

Promising Practices Brief #8

Transition from School-To-Work Program

Grady High School is located in the mid-town area of Atlanta and is part of the Atlanta Public School System. Approximately 1200 students are enrolled at Grady High School. Forty-one percent of the students are eligible to receive a free or reduced price lunch. Sixty-four percent (64%) of the students are African American, <1% Multi-racial, 2% Asian, 31% Caucasian, and 3% Hispanic.

Transitioning Grady High School students with disabilities from school-to-work is the responsibility of the Grady High School Related Vocational Instruction (RVI) Coordinator. The process begins in the early spring of each school year when the RVI Coordinator and the IEP Teams develop a list of students with disabilities who have indicated an interest in transitioning directly to work after high school. "RVI list" also includes known information about individual student needs and interests. In order to more fully identify and begin to plan for securing appropriate services to help facilitate a successful transition, additional information is secured directly from each student in a private meeting with all involved stakeholders. For some students this meeting might plan for the RVI Coordinator to: assist the student during a vocational education class by providing in-class support, arrange for tutoring outside of the classroom, identify potential employers, provide direct job placement, conduct a career planning class, or link a student with other job placement programs available through the Atlanta Public School System. All students with disabilities who are on the RVI list attend a weekly class during the fall and spring semesters that is jointly conducted by the RVI Coordinator and the Bridges Coordinator, and/or university student tutors. This class provides basic information on job readiness and community-based agency personnel to help prepare students with disabilities for their life after high school.

The RVI Coordinator also works closely with the *Bridges...From School to Work Program* (hereafter referred to as the "Bridges Program"). Founded in 1989 by members of the Marriott family as a (501c) 3 non-profit organization, the program is headquartered in Washington, DC and operates in six large urban centers where Marriott Hotels has a presence: Chicago, San Francisco, Washington (D.C.), Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Philadelphia. The Bridges Program is especially designed to help poor, inner-city youth with disabilities secure post high school employment. Nationally, the Bridges Program currently serves more than 1,000 young people annually, providing them with work place skills and employment opportunities, and over the years has placed more than 7,800 youth into competitive employment with over 1,500 different employers. Eighty-nine percent of those who successfully complete the program receive offers of ongoing employment. Bridges is jointly funded by the Federal Government, state and local school districts, and private foundations.

Each year the Grady High School IEP Teams and RVI Coordinator select students to participate in the Bridges Program who meet the following criteria: excellent attendance, excellent school conduct, receive special education services, attend a vocational education class at Grady High School, are at least 18 years of age, and qualify for Vocational Rehabilitation Services. These students attend class one period each week and work with the RVI Coordinator and the Bridges Employer Representative to identify

potential employment opportunities. The RVI Coordinator and the Bridges Employer Representative help each student go through the process of identifying opportunities, preparing a resume, and applying for a job. They also support the student in obtaining and retaining his/her employment. The Bridges Employer Representative also develops a career plan with each student that might include part-time work with a goal of going to a vocational training school after they complete the Bridges Program. For example, if a student is placed in a beauty salon, the student's career plan might include going to school to study cosmetology.

The Bridges Program Employer Representative works with students at Grady High School and two other high schools in Atlanta. The Representative comes to Grady on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons to teach a class on job readiness using a curriculum developed by the Bridges Program. The curriculum focuses on employability skills and job retention skills, including job interests, interviewing skills, and the social and academic skills students will need to stay employed. The class also includes: guest speakers from employers who talk about what they look for in a good employee; interviewing skills; participating in mock job interviews; and guest speakers from state and local agencies explaining what services they offer that might be of help or interest to students with disabilities. The class also views short films about different fields of employment to give students an idea of what jobs might be like in a particular career.

The Tuesday and Thursday classes often include other students with disabilities who are not enrolled in the Bridges program. These students are Grady RVI students but may be too young or otherwise not qualified for the Bridges Program. The RVI Coordinator and the Bridges Program Employer Representative occasionally co-teach the class and also coordinate providing school-based services for Bridges as well as RVI students. The RVI Coordinator also works with RVI students who are under 18 to find part-time employment based on interests and skills, and other agency and community-based opportunities similar to the Bridges program. Because the RVI Coordinator's work is very similar to the Bridges Program Employer Representative's work, they share potential job placements sites for students and often share responsibilities related to picking up students and accompanying them to job interviews.

Most jobs in the Bridges Program are entry level jobs at hotels, grocery stores, airport, and other community businesses. The goal of the program is to collaborate with the Department of Labor Atlanta Office to place students in jobs where the Bridges Employer Representative can advocate for their advancement. The Bridges Employer Representative and the Department of Labor collaborate to help each student find an appropriate placement and help him/her through the application process. Once the student has attained competitive employment, the Bridges Employer Representative monitors the student's performance for eighteen months . . . well after graduation from high school. During this time the Employer Representative advocates for the student and attempts to have the student leave the Bridges Program with higher pay, more responsibility or more hours.

At Grady High School, the Bridges Program also works with autistic students to secure community-based vocational instruction. These students work in housekeeping and food services at the Marriott Hotel folding towels, dusting, vacuuming and performing other tasks. The hotel provides lunch for the students, free of charge. After the students have been trained by the RVI Coordinator, the hotel also provides tokens for

students to use the Atlanta Mass Transportation System to travel to-and-from work. This work is unpaid and is considered more of an internship and can also be used towards the students' graduation requirement for community service hours.

For more information contact:

Reginald Marin
Special Education Coordinator
Email: rmarin@atlanta.k12.ga.us

Henry W. Grady High School
929 Charles Allen Drive, NE
Atlanta, GA 30309

Phone: 404-802-3001