

Needs Assessment

This project was initiated because students with disabilities often feel left out of the college process. They recognize they are different and have more unique needs compared to the rest of their peers. This can leave them feeling discouraged. Frequently students with disabilities do not understand exactly what is required of their desired profession, which can lead students to be unrealistic in their visions of post secondary options.

Objectives

- To help students with disabilities decide if college is an appropriate option
- To make students with disabilities the center of post secondary decision making
- To prepare students with disabilities for life after high school
- To expose students with disabilities to college representatives
- To engage students with disabilities in meaningful conversations with guidance counselors and parents about life after high school
- To raise awareness about the college process and transition from high school for students with disabilities

Project Planning and Implementation

My department chairman had mentioned in previous years that he would like to implement a college night for students with disabilities. This population often lacks the awareness, both self and legal, necessary to make appropriate post secondary decisions. As college transition has always been a passion of mine, I decided to take this idea and run with it.

To begin I met with building administrators, the special education director, guidance counselors, and resource room teachers for ideas and feedback. They were critical in helping with the brainstorming process. It was wonderful to collaborate with them on the project. From

there I recognized I needed to learn more about the varying programs offered by colleges and universities.

My next step was to attend various college fairs around Long Island and network with college representatives. It was during this time that I came across a college representative that specialized in giving motivational speeches to students about the transition to college. I immediately thought this would be a perfect opportunity for students with disabilities. I especially liked this idea because students would be hearing from a different face; they always hear lectures from their teachers and the director of special education. I felt the impact would be greater if hearing from someone they had never met before. Upon approval from building administration, I arranged and secured this motivational speaker to present to our junior and senior special education population. This event was also extended to the members and families of SEPTA, building guidance counselors, and psychologists. I was so pleased with the turnout! During the actual presentation I had student volunteers take notes on an iPad. From those notes I created a “Points to Remember” reference sheet for students to look back on. Students also completed a reflection following the presentation.

Afterwards I received feedback that students were taking his advice and beginning to do preliminary research about their preferred career choice. It was my goal to make this a springboard for more awareness about the transition from high school to college, which leads to the next piece of the project.

While planning for the guest speaker to present, I also maintained connections with college representatives. I reached out to many of them and invited them to a SEPTA meeting which focused on the transition from high school to college for students with disabilities. I was able to secure representatives from three colleges: City University of New York, New York

Institute of Technology, and Adelphi University. Working closely with our district transition coordinator was also a large part of this piece of the project. I learned a lot about communicating with colleges and parents from her. The college representatives were present at the SEPTA meeting and were available to answer any questions parents or students might have. I was very proud of how this event turned out. Parents in attendance were gaining valuable information about the programs these schools offered. Many of them thanked me for offering this and asked for it to continue for next year.

In the third part of the project I compiled all the research and resources I culled during the previous year into a college resource website. This website includes lists of questions for students to ask themselves and prospective colleges, a mind map survey, and a directory of colleges, both in state and out of state, with specialized programs for students with disabilities. I chose to focus on those programs because virtually every college has a support office for students with disabilities. What is not that well known are the specific college programs for students with learning disabilities. Upon completion, I shared this website with central office staff who felt it should be included not only on the SEPTA website, but also on the South High School's and North High School's guidance and special education website.

Project Description

This project had three parts:

1. Arrange and secure guest speaker to enhance students' awareness about college. This encouraged conversations at home, which led to the second piece.

2. SEPTA parents, students, and faculty were invited to a SEPTA meeting focusing on the transition from high school to college. This meeting also featured representatives from three local colleges.

3. A college resource website was created to include all the information that was accumulated over the past year.

Project Evaluation

To assess whether the project objectives have been met I used student feedback and reflections from guest speaker. I also got a lot of feedback from resource room teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and psychologists thanking me for bringing in both the guest speaker and the college representatives to the SEPTA meeting. My biggest goal was to make students with disabilities feel more a part of the college process that our school focuses so greatly on.

Project Reflection

The transition from high school to post secondary life for students with disabilities is a true passion of mine. It is something I have had a genuine interest in since beginning my Masters Degree at Long Island University. I am pleased with the results of my project as I have received very positive feedback from teachers, parents, and administration. I do feel that it has left a lasting impact on the school and will continue to be used for years to come.