate social behaviors. One mentor reported taking her assigned student to her Greek Life events to expand his social circle. She said, *“This is a great way for him to make more friends. He participated without hesitation. He engaged appropriately and was nice to everyone he met.”* Other mentors were in agreement that on-campus events provided benefits to all parties involved.

Off-campus involvement. Along with on-campus involvement, mentors reported spending time together off-campus to make the relationship more authentic. One mentor indicated that when finding out the student held a common interest in a video game, the two began getting together off campus with friends to play the game. He related, *“Our online gaming has really been a nice way to spend quality time and socialize.”* Others recorded going to events (both program sponsored and non-program sponsored) off-campus such as movies, festivals, and fairs. Mentors indicated these off-campus events offered mentees a chance to practice social behaviors in places other than the University setting. One mentor also noted that finding activities off-campus incorporated technology into the sessions as the mentee would use an app on his i-Pad to find things to do in the area. A few mentors attended university conferences with their mentees and one commented, *“[It was] such a fun time for everyone. We all bonded on a new level.”* Generally, mentors were in agreement that off-campus activities were beneficial to the mentorship process though some reported difficulty in planning these events due to time constraints and transportation.

Self-Determination

Self-advocacy. Mentors frequently mentioned the use of learning style quizzes disseminated at the initial orientation and training. Several mentors reported that filling out the learning style quiz helped them to help their mentees. One mentor added that her mentee was able to open up a dialogue about what he needed help with the most. Mentors shared that the quiz was a valuable tool to establish rapport with their mentees by learning about each other. As one stated, *“Today we talked about what we thought our strengths and weaknesses were. It ended up being a great ice breaker.”* Other mentors also indicated that the learning style quiz led to setting goals for the semester.

Mentors reported several different ways in which self-advocacy was encouraged with their mentees including travel training, speaking to professors, and establishing an ongoing dialogue with their parents. Mentors mentioned assisting students with being on time for their transportation and planning ahead to ensure arrival in the correct place. One mentor went as far

as to ride the public transportation with her mentee to get him acclimated. She reported, *“I would really like to see him take advantage of the transportation resources provided to him. We will ride together so he feels more comfortable with the process.”* Later in the semester the same mentor reported, *“He really loves taking the bus now!”* Yet another mentor reported helping his mentee research driving programs and opening a dialogue with his parents about learning how to drive. Other mentors reported going to class with their mentee to encourage them to speak to their professors about needed accommodations. Some mentors recorded meeting with mentees’ parents and encouraging more levels of independence. One mentor reported encouraging self-advocacy to allow for more time for off-campus activities together. *“Today we talked about some more leisure time that her parents could give her to have off campus activities possible. Her homework for the next meeting is to talk to them about this topic.”*

Adaptive Behavior Skills

A common theme among the data revolved around the four (4) different adaptive behavior skills: Career Development, Social and Communication Skills, Physical Development/Health and Wellness, and Academic Skills. It was also within this area that many mentors reported problem-areas and frustrations with their mentees. Adaptive Behavior Skills were a focal point in the initial orientation and training for the mentors during which mentors were encouraged to model proper behaviors and use self-determination skills to assist their students.

Career development. Mentors indicated asking their mentees what their interests and future goals were. A few mentors mentioned visiting their mentees at their job shadowing or paid job sites for observation. One mentor commented, *“He got to show me what he does at work each day and his responsibilities.”* Other mentors agreed that observation was a mutually benefitting experience. Additionally, mentors recorded activities to prepare mentees with the skills necessary for a workplace. Some activities included: building a resume, attending job fairs, conducting mock interviews, and building time management skills. One mentor said, *“We sent his resume to his advisor. I noticed he is developing a sense of professionalism.”* Another mentor commented on working on her mentee’s time management skills, *“I explained how it is rude to arrive late to anything, I emphasized the idea that if he was ever late to work they would fire him.”* Mentors were in consensus that behavior should be congruent from mentor meetings to job sites and reinforced this throughout the study – not sure what this sentence means; delete or revise

Technological skills were also emphasized in regards to adaptive behaviors for employment. All students in the program received an iPad and training, and mentors reported assisting their mentees with utilizing the iPad. . Nearly all mentors reported working with their mentees to send e-mail and using Apps for organization, calendars, and learning. One mentor discussed his use of technology with his mentee as, *“He had a lot of difficulty with organization in general, and I tried to help by getting him an app that will remind him about the things he needs to do.”* Another reported his use of technology as, *“She knows basic skills, but I am going to help her learn how to use Microsoft Word and PowerPoint.”* Others reported using the iPads for practicing academic skills such as Reading and Math. A mentor commented, *“The games are fun and he really enjoys it while learning Math skills.”* All mentors were in agreement that the iPad was a useful tool for their mentee’s career development skills and this data aligns with previous literature (Davies, Stock, & Wehmeyer, 2002).

The data revealed that an area of challenge and frustration for mentors included the lack of time management and organizational skills exhibited by the students in the program. Mentors

referenced mentees missing appointments, being unorganized, not prioritizing items, and forgetting materials during classes or sessions. As one mentor commented at the end of the semester, *“Overall, good experience to work with [her]; however, her organizational skills need to improve.”* Another commented, *“The biggest frustration was working on her time management skills.”* Literature demonstrated that improved time management can lead to enhanced independence (Davies, Stock, & Wehmeyer, 2002). This may be indicative of attention needed in relation to these skills by support staff and mentors in the future.

Social and communication skills. Social and communication skills play a major role in adaptive behavior and social competence which directly affects future adjustment including employment (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990). Social behavior, communication, and interactions were emphasized in the initial orientation and training for the mentors, therefore drawing it to their attention during the study. Many mentors chose to focus on communication and appropriate social behavior with their mentees as a goal for the semester or academic year. Several mentors noted that seeing social growth and intellectual connections with their mentees was the most rewarding part of the program.

A few common themes that occurred during the study regarding social and communication skills were appropriateness, public speaking, and expanding social circles. Nearly all mentors mentioned introducing their mentee to their circle of friends. One mentor added, *“I introduced her to my friend who is majoring [in] Nursing, that’s the major that she wants to study. We had a conversation about that.”* Several mentors spent weeks preparing and practicing speeches with their mentees who attended conferences with one mentor/mentee group making memorizing a speech a semester goal.

Even though much growth was reported, mentors expressed challenges with social behaviors and the need to redirect students to more appropriate and acceptable behaviors. One mentor stated, *“He tells so many girls they are beautiful, I explained how that might make them feel uncomfortable.”* Continuing to support mentors and other program staff in implementing strategies to improve social and communication skills is a future consideration and is supported by the literature (Campbell-Whatley, 2001; Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990).

Physical development/health and wellness. Teaching mentees about healthy diets and workout plans was a common theme in the data collected. While the mentees attended sessions during the week at the Recreational Center on campus, most mentors felt that additional help was needed. Activities reported in the logs included spinning and Zumba classes, weight training, intramural basketball and volleyball, and other machine training. One mentor reported, *“I went to the gym with [him], we came up with a workout plan that he should stick with and brought some workout exercises.”* Other mentors reported progress with their workout goals for the semester. One mentor commented on her experience, *“He called me the next day telling me he was sore but that he’s happy I made him do the extra 2 sets at the gym yesterday. I think he is seeing results!”* Overall, mentors agreed that doing physical activities played an important role in the overall experience for their mentees. This also aligns with previous literature associating regular physical activity with higher levels of self-esteem and fewer health risk factors (Robertson, Emerson, Gregory, Hatton, Turner, Kessissoglou, & Hallam, 2000; Sonstroem, 1997).

Mentors also reported having conversations with their mentees regarding diet and nutrition. One commented, *“We talked about how he needs to be on a diet and too many French fries are not good for him.”* Others reported their mentees used information from a nutrition class and applied it to their everyday life. One mentor reported a semester goal of helping her mentee

make healthier choices at the store on campus. Overall, mentors reported an increase of healthy eating habits over the course of the year study. Although diet and nutrition was not originally presented in the orientation and training meeting, a healthy diet can reduce the risk of obesity which occurs more frequently in people with intellectual disabilities (Marshall, McConkey, & Moore, 2003). Therefore, more consideration about a diet and exercise plan for the program may be necessary in the future.

Academic skills. Mentors were introduced to various instructional strategies for helping their mentees with academics at the orientation and training meeting including note-taking and studying for tests. Nearly all mentors reported working one-on-one with their mentee on academic work at some point during the study. Academic skills mentioned in the data included reading comprehension, vocabulary, math and calculation, study skills, researching in the library, and writing outlines for papers. One mentor recounted a success story with her student, *“While preparing the outline for the essay, she had some trouble spelling out certain words. Rather than asking me, she went on her phone and used an app that allows her to spell check.”* A number of mentees were reported as verbally asking for help while others required prompts regarding assignments and due dates. Other mentors also shared that their mentees showed improvement in academics throughout the study. One mentor stated, *“As the semester goes on she is taking responsibility for her own learning.”* Another mentor said, *“I love how she is becoming an independent student.”* Study skills were also emphasized in the data sets through note cards, reviewing note-taker notes, and reviewing handouts. One mentor recounted her strategies for studying with her mentee, *“She typed the notes by herself and offered to read information as I read and explain the information to her. Her homework was to take the notes home and highlight important details.”* Another mentor described giving vocabulary homework to her mentee to improve comprehension when reading for class. Overall, mentors reported attempting multiple study strategies with their mentees and ultimately witnessing positive and improved academic results at the end of each semester.

Alternatively, many concerns from the mentors emerged when examining the data. Mentors reported feeling that online classes were difficult for their mentees due to the reliance on personal accountability. Several mentors also commented on the number of classes their mentees were taking per semester. One mentor recounted, *“He was overwhelmed the entire semester and unable to keep up with 3 classes and a work schedule. It took away from his academics.”* The consensus was that mentoring sessions were not as effective when more than two classes per semester were selected. Other concerns included difficulty with assisting students with course assignments due to limited functional skills in reading and math. One mentor retold a scenario, *“He had an assignment regarding budgeting. He had trouble making easy calculations and lost any interest on the subject.”*

Discussion

Federal legislation is now making it possible for students with ID to enroll in university programs through inclusive transition models that focus on academics, social activities, employment, and independent living. With the increase in the number of students with ID participating in these programs, it is necessary to examine the types of supports that need to be in place for this population of students to experience success. One of the supports that is often identified is the use of peer mentorship for improved academic and social development (Campbell-Whatley, 2001).

In this study we examined the mentoring support students with ID received in a postsecondary transition program called ***Panther LIFE***. The purpose of the study was to

determine the specific skills mentors needed and used during their mentoring sessions as well as to identify potential struggles and challenges with mentoring partnerships in postsecondary transition programs. The data reported from participating mentors revealed the skills that were held in high priority during mentoring sessions were improving and enhancing the academic, social, and employability skills of the students. Mentors wanted their students to understand their academic responsibilities in university courses, but equally stressed the importance of understanding and displaying appropriate social behavior on and off campus. Furthermore, mentors understood that the goal of the program was to prepare students for paid employment after program completion and therefore engaged their students in conversations and activities related to career exploration and the development of work-related skills. These mentor perspectives allow transition programs such as *Panther LIFE* to re-evaluate priorities and focus on overall student inclusion and future success.

The results also demonstrate that mentors at the postsecondary level for students with ID choose to focus on challenges that directly reflect their own as well as other college-aged students without ID: becoming a self-advocate, attempting to be more independent, expanding social circles, and gaining employment after graduation. While students with ID may struggle with these challenges in different ways, ultimately mentors serve as a bridge of understanding between a college campus and a student. Researchers such as Jones and Goble (2012) have noted that mentors require preparation and training before working with students with ID, however, the results indicate that continued support throughout the transition programs is needed. Mentors need further support from postsecondary transition programs especially in areas related to time management - balancing work life, school life, and social life.

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Table 1. Program Activities and Descriptions

Program Activity	Description
On-campus Job Shadowing Experiences (n=3)	These employability experiences will occur on-campus with the support of the Employability/Community Coordinator in collaboration with the student's assigned job coach and on-the-job supervisor. Each student will have a total of three (3) job shadowing experiences to introduce them to a particular knowledge base and skill set (e.g., clerical/office, recreational, child care). Job shadowing experiences are part-time typically occurring 2-3 times per week.
Off-campus Supervised Employment Internship (=2)	These employability internship experiences will occur off-campus with the support of the Employability/Community Coordinator in collaboration with the student's assigned job coach and on-the-job supervisor. Each student will have a total of two (2) supervised internships with a public or private business in the local community to focus on developing expertise in an area of career interest. Internships are full-time typically occurring 5 times per week.
Online Functional Academics Curriculum	<i>i-Ready Reading and Math Curriculum</i> will be used by students in the program under the direction of the M-DCPS Project Coordinator. This curriculum focuses on the development of reading and math skills through online individualized instruction with ongoing progress monitoring.
Online Transition Curriculum	<i>Unique Learning System Transition Program</i> will be used by students in the program under the direction of the M-DCPS Project Coordinator. The primary goal of this curriculum is to increase a student's independence in the areas of job skills and daily living through the creation of learning opportunities in the context of real-world scenarios.
Online Employability Curriculum	<i>Microcomputer Evaluation of Careers and Academics (MECA)</i> will be accessed by students in the program under the direction of the M-DCPS Project Coordinator. <i>MECA</i> is an age-appropriate transition, career exploration, career assessment, and vocational assessment system related to training, education, and employment.
Program Activities	Program activities include attendance at University Orientation & Welcome Back meetings, weekly sessions with system of supports (e.g., academic mentors, peer coaches), attending monthly student meetings, family/student seminars, etc.

Table 2. Mentor Reported Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme	Frequently Recorded Activities
Inclusion	On-Campus Involvement	Homecoming Activities Sporting Events Greek Life Activities Joining a Club
	Off-Campus Involvement	Special Olympics Activities Going to the movies Attending festivals
Self-Determination	Self-Advocacy	Creating Personal Goals Utilizing the Disability Resource Center Using Public Transportation Determining Learning Style
Adaptive Behavior Skills	Career Development	Career Services Events Resume/Job Interview Prep Observing student at Work Sending e-mails Utilizing iPad for organization
	Social and Communication Skills	Meeting for Lunch Practicing Speech Making Symposiums, Presentations, and Conferences
	Physical Development/Health and Wellness	Going to the gym together Working on a diet and talking about nutrition Doing Yoga
	Academic Skills	Reading/Answering Book Questions Doing homework and projects Studying together and going over study habits Meeting at and using the library