



University of Wisconsin
Whitewater

Center for Inclusive Transition, Education & Employment Transition Perspectives College Day

The Transitions Perspective program provides an opportunity to introduce the topics of transition, college, and career awareness to eighth-graders in southern/southeastern Wisconsin school districts.

Extensive research shows that middle school students – especially those who are most marginalized - who participate in career exploration activities prior to entering high school:

- have higher graduation rates,
- learn valuable skills that will help them find a job,
- and start high school feeling better prepared to focus on their career interests and skill-building and, subsequently, with less stress about their future ([American Student Assistance, 2021](#)).

The main event for this program was a College Day at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater held October 20, 2022.



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What did we do?

- **Welcome to College** - Networking with UW-Whitewater Peer Mentors
UW-Whitewater students, with and without disabilities, served as peer mentors engaged the eighth graders in semi-structured conversation about life as a college student, their career interests and how that was related to their academics.
- **Career Interests Tour** - Students toured campus through the lens of their career interests. Tours included the chance to continue talking with peer mentors, while exploring the various jobs and tasks within departments and a broad overview of the field represented by that department (e.g. Ambrose Health Center = health careers, Virtual Reality Lab = technology careers, Roberta's Art Gallery = art careers). Students completed a poll prior to attendance to learn what broad career interest area – Heart (working with people), Head (working with ideas) or Hands (working with things/hands on) – they were most drawn to in order to best match them up with departments on campus. Students also toured a residence hall room with discussion about student life and self-direction on campus.

- **A Bit of Fun!**

Students ended the College Day experience and campus tour at the Williams Center athletic facility. Students complete a short evaluation survey and then had time to run around the indoor track and play basketball with the UW-Whitewater men's basketball team. Students got to meet and take pictures with some of the UW-Whitewater athletes and UW-Whitewater's mascot, Willie the Warhawk. This offered a chance for physical activity and fun prior to the bus ride home.



Who made this happen?

Through the WITP "Communities of Solutions" work with Rock County family stakeholders, youth between the ages of 12-16 years old were identified as a focus population for earlier exposure to integrated transitions. The Transition Perspectives College Day was created by CITEE, with this input from Rock County families and stakeholders and support through the project team at the Waisman Center and the Director of the Southern Regional Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs. The event would not be possible without the student and school district participation, UW-Whitewater student peer mentors, CITEE's Employment Connections team, as well as the engagement of campus colleagues.



A list of campus tour destinations and others making this campus experience possible is listed on the project website. <https://www.uww.edu/orsp/research-centers-and-initiatives/citee/wi-integrated-transition-planning-proj>

The UW-Whitewater College of Education & Professional Studies has been a key partner through the leadership of then Dean, Dr. Robin Fox and Interim Dean, Dr. Lana Collet-Klingenberg. Dr. James Collins, Director of the Learning is for Everyone (LIFE) Program and Sara Athorp, LIFE Program Coordinator, along with several of their graduate students recruited student peer mentors, provided guidance and support for the student peer mentor training prior to the event, and were participants at the event supporting student peer mentors who needed that extra support in their role as peer mentors to the middle-schoolers.



UW-W Student Peer Mentors

A crucial component of the program was the involvement of college student peer mentors. While the time spent with college student peer mentors for this program was minimal, learning about the college experience and making the connection to careers from actual college students while on a college campus is time well spent according to early-awareness literature (Adams, 2014; Schaefer, 2014).

Peer mentors were prepared with a recorded presentation, a detailed individualized program guide with guidelines for participation, opportunities to meet to discuss, and day of event detailed tour itinerary in addition to coaching and support.



Peer mentor testimonial:

"A couple of them have ADHD like I do, which gave me the unique ability to address some of their concerns from the feelings I remember at their age. We were able to have some really awesome open, honest, and fun conversations as a group about college and disabilities...I know the point of today was for us to have an impact on those kids, but they also had one on me that I will remember for a long time... To be able to give some advice to them I wish someone would have given me as an 8th grader..."

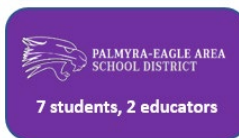
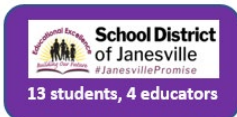


Career Interests Tour



The Career Interest Tour highlights the many employment opportunities on a college campus, the relationship of careers to students' broader career interests, and how these relate to post-secondary education or training and health in some way – all while exploring campus. CITEE recruited departments based on the career interest areas of the middle-schoolers. The staff in these departments or spaces on campus then provided a brief tour of the space and career information – including practical guidance regarding any college preparation needed for those careers.

Tim Markle, Director [Southern Regional Center for Children & Youth with Special Health Care Needs](#) provided consultation and materials related to health care transition, support during the networking activity and Career Interests Tour and participated in the in-depth team debrief session at the end of the day.



Regional School Districts

Six regional school districts sent 8th grade students and educators to the UW-Whitewater main campus for the day. The grant supported transportation costs for most of the districts to remove that financial and sometimes logistical barrier.

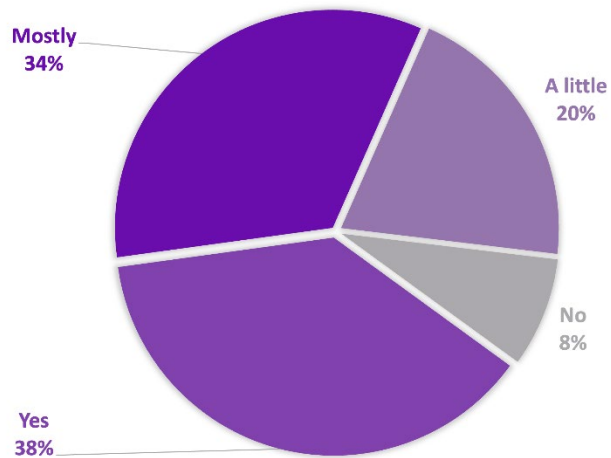
The project provided classroom lessons and materials that complemented the career and college awareness focus of the event and aligned with required WI Department of Public Instruction transition planning activities for Academic Career Plans, Transition Individual Education Plans, Pre-Employment Transition Services required through Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).



What did we learn?

77 students and 8 educators completed evaluation survey. Here are the results:

DID YOU FIND SOMETHING INTERESTING TO PURSUE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL WHEN VISITING UWW?



Statements from the Students

When students were asked "What is something I learned from this field trip?", they responded with:

- "This is a good campus"
- "There are a lot of things to do"
- "There are many different jobs to try!"
- "I want to go to college after high school"
- "That you should do and learn stuff"
- "UW-Whitewater is cool"
- "That I can help others"
- "Be aware of your health"
- "That it's okay to go to college"



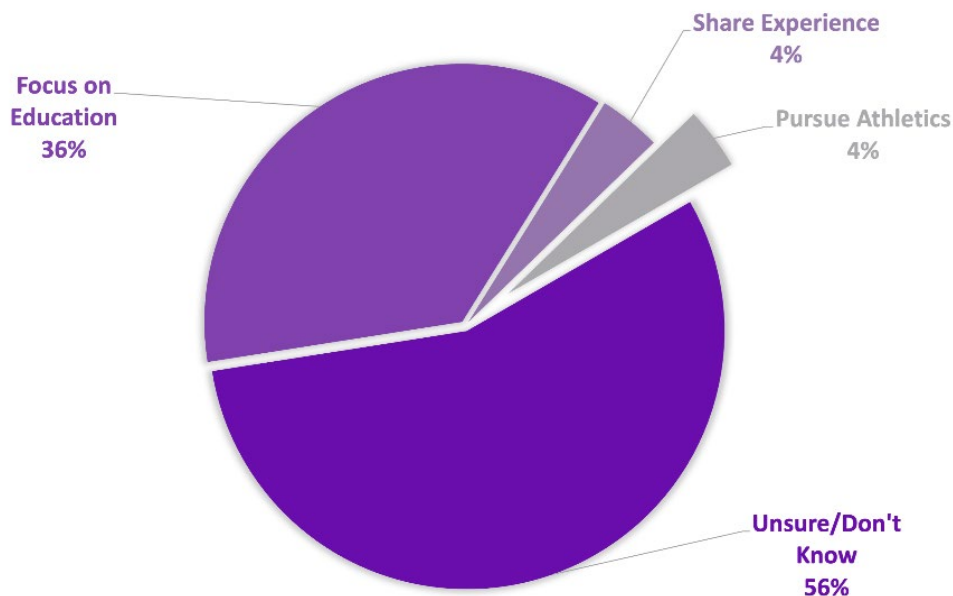
What's Next?

As shown in the survey, a number of students reported not knowing what to do next in relation to the transition to high school. Therefore, plans are underway to continue the connection with students after their day on campus.

UW-W CITEE is also working to formalize the campus's role in hosting the event and the career interests tour experience, including deepening the engagement with students as peer mentors through Whitewater

Student Government and mirror the UW-W LIFE student engagement among the other Education majors. We also plan to adapt the Educator & Student/Family packets to make them more user friendly.

WHAT WILL YOU DO NEXT?



Conclusion



Middle-school students can experience stress as they face the transition from intermediate grades to high school. Students who participate in the Transition Perspectives College Day event learn that postsecondary learning is for everyone directly from students that look like them and have similar backgrounds. Their direct feedback shows that they appreciate the opportunity to explore all the possibilities that may be available to them. Perhaps this experience will ease their stress as they make the transition to high school.

Funding Statement

