

THE CAREER ASSESSMENT PROCESS IN THE INTERMEDIATE DISTRICT; A SERVICE TO A DIVERSIFIED AGE AND ABILITY LEVEL CLIENTELE

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ABSTRACT: This paper describes the implementation of comprehensive career services in Minnesota Intermediate District #287. These services provide a wide range of specialized services to a diverse audience.

With the development of the Joint Intermediate District in 1967, the intermediate district concept became a reality in that it was an extension of service to the local community, local schools, business and industry and the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul community at large.

The Career Assessment Service was developed and has grown in direct response to the growing and continually changing demands of that community and the state. It is a career assessment approach incorporating many of the concepts of the intermediate district. The magnitude, the mission and the multitude of services provided as a district affords unlimited opportunities for a dynamic model of Career Assessment Services. Discussion of the specific components of the intermediate and the uniqueness of the services delivery options of career assessment are discussed. The Career Assessment Service (C.A.S.) demonstrates innovative linkages, in-kind contributions and a cascade of services career assessment and planning model unique in its scope and networking capabilities.

Career planning and assessment professionals frequently experience resistance and/or frustration in attempting to develop and implement new programs or to improve existing programs and services. (Sankovsky, 1969). Unfortunately, individuals from the various professional disciplines who are involved in career services often have little opportunity for the development of interdisciplinary goals and service linkage to provide a comprehensive career service model.

Within the State of Minnesota many public policies have been instituted to facilitate educational program development. Minnesota has a comprehensive plan for vocational-technical education which includes Secondary, Post Secondary and Adult Vocational Education (1963, 1976). Extensive planning and coordination (HECC, 1984 High Education Coordinating Commission of State educational facilities has been undertaken in the continuing effort to adequately address the occupational preparation needs of Minnesota citizens.

Hennepin Technical Centers (H.T.C.), Intermediate District #287 is a unique service delivery unit which is comprised of 13 member school districts. It was legislatively created and sanctioned in 1965, when in November of that year Independent School Districts No. 271 (Bloomington), No. 273 (Edina), No. 274 (Hopkins), No. 280 (Richfield), and No. 283 (St. Louis Park), suburban Hennepin County districts in Minnesota, entered into an agreement to form the Suburban Schools Services Joint Board, under Minnesota Statutes, Section 471.59 which provides for the Joint Exercise of Powers (1965). In January 1967, Independent School District No. 281 (Robbinsdale) became a sixth member of the Joint Board. The primary function of the Joint Board was to serve as a cooperative interdistrict agency for planning Federal programs.

The need for vocational education facilities in suburban Hennepin County became a concern of the Joint Board.

This concern was brought before the 1967 Session of the Minnesota Legislature. Special Legislation, Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 822, was passed enabling 15 of the Independent School Districts in suburban Hennepin County to enter into an agreement which would establish a cooperative organizational structure for vocational education (1967).

In the Fall of 1967, nine other independent school districts of suburban Hennepin County joined with the members of the Suburban Schools Services Joint Board to form a temporary Joint Planning Board for Vocational-Technical Education. The additional nine districts included Independent School Districts No. 272 (Eden Prairie), No. 275 (Golden Valley), No. 276 (Minnetonka), No. 277 (Mound), No. 278 (Orono), No. 279 (Osseo), No. 282 (St. Anthony Village), No. 284 (Wayzata), and No. 286 (Brooklyn Center).

On October 10, 1968, the participating member districts held their organizational meeting. Formal bylaws were adopted in December, 1968, and were revised to enlarge the size of the Executive Committee in July, 1971. Bylaws provided for the appointment of two representatives from each participating district appointed by the local district board. The full Board of 26 was empowered through a Nominating Committee to elect an Executive Committee of 13 members.

The need for coordination and development of certain special education activities and driver education in suburban Hennepin County became a concern of the Joint Board during the Fall of 1968. This concern was brought before the 1969 Session of the Minnesota Legislature. An additional piece of special legislation, Chapter 945 under Minnesota Statutes, Section 471.59 was passed in June, 1969, which amended the 1967 law to enable member districts to participate in special education and driver education activities (1969).

The mission of this Intermediate district was to provide vocational--technical education to Secondary, Post-Secondary, and Adult students as well as Special Education Services

to low-incidence handicapped students. The organization of Intermediate District #287 and a complex network of Social Services in which the District operates, enables it to be an optimal host for a wide diversity of collaborative efforts.

The District covers over 500 square miles in suburban Hennepin County with a population of 600,000 people. It serves students referred from throughout the Midwest and its location (just west of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan area) affords unique opportunities for linkages with business and industry. (Carter, 1984).

The District's 1983-84 revenue of \$35,730,423 came from:

1. Local property tax levies.
2. Other local and county revenues.
3. State sources.
4. Federal sources.
5. Sales and conversions of assets.

Its 1983 schedule of assessed valuation (20% of market value was \$4,654,833,048. (Carter).

In a most cost effective manner Intermediate District #287 provided in Fiscal Year 1983-84 services within the following divisions.

1. Special Education - 1,297 students, 43,070 hours of instruction/services.
2. C.E.C. (Continuing Education Centers) providing education health and welfare needs for pregnant teenagers. Served 78 students, 1983-84.
3. Secondary Vocational Programs which compliment and supplement member districts. 1,584 students from the 11th and 12th grade (10th an waiver) from 13 member districts were served during 1983-84 at three sites in 30 programs.
4. Post-Secondary vocational programs provide 64 career choices with full or part-time training serving 5,620 students (1983-84) at four sites.

5. 47,639 adults were provided educational services.
6. Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) served 1,446 individuals during the 1983-84 year.
7. 70,001 is a nationally organized program for high school dropouts between the ages of 16 and 21 who live in suburban Hennepin County. 235 individuals were served during the 1983-84 year.
8. Career Assessment Services (C.A.S.) - 522 students/clients were served during the 1983-84 year.

Given the scope and diversity of services offered in the Intermediate District, (the population base, the funding resources and divisions), the comprehensive career assessment services were to become a reality. The need for career assessment services within this unique intermediate district concept had been expressed from a number of areas both within and outside the Intermediate service area boundaries.

During the late Seventies member school districts, due to decreased pupil service budgets and increased work loads, were unable to provide career education and assessment services at the needed level. Many services were provided by contracting with outside vendors. As described above, within the joint Independent District #287 were a range of service options which, if pulled together, could meet the varying and changing needs of the service audience. In addition, the Intermediate District recognized the specialized needs of the large number of handicapped citizens living in suburban Hennepin County and implemented support options according to the Rules and Regulations of 92-142 (DRF, TITLE 45, PART 121.3a) especially in response to the wording . . .

"to assure that every handicapped child who leaves school has had career educational training that is relevant to the job market . . ."

Based on this need the JISD #287 Board approved the development of a career assessment service model, to be implemented on a pilot basis during the 1981-82 school year. (May 7, 1981 - Vocational Assessment Proposal presented to the Board). The proposal was the result of an in-house study which had been previously completed and as a response to numerous requests for vocational assessment, within the Intermediate district. At this point a coordinator was assigned and individual staff members from all divisions were appointed to complete a needs assessment and to outline the scope of services required within the District. This group established criteria which was deemed essential to the success of a career assessment service. These components included:

1. Strong support from JISD #287 Board and the local administration for the program.
2. A linkage and in-kind sharing between all Intermediate District Divisions (Secondary, Post-Secondary, Adult, Special Education, JTPA).
3. Positive attitude and support from all Intermediate District staff toward the needs of all individual students/clients.
4. Strong, comprehensive student support services.
5. Commitment to the philosophy emphasizing supportive education services to students needing specialized instructional assistance to succeed in training. (Examples of this would include providing interpreters in the classroom for the hearing impaired, mobility aides in assisting the physically impaired, physical therapists, etc.)
6. Direct access to all existing resources available throughout the District.
7. That the service will not function as a funnel and screen for HTC programs but

will meet individual career needs.

With this criteria in mind, a review of the literature and contacts with existing facilities were completed to determine the level and kind of services which existed within the community. Upon completing this review, it was determined that the Intermediate District #287 Career Assessment Service model must include the assessment of interest, aptitudes, work skills, work tolerances and work habits through the use of work, real or simulated, as the focal point of the assessment. (May, 1972). Additionally, it was felt that the goal of an assessment service should be to assist the student/client to become more productive until he or she is able to adequately function in an "achievement-demanding" setting. (Gellman, Stern and Soloff, 1963). With these theories functioning as a cornerstone, the Career Assessment service staff began the work of implementing services within the District. The traditional vocational evaluation models (Pruitt, 1977), and (Tenth Institute, 1972) were utilized as a guide in establishing services. This model included:

1. Referral (to include case history consultation).
2. Intake and Initial Interview to determine the appropriateness of referral and level of service required.
3. Vocational Evaluation which included psychometric, and work sample testing, behavioral observations, review of work/educational history and other specialized testing.
4. Occupational try-out, being an actual "hands-on" lab experience, within a determined training program or work experience site - (the primary objective of the try-out being to provide the client with further exposure to a specific program as well as obtaining additional information as to the clients' skills, abilities and behaviors, related

to the specific training area).

5. Staffing/Report - career assessment results are conveyed to the referral source through a combined means of a staffing and the comprehensive final written report.

A coordinator was assigned from the Vocational Division to develop, organize and guide the pilot program, under the direction of the Intermediate District's division directors and local school district administrators. It was this steering committee that developed a budget which reflected the service audience needs that first year (secondary aged handicapped) and reimbursement was at 65% from State Secondary Special Needs dollars. A demonstration grant was written to gain additional revenue to hire a vocational evaluator and a secretary.

Also, in-kind contributions of staff and other resources were given by many of the Intermediate Divisions. After much research, material development, and lab set-up, the first student was accepted for service and began the career assessment process in January of 1982. From January through June of 1982, 72 secondary aged handicapped students were provided a comprehensive career assessment experience. During 1982-83 additional resources and staff were mobilized as the joint board authorized the pilot project to continue under fully approved program status. Three-hundred fifty clients were served during 1982-83. As the new program grew in size so too did the scope of audiences served.

During the 1983-84 school year over 500 persons ranging in age from 14 to 66 experienced career assessment. In addition, "Career screening" was provided to 152 individuals, on an outreach basis. Career Screening is a short term, informational gathering process to assist an individual in developing a career path. To accomplish this variety of psychometric tests

are administered including, but not limited to the following: (1) Interest Testing, (2) Achievement Testing, (3) Aptitude Testing and (4) Work Value Testing. Identification of career interest areas, aptitudes and work temperaments, aids in career counseling and provides an individual with a focal point for career exploration. The referral base had also been opened up to include all levels of students and clientele within and outside the district, including private for profit rehabilitation agencies. A comprehensive fee schedule was developed during 1983-84 to entertain any type of referral, and those dollars were credited to an assessment service enterprise account.

One recent innovative expansion was the Career Life Planning option which was provided to laid-off teachers from local school districts. These teachers were offered vocational testing and assistance in developing a career plan. This was accomplished through a combined effort of several divisions within the Intermediate District (Career Assessment Service, Post-Secondary, HTC-JTPA and the Administrative offices).

This option was initiated and developed in a joint fashion by local district union officials, personnel specialists and the Career Assessment Service staff.

The current C.A.S. service delivery system has evaluation labs at two vocational technical sites and uses many other district and member district facilities in outreach. The core evaluation labs on the two campuses occupy approximately 7,000 square feet of space and provide a diversity of career assessment tools both commercially and locally developed (MESA, SINGER, Project Discovery, Job Search, Choice, Vocationology, etc.). The 1984-85 Operational Budget is approximately \$400,000. The program is staffed by a Coordinator/Psychologist, five M.S. level vocational evaluators, four licensed vocational evaluation technicians, numerous in-kind specialists (Technical tutors, interpreters, OT's PT's, LEP, etc.) and secretarial staff.

Additional staff positions and consultative dollars have been budgeted for continued expansion of service. Plans have been developed with Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and private placement specialists to provide on-going in-service to the C.A.S. staff regarding labor market analysis and trends. At this point, the Career Assessment Service has grown in a positive, controlled direction. The uniqueness and variety of services offered within the Intermediate District has been described as a host for development and fostering of an innovative career assessment model.

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