

COMMUNITY BASED INSTRUCTION

Community experiences, by definition, are those services provided outside of the school building, in community settings or perhaps by schools or other agencies (community-based work experiences, job site training programs, banking, shopping, transportation, community counseling, recreational services, independent living centers, adult services providers, etc.). Although these activities are generally considered for children receiving transition services - beginning at 14 years of age under PA Special Education Regulations, for younger children with more severe disabilities, these services are important as well. Community based experiences and activities connect school learning to community learning in the actual environments in which the student will apply them.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Many youngsters with disabilities simply cannot generalize skills well enough to learn them in one place (a classroom) and have the skills carry over into real life situations (the community).

WHERE TO START?

As with most services for children with disabilities, community based instruction starts with an evaluation.

- What are the interests of the student?
- What are the strengths of the student?
- What are the needs of the student?
- What are the available resources in the community?
- Which of these resources will lend themselves to meeting the needs of the student?
- Develop a 'vision'

QUESTIONS THE IEP TEAM SHOULD ASK

The answers to the following questions should lead to a plan for community based instruction.

- Can the student express his/her need for support services or accommodations?
- What public transportation is available for the student?
- Does the student need special transportation arrangements on an ongoing basis?
- How does the student act in social situations?
- Is the student aware of and able to follow the law?
- Is the student able to purchase and prepare food?
- Is the student able to use and manage money?
- Does the student maintain personal hygiene?
- What type of supports might the student continue to need in any of these areas?
- Where might that support come from after graduation?

HOW TO START

Ideally, the IEP team should be looking at the community as a resource but, frequently, they do not. What do you have in your community? How can each location be used to meet the goals of the student? No matter how small your area, many of the following resources exist.

- Bank
- Grocery store
- Library
- Fast food restaurant
- Shopping center or mall
- Laundry or Dry cleaners
- Post Office

GETTING STARTED

- Walk around town
- Check the Google Maps or local network
- Speak to owners/managers/employees in various locations
- Share your vision

WHAT SKILLS DOES YOUR CHILD NEED TO DEVELOP?

- Communication
- Functional life skills
- Vocational skills
- Social skills
- Recreation/Leisure

HOW DO THEY FIT?

In a very practical way, each community location can offer an opportunity to learn and practice the skills that are needed for adult living. The following is an example of a consolidated plan of activities and how they are tied together.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- At school a menu might be planned.
- A shopping list is developed.
- Cost of items on the shopping list are estimated.
- Transportation is arranged (or planned) for trip to grocery store.
- Using the layout of the store, items are selected to fulfill the shopping list.
- Groceries are paid for checking change and receipt.
- Lunch is prepared by student on return to school.
- Lunch can be shared with other students or school staff.

This activity can be used to offer an opportunity to order and purchase lunch in the community during the shopping trip and save the food that is purchased to prepare another meal. Students can 'run errands' during shopping trip for school staff. Lists of items needed can be collected from staff. Students can purchase items to hold a bake sale in school. Monies earned can be used to pay for trip or special activities around school. The possibilities are limited only by your imagination!

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