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THE EFFECTS OF TRAINING ON PARENT KNOWLEDGE
AND EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENT
POSTSCHOOL OUTCOMES

by

Robert Jake Hunsaker

A creative project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTERS OF EDUCATION

In

Special Education

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

The Effects of Training on Parent Knowledge and Expectations of Student
Postschool Outcomes

by

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Most students with disabilities have poor postschool outcomes related to employment or postsecondary education. Very few of these students gain meaningful jobs or go to college. A key predictor of successful postschool outcomes for students with disabilities is high parental expectations. This project examined the effects of parent training on transition agency services on increasing parents' knowledge and expectations for postschool outcomes for their young adult with disabilities. Participants included English-speaking parents/guardians of young adults with disabilities from Alpine school district in Utah. Participants' knowledge was measured by correct answers on identical pretests and posttests. Participants' expectations were measured on a 4-point rating scale in identical pretests and posttests. Participants were given a pretest before a training session on agency services related to employment and postsecondary education. Participants were then given a posttest. Parents were given an assignment to contact one of the agencies discussed in training. An optional second 45 min training was scheduled 1 week after the initial training discussing expectations and how they have changed. The

parent training increased both the participants' knowledge of employment and postsecondary services provided by agencies and their postschool expectations for their young adult with disabilities. The implications of these results can improve how education professionals deliver transition services.

Introduction

The purpose of education services is to prepare students for life outside of school. This statement holds true for students who receive special education services. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) considers students with disabilities to be successful when they are employed and continue their education in a post-secondary setting. Special education teachers are expected to have students from their classes be employed or attending a post-secondary education program one year after exiting out of public education.

Researchers (Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012; Papay & Bambara, 2013) found that parent expectation is a key indicator for successful post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities. For example, Papay and Bambara (2013) stated that parent expectations were the strongest predictor of obtaining employment and attending a post-secondary education program. These researchers also considered that parent expectations were family characteristics and were unalterable by special educators.

In a related study, Pleet-Odle et al. (2016) found that 25 parent advocates of students with disabilities credited parent training as a strategy that supported and promoted high parent expectations of post-school outcomes. Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, and Zane (2007) recommended that informing parents about career options could expand career aspirations parents had for their child with a disability. Although research supported parent training as a key practice for promoting parent expectations, there have only been three studies published about its effectiveness (Boone, 1992; Rowe & Test, 2010; Young, Morgan, Callow-Heusser, & Lindstrom, 2014). If

parent expectations are a key indicator for successful post-secondary outcomes, one might expect more investigation into the effects of parent training.

Literature Review

I conducted a search using ERIC EBSCOhost, and Google Scholar with a combination of the following terms: *disabilities, postschool outcomes, family perceptions, special education, employment, students with disabilities, transition, family preparation, parent involvement, increasing parent expectations, parent expectations, individuals with disabilities, and transition to adulthood*. The search yielded 102 articles. I only reviewed articles that involved parent expectations and/or parent trainings for students with disabilities not already in post-secondary settings, which narrowed the articles to 18 studies. The three articles that were deemed most relevant to this study, because of their connection to parent expectations and post-secondary outcomes and parent training regarding post-secondary material, comprise the review below.

First, Doren, Gau, and Lindstrom (2012) conducted a secondary analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). The purpose of their analysis was to (a) examine the effects that parents' expectations of their child with disabilities had on high school graduation and postschool outcomes, (b) examine demographics of families and individuals that might moderate the relationship between parent expectations and high school graduation and postschool outcomes, and (c) examine autonomy as a mediator between parent expectations and high school graduation and postschool outcomes. The authors examined data from the NLTS2 nationally representative sample of students receiving special education services who were 13-17-year-old during the 2000-2001 school year. At the time that Doren et al. conducted their study, the students

were 24-27 years old. Doren et al. found that when parents had high expectations for high school graduation and postschool outcomes of their young adult with a disability, the young adult was significantly more likely to achieve the outcome. The authors also found that demographic characteristics did not affect the outcomes of high parent expectations. Doren et al. noted that parent expectations of receiving a high school diploma for students with an intellectual disability did not impact the outcome, but the expectations did affect students with a learning disability. The authors found that autonomy did not mediate the relationship between parent expectations and high school graduation and postschool outcomes. Doren et al. concluded their study with two recommendations. The first recommendation was for education professionals to help parents change the way they thought about what successful postschool outcomes mean. The second recommendation was for schools to provide information regarding supports, accommodations, and services available to help individuals with disabilities achieve postschool outcomes.

Providing information regarding available resources for individuals with disabilities after high school is important for sustaining parents high expectations. Pleet-Odle et al. (2016) conducted a survey of 25 advocates of young adults with disabilities concerning ways that schools can promote high parent expectations. The advocates consisted of parents of children with disabilities in high school or older and special education professionals. The advocates answered questions regarding their experiences with the school system and what professionals could do to promote high expectations to make parents feel like valued members of the transition team. The authors sorted the

responses into major strategies. The survey yielded seven strategies suggesting what special education professionals can do to promote high expectations. They were:

- Engage parents in training opportunities in a variety of formats to address transition-related school and adult support services, eligibility, and access.
- Partner with families to explore role models.
- Interact respectfully with each family according to their unique cultural—linguistic differences and priorities.
- Begin planning for transition early, engaging families as partners to build a robust transition IEP and empower them as allies.
- Partner with families to support their young person's independence.
- Empower families to trust their instincts about their youth's future and help them build a network of support.
- Work with families to support students' success in all domains—academic, recreational, extracurricular, spiritual, and community participation.

The advocates stated that engaging parents in trainings that provided information regarding transition-related school and adult support services promoted parents to have high expectations. The researchers also recommended that education agencies sponsor training to connect families with information about services provided through state agencies. Because the researchers used a survey method to collect this information, no data actually supported that these suggestions had an effect on parent expectations or how they increased parent knowledge regarding employment and post-secondary education services.

Young et al. (2014) conducted a study with 29 parents of individuals with disabilities between the ages of 15-18 years of age within the Alpine school district in Utah. This study examined the difference of knowledge gain between parents who received an informative brochure about transition services provided by the school district and other agencies and parents who received the brochure plus training regarding the information from the brochure. The authors also examined whether parents contacted an agency mentioned on the brochure within 30 days of the training. Young et al. divided the 29 parents into two groups, 13 parents were assigned to a brochure-only group, and 16 parents were assigned to a brochure-plus-training group. Participants from both groups were given a pretest. Thereafter, brochure-only participants were given 60 min to review the information from the brochure and were then given a posttest. The brochure plus training participants were given the brochure and a 60-min training from the first author using the brochure as an outline for the training. The participants were given a posttest after training. Participants from both groups were contacted 30 days after the training and asked if they had made contact with any of the agencies listed on the brochure. Young et al. found that participants from the brochure-plus-training group evidenced increased knowledge scores on the posttests compared to the brochure-only participant. Additionally, participants in the brochure-plus-training also were more likely to contact agencies covered during the training.

Young et al. found that connecting parents with information through training was more effective at increasing their knowledge than just giving them a brochure with the information. Young et al. did not examine if the increase of knowledge the parents

gained from the training affected the parents' expectations for their child with a disability regarding postschool outcomes.

The extant research links high parent expectations to successful postschool outcomes, and the importance of connecting parents with information regarding services provide by other agencies. Additionally, the literature shows the importance of training in increasing parent knowledge regarding available services. However, there exists no literature on what effect parent training has on increasing parent expectations for postschool outcomes.

The purpose of this study is twofold. The first purpose is to examine to what extent parent training on transition services provided by other agencies for individuals with disabilities will increase parent knowledge. The second part is to examine to what extent parents' expectations for postschool outcomes increases as a byproduct of their increased knowledge. Both purposes will be measured by comparing parent responses on a pre and post-test.

Research Questions

Given parents of students with disabilities between the ages of 14-21 years, to what extent will parent training on services for adults with disabilities increase parent knowledge according to results of pretest and posttest?

Given parent training on services for adults with disabilities, will parent expectations for post-secondary outcomes of their child with a disability increase based on pre- and post-test measures?

Method

Participants and Setting

Participants were eight mothers of students with disabilities. These participants lived within the Alpine school district in Utah. Participants were all females and their ages ranged between 48 to 55 years of age. Participants were selected because they were parents/guardians of students ages 14-22 years old, who are receiving special education services. All eight participants had students with low-incidence disabilities such as severe intellectual disabilities. Participants were recruited through a flier describing parent training related to transition from school to adulthood. The flier described the parent training as a research project conducted by a student researcher under supervision of a professor at Utah State University. The participants volunteered for the training session by contacting the student researcher. The student researcher added the parent/guardian to a password-protected computer file listing names and contact information. After parents/guardians provided informed consent, the file of names and contact information were used by the student researcher to contact parents following the training session to ask if parents/guardians carried out their assignment (described below). The file with identifying information was then destroyed 14 days after the second, optional training session. Participants were given an informed consent form and were able to ask the researcher any questions for clarification, and were then asked to sign the consent form. The training was also limited to parents/guardians, which excluded siblings and extended family.

The training and optional follow-up session was conducted in a small gym of a post-high school within the same district. The gym was 697 square m. The gym had chairs and tables for participants. There was a projector and a screen to show a presentation accompanying the training. The presenter and participants used a built-in sound system.

Pretest

Composition of the pretest. The pretest consisted of questions regarding the participant's demographics, knowledge of adult agency services, and expectations for postschool outcomes. See Appendix A for test questions. The demographics section included questions that focused on the parent's/guardian's gender, adult student's disability classification, age, and relationship to participant. The knowledge section included 12 open-ended questions worth 20 points focusing on agencies that provide services for employment and postsecondary education (i.e. Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Services for People with Disabilities, College Disability Resource Centers, etc.). The expectation section included four questions with a 4-point rating scale of participant's expectations of the students' likely achievements regarding employment and postsecondary education.

Pretest preparation. As the researcher, I presented the pretest questions to four faculty members for suggestions on increasing clarity, comprehensiveness, and relevance. Their recommendations were incorporated.

Administration of pretest. The pretest was administered after participants signed the informed consent form and before the beginning of the training. The completed pretests were gathered before the training began.

Training Procedures

Number of sessions and duration. The training was conducted in one session. See Appendix B for an outline of the parent training and follow-up session. The training session lasted 60 min. The training was focused on introducing agencies and some services they provide to participants and giving participants the assignment of contacting one of the agencies. The follow-up session was optional and would have focused on a discussion of the participants' experience with the assignment and questions they may have related to the training. All participants chose not to participate in the follow-up session and preferred a call from the researcher for follow-up on the assignment, the calls lasted from 3-5 min each. Including time necessary to read the informed consent form and take the pretest and posttest, total duration of participation was 60-75 min.

Orientation of training. The researcher spent 5 min greeting the participants and welcoming them to the training and explaining to them that the training was focused on a few agencies that could help students with disabilities obtain competitive employment and continue their education after they finish secondary school.

Session 1 training topics. The researcher began the training by introducing himself and sharing two success stories of individuals with disabilities becoming employed and attending postsecondary education. The researcher then explained that high parental expectations for young adults were a key predictor of the young adult having successful postschool outcomes. The training continued with the researcher explaining how Utah is an "Employment First" state and what that meant for them (i.e., that employment is first priority for young adults with disabilities and that jobs should be sought in integrated, community environments at minimum wage or higher). The

researcher then introduced different services for young adults with disabilities and mentioned a few services that can assist individuals with disabilities obtain employment and attend post-secondary education. The researcher introduced services and service agencies such as Supplemental Security Income, Utah Work Incentive Planning Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Services for Persons with Disabilities, Department of Workforce Services, and Medicaid. The researcher also talked about college disability resource centers and the availability of scholarships for individuals with disabilities.

Follow-up phone call. The researcher attempted to contact all eight participants by phone to ask questions regarding completion of the assignment.

Posttest

Composition of the posttest. The posttest contained the same knowledge-based and expectation-based questions as the pretest. The questions were presented in a randomized order using the pretest as the original sequence. Participants were able to use any notes obtained through the training to answer the questions on the posttest.

Training assignment. At the end of the training session, the researcher gave the participants the assignment to contact one of the service providers described in the training, and talk with providers about that service. The participants' were given one week to complete the assignment. The researcher made phone calls to parents/guardians 7 days following the training session, for parents/guardians to report whether or not they completed the assignment. In the follow-up phone call, parents/guardians were asked to simply respond "yes" or "no" to the question about whether the assignment was completed. If "yes" the researcher asked which adult service provider was contacted and when/if an appointment was scheduled.

Administration of posttest. The posttest was administered after the first training. The posttest was gathered before the participants left the training room.

Dependent Variables and Data Collection

Pretest items measuring expectations required that participants rate each item on a 4-point scale (from “very unlikely” to “very likely”). The researcher computed means and standard deviations on both pretests and posttests, as well as percent of total respondents who selected each of the four points on the scale for each question. The researcher scored the knowledge-based questions and scored them according to percent correct. The data were compiled by the researcher into a spreadsheet and sorted by type of question.

Interscorer Reliability

The researcher and a co-investigator scored the knowledge-based questions on both the pretest and posttest. Interscorer reliability was calculated on 25% of pre and posttests ($n=2$ participants) based on identical scoring of each question. Interscorer reliability was calculated by dividing the total number of agreements by the total number agreements plus disagreements and multiplying that score by 100. Disagreement was defined as a difference in how scorers scored an answer. Overall, interscorer reliability was 93.75% (95.83% for pre-assessments and 91.67% for post-assessments).

Data Analysis

The researcher evaluated the knowledge-based questions by checking for correct answers. Some questions had multiple parts. The researcher calculated mean percent correct on the knowledge-based questions and mean ratings for expectation-based items. I compared the means of both types of questions between the pretest and posttest. I also examined the relationship of the change in means relative to standard deviations and

compute an effect size $(M_{\text{post}} - M_{\text{pre}})/SD_{\text{pre}}$ as a measure of the magnitude of the training effect.

Results

Demographic Questions

Two participants stated that their young adults had the disability classification of an intellectual disability. Three participants stated that their young adults had the disability classification of autism. One participant stated that her young adult had multiple disabilities. Two participants chose multiple classifications for their young adults, one participant stated her young adult had the disability classifications of autism and emotional disturbance, the other participant stated her young adult had an intellectual disability, an orthopedic impairment, and speech or language impairment.

Knowledge-Based Questions

As shown in Figure 1, the participants' mean from the knowledge-based questions increased from around 12% correct on the pretest to approximately 54% correct on the posttest. On the posttest, overall scores were 42% higher than on the pretest.

The range of the pretest was 0-5 correct responses out of 20, with a SD of 0.65 correct responses. The range of the posttest was 5-17 correct responses out of 20, with a SD of 1.46 correct responses. The effect size of the training was 1.71 (i.e., $10.75 - 2.38 = 8.37$ divided by the square root of the pre mean square [square root of $23.8752 = 4.8862$] $= 8.37 \div 4.88$). An effect size of 1.71 is relatively large and indicates a positive increase in knowledge question performance as a function of training.

Expectation-Based Questions

The average ratings of participants' expectations based on the pretest and posttest are shown in Table 1 the ratings are based on a 4-point scale. The participants' expectation for their child to graduate with a high school diploma increased from an average of 1.25 to an average of 1.63. The participants' expectation for their child to obtain part-time employment increased from an average of 2.88 to an average of 3.50. The participants' expectation for their child to obtain part-time employment increased from an average of 1.50 to an average of 2.13. The participants' expectation for their child to attend postsecondary education decreased from an average of 2.88 to an average of 2.50. Although data are insufficient, two of the four parents who had young adults with the disability classification of autism had lower expectations regarding their young adults attending postsecondary education on the posttest. More data would be needed to draw any conclusions.

Assignment Follow-Up

The researcher was able to contact 5 of 8 participants over the phone. Two participants reported that they had completed their assignment of contacting an agency. One participant contacted a college disability resource center, and the other participant contacted the Division of Services for Persons with Disabilities and Vocational Rehabilitation. The three participants that were contacted who did not complete the assignment stated that they forgot, got busy, or had already been in contact with the agencies discussed in the training.

Unanticipated Results

Some unanticipated results were the decrease in the average parent/guardian expectation for their young adult with a disability to attend postsecondary education as

shown in Table 1. That is, mean expectations of participants decreased slightly on the question about whether parents expected their child to attend college. This could have been a result of misunderstanding regarding local postsecondary programs before as compared to after the training. That is, during the training, parents understood more specifically the eligibility requirements for programs in the state tailored to college students with developmental disabilities, and as a result, their expectations may have decreased.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was twofold. The first focused on the effects of a parent training on increasing parent knowledge regarding employment and postsecondary education services. The second focused on the effects of the training on increasing parent/guardian expectations for employment and postsecondary education for their young adult with disabilities. The researcher found that both parent/guardian knowledge and expectations increased on the posttest, except for the expectation of their child attending postsecondary education. The job-related expectations increased more than the education-based expectations, perhaps because the majority of the training session focused on services available to support employment. The findings that training increased parent/guardian knowledge are consistent with those from the study conducted by Young et al. (2014). The findings that the training increased parent/guardian expectations for their young adults becoming employed are consistent with the findings from the survey conducted by Pleet-Odle et al. (2016) which showed that connecting parents/guardians with information promoted and maintained high expectations. The findings that the training decreased parent/guardian expectations for their young adults

attending postsecondary education is not consistent with the survey by Pleet-Odle et al., as stated above the decrease might be a result of participants misunderstandings regarding local postsecondary education programs before the training. Collectively, data from this study add to the existing research base indicating that parent perspectives change when they receive information on child postschool services and supports. Future research should investigate further the relationship between parent expectations and knowledge before and after training, such as the effects of multiple training sessions over time or carrying out assignments with their child.

Limitations

This study contained notable limitations. One was the low number of participants and their demographics limited to the Alpine school district in Utah. Although efforts were made to recruit parents of students from multiple schools, few parents responded. Future research must explore ways to incentivize parent involvement in training, perhaps through recruitment efforts from other parents or parent organizations. Another limitation was that the training was only provided in English, excluding parents/guardians that could not speak or understand the language. Given that youth from other linguistic backgrounds probably struggle in postschool outcomes, future research should explore ways to recruit parents representing other languages. A third limitation was that participation in the study was based on parents/guardians volunteering, potentially producing a sample biased towards higher expectations and knowledge, and thus not representative or generalizable to the population at large. This limitation is particularly difficult to navigate because participants must have the opportunity to consent to participation. Perhaps a more organized and multi-faceted effort is needed such as online

training offered continuously to provide flexibility or trained parents who recruit other parents. Finally, all participants were parents of young adults with low-incidence disabilities therefore results are not representative of other parents, such as those who have children with specific learning disabilities. Future research should take into account these expectations by generating parent samples that are more diverse, thus increasing generalizability.

Implications

Implications of this study suggest that if education professionals provide training to parents/guardians regarding services provided by agencies for employment, the expectations of parents/guardians' will increase for employment. As found by Doren et al. (2012), this increase of parent expectations may be associated with successful postschool outcomes. Future research should consider the longitudinal outcomes of youth with disabilities whose parents are involved in training (compared to those who are not) to determine whether training is associated with successful outcomes.

Directions for Future Practice

This project has implications for special education practice related to parent knowledge and expectations. Districts should make an effort to provide information to parents regarding services of adult agencies related employment and postsecondary education. The information should be provided in a variety of different ways including parent trainings, transition fairs, and pamphlets. Information could be transmitted through transition specialists, parent liaisons, or groups of parents whose young adults have made the transition from special education services.

Directions for Future Research

Further research should be conducted focusing on whether increasing parent/guardian expectations and knowledge actually results in successful postschool outcomes. Additionally, further research should examine different durations of training and on providing more specific training on how to apply for services for the different agencies. Although the study by Pleet-Odle et al. (2016) set the stage and the current study aligns with Young et al. (2014) showing effects of parent knowledge, the research foundation for parent training in student transition from school to adulthood is still grossly limited. Limitations in educational funding and resources are likely to continue, so the argument for parent support for transition efforts is compelling. Training of parents in effort to increase their knowledge and expectations should be a central point in the educational agenda of state and local education agencies.

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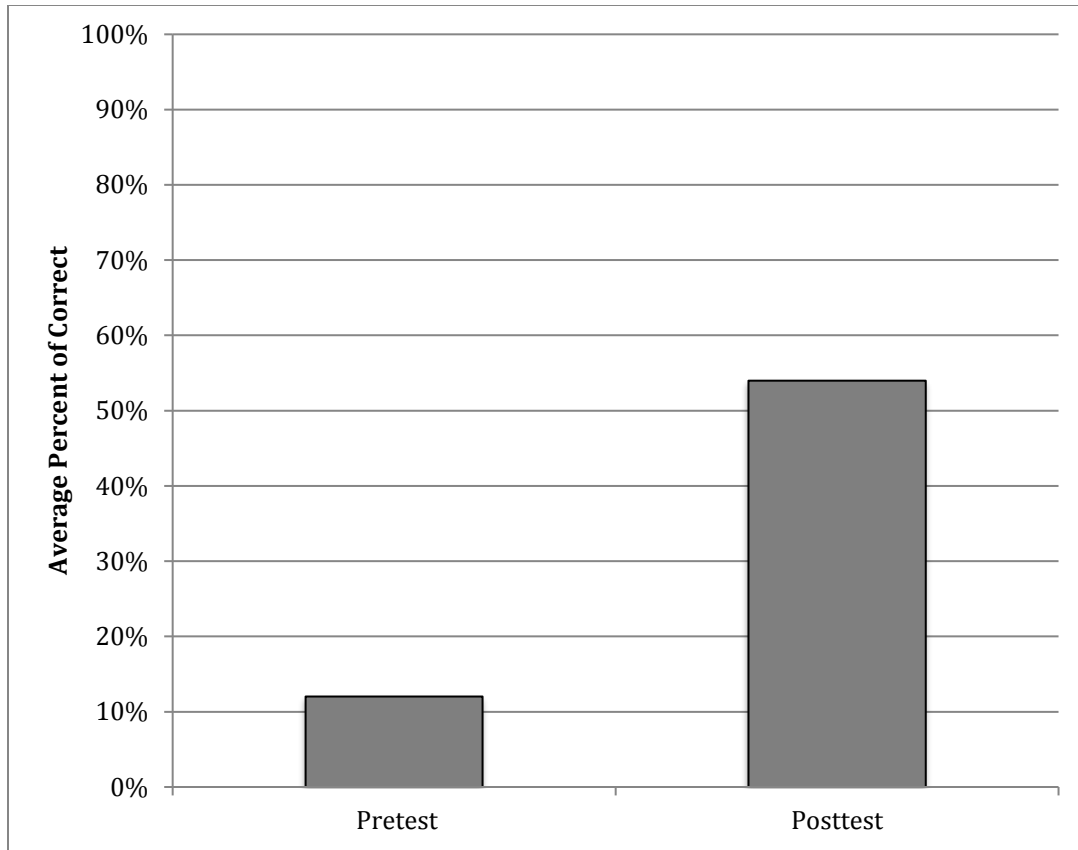


Figure 1. Data Showing Mean Percent Correct from Parent Knowledge-based Questions

Table 1. *Mean of Pretest-Posttest Difference Data from Parent Postsecondary Transition Expectations-Based Question Using a 4-Point Scale*

Question	Pretest Score	Posttest Score	Difference
How likely do you think that it is that your young adult will get a standard high school diploma?	1.25	1.63	0.38
How likely do you think that it is that your young adult eventually will get at least a part-time paid job?	2.88	3.50	0.62
How likely do you think that it is that your young adult eventually will get at least a full-time paid job?	1.50	2.13	0.63
How likely do you think it is that your young adult will attend school after high school?	2.88	2.50	-0.38

Appendix A

Pretest and Posttest Questions

Demographic Information

1. Gender: Male/Female
2. What is your age?
3. What is your relationship to the adult student?
4. What is your adult student's disability classification: Autism, Deaf-blindness, Deafness, Emotional disturbance, Hearing impairment, Intellectual disability, Multiple disabilities, Orthopedic impairment, Other health impairment, Specific learning disability, Speech or language impairment, Traumatic brain injury, Visual impairment, including blindness, Unknown.

Expectation-Based Questions

Questions	Very Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely
How likely do you think that it is that your young adult will get a standard high school diploma?				
How likely do you think that it is that your young adult eventually will get at least a part-time paid job?				
How likely do you think that it is that your young adult eventually will get at least a full-time paid job?				
How likely do you think it is that your young adult will attend school after high school?				

Knowledge-Based Questions:

1. What does it mean that Utah is an Employment First State?
2. Name two services provided by Vocational Rehabilitation that can help an individual with a disability obtain employment?
3. How does paid employment impact Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits?
4. What agency provides assistance with benefits planning?
5. Name two work incentives Social Security can provide?
6. Name two services an individual can receive regarding employment if he/she is on the Division of Services for Persons with Disabilities (DSPD) waitlist.
7. Name one service provided by DSPD to help an individual with disabilities maintain employment.
8. Which agency provides service for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) Youth Program?
9. Name two services provided by the WIOA Youth Program.
10. What postsecondary education service is available for individuals with disabilities going to 2- or 4-year college, and name two supports they can provide?
11. Name two College-based programs for people with disabilities.
12. Name two scholarships for people with disabilities.

Appendix B
Parent Training Outline

I. Training Session:

A. Pretest

B. Introduction

1. Who I am and the purpose of the training
2. Success stories

C. Work:

1. Employment 1st
2. SSI
 - a. UWIPS
 - b. SS Work Incentives
3. Vocational Rehabilitation
4. DSPD Wait List Support-Work-Independence
5. DSPD Supported Employment Services
6. EPAS from Medicaid
 - a. Not available if on DSPD
 - b. Available if on DSPD Waitlist
7. Department of Workforce Services
 - a. Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act Youth Program

D. Postsecondary Education:

1. Disability Resource Centers

2. Programs for Individuals with Disabilities

a. Aggies Elevated

b. UVU Passages

3. Paying for College

a. Financial Aid

b. Scholarships Available for Individuals with Disabilities

c. Tuition Waivers

E. Assignment to Contact an Agency Discussed

F. Posttest

II. Optional Follow-Up Session:

A. Review Assignment Experiences

B. Answer Questions Regarding Employment and Postsecondary Education