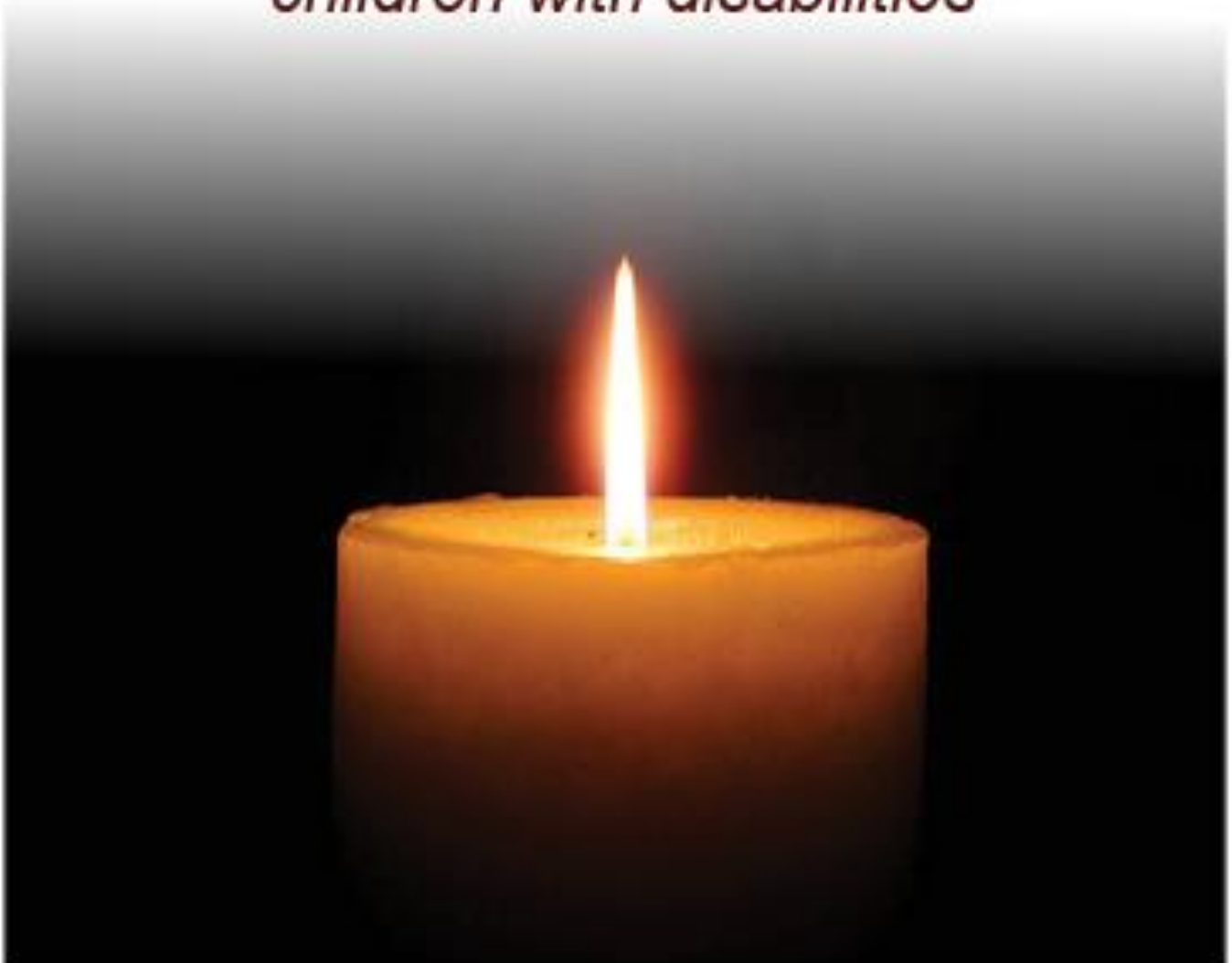


Lighting the Way:

*A transition workshop for parents of
children with disabilities*



Lighting the Way
Hispanic Austin Leadership
Education Community Impact Project
May 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ISSUE AND IMPACT

Nationwide, 19% of the population has a disability. That amounts to 56.7 million people. While the national unemployment rate sits at around 4.1%, the unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities is 10.5%, over twice the rate of individuals without disabilities.

There are many causal factors that contribute to this startling statistic, so TITLE NAME HERE was created to address some of these factors. We strove to educate parents of children with disabilities on the resources and options available to their children as they transition from the education world to the next step in their adult lives.

PROJECT SELECTION

We identified 10 different educational contacts and interviewed 8 of them to learn what they believe are the major educational needs and opportunities in the Greater Austin community. Through those interviews, we identified numerous opportunities to make an impactful difference on the education community in Austin. Together, we discussed the results of our interviews and narrowed down the major educational needs and opportunities to ones we believed would be the most impactful and allow us to sustain this initiative after the conclusion of the project. As a team, we recognized that the following areas were the ones we wanted to focus on for our project, which we addressed through workshops:

- Employment training and post-secondary options available to individuals with disabilities
- Independent living resources for young adults with disabilities in the Austin community
- Empowering families to find resources for their children with disabilities
- Increasing the amount of young adults with disabilities finding work in the Central Texas community

WHAT DID WE DO

We partnered with VELA and held 2 workshops for parents with children with disabilities in the Central Texas area. The workshops focused on educating parents on employment training & post-secondary resources, independent living resources, and how to talk to their child about transitioning from high school to the next step in their adult journey.

VELA is an organization that educates parents on navigating the special education system within their school district and advocating for their child as he/she continues to grow. By partnering with VELA, we were able to utilize the already robust network of families that have been served by this incredible organization and expand the services offered so that VELA can continue assisting families throughout their child's educational journey.

Sincerely,
Education Team
2018 Hispanic Austin Leadership



IDENTIFYING THE NEED

The Individuals with Disabilities Act, or IDEA, previously Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) from 1975 to 1990, was passed in legislation to federally fund states so that children with disabilities may receive a free public education in the least restrictive environment. Changed to IDEA in 1990, it details the rights of the parents of the children with disabilities and grants money to the state to fund their education. Any state that receives federal funds is required to provide free public education to all children with disabilities. Each student will have an Individualized Education Program, or IEP, prepared in an ARD meeting, or Admission, Review, and Dismissal, which will include the parents or guardians, the child (optional until transition), the child's regular and special education teacher(s), and at least one school district representative. The IEP is the program the child will follow while attending school, and it includes goals, accommodations, current needs, competencies, modifications, objectives and benchmarks, and Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP).

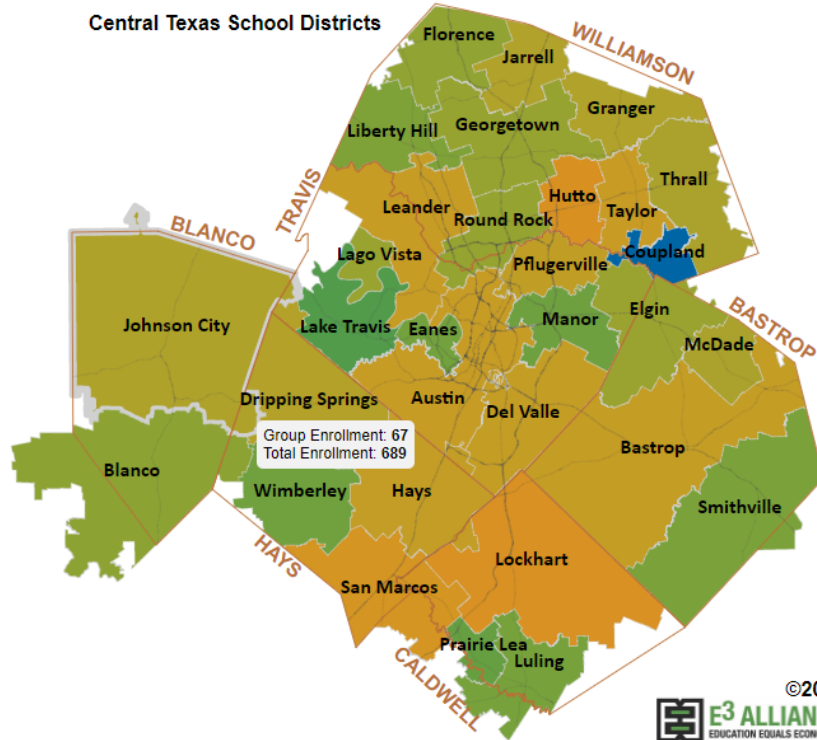
Going through the ARD process to get the IEP the child needs can be a daunting task, especially for parents who are new to the whole process, and the parents will often feel alone and afraid because they don't know what resources, or even *if* any resources are available. Fortunately, Vela is a non-profit that teaches parents about the ARD process and resources available to them. Families are able to come to Vela for classes, up to 7 weeks long, and for consulting on their IEP in preparation for the ARD and it is free to the families. Vela also has special events such as Family Fun Days, and support groups for parents to have a safe space to share with and support other parents.

Vela is an amazing non-profit aimed at helping families get the best education for their children, and supporting the parents through it all. However, they do still need help on expanding their classes and age of children being helped. Currently Vela is geared more towards younger children who have recently been diagnosed with a disability or starting school, so we approached Vela and proposed to help with the older population of children with disabilities. This is called transition; where the students will start to prepare for what comes after school. Whether it be going to college, getting a job, living with roommates, or living alone, there needs to be preparation for the transition so that everyone involved is ready when the time comes.

Transition ARD meetings need to be held when the child turns 14 so that the IEP contains transition services, this can be requested at a younger age if the IEP team agrees. Some of the parents do not know about the transition process and all the available resources, or they know they need to prepare for transition but do not know where to start. This is why we are helping Vela to create a curriculum around the transition process and available resources.

Central Texas Education Profile

Pre-K Through Grade 12	Higher Education	Regional Demographics and Workforce
Hutto	11%	
Lockhart	11%	
San Marcos	11%	
Taylor	10%	
Austin	10%	
Leander	10%	
Bastrop	10%	
Del Valle	10%	
Hays	10%	
Pflugerville	10%	
Dripping Springs	10%	
Jarrell	10%	
Granger	10%	
Johnson City	10%	
Thrall	10%	
McDade	10%	
Elgin	9%	
Lago Vista	9%	
Georgetown	9%	
Round Rock	9%	
Florence	9%	
Blanco	9%	
Liberty Hill	9%	
Smithville	8%	
Luling	8%	
Eanes	8%	
Wimberley	8%	
Manor	8%	
Prairie Lea	8%	
Lake Travis	7%	
Coupland	4%	



Central Texas Percent of Special Education Students by District, 2017

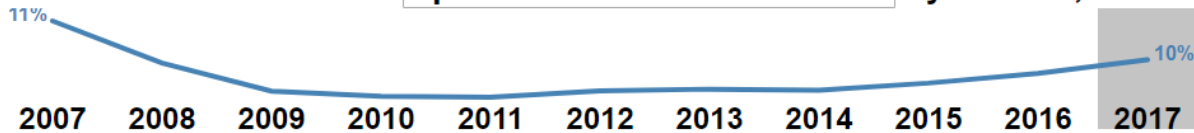


Figure 1: Central Texas Percent of Special Education Students in 2017

PROJECT SELECTION

TAKING ACTION: WHAT WE DID AND THE IMPACT

We sought to educate parents on the “Transition” resources available to their children with disabilities in the domains of employment, post-secondary education, and independent living through a series of workshops. Transition is the time period when an individual with a disability finishes their academic requirements in order to graduate from high school, leaves the high school world, and enters the next phase of their journey.

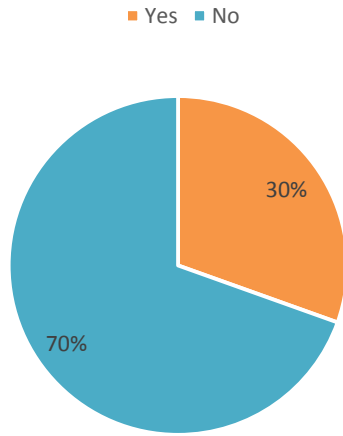
Before deciding on what topics to cover at the workshops, we created a survey to learn about what questions the families of children with disabilities had regarding transition. Using the already existing network of parents of children with disabilities that VELA has, we collected over 40 responses. The survey was provided in English and Spanish, with 22 responses coming from primarily English-speaking families and 19 responses coming from primarily Spanish-speaking families.

Transition can be an overwhelming time for individuals with disabilities and their families. After being in a school system for 12 years of their lives, they are faced with the unknown: will their child pursue a higher education, or will they go to work? Where will their child live? How do they start to talk to their child about all the options that are available?

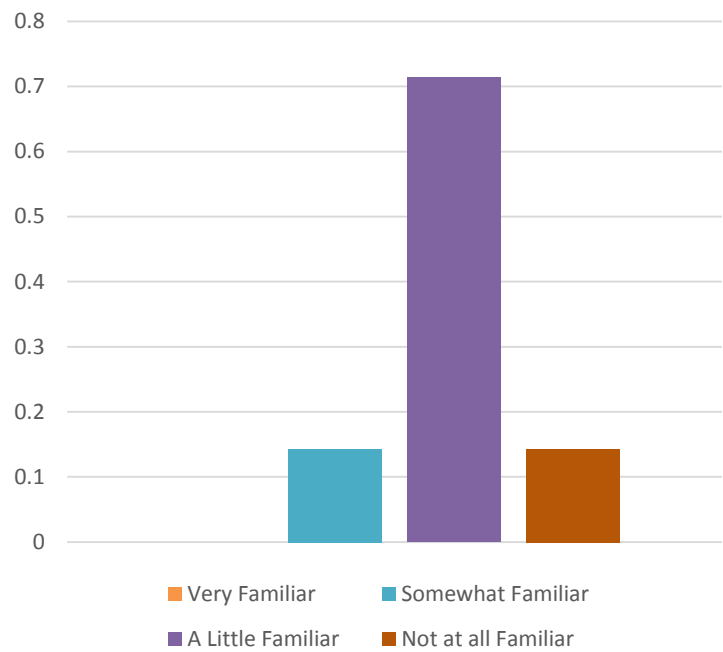
We created this survey to help narrow down the top questions that parents have for this daunting period in their lives. We listed several questions that VELA had received throughout the years about transition and asked parents to select their top 2 choices in each category: school, employment & college, and independent living.

BELOW ARE THE RESULTS FROM THE PRIMARILY ENGLISH-SPEAKING SURVEY

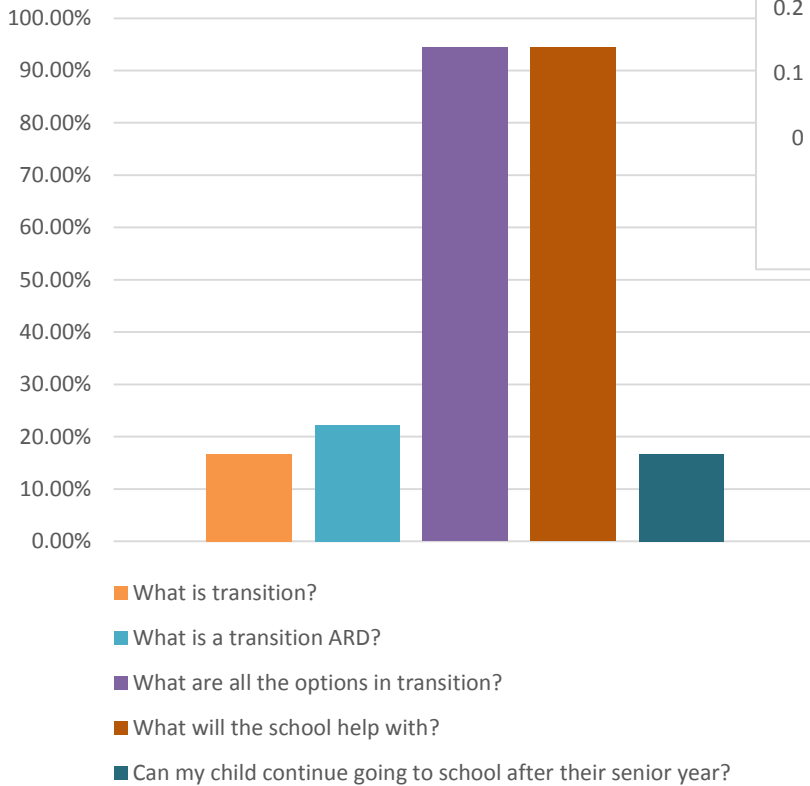
Do you know what "transition services" means with regard to your child and the special education system?



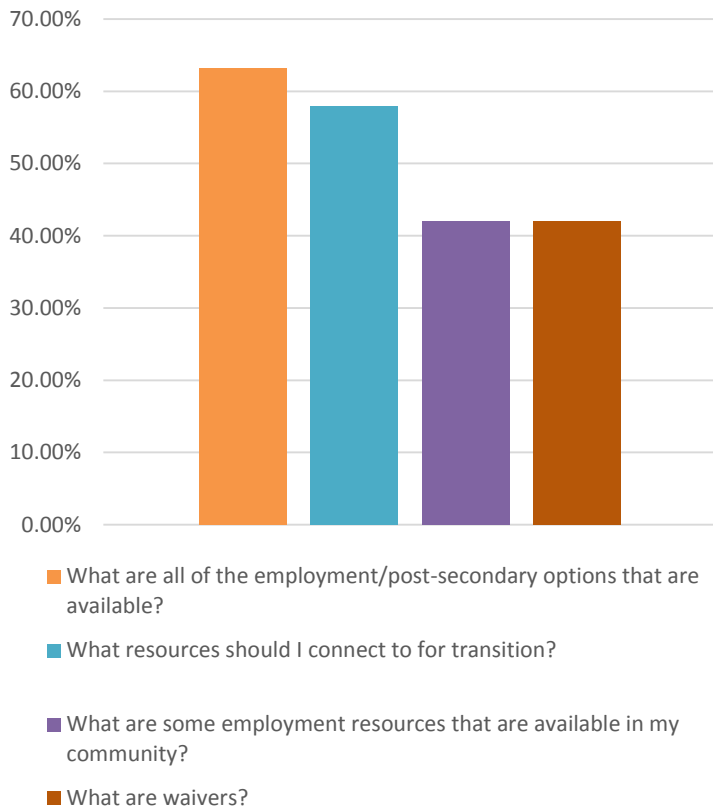
How familiar are you with what "transition services are and how to access these services?"



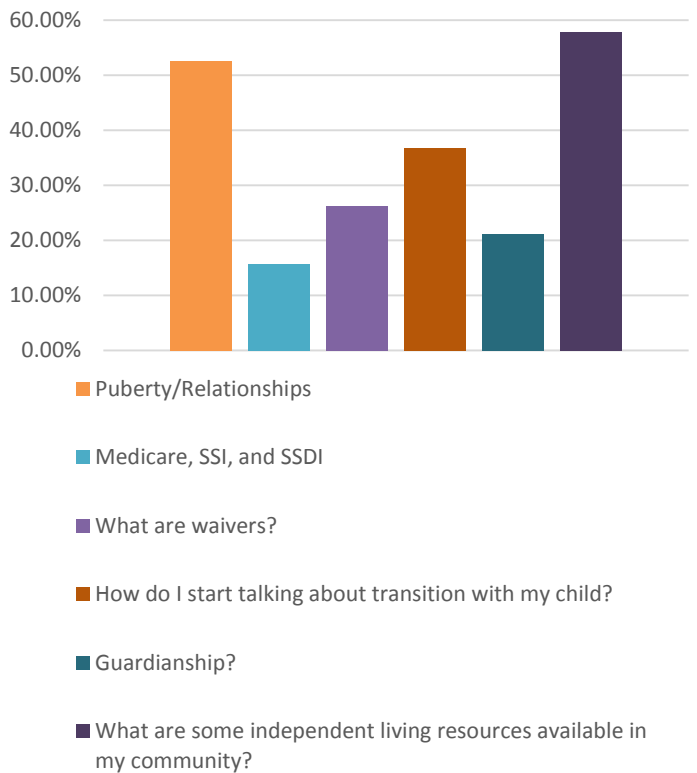
Pick the top 2 questions you have about school



Pick the top 2 questions you have about employment or college options

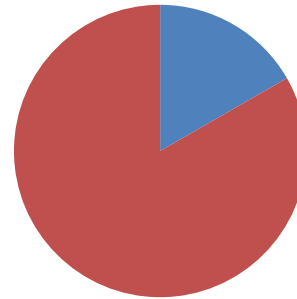


Pick the top 2 questions you have about independent living



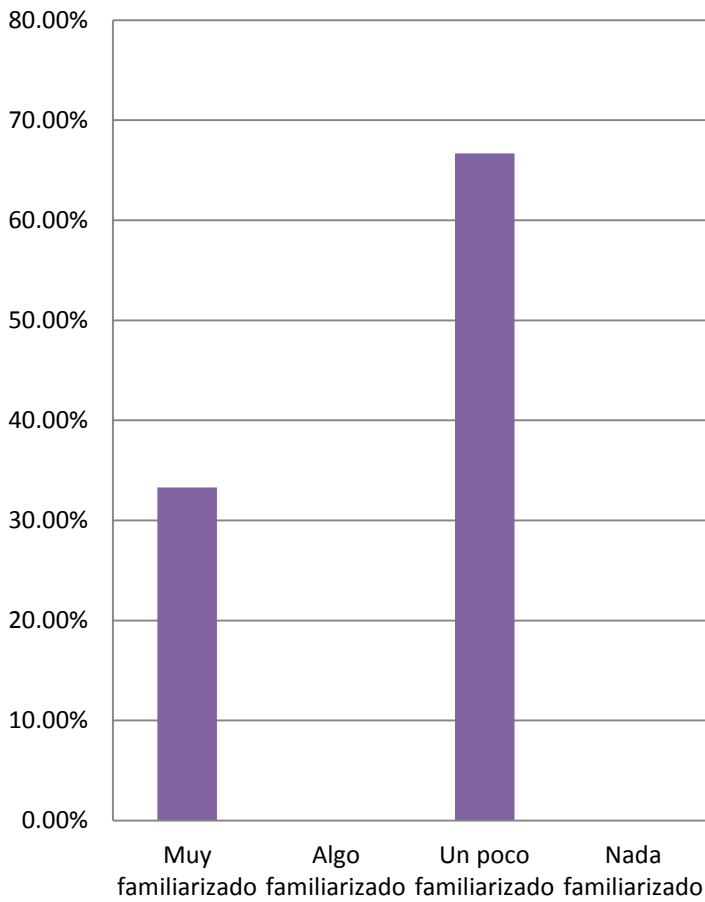
BELOW ARE THE RESULTS FROM THE PRIMARILY SPANISH-SPEAKING SURVEY

¿Sabe qué significa "servicios de transición" con respecto a su hijo y al sistema de educación especial?

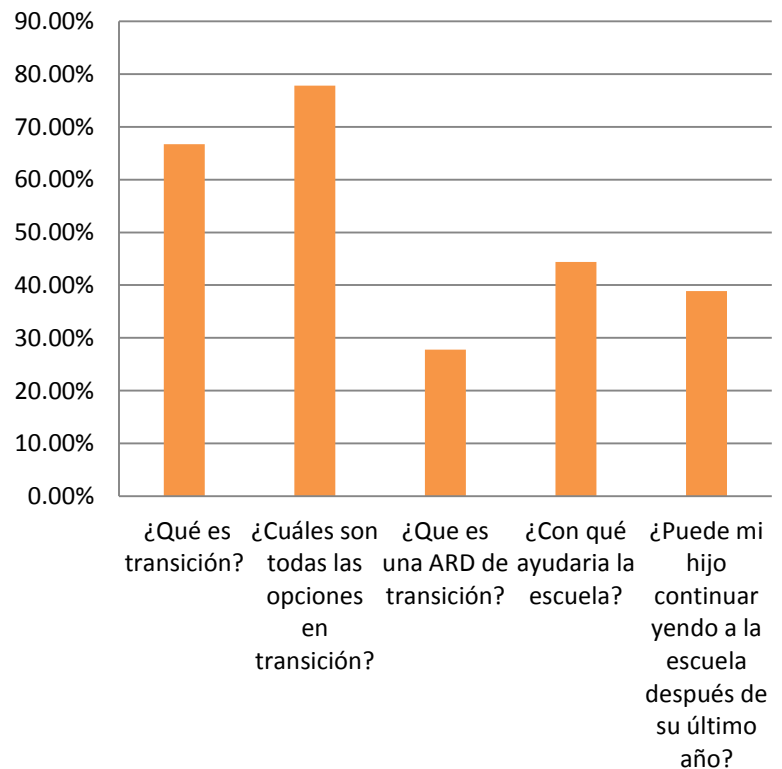


■ Sí ■ No

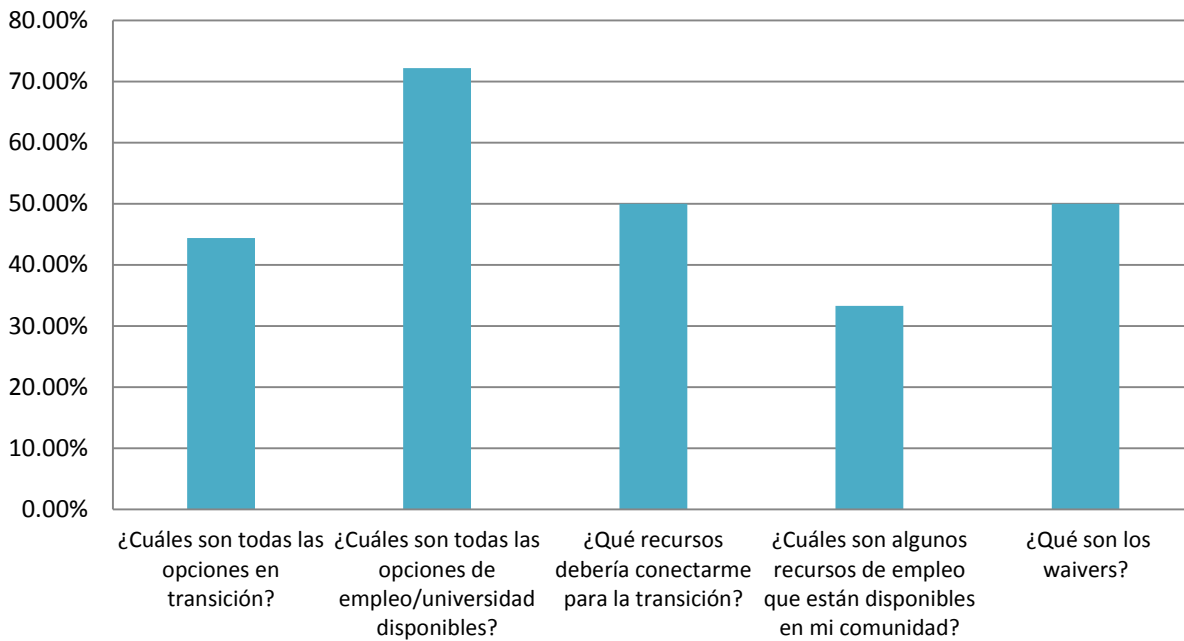
¿Qué tan familiarizado está con qué son los "servicios de transición" y cómo acceder estos servicios?



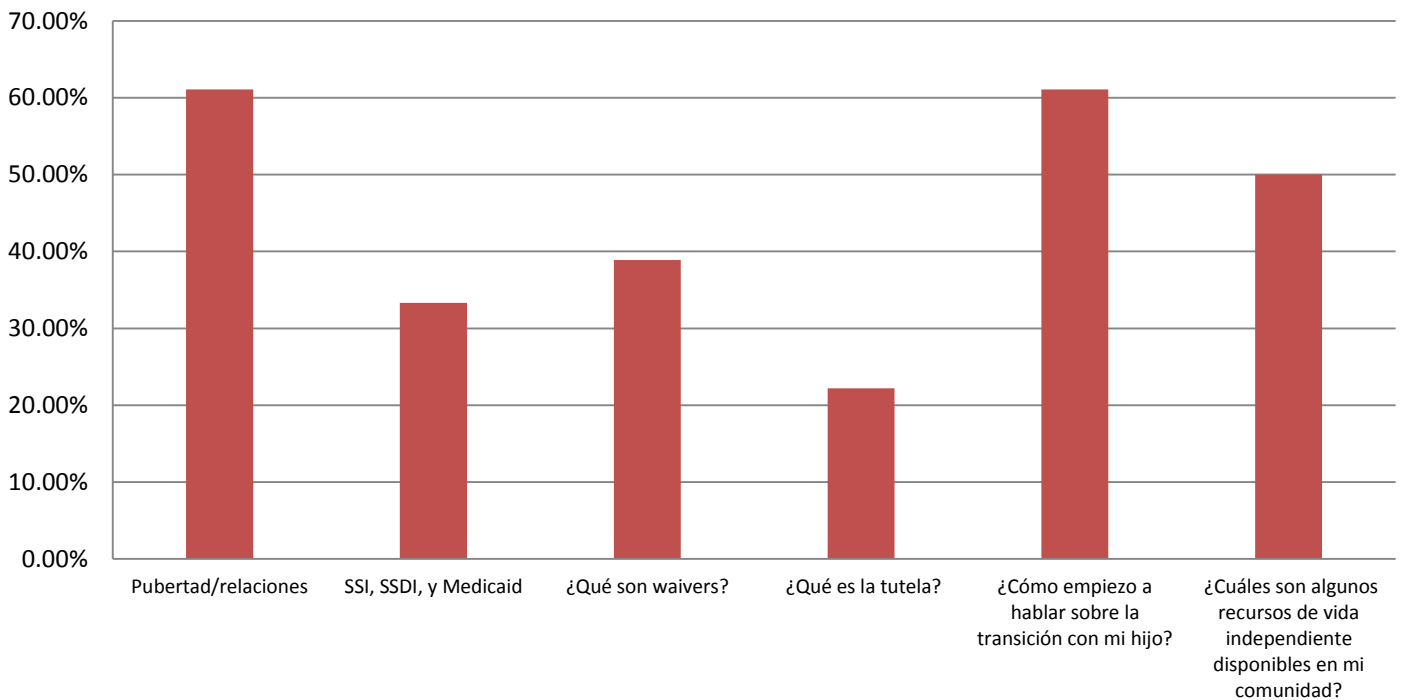
Selecciona los dos temas principales del distrito escolar sobre los que te gustaría aprender



Selecciona los dos temas principales relacionados con el empleo/universidad sobre los que te gustaría aprender.



Selecciona los dos temas principales relacionados con la vida independiente sobre los que te gustaría aprender.



Once we had the completed results from the surveys, we began working with local authorities to compile information in the most compelling and efficient manner for the 3-hour workshop. Based on the similar gaps in knowledge in both the primarily English- and Spanish-speaking communities, we decided to cover the following topics in both sessions:

- What is transition?
- What is a transition ARD?
- What are all the options in transition?
- What will the school help with?
- What employment/post-secondary options are available?
- What resources are available for employment/post-secondary paths?
- What are waivers?
- What independent living resources are available?
- How do I talk to my child about transition?

PRIMARYLY ENGLISH-SPEAKING SESSION

WHAT IS TRANSITION?

Transition is the time period when your child is exiting the school system and entering the next phase of their lives.

There are a ton of options and resources – it will look different for each young adult.



On March 24th, we held a session for primarily English-speaking parents at VELA’s center. We hosted 16 families of children with disabilities. We discussed the topics listed above and spoke with the families about ways to advocate for their child through the transition period in their lives.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU – (THE PARENTS)

To gauge the impact on the families, we asked everyone to take a survey before the workshop and then to take the same survey after the workshop. The results of the surveys are listed below.

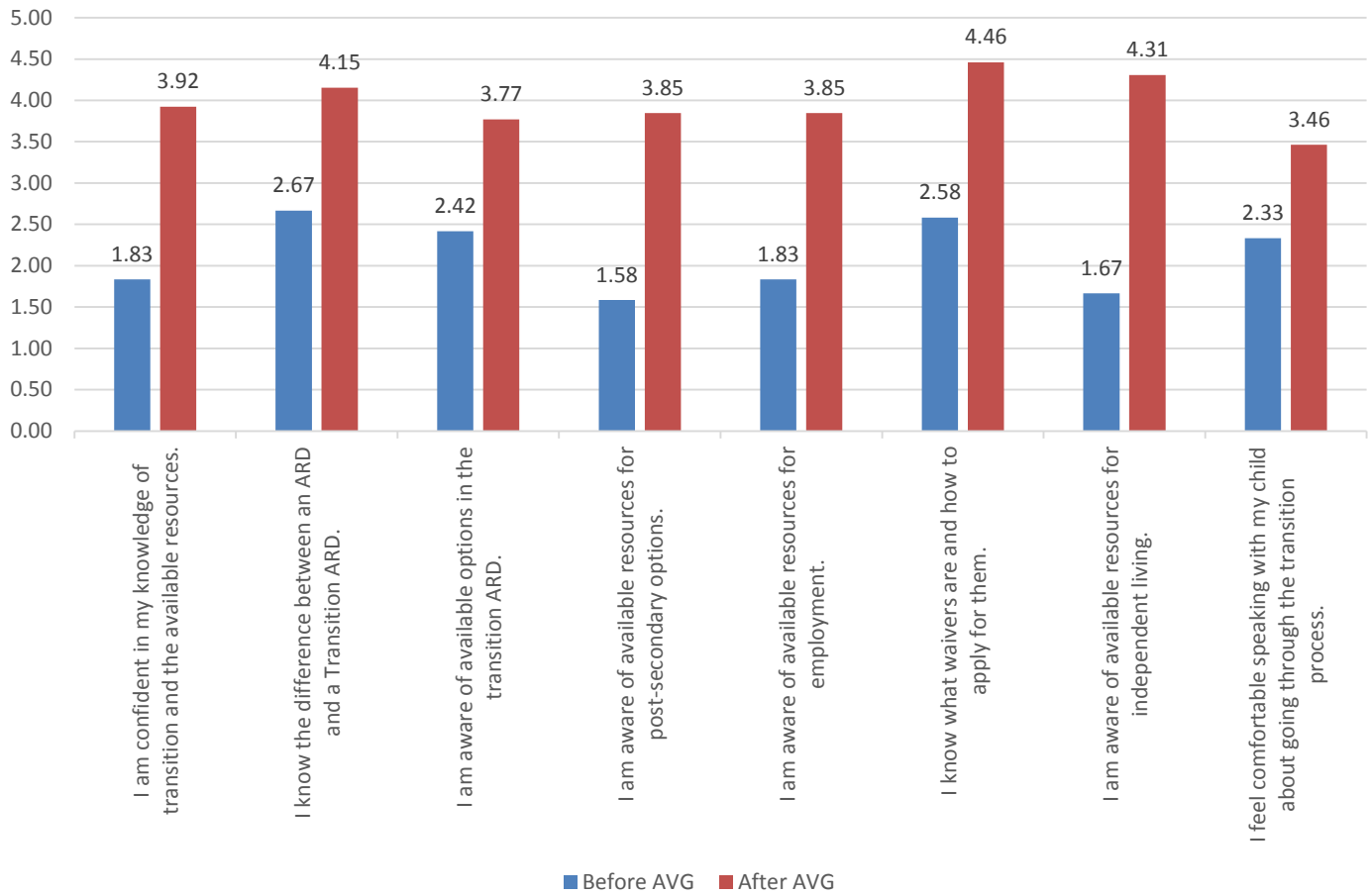
- May be asked for input – BUT the transition plan is up to the student
- Give committee information on what services they are already receiving
- Have a good baseline for where the student is at
- Coordinated set of activities



BREATHING AND TAKING IT ONE STEP AT A TIME



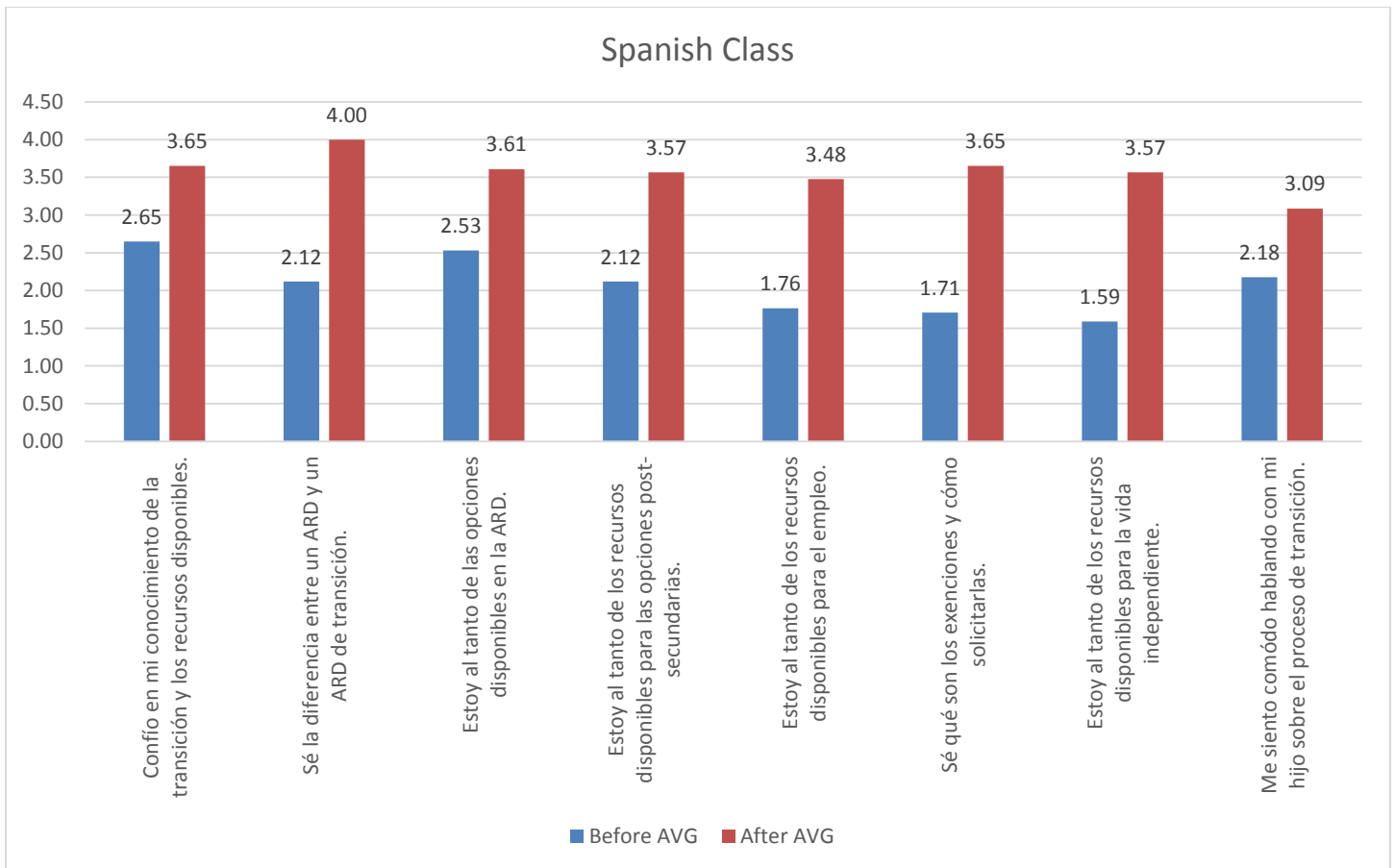
English Class



PRIMARILY SPANISH-SPEAKING SESSION

On March 24th, we held a session for primarily Spanish-speaking parents at VELA's Center. We hosted 23 families of children with disabilities. We discussed the same topics from the primarily English-speaking workshop and brainstormed with families on ways to advocate for their child during transition.

We asked the families to complete surveys using the same metrics as the English-speaking session. The results of those surveys are below.



SUSTAINABLE GROWTH: KEEPING THE CANDLE BURNING

After careful consideration and coordination with the team at Vela, the education team has created a plan for sustainable growth within the HAL created project.

The issues incorporated within the community Vela services will unfortunately always continue and grow. Creating sustainable programs to match that growth and build pillars of strength within the organization was the education teams challenge. What makes Vela unique is that it is one of the few organizations that focus on the parents instead of the children. By empowering the parents of the children, Vela has a unique opportunity to recruit people with first-hand experience and a passion for advocacy that can only come from parents who have been through the trials and tribulations of the process. The size of Vela's staff allowed the HAL education team an opportunity to help in truly beneficial areas. By increasing their bandwidth and formulating plans to continue our programs into the future were. We have identified a few components that were created that allows for our impact to be sustainable.

The creation of the transition workshop and its educational materials is the perfect opportunity to tap into this. The transition workshop is something that meets an immediate need and allows for Vela to offer yet another service to its parents. As we previously discussed, our project was developed from the ground up. From the development process through implementation, the education team learned how to refine the workshop. The education team created the educational materials as well as before and after survey's. The survey's allowed the team to record the progression of knowledge and the relevancy of the information. Based on the survey's received, the information was both new and relevant to the parents. More importantly, the parents deemed the class helpful to their situation. Using survey's before and after each session will allow Vela to monitor the data and be fluid to change if necessary. Also, by using zip code information asked for on the beginning survey, Vela can target where their parents are located and offer volunteer classes away from their central location. This gives Vela an opportunity to grow the program by finding parents capable of teaching the class in hotspot areas. Offering the program's materials online will allow for teachers of future transition classes to download the materials and teach from an offsite location. The potential for recorded classes accessible on the Vela homepage coupled with more physical classes that can be conducted in more convenient locations near the parents will allow for more parents being serviced.

The use of free media will be another component to the growth of Vela as an organization. The education team worked with refining Vela's message and coming up with a questionnaire for parents to use when advocating for the program. An email template was created for Vela to use when reaching out to news organizations. The month of April was Autism awareness month. The education team worked with Vela to embrace the opportunity to speak to local news agencies about their program. The initial fear Vela's staff had was being labeled as an "Autism only" organization. Through conversation with the Vela and education team, a decision was reached to use the month of April to piggy back off the autism conversation and also mention the other programs Vela offers. The education team worked with Vela to get their organization on Univision. The continued outreach to free media sources gives Vela the opportunity to grow their name and bring awareness to their programs.

Sustainable growth is crucial for a smaller organization like Vela. Finding growth opportunities while balancing the time requirement on a small staff was not easy. But the growth potential is almost endless when volunteers are factored in.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Vela for providing space and support in this adventure.



FINANCIAL SUMMARY

THE TEAM

Our team was comprised of a group of individuals with diverse skills sets, experiences, and backgrounds. Below is a brief description including project role, position at our current employer, and education.



Steven Garza
Marketing/Finance Leader
Building & Energy Codes Consultant
One Gas

Bachelor of Arts, Texas State University



Andrew Gonzales
Information Leader
Operations & Customer Quality Engineer
Applied Materials

Bachelor of Science, New Mexico State University



Yvette Moreno
Project Manager
Claims Supervisor
Texas Mutual Insurance

Bachelor of Science, Texas State University



Jennifer Woods
Project Administrator
Project SEARCH Coordinator
Seton Healthcare Family

Bachelor of Science, University of Michigan

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