



Key points:

- **Bolster transition-ready behavior in addition to academic success**
- **Gather data to support implementation of constructs**
- **Highlight expectations, norms of career, college cultures**

≤ Use 6 constructs as 'blueprint' for your transition planning

A common misconception of postsecondary transition is that it's all about helping kids find jobs and go to college, said Mary Morningstar, director of the [Transition Coalition](#) and associate professor in the Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas. However, she said, there's much more to it than that.

"Students have to be engaged in their schools to be successful in the future and in order to get a sense that learning is important," Morningstar said. To strengthen [postsecondary transition planning](#), Morningstar and her colleagues have developed six constructs of college and career readiness.

"Our constructs include not only academic knowledge, but also behaviors that students need to exhibit over time to show success in academics," she said.

"Ask what you can do to integrate these constructs in students' IEPs," added Allison Lombardi, an educational psychology professor at the University of Connecticut who worked with Morningstar to develop the constructs. "Think of them as a roadmap or blueprint," she said.

Consider the following constructs as you assess the postsecondary transition needs of your students:

1. Emphasize critical thinking. Start by addressing how students are problem-solving, how they are communicating with peers and adults, and whether they are able to come up with novel solutions to problems that occur inside and outside of the classroom, Morningstar said. Measure students' critical thinking with specific data -- for example, you can gather information about a student's communication skills from his performance on verbal and written presentations. (*Source: Six Constructs of College and Career Readiness: Student Readiness, Table 2.*)

2. Engage students in academics. "This construct is where we focus much more on students' specific content knowledge across subjects," Morningstar said. "It is more directly aligned with academic achievement and the [Common Core State Standards](#)." Students' ability to link ideas and organize concepts should be taken into account, as should their work habits, class participation, productivity, and school attendance, Morningstar said.

"You have to align [school] attendance with responsibility and the transition element," she said. "Ask: 'Does your high school have an early warning system in place?' and 'Are students dropping out of school because of too many absences?'" she said. "You need to be tracking this and providing more support if this is the case," Morningstar said.

3. Promote a growth mindset. Instill students' sense of belonging and promote trusting relationships with adults in school, Morningstar said. Furthermore, she said, develop students' growth mindset -- this

means teaching them self-efficacy, self-determination, and self-confidence, she said. It is important for students, especially those with intensive needs, to have the mindset that they are continuing to grow despite their struggles, Morningstar said. "From research of students with disabilities, those who are successful persevere through difficulties. Educators need to support that."

Lombardi agrees. "Teachers need to understand that having a disability does not equal a 'fixed' mindset," she said. "If a student has a disability, there might be certain limitations, but that doesn't mean that they can't strengthen certain skills. Allow students to make mistakes and learn from them."

In addition, give students a sense of ownership for their learning, Morningstar said. For example, you can have them keep track of their own grades and have them devise their own solutions if they are not passing the class. "It's not just, 'attend a class and get information out,'" she said. "It's active learning."

4. Incorporate learning strategies. Test-taking skills, note-taking skills, time management, and organizational skills should all be part of students' transition planning toolbox, Morningstar said. It's also critical to teach students technical skills such as using [assistive technology](#) and computers, she said. With these skills, students have access to the academic content, Morningstar said.

5. Focus on interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills such as teamwork, cooperation, working in groups, and taking responsibility are also important for college and career readiness, Morningstar said. "We've also added adaptability and flexibility to this list after hearing how most secondary schools are becoming more diverse," she said. Students need to learn how to build tolerance and work with students who are different from themselves, she added.

6. Instill transition knowledge. Learning how to apply for a job and to college and how to fill out relevant applications are crucial to students' postsecondary success, Morningstar said. However, it's also important for students to understand the career and college cultures, she said. For example, if a student is applying for college, transition teams should inform him about faculty expectations and norms that are distinct to the college campus, she said. "On the other side is career culture, which entails professionalism, interview skills, developing a resume, vocational interests and goals, and getting a sense of where the students think they are headed in the future," Morningstar said.

Finally, ensure team members know their roles and responsibilities regarding accessing community resources and vocational opportunities for the student, providing transportation when necessary, and helping the student with financial literacy and planning. (*Source: Six Constructs of College and Career Readiness: Student Readiness, Table 2.*)

See also:

- [Assess transition needs in 3 key areas for students with multiple disabilities](#) (June 6)
- [Transition plans: Help students put financial literacy into practice](#) (May 28)
- [Put students with disabilities on road to self-advocacy](#) (May 5)

For more stories and guidance on this topic, see the [Postsecondary Transition Roundup](#).

Philip Barnes covers postsecondary transition and charter school topics for LRP Publications.

August 27, 2014

*Reprinted with Permission from: **SpecialEdConnection**[®]. Copyright © 2014 by LRP Publications, 360 Hiatt Drive, Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33418. All rights reserved. For more information on this or other products published by LRP Publications, please call 1-800-341-7874 or visit our website at www.specialedconnection.com.*