

Future orientation and hope for students with disabilities

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Biography:

David Stevens is a doctoral student at the University of California, Berkeley, Graduate School of Education. His research centres on the development of alternative methods for analysing educational data and the measurement of inequality.

ABSTRACT

In the United States, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) included language requiring that students with disabilities (SwD) begin developing Individual Transition Plans (ITP) at age fourteen, an age which typically coincides with the first year of high school. The ITP is informed by the student's post-secondary goals and may include topics ranging from independent living to college and career planning. As part of the ITP, a team consisting of the student, parents or guardians, teachers, and school psychologist develop a detailed plan to meet the student's long- and short-term goals. The Children's Hope Scale (CHS) measures future orientation along two subscales: agency and pathway. Whereas agency provides a measure of an individual's belief and motivation in their capacity to achieve their goals, pathway is a measure of their knowledge regarding the steps needed to achieve those goals. For our study we evaluated the impact of the ITP on the future orientation of SwD. We used cross-sectional survey data (grades 6 through 12, $n = 2,676$) to compare the pathway and agency scores for SwD and non-SwD between middle school (grades 6-8) and high school (grades 9-12). We hypothesized that participation in the development of the ITP would positively impact students' understanding of how to achieve future goals and manifest in higher pathway scores. Our analysis found significantly higher scores for SwD in high school compared to middle school ($d = .42$). Concurrently, whereas moderate differences in pathway scores ($d = .43$) were found between SwD and non-SwD in middle school, those differences were no longer significant in high school suggesting that participating in the ITP positively impacted the future orientation for SwD. These findings provide empirical support regarding the psychosocial benefits of the ITP process for students receiving Special Education services.