CEC's DCDT FAST FACTS: Occupational Courses
Prepared by the DCDT Publications Committee

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center has identified evidence-based predictors of post-school success for students with disabilities based on a systematic correlational literature review (Test et al., 2009). Findings indicated that students with disabilities, who participate in occupational coursework in high school, are more likely to be engaged in post-school employment and education experiences (Halpern, Yovanoff, Doren, & Benz, 1995; Heal & Rusch, 1995). Recently, Rowe et al. (2013) conducted a Delphi study to add specificity to the existing predictor definitions identified by Test et al. (2009) and operationally defined the predictors so local educators understand the components necessary to develop, implement, and evaluate secondary transition programs based on predictor research.

Occupational courses have been operationally defined as “individual courses that support career awareness, allow or enable students to explore various career pathways, develop occupational specific skills through instruction, and experiences focused on their desired employment goals” (Rowe et al., 2013).

Occupational courses should include the following essential program characteristics identified by Rowe et al., 2013:

- Embed career awareness activities, career planning, and vocational assessments
- Design curriculum for each course to include technology, 21st century skills, and employability skills for specific career/career cluster content
- Provide hands-on and community-based opportunities to learn occupational specific skills
- Incorporate Universal Design for Learning principles in Career Technical Education programs including cooperative education programs to provide access to students with disabilities
- Provide course offerings throughout the school day so scheduling conflicts do not restrict student access
- Provide occupational courses that represent a wide variety of occupational clusters to provide students course choices that match their preferences, interests, needs, and strengths

Application to Teachers

- Evaluate occupational courses to ensure essential program characteristics are included.
- Review descriptions of high school occupational classes and career clusters to become familiar with the skills, expertise, and knowledge being developed in each class.
- Share class descriptions with students and families to help students identify appropriate occupational courses based on their post-school goals, strengths, preferences, interests, and needs.
- Participate in curriculum alignment activities at the school, district, and state levels to ensure skills, expertise, and knowledge relative to a single occupation or career cluster are explicitly stated and designed to include students with diverse abilities.
• Collaborate with occupational class teachers and guidance counselors to identify appropriate classes for individual students.
• Ensure occupational coursework is included in students’ IEPs.
• Embed occupational skills into general education content.

Application to Administrators
• Use the Predictor Self-Assessment to evaluate occupational courses located here: http://psocenter.org/content_page_assets/content_page_3/Predictor_Self-Assessment.final_06_24_13.pdf
• Guide curriculum alignment activities to ensure skills, expertise, and knowledge relative to a single occupation or career cluster are clear to all teachers.
• Provide leadership at the district and state levels for curriculum alignment activities to ensure skills, expertise, and knowledge relative to a single occupation or career cluster are explicitly stated and designed to include students with diverse abilities.
• Provide professional development opportunities on occupational classes and career clusters for all teachers in the school, not just career and technical education teachers.
• Provide opportunities for special education teachers and transition coordinators to collaborate with career and technical education teachers and guidance counselors to build understanding of the occupational courses available to all students and to select courses for individual students.

Application to Families
• Talk with your child about his or her post-school goals and help him or her select courses that are in line with his or her interests and what he or she plans to do after leaving high school.
• Ask how your child’s high school classes and IEP goals and objectives will support what he or she plans to do after leaving high school.
• Volunteer to serve on school and district committees to provide perspective and ensure all students are represented in planning and design of occupational courses.

Where to go for Additional Information

Websites
Association for Career and Technical Education
• https://www.acteonline.org
Career and Technical Education at the US Department of Education
• http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cte/index.html
National Research Center for Career and Technical Education
• http://www.nrccte.org
National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center students with disabilities and readiness for college and careers: 101 documents
Books and Research Articles


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