

Section 13.0

UNDERSTANDING AND PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNITY

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13.01 Introduction

“The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers and cities; but to know someone who thinks and feels with us, and who ... is close to us in spirit, this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden.” Goethe

Community-based learning opportunities give students opportunities to use their emerging personal and interpersonal skills in real-world situations. New awareness ignited on campus continues to evolve and expand. Knowledge about how communities and society work becomes more meaningful as it is experienced first-hand. Social engagement skills have the chance to become more sophisticated as they are applied daily in a variety of situations.

Most people learn best through experience, and this is especially true for individuals on the autism spectrum. Traditional teaching methods such as instruction, discussion, reading, media, and research are important and necessary teaching tools for knowledge acquisition. For the transition student, however, these methods always should be paired with meaningful and applicable experiences useful in daily living, supported by coaching and modeling.

It is within the context of the day-to-day community life that transition students learn to translate knowledge into action, sharpen adaptive and independence skills, and become active, contributing members.

Although most students will have experienced community on a small scale (friends, family, school, therapeutic support team, etc.), many may have yet to explore the wider environment. This module provides a bridge for transition students to expand into their communities, at their own paces, and in their unique styles, and leverages that learning to promote understanding of their place in the large society.

In support of these goals, the Community module has the following objectives:

Understanding Community

- Understand what a community is, and what it means to be a member of a community (in some cases several communities)
- Understand what roles, rules, and infrastructure keep one’s community alive and growing
- Learn the richness of resources and people that exist in one’s community

Participating in Community

- Learn to socially navigate a community and interact positively with its members. This includes practicing verbal and behavioral skills needed to navigate spontaneous social interactions
- Learn to physically navigate one’s community effectively and become more independent
- Apply content learned in the program into real-life situations
- Strengthen executive function, creative problem-solving, decision-making, adaptability, and resiliency skills in a wider range of social scenarios

- Gain skills in using local resources and become more self-advocating and self-determined in seeking information, locating resources, and meeting one's needs
- Reframe distortions or biases about places and people through new positive experiences, in doing so strengthening meaningful self-reflection and the ability to reflect on others
- Reduce anxiety and dysregulation regarding unexpected factors, crowds and open spaces, strangers and unfamiliar places, unknown outcomes, inability to control one's environment
- Increase ability to establish and improve relationships with community members
- Identify and establish community mentors, partnerships, and allies
- Strengthen and widen affinities, interests, and passions, and discover new ways to leverage them into increased community involvement and social relationships
- Set educational, career, recreational, social, executive function, self-regulation, and other personal goals that can be worked on within the community and with community members
- Create community-based, collaborative endeavors to use as vehicles for interacting with community members, skill-building, and expressing creativity and passions

Understanding and Participating in Society

- Strengthen current passions and interests (research, field trips, activities, discussions, projects)
- Use curiosity to awaken new interests and passions (watching a documentary, following the news, interviewing people)
- Build independence (self-advocacy, making life decisions, voting, citizenship)
- Increase community participation (attending a rally, lecture, or cultural performance, visiting the state capitol)
- Bolster executive function skills (writing a letter to the President, planning a project to raise money for a societal cause, planning a trip)
- Raise awareness of how our actions affect others (recycling, volunteerism)
- Develop and expand work and career options
- Create a bank of topics for conversation with others
- Support critical thinking (comparing, contrasting, formulating opinions, appreciating diversity, debating)

Before beginning



This section guides the teacher and learner in experiential learning activities in the community. **Section 13.17, General Guidance for Being Out and About in the Community with Students**, will help with initial planning, contingency planning, organization, plan implementation, and post-experience management, and should be read and considered before

13.02 Part 1: What is a Community?

Establish the meaning of the word “community.”

The literal definition according to Merriam-Webster is, “a unified body of individuals.” Although this definition is short and dry, the word “unified” hints at a deeper, more profound meaning of the word: *Community is a group of individuals who come together in the shared human need to have a sense of belonging.* This sense of belonging creates emotional connectedness and opens doors to building functional and interpersonal skills. The communication and collaboration found in active communities provide each member with opportunities to build and strengthen relationships, understand the needs and perspectives of others, learn, and self-advocate.

Ultimately we want to establish a deep, internal, felt sense of community. To get there, however, we must first lay a foundation of cognitive understanding and then gradually lead them to the more complex layers as they are ready.

Establish the concept of community through 1:1 or group discussion:

- Define the word and brainstorm associated words that help strengthen their conceptual understanding – *together, sharing, cooperating, friendly*, etc. If possible include both action and emotion words to show the multi-dimensional nature of communities
- Generate examples of communities – encourage them to draw from their experiences and knowledge about the world
- Look at pictures of communities and people doing community-based activities – voting, parades, flea market, etc.
- Apply other creative methods for representing community – movement, art, etc.

Once students can visualize and conceptualize community, they are cognitively prepared to layer on information about the structure, organization, and uses of a community.

Understanding the parts of a community

Here we deepen the foundation on which to layer more information, raise awareness, pique interest, think creatively, and build skills. It is usually best to begin with the physical neighborhood in which the institution hosting this program resides.

This step involves

- Identifying the physical aspects of community – the places, people, and physical map of area
- Breaking down the broad, abstract concept of community into its vital parts
- Clarifying how the parts work individually
- Illuminating how they all work together

Before jumping into *what to teach*, the following general guidance may be helpful to teachers:

General Guidelines Point #1

There will be a wide range of variation among students in terms of their awareness, knowledge, and experience concerning *community*. Many students will be somewhere in the middle, possessing some knowledge but with gaps of understanding and awareness that need filling in. *The wider the variation in awareness, knowledge, and experience, the more challenging it can be for teachers to choose strategies and approaches for group settings.*

Solution

Before launching into the module and layering on new information, elicit from students what they already know. “What do you know?” sessions will help teachers identify:

- Each student’s level of knowledge
- Natural small groupings of students who might work well together
- Students who need more intensive 1:1 support to navigate the information and make it meaningful
- Students who can be mentors for other students or considered “experts” because of their knowledge and skills

This exploration can be done in a group discussion where the teacher writes down contributions, draws pictures and concept maps using a whiteboard for all to see and respond to.

General Guidelines Point #2

Some students will claim to have no community experience from which to draw.

Solution

Even a student with very little experience out and about in the local community still lives in one. Help her see that she does have some knowledge through her *micro-community* (family, friends, teachers, therapeutic support systems). This will help her connect with the module content.

General Guidelines Point #3

Some individuals experience life in a variety of communities: Perhaps an old neighborhood where he or she used to live, the community where family home is now, a second home community they see only in the summer, grandparent’s neighborhood, etc. Divorce and split custodial arrangements can further confuse the issue. This may confuse teachers and peers at times while trying to determine to which community the student is referring.

Solution

It may also prove helpful for each student to have a “My Communities” book they create that contains separate sections for each community as they move through the module. Students can have fun naming each one to reduce confusion and give them reference points in discussions. Within each community section,

pictures can be drawn, representational images from magazines can be pasted, and words written to help with comprehension, retention, and thought organization.

This helps individuals cognitively separate the different communities and make comparisons among them more easily.

Students with connections to several communities can be regarded as “experts” in certain areas. Teachers can look to them for contributions, to generate ideas, and to be helpful to fellow students.

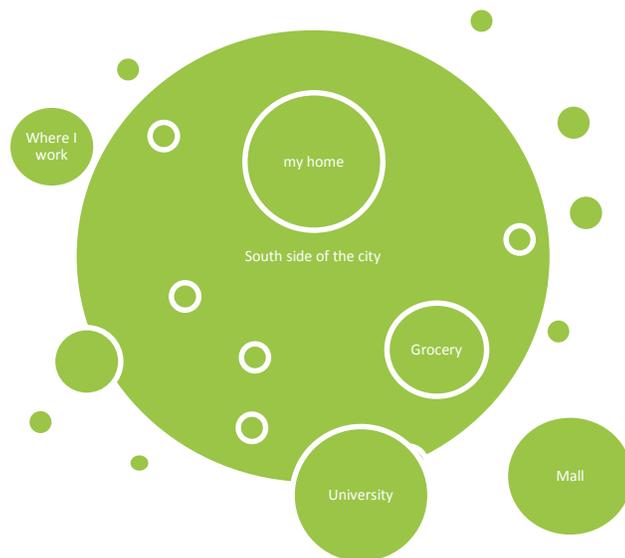
General Guidelines Point #4

The transition program resides within a physical neighborhood with specific zoning and cultural or ethnic identity. This neighborhood resides within and alongside other such neighborhoods, which together comprise a larger community or region of the city, and so on.

This concept of *communities within communities*, and how they fit into the community at large, can be confusing and disorienting to some students.

Solution

Visual aids such as concentric ring diagrams can be very helpful. Students and teachers can write where each community fits into the bigger picture, adding key words and images. Some individuals on the autism spectrum struggle with recall of new information. Concentric ring diagrams support retention and comprehension and reduce student confusion. These diagrams can remain posted to remind students of what they discussed and how they relate.



Maps can be of great value throughout the community module. Draw on a laminated map with dry erase markers. Different areas can be color coded and highlighted as needed: walking routes, bus and trip pathways, common destinations, and other important community reference points. Pins can be color coded and placed on locations students have been or want to go.

For individuals who struggle with spatial ordering and active working memory, posted maps provide a constant reference during discussion and activities. Post maps in an area easily accessible to students. Staff can encourage students to use them to seek information independently or with assistance.

General Guidelines Point #5

Establishing a conceptual understanding of community with students is complicated because it encapsulates concrete, abstract, and multi-dimensional aspects. In order for them to grasp where they fit in and how they might participate, students will need to grasp:

- What are the vital parts that make up a community
- How these parts work in harmony for a community to thrive

They will begin to see the fabric of a community depends upon relationships, communication, and collaboration – and that these are important skills to becoming independent and interdependent.

Solution

A multi-sensory teaching approach helps students gain a strong conceptual understanding of the preceding points. Use:

- Auditory teaching methods that incorporate music, guest speakers, presentations, and discussions to strengthen understanding and build essential listening skills
- Visual representations in the form of photographs, drawings, symbols, and concept maps to provide students with a way to organize thinking, build visual processing skills, and bolster comprehension
- Kinesthetic learning techniques such as movement games and art projects to capitalize on physical and sensory experiences, enliven learning, and bolster comprehension through engaging the body
- Experiential learning approaches such as field trips, role-play, group activities, and projects that support understanding through interactive and engaging experiences

A note on structure and repetition



Note that the following sections dealing with School and Local communities are arranged intentionally so concrete aspects of communities are repeated with each layer (physical, residents, government, businesses, etc.). Throughout, we include recommendations on **Points of Emphasis** and **Drawing Conclusions**. This repetition and predictability reinforces the similarities that run through the different types of communities. It also makes it easier to compare and contrast communities, which is a more difficult cognitive task

13.03 Our Local School Community

A good starting point for building a conceptual framework for community is the student's school community. By drawing upon these immediately visible examples, teachers can help students understand community on a small scale and then expand into larger examples as student comprehension strengthens. Some students may have difficulty conceptualizing the school as a community because of its structure. This offers opportunities to work on critical thinking skills such as comparisons, contrasts, similarities, and differences.

For example:

- What is the physical layout of the school? What are the resources and people available to me and where do I find them?
- What town or neighborhood government position is similar to/different from our (head teacher, school principal, other staff position)
- How are their positions of authority different?
- How do their decisions affect us as members of their communities?

13.03.01 Physical Space: Creating a Map of My School

Starting with a pre-made basic blueprint of the school and school grounds, students fill in the information below. Color-coding, symbols, and pictures are great ways to enhance the map. If repeated symbols are used, a legend can be created at the corner of the map for reference. Once the map is complete, post it in the student lounge or a common area where students can use it as needed. Building a three-dimensional model of the school would engage the student's artistic skills as well as support individuals with spatial ordering challenges. Include:

- Locations (lunchroom, library, offices, gym, music room, art room, etc.)
- Resources (first aid, fire extinguishers, community event postings, information sources, etc.)
- Services (where staff offices are located and the services they offer to students)

Points of Emphasis

Each school community will have its own unique feel and layout. It is important to orient students to their physical space in terms of function, but also awaken their awareness to the ways in which different places – and moving around these places – affects their moods, thoughts, and energy levels. Having individuals relate to their surroundings on a more personal and emotional level provides them with opportunities to identify preferences as well as evaluate thoughts and feelings in relation to something outside themselves.

- How do I navigate through different parts of my community? (*Example: What is the best way to get from the library to the gymnasium?*)

- What is the relationship between the different locations? (*Example: Food is prepared in the kitchen but eaten in the cafeteria.*)
- What are my reactions and feelings about the different places? (*Example: The library is a comfortable place to relax and read; the kitchen is very busy, crowded, and loud during meal preparation. I prefer to go to the kitchen between meals when it is quieter and calmer.*)
- Where do I find who or what I need? (*Example: When I want to know what is happening today, I can check the bulletin board in the student lounge, go to my advisor's office, or ask, etc. If I need a Band-Aid, I go to the nurse's office.*)
- When I have a request or want something changed, who is in a position of authority to make a decision? (*Example: I want to change the day of a school outing, I would like the school cafeteria to serve pizza, I would like permission to miss class/leave campus, etc.*)
- Where are my favorite spots, short-cuts, or quiet places? (*Examples: I love staring out the giant picture window in the library. It is faster to get to my cubby from the gym if I cut through the dining room. When I am giddy, I like to sit in the courtyard next to the front entrance and calm myself down.*)

Drawing Conclusions

Examples: "It takes a lot of people to run a school program. There are many places and activities to explore in my school. Our school has done a lot to make sure they can handle emergencies if they happen and that makes me feel safe here."

13.03.02 Residents: Profile of Peers

Examine the residents of the school community:

- Gender
- Age
- Ethnicity and race (this is a useful place to define and illustrate ethnicity)
- Which peers would I like to know better or engage with in a specific activity? (seed for personal and interpersonal goals)

Points of Emphasis

When we are aware of the presence of those around us, it can help us to feel more grounded and oriented. If we are in a crowd of strangers or in a time of stress, seeing someone familiar is often calming and soothing. In these instances the defining characteristic of a person is *familiar vs unfamiliar*. When we are not under duress, we are typically available to observe more about people and these observations can become points of curiosity, interest, conversation, and connection. Taking time to identify and discuss the characteristics, similarities, and differences among fellow peers gives students opportunities to develop people-based observational skills and practice how to make meaning and connection from the similarities and differences found.

- What is the range of ages in my peer group? What are the benefits to having friends/peers of similar ages? If there is a range, what is good about having people of different ages in my group? What age range do I prefer for making friends? Why?
- What is the distribution of males and females in my peer group? Do the different genders bring/contribute different things? What are the benefits to having a mixed gender group? What are the benefits to same gender groups? Which do you prefer and why?
- What is my ethnicity? What cultures do my family members come from? What ethnicities and races are represented by the people in my peer group?
- Sometimes friendships are based in shared interests. What are the interests of other people in the group? Do I share any of their interests or are they interested in something I would like to know more about?

Drawing Conclusions

Example: “My fellow students have a lot in common with each other because we are all around the same age. There are more males in the program and it would be nice to have more females.”

13.03.03 Government/Management

A great project for this section is to have students design and construct an “About the Staff” or “About the Student Government” board. It can contain staff members or student government portraits (photo or drawn), a list of their responsibilities, hobbies or other outside interests, and any other interesting information they would like to include. Students can interview staff members or student government leaders. This reinforces language skills and relationship building.

- Staff members / student government leaders and their roles
- Authority/hierarchy – who makes decisions, chain of command, what are set campus rules, and what is up for negotiation (which decisions and rules are decided by authority and which are decided by consensus), how do students make requests/have their suggestions heard, etc.
- Which staff members or student government leaders would I like to get to know better, do something specific with or have difficulty with (seed for personal and interpersonal goals)

Points of Emphasis

Government, rules, and authority are important concepts for students on the autism spectrum to grasp. External rules, guidelines, governing bodies, and people in positions of authority dictate a significant aspect of adulthood. A conceptual and literal understanding of these rules, guidelines, governing bodies, and positions of authority are vital for successful experiences on the job, while interacting with agencies, or managing personal finances to name a few. Students can begin to understand these complex concepts by starting with the student’s experiences with staff and school policies, as they relate directly to their lives. Once the concept is anchored and meaningful, it will be easier for students to stretch their thinking to understand larger forms of government in a wide variety of settings (work, stores, banks, local government, etc.).

- Who are the staff members at my school? What are their roles and responsibilities? Who is in charge of what? How do their roles and responsibilities contribute to the overall operation of my school? Why are their jobs important? How do their roles affect my life?
- How are decisions made and problems solved at my school (chain of command, key decision makers, and in what areas of the school)? If I have a question or problem with the rules or staff member enforcing them, what do I do, who do I talk to, and how?
- What things am I allowed to control or choose? What decisions and situations in which school rules or staff decide what I do? What school rules are set in stone? Who enforces them?
- What are points of negotiation? With whom would I negotiate? When things are decided by consensus how are they approached (voting, group discussions, submit idea to a posted suggestion box, student request form, approach advisor, etc.)
- What are the consequences for not complying with school rules and authority?
- How would I describe my relationship with different staff members? Are there staff members I would like to get to know better? Why? Are there staff members (or rules) whose authority I have trouble following?
- What positions of authority do students have at my school? Which students currently have those positions? Would I like to have one of those positions? Why?

To support students in understanding how decisions are made in an organization or group, the following abstract concepts are important to build:

- Voting – what it is, how it works, who is included (*a more complete discussion of voting and citizenship can be found below in Part 2 of this module, Section 13.21, Developing a Community View.*)
- Identifying the issue and containing the solution – what salient facts, people, etc. do I need to include in this discussion; developing a clear desired outcome or goal; assessing the realism of the situation (cost, logistics, related factors/contingencies, who is affected by this idea/decision, timing)
- Group brainstorming – how to think together productively, how to keep track of everyone’s ideas, expressing oneself and managing emotions, giving feedback
- The art of negotiation – how to share ideas respectfully and agree or disagree; the importance of listening fully to other’s ideas before commenting; tips and tricks for reaching a compromise
- Making informed decisions – what I need to know before making a decision or casting my vote
- Managing expectations – what happens after the vote or decision is made, when can I expect to see changes, and in what form(s) will they come? Having realistic expectations of others/organization, managing emotional aftermath (how do I handle disappointment, frustration, giddiness, etc. if the vote/decision does not go my way; and how do I manage my emotions if the result is not what I imagined?)

Starting this discussion on a micro level with the school community helps students more easily develop a conceptual understanding of group decision making and external authority with real-life examples that

affect them directly. It also gives them a chance to work on the social-emotional aspects of group decision-making and rule adherence, something that can be quite challenging for individuals on the Autism Spectrum. As students move through the widening concentric circles of their communities, they can explore what these concepts mean on increasingly more complex levels. In doing so, students receive practice in strengthening their critical thinking, language, and executive function skills as it relates to making decisions, personal empowerment, collaboration, and effecting change.

Suggestions:

- Go through the school handbook with students and discuss the rules, why they were written and how easy or hard they are to comply with. Discuss concepts such as fairness, equality, and balancing the needs of members of a group. Have students discuss what they do or do not agree with. Tap into imagination and creativity by picturing the “perfect” school rules and describe why they would or would not work.
- Group discussions about rules they are aware of in various settings based on experience (no running at the pool, being quiet in a library, etc.). Share what was hard or easy about complying.
- Group discussions about experiences students have had in arriving at a decision by vote (*Examples: family or friends choosing a restaurant or movie, deciding what color to paint bedroom walls, etc.*)
- Practice understanding voting and other ways to reach group consensus with a wide range of low stakes activities (*Examples: best superhero, worst pop star, best place to vacation*). As the group becomes more adept with the dynamic, begin adding increasingly higher stakes decisions (*Examples: which restaurant to go to on an outing, what color to paint the student lounge, deciding on a school mascot, theme of an upcoming event*). Flex the ways in which people vote (*Examples: ballot, raising hands, standing up, etc.*) so students experience a range of voting/decision-making methods.
- Please note that staff should be prepared to manage all aspects of the group decision-making process:
 - executive function: logistics, method, and organization of the process
 - critical thinking: weighing ideas, comparisons, contrasts, brainstorming, creativity, evaluation, causal relationships, detail and big picture thinking, generation and visualization of possible outcomes
 - social cognition: compromise, collaboration, listening to others, responding to others, respectful agreeing/disagreeing, fairness
 - emotion regulation: managing emotions as they arise in the process, how to stay regulated, how to become regulated if get upset, controlling impulses and outbursts

Because group decision making is so complex and there are a wide range of important dynamics and aspects, it is better to break the process down as needed and not rush it. It is important for students to experience the

entire process as meaningful and understand that decisions can take time to arrive at rather than rushing and missing valuable teachable moments because of an imposed deadline.

Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “Staff members are very friendly. I prefer to be close with a few staff members who are my personal go-to people. I am comfortable asking for help from any staff member.” “When I fill out a student request form with my advisor it is easier to organize my ideas and ask for what I want.” “Voting and deciding things in a group is complicated and takes time because everyone’s ideas need to be heard and considered. This is hard because sometimes I am impatient and want changes to happen fast.”

13.03.04 Businesses

Many roles are needed to start and maintain a business. As this section is covered, teachers are encouraged to note which students get energized by which ideas and/or specific roles as it will inform work and career planning, as well as goal setting.

- Does your program or school have any businesses (*Examples: student store, print shop, café...*)
- What businesses might we start here?
 - Brainstorm ideas
 - In what ways would each idea benefit the school and its members?
 - Who would do what tasks in the business?
 - How much do you think it would cost to start the business? Whose time, and how much of it would the business require to be successful?
 - What would be the most difficult part of running this business at school or in our program? Do you think we could be successful?

Points of Emphasis

There is great merit to discussing and brainstorming business ideas with students on the spectrum because the experience is ripe with opportunities to apply critical thinking, creativity, and executive function skills. All ideas, including those that are impracticable, have value because they can be visualized, discussed, acted out, represented through art, and analyzed. This generates additional brainstorming, inspiration, and group collaboration. The bigger picture goal is to identify and develop student-generated business ideas that can become individual or group projects, school-wide endeavors, or seeds for collaboration with community partners and businesses.

- One way to come up with a business is to see what is popular. Brainstorm a list of businesses you know of that are already in existence that are popular or you like. Help students organize their thinking by putting them into categories (food, services, entertainment, etc.)
- Would a smaller version of any of those businesses be a good idea to try here? What would that look like?

- Another way to come up with a business idea is to identify needs people or places have and imagine those needs being filled. Can you think of anything the school or its members need or would benefit from? What would that look like?
- Who is going to be involved in making decisions about a school business? How will we make decisions? (voting, board/committee, representative, school rules and restrictions that may affect the business idea)

Drawing conclusions

Examples: “Starting a business sounds like fun. The school could get lots of positive benefits from having its own business. It is wise to start small and then grow the business as it becomes successful.” “it was hard to decide on which school business might be the best because there were so many good ideas and a lot of facts to consider!”

13.03.05 Services Available

Students find it fun and informative to have staff make mini presentations about what they do. This gives students the opportunity to ask questions and, at the same time, open doors for developing new relationships, collaborations, or projects.

- What services does my program offer?
- Who qualifies for each service?
- What services am I currently using?
- Services I would like to try or feel I need? (note for future planning)

Points of Emphasis

This section is related to information covered in 13.03.3 Government/ Management and provides a wonderful opportunity for students to review staff members and their roles. It prompts students to analyze staff roles and responsibilities at a higher level of complexity. It illuminates what services staff represent and why those services are vital to the school, its student body, and each individual. Connections can be made between services the school provides and the parallel services provided within the larger communities around them (*Example: Cafeteria or school kitchen provides food vs. community restaurants, fast food places, and grocery stores as sources of food*).

- Brainstorm a list of school services. Have students “discover” new information by making a list of unknowns and discussing how to find the answers by asking questions, referring to a student handbook, reading posted signs, etc. Do this in a way that students can be active in their learning (discovering information on their own or with facilitation) rather than passive (being told the information).
- Each student makes a school services chart containing a list of all services, who provides them, any important guidelines (*Example: Kitchen is open from 9am-8pm*), and which ones they are currently using. This chart can be useful as a source of information and a tool during advisement and goal setting.

- Compare among group members who is using these services. Detect similarities and differences of needs. Encourage the exchange of stories and “advice” among students (*Example: The librarian is really nice, she knows a lot about Anime, you should try to talk to her*). Anticipate services each individual may want or need to make use of in the future. Identify services the student may want to explore further.
- Are there any services offered in which I would like to partake? (*Examples: Cooking in kitchen and sorting office supplies*). These are seeds for potential campus internships, business ideas, and career paths.

Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “There were a lot of services in my program I was not aware of. I am happy with my current use of program services.”

13.03.06 Connections between My Program and Local Community

This step examines connections between the school program and resources in the local community. Use concept maps to help students understand and keep track of the connections discussed. Note areas of high student interest, where collaborative connections can be capitalized upon for internships, guest speakers, and student-driven collaborations.

- Services the program uses
- Services that benefit me directly
- Partnerships and sponsors
- Brainstorm potential partnerships and how they would benefit both the program and the local community

Points of Emphasis

The biggest challenge for students in this section is the critical thinking activity of “bridging” or transferring knowledge. Bridging the knowledge is the ability to take information known in one context and apply it in a different context, taking into consideration any changes or adjustments needed to make it applicable. Developing this ability is greatly assisted by the use of visuals to reinforce connections, similarities, and differences.

- Using the School Services chart made in 13.03.5 Services Available, have students brainstorm which local community services have roles in each school service. This approach provides teachers with a concrete platform to help students bridge and think critically. Students can generate questions to ask staff members and search for information on the internet to fill in unknowns.

- Provide students with a list of school sponsors, established community partners, and other resource providers. Discuss their roles and contributions, including any role the school takes in a given partnership (*Example: Local bakery provides baked goods with the agreement that the school will use only their baked products and puts their logo on the school banner*).
- Brainstorm other potential partners. Teachers may have to generate a few starter examples, including some that are unrealistic, to activate critical thinking and brainstorming. Discuss how the school decides which businesses to partner with.

Note regarding brainstorming potential partnerships

Students will likely need teacher assistance to come up with ideas, especially viable ones. Collect all brainstormed ideas, no matter how implausible they may be (*Examples: building Disneyland on campus, having Nike sponsor new sports equipment*). There is great value in including even the most implausible since they generate excitement, promote engagement, and support creativity and dreaming big.

Next, assess the ideas one by one to determine the level of challenge for each. This supports critical thinking. Staff and students should decide together which to act on now versus which to table for later. This part gives excellent executive function practice.

From this exercise, maintain a running list of organizations, businesses, and entities to approach for future staff-facilitated projects (generating a proposal or plan, correspondence, collaboration, negotiation, pitching ideas, etc.).

Drawing conclusions

Examples: “We have a lot of options available. There are only a few ideas that interested me and they all had to do with food.”

13.03.07 Special and Historical Lore (Local Flavor)

- History of my program
- Interesting facts or lore related to my program

Points of Emphasis

Approaching this section as an exercise in digging up fun facts engages students in an enjoyable and adventurous activity. Teachers will want to identify important points prior to this section and prepare novel and interesting ways to introduce the fact or historical event. Using experiential learning can make this section come alive, such as campus scavenger hunts, interviewing staff, creating artistic representations (collages, dioramas, drawings, short film, etc.).

Students may need help with the abstract concept of “making history” through visualization, imagination, creativity, and brainstorming concrete examples.

Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “My program does not have a long history because it is new. I want to make my mark in the history of this program by adding something special that future students will benefit from.”

13.03.08 Culture and Ethnicities

- Given the ethnicities represented by staff and peer in my program, what are we doing to celebrate and teach one another about our ethnic/cultural similarities and differences?
- Cultural or ethnic program events
 - events occurring or planned
 - brainstorming cultural events the program could do

Drawing conclusions

Examples: “I am excited to learn more about different races and cultures. There is not much variety of races and cultures in our student body.”

Points of Emphasis

In *Section 13.03.2 Residents: Profile of Peers*, students identified the various races and ethnicities represented in the school (student and staff). This section is designed to help students take a closer look at culture and ethnicity from a more interpersonal standpoint: what do the different ethnicities and cultures represent.

- What do I know/understand about different ethnicities and cultures of those around me? Share experiences (Epcot Center, travels, ethnic parade/event, ethnic food, friends or family members of different ethnicities/cultures).
- Are there things about another peer’s race or ethnicity that interest you or you are curious about? How do I get my questions regarding race and ethnicity answered (facilitated work on how to discuss race and ethnicity with others in a respectful manner)? How do we show respect for other races and ethnicities (socially accepted dos and don’ts)?
- How does a group benefit by having members of different races/ethnicities? What can we learn from one another?

13.03.09 Big Picture: If I Were in Charge of My Program

- Things I would keep. What and why?
- Changes I would make
 - things I would add. What and why?
 - things I don’t think need to be there. What and why?

- How will decisions be made, who is in charge of what?
- Student-generated ideas

Points of Emphasis

To support students in big picture thinking, we recommend there be a strong visual component to this section's discussions. Students may also need to review the different parts discussed previously in this section to bolster memory, identify important points to consider, and help lead them to drawing larger conclusions and thinking critically.

Drawing Conclusions

Example: "Overall I am satisfied with what my program has to offer. My program experience would be better if xyz changes were made. This program is meeting my current needs and interests."

**"But if I ran
the zoo," said
young Gerald
McGrew, "I'd
make a few
changes.
That's just
what I'd do..."**
-- Dr. Seuss

13.04 The Local Neighborhood / Local Community

13.04.01 Physical Layout

To help students visualize their immediate neighborhood and be able to organize the information below meaningfully, create a map. Using a basic pre-made map of the local streets, students can explore the neighborhood and learn a lot through discovery (driving in a car, walking, biking, etc.). There is great benefit to walking the area by foot because it engages the body while students are learning, opens the door to spontaneous interactions with local people, and provides valuable data to teachers as they observe what students notice about their surroundings. Creative ways to explore one's surroundings include scavenger hunts, riddles, I Spy, and other engaging games.

Additional benefits to getting to know the local neighborhood on foot:

- Generates ideas for local walking, biking, and jogging routes
- Begins to establish a comfort level with one's surroundings; students may feel more comfortable leaving the school grounds
- Creates visual familiarity with the local layout – if a student wanders, goes for a walk, or runs an errand and becomes lost, he will have a sense of how to get back to school
- Pairs movement in the physical area with a bank of information about it, which increases understanding and bolsters memory recall
- Inspires student project ideas (*Examples: photography, building a bench, upkeep of a park, having a bake sale, etc.*)
- Increases interaction with local residents who may become mentors, community allies, and helpers for students who become lost and need help finding their way back to school

Drawing Conclusions

Examples: "This neighborhood looks a lot like the one where I grew up. I really like the local coffee shop – it is a cool place. I want to come back here again."

13.04.02 Residents

The topic of *residents* is touched on throughout this module. It provides teachers with valuable inroads to discuss similarities and commonalities people have despite differences in appearance, beliefs, and practices. It also creates opportunities to address important social-relational issues such as knowing appropriate terms/words for different races, as well as more complex issues such as diversity.

Some students may not be ready developmentally or cognitively to discuss abstract issues such as diversity and racism. These topics can be the inspiration for small group classes or 1:1 discussions at another time for students who find these topics compelling.

- Who lives in my neighborhood?
- What types of people live in my neighborhood (race, culture, religion, age)

- What are the ways residents in a neighborhood interact? (yard sales, neighborhood groups, churches, etc.)
- Do I want to become involved in any of these activities? (seeds for goal setting, outings, and projects)

Points of Emphasis

As in the prior section, students on the autism spectrum may have difficulty drawing conclusions that are more abstract from the concrete details discussed. The following will require more scaffolding, examples, and modeling to move from facts to more evaluative thinking:

- Personal preferences/favorite places (*Example: what makes a place “cool” or “welcoming”*)
- The “feel” of a community (*Examples: friendly, busy, politically active*)
- Formulating opinions (*Example: the benefit to living in a close community is people look out for one another more, they detect and report crimes more, and the elderly and sick get more help from neighbors*).

Drawing Conclusions

Help students draw their own conclusions about residents in their area. (“People are very similar in my neighborhood. There are a lot of different kinds of people living around me.”)

13.04.03 Government/Management

Before beginning this section, be sure students have a working concept of someone being “in charge” (discussion begins in *Section 13.03.3*). Some students may need to learn what government or management is before they can proceed.

Local chambers of commerce, city websites, town halls, libraries, and courthouses offer great sources of information on local government.

- Who is in charge of my neighborhood? (Who makes the rules and laws we follow?)
- What do the citizens of my neighborhood have control over and how do they get their voices heard? (*Examples: voting, town meetings, rallies, picketing, groups/organizations, newsletters and websites, etc.*)
- What neighborhood groups exist? Is there a town hall?
- What roles do the above play in local government?
- What are some places I might want to visit or people I might want to meet on this topic? (seeds for goal setting, outings, and projects)

Points of Emphasis

This section runs the risk of overwhelming students with facts and details. Students need to build a conceptual understanding that gives them places to put the details and facts covered. Visual manipulatives such as charts, tables, and video clips are helpful. Teachers should decide ahead of time which facts and

details are salient and how to present the information in a dynamic manner that avoids listing of rote facts and superficial processing. Additionally, experiential learning such as internet research, going out and about to visit places, and asking people questions to get information are all ways to help this section become more alive and connect students to the information on a personal level.

Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “Is there anything missing in my neighborhood? Are there too many rules or not enough rules? Are there things that need fixing? Who would be in charge of fixing or building it? Do I want to get involved and how?”

13.04.04 Businesses

Begin by engaging in a group brainstorming session on what comes to mind when we talk about businesses (*Examples: store, money, boss, cash register, etc.*). Next, create a list of businesses (the longer the better), regardless of whether or not they are local.

As their thinking and creativity is stimulated, teachers can move into categorization (*Example: Make a column on a whiteboard of big chain stores vs. local businesses; high-end vs. discount stores; service vs. entertainment vs. retail businesses, etc.*).

Once they are engaged, bridge to the content below. In the local neighborhood (or in “my neighborhood”):

- What businesses operate in my neighborhood?
- How do I find out more about local businesses? (*Examples: web searches, customer reviews, local laws and regulations, better business bureau, franchises/chains/locally owned, etc.*)
- Which ones do I use?
- Which businesses are popular?
- Which places might I want to visit (seeds for goal setting, outings, and projects)
- What places might I want to work at?

Points of Emphasis

Projects such as creating maps or 3D dioramas help students learn by activating their creativity and visualization, and engages them in active rather than passive learning. Exploring, field trips, and scavenger hunts offer opportunities for executive function practice (planning and executing) and engages the body as well as the mind and emotions. Students can also get important practice in evaluative thinking by using an external scale to rate businesses. Teachers can provide students with a scale (such as a Likert-type scale rating from 1 to 10) and explicit guidance on what they are evaluating (*Example: how much you like it, how important it is*). For individuals with more advanced skills, teachers can enlist students in the design of the scale and what it will measure (*Example: we will use a star rating: 1 star = bad, 5 stars = excellent; we will evaluate it based on “coolness” or “usefulness”*). Collaboration and independent work can also be emphasized, depending on what works better for the student (*Example: students are assigned their own grid section of the*

town and have to coordinate as a group how to make one large map; each student makes his or her own map and then compares with peers).

Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “There are a lot of restaurants in my neighborhood. We need more grocery stores nearby. I always shop at the same places.”

13.04.05 Civic Services and Locations

As students become more aware of their needs, they will want to learn about the services that their community has to offer. This will decrease their dependence upon caregivers and take them another step closer towards independence.

Some students will have picked up skills along the way, are innately curious, have sought out learning about community resources, or have begun to do some things on their own. These students can bring a lot to the table in terms of sharing experiences and knowledge, modeling independence for their fellow students, and encouraging peers.

Students who approach this section with little knowledge or experience will need more facilitation and coaching to identify their needs, locate available services, research and compare options, arrive at a decision, and execute a plan to get a need met or desire fulfilled. In these situations, staff efforts will be to:

- Activate curiosity and interest
- Help students find personal meaning in the content
- Increase sense of ownership of own needs
- Help them manage any anxiety that arises.

Executive function and critical thinking will likely need support since navigating resources successfully will draw heavily upon these two cognitive domains.

Topics to cover include:

- My local police station, fire department, etc.
- Public schools
- Garbage, recycling, and other pick-up services, recycling centers, local dump
- YMCA and other community places in my neighborhood
- Community organizations (community watch, neighborhood clean-up, etc.)
- Services and places I use
- Services and places I would like to visit/know more about (seeds for goal setting, outings, and projects)
- Where are the parks in my neighborhood and who takes care of them?
- What do people vote on neighborhood decisions, how does it work and where do people go to vote?

Points of Emphasis

As with other sections in this module, it is vital that this work not rest solely on facts. Of equal importance is emphasis on **executive function** (HOW to organize details and facts covered and HOW to navigate each place successfully), **interpersonal elements** (what people and communication skills are needed to navigate the various services and locations), and **life skills** (identifying needs, the correlating agency, and what you can expect them to do to help or provide, waiting times, etc.).

Drawing Conclusions

Example: “What community services help me do (this task)? Will that be helpful to me? Now that I know about it, how will I do things differently in the future?”

13.04.06 Special and Historical Lore (Local Flavor)

For this section, guest speakers, media, and the internet offer excellent access to local lore. Engaging activities can enliven this section of the module and make learning more community-based and experiential.

Examples: Field trip to the famous donut shop to watch them bake and taste a donut hot out of the pan, dressing up in costume to fit a particular theme or time period, doing a hunt to find a famous statue.

- Is my neighborhood known for anything special (a food product, historical event location, local lore)
- Places I would like to visit
- Events I would like to know more about (seeds for goal setting and projects)

Points of Emphasis

This section is intended to be highly interactive and engaging. Teachers should assemble a list of neighborhood facts ahead of time that can be explored with students. In addition to internet research, there are many creative ways to explore neighborhood history: visiting local chamber of commerce or library branch, local historians, and talking to people who have lived in the neighborhood a long time.

Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “My neighborhood is interesting because (fill in the blank). Is that a good or bad thing to be famous for?”

13.04.07 Spiritual Places and the Beliefs They Represent

It can be helpful to ask the group initially if they or their families practice a religion or identify with a particular ethnicity or culture. Sharing what is known is a wonderful way to tackle new material.

This step also gives staff a chance to assess whether there are any students who have any sensitivities or biases. Religion can be a hot topic for some. Staff will need to be sensitive to this as they progress through the module.

Some students may have a strong interest in religion and a wide knowledge base. They might be excited to share insights with their peers. Teachers will need to decide how much is appropriate for the group. If there is an individual or small group that wishes to explore religion and culture in depth while others are not interested, these topics can become inspiration for a small study group, discussion, future field trips, or independent/small group projects.

Teachers should test out creative, experiential ways to expose students to different cultures (music, food, dance, rituals, clothing, special holidays, guest speakers, and performances, etc.).

- Local churches, temples, meditation centers, etc.
- Places I might want to visit
- Questions I have about religions discussed (seeds for goal setting, outings, and projects)

Points of Emphasis

Students will have discussed race and ethnicity in prior sections. It is likely that the issue of spiritual practice, religion, and places of worship will have arisen in those contexts. Any related threads and any glimmers of interest or curiosity that came out of prior discussions can be brought forward and examined more closely (or revisited if time was spent discussing them in detail prior). Since religion can be a hot topic for some, teachers should be aware of the potential for emotional dysregulation, anxiety, or disagreements to surface within or between students. For this reason, it is recommended that teachers facilitating these discussions explicitly set and consistently review rules for respectful discussion and maintaining a climate for a productive dialogue.

Drawing Conclusions

Examples: "There are a lot of different religious beliefs among people in my community. I would like to know more people who have different religious beliefs."

13.04.08 Big Picture Thinking: If I Were in Charge of My Neighborhood

This section stretches students' critical thinking and creativity skills. It has the potential to generate ideas for individual, small group, or program-wide projects. Teachers can have fun helping students dream up both realistic and far-fetched ideas for play and debate.

- Changes I would make to my neighborhood
 - What would I add and why?
 - What would I eliminate and why?
- What would I keep the same and why?
- Other student generated ideas

Points of Emphasis

To support students in big picture thinking, it is recommended there be a strong visual component to this section's discussions. Students may also need a review of the different parts discussed previously in this section to bolster memory, identify important points to consider, and help lead them to draw larger conclusions and thinking critically.

Drawing Conclusions

Examples: "Overall I am pretty happy with my neighborhood and the things I would change are small. There are many things I would like to be different in my neighborhood. I like thinking about being in charge; I have a lot of creative ideas for making my neighborhood a better place."

13.05 What is Happening in the Community

Students will have different levels of interest in community events. Nevertheless, they should be encouraged to explore a variety of events to see if a new interest piques, or to become more civically aware.

Since the volume of information can be overwhelming, it might be helpful to break this section into chunks and intersperse with web research, discussion, and activities to anchor each topic.

Once students identify civic activities they wish to observe, learn more about, or participate in, natural groups may form where they can explore an event in more depth. This might lead to planning a group outing.

Idea: In a central place, create a giant corkboard and post community information for students and staff: calendars of community events, flyers, maps, bus schedules, brochures, and pictures or drawings of past or upcoming events.

Encourage students to post flyers they collect, sign-up sheets for events, or add events to the calendar.

Initially, staff can maintain the board and, when appropriate, a student can assist in managing the board as an in-school internship. Among other duties, tasks could include finding and soliciting for new events to post.

In addition to supporting students in previewing, selecting, attending and participating in community events it is vital to offer post-event follow-up. Follow-up and post-event discussions will help students strengthen their ability to reflect, make meaning of their experiences, evaluate them and use them to inform future decisions. It is recommended each event be revisited afterwards to process, discuss, share, form opinions, and draw conclusions. By establishing a predictable protocol of questions and discussion points that students engage in each time they attend an event, we not only help students organize their thinking but we also model strategies for ways they can begin to independently assess their experiences.

Reminder: When planning an outing, be sure to incorporate awareness of student environmental sensitivities (including crowds), sensory sensitivities, and other regulatory needs. Create contingency plans for individuals who become dysregulated or overwhelmed and need a quiet place or must return to the program.

13.05.01 Community Events

Consider all of these different types of events, ask students whether they may have participated in them, then discuss the series of questions that follows.

- Community building examples: parades, festivals, concerts in the park, etc.
- Community service examples: tree plantings, community clean-ups, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, animal rescue, etc.
- Public Education event examples: college and health fairs
- Recreational event examples: parades, festivals, outdoor movies in the park, sporting events, etc.
- Cultural Event examples: Ethnic festivals, food festivals, ethnic parades, holiday celebrations
- Political Event examples: voting days, rallies, protests, topics up for vote, people up for election/re-election, hot issues

Questions for discussion

- Why are these types of events important? How do they benefit the community? How does attending benefit me?
- Why these types of projects important? How do they benefit the community? What valuable things do we learn about other people and ourselves when we participate in them? How does helping others benefit me?
- What I would like to learn more about or participate in
- What personal needs and sensitivities could arise if I were to participate in these events?
 - environmental factors
 - internal factors
- How can my needs be met so I can attend this event, feel comfortable, and enjoy myself?
 - What I can do
 - What others can do to help

13.06 Finding Information

13.06.01 How to Learn About Upcoming Events

- Flyers, banners, billboards, and other public postings
- Websites and social media
- TV and radio ads
- Local news and local papers
- Putting my name on an email list to receive notifications

13.06.02 Getting the Details I Need So I Can Plan

- What information source will best provide me with the information I need – print, web, asking someone, going to the location to find out
- Locating the point person/contact within the organization for asking my questions
- Calling or emailing my questions (how to do it, what to ask)
- What I may need to know when deciding whether to go
 - cost
 - time commitment
 - location and how I will get there
 - expectations of participants (bring 2 cans of food for a food drive, have to stay a specific amount of time)
 - Does the event conflict with plans I already have?
 - Is this event compatible with my environmental and sensory needs? If not, can I take measures to take care of myself so I can still participate?

Reflection: What was easy about finding the information? What was difficult?

13.07 Locating Services

- Internet (visiting websites, finding directions, using Google maps, etc.)
- Telephone
- Asking someone for help (parent, staff member, peer)
- Local maps and GPS

Reflection: What was easy about locating services? What was difficult?

13.08 Entertainment and Recreation

- Review options and places from earlier discussions, and add new ones
- Rate list according to preference, fun, sensory, emotional reactions, relates to a personal affinity or interest, etc.
- Explore unknown or unfamiliar options student might want to add
- Things I need to/want to learn so I can enjoy these options better (*Example: practice roller skating in basement and get confident before going to the rink*)
- Things I am scared or hesitant to try but want to do
 - What is scary/unsettling (*Examples: want to go to concert but afraid it might be too loud; want to go to car show but I'm reactive to crowds*)
 - Things I (or someone else) can do to help me overcome my fear or hesitation (*Examples: wear earplugs; attend car show during slow times so there are fewer people*)

Reflection: What feelings surfaced when I talked about entertainment and recreational activities? What have I learned about my preferences for entertainment and recreation?

13.09 Where and When to Buy

Students will need a certain level of foundational understanding for this section to be meaningful and lead to independence with money management. Students who struggle with math or money sense may need small group or 1:1 work to strengthen specific areas.

13.09 .01 How Do I Spend My Money?

- Food: groceries, restaurants
- Entertainment: games, video games, movies
- Collecting: stamps, coins, or other collectible items
- Personal care: haircuts, shampoo, toothpaste, etc.
- Impulse buying
- Gifts
- Other
- Assessing what I buy
 - I am happy with it
 - I want to change my habits by setting goals

13.09.02 Where Do I Like to Shop?

- In store (list places and why I like them)
- Online (list sites and why I chose them)
- Satisfaction level
 - I am happy where I shop
 - I would like to try new places to shop (identify and why)

13.09.03 Saving Money for Big or Special Items Such as Electronics or Trips

- Ways to save
 - savings account
 - give it to trusted person to hold for you
 - piggy bank or money box in room
 - reducing expenses to save
- Delay gratification and wait until I have enough money
 - managing excitement
 - self-control
 - ways and tricks to keep my eye on the prize

13.09.04 My Spending Habits

- Saver/conservative
- Impulse buyer
- Easily persuaded (salesman, TV, etc.)
- Anxious about spending
- Independent and confident
- Buyer's remorse, return things a lot
- Dependent on parent or staff to help (anxiety, numbers, organization, limit setting, etc.)
- Cash vs. credit or debit card
- Do I have a system for keeping track of my money?
 - If yes, discuss and refine as needed
 - If no, begin working on an individualized plan
- Personal goals for spending

Reflection: What was easy about spending money? What was difficult?

13.10 Where to Eat

Food can be problematic for individuals with developmental disabilities because of sensory sensitivities, preferences, oral-motor issues, and gastrointestinal problems. Some students may be anxious about food and restricted in what they can or will eat.

Given this individual variation, staff may want to split students into groups that share similar eating preferences. This will make lesson planning easier and more effective. For example, some students will approach a food taste/test activity with great excitement and curiosity. Others may resist participating and not find it an enjoyable activity.

Forming *Lunch Clubs* with students who share similar or compatible developmental levels and food preferences will allow teachers to design goals that best target individual needs. For example, one group may focus on the basics of eating out: navigating menus, self-regulating, initiating and maintaining conversation, and managing the bill. Other small groups may be more experienced and comfortable with the basics but struggle with some of the more nuanced issues involved with dining out. They may require focus on negotiating which restaurant to go to, tipping, interacting with the wait staff, or trying food outside their comfort zone.

Establish lunch groups before eating out. Preparatory steps might include:

- Strengthening collaboration
- Establishing group goals
- Voting on ideas generated by the group
- Previewing menus online
- Identifying places to go
- Looking at a calendar to plan when
- Planning logistics – how getting there, how long it will take

Regardless of developmental levels, all students need some support in managing anxiety, money, executive functions, and social navigation.

13.10.01 What to Think About When Choosing Where/What to Eat

- Dietary needs
- Cravings
- Healthy choices
- How much time you have
- How much money you can spend
- Logistics (getting there, how far away)
- Collaborating with others

13.10.02 Fast Food Places

- Ordering
- Pick up or delivery
- Health concerns with fast food – identify “healthier” fast food places

13.10.03 Restaurants

- Ordering and menu options
 - Previewing menu online
 - Special dietary needs and whether they can be accommodated
- Environmental and sensory issues and preferences
- Preferences
 - ambiance
 - food types, favorite ethnic foods, etc
- Identifying new restaurants I might like to try

Reflection: What is easy about eating out? What was difficult?

13.11 Getting Around

Maps used in previous sections will be helpful here. They can be displayed on a Getting Around Town board that posts related information such as:

- Bus and train schedules
- Taxi and shuttle contact numbers (if possible make alliances with a cab company and even specific drivers so they are sensitive to student needs)
- Safety reminders
- Executive function tips (lists of what to carry when going out such as money, cell phone, important telephone numbers etc.)
- Signup sheets and posted notes to encourage students to coordinate doing errands and outings with one another
- Other vital information related to transportation, personal safety, and independence while out and about

13.11.01 Walking

- Directions/distances
- Places to stop and rest
- Being comfortable
 - good walking shoes
 - things I may want to take with me (inhaler or other medication, tissues, water bottle, sunglasses, money, etc.)
- Walking safety (with sidewalks, with no sidewalks, safety tips)

Reflection: What is easy about walking? What was difficult? What do I like or dislike about getting around on foot?

Tip: Pedometers are a fun, meaningful and engaging way to help students connect information with movement.

13.11.02 Cycling

Due to coordination and motor planning issues, some students will not be cyclers. They should cover the basics, such as when a bike rider has the right of way when one is walking or driving but the rest of the section will likely not apply.

For students who do like to cycle or want to learn, this section could be the seed for a program bike club.

- Road etiquette
- What to do if have a flat tire or other mechanical problem
- What to do if I fall off my bike, get hit by a car, or are injured
- Locking up my bike, where and how
- What I need to take with me and where to put it

Reflection: What is easy/difficult about biking? What do I like or dislike about getting around by bicycle?

13.11.03 Public Transportation

Public transportation offers students the opportunity to get around more independently. For students to feel comfortable taking advantage of these services, they have to understand and acclimate to rules, environments, and people connected with them. The main issues will be:

- Self-regulation
- Executive function – knowing the steps, what to attend to, and keeping track of information
- Spatial reasoning – staying oriented and knowing what to do at each point of change

A sample general sequence for increasing competence in using public transportation is as follows:

1. Create practice scenarios using role play and improvisation
2. Undertake small excursions with staff to accomplish very limited goals (*Example: quick trip to the local post office*)
3. Make trips without any concern about the destination (*Example: take a train trip to an arbitrary station and then return*)
4. Have purposeful destinations (to purchase something) and back

By phasing the experiences, students gain and solidify skills incrementally. This results in better retention and is less overwhelming compared with undertaking a more complex excursion before they are ready.

Points to address incrementally:

- Cost
- Safety
 - stranger safety (pan handlers, pickpocketing, etc.)
 - asking for help

- Timing (missed bus, have to wait)
- Time required
- Logistics (transfers, etc.)
- Etiquette
- Modes of transportation I use
- Mode of transportation I would like to use or try

Reflection: What was easy about using public transportation? What was difficult? What do I like/dislike about getting around this way?

Note: All students will benefit from learning and practicing how to use public transportation. For many it opens doors for increased independence. It is important to recognize, however, that for some students, public transportation, especially alone, can be too great a challenge given their preferences, environmental sensitivities, personalities, or regulatory needs. In these cases, public transportation should still be encouraged and used whenever possible but it may not become a practical part of their personal path towards building independence.

13.11.04 Rides from Friends and Family

- Who it is okay to ask for a ride
- What and how to ask
- Etiquette (contributing money for gas, not taking over the radio, etc.)

Reflection: What was easy about riding in a car? What was difficult? What do I like/dislike about riding in a car?

13.11.05 Taxis and Shuttles

- Safety
 - making sure it is a legitimate company
 - making sure you are going where you want/need to go
 - being dropped off in a familiar area
- Cost (negotiating cost of ride, including tip)
- Etiquette

Reflection: What was easy about taking a taxi or shuttle? What was difficult? What do I like/dislike about it?

13.11.06 General Safety

General safety while out and about requires self-regulation, managing the unexpected, critical thinking, executive function, and social awareness. Therefore, although short in outline, this section requires much discussion and practice – through “rehearsal”, role-playing, and facilitated interactions out in the community.

- Carrying ID
- Cell phone with numbers you need programmed in
- Who to ask if lost
- Stranger safety (do not accept rides from strangers, etc.)

Reflection: What was easy about staying safe when I was out and about? What was difficult?

13.12 Identifying My Favorite Places, Businesses, and Events

This section offers students the opportunity to review what they learned in the module. They might wish to expand on preferences expressed, reflect on experiences, and notice how these experiences affected their preferences.

Students evaluate whether the places they have listed or visited should remain on their favorites list and what new places should be added. This mental exercise focuses on flexibility and evaluation skills. It is also an excellent opportunity for staff to remind students of places they found enjoyable but had forgotten.

13.13 Places I Might Want to Visit

It is very helpful for students to have checklists or forms they can fill out that walks them through the planning process, highlights what information they need to execute an outing, and supports their executive function.

- Generating goals
- Planning trips and visits

13.14 Where to Meet People

To assure strong skill building, reduce anxiety, and allow each student to work at his own pace, take an incremental approach to this topic. We suggest the following sequence:

1. Use role play to practice meeting people
2. Organize an outing just to observe
3. Organize outings where staff can model for students how to engage others in the community

Here are a few proven steps for learning how to interact successfully with others in the community:

1. Casual and brief social interactions
 - Stores
 - Recreational places (parks, etc.)
 - Standing in line
 - Public transportation
 - Community events (parades, rallies, etc.)
2. Longer and more involved social interactions
 - Community events
 - Volunteer activities
 - Clubs and meetings

13.15 Places I Might Want to Volunteer

1. Review ideas generated in the Community Service section of *Section 13.06 What is Happening in My Community?*
2. Brainstorm and discuss additional volunteer tasks, organizations, and community needs
3. For each volunteer idea evaluate:
 - Feasibility (time commitment, location)
 - Meets my environmental and sensory needs
 - Volunteer expectations and requirements
 - Break down of tasks and skills required for volunteer position
 - Whether my skills and strengths are a good match for each place/volunteer position
4. Plan trips to tour a volunteer location, shadow a volunteer on his/her shift, or invite guest speakers to learn more
5. Narrow down list and exploring deeper according to personal needs and sensitivities. Individualized according to each student's needs, skills, timing, developmental level, etc.
6. Do further research. Some volunteer positions have age and skill requirements or have a minimum shift length or time commitment. Staff should discuss with volunteer organizations of interest extent to which they can accommodate student needs and challenges. This research will save time and help staff and students focus on viable options.

13.16 Places I Might Want to Work

Use same steps listed in *Section 13.15 Places I Might Want to Volunteer*.

13.17 General Guidance for Being Out and About in the Community with Students

When staff members feel students are ready to experience being out and about in the community, the following will help guide initial planning, contingency planning, organization, plan implementation, and post-experience management.

13.17.01 Examples of Community-Based Learning Experiences

- Attending a community event (dedication, concert, handing out water at a bike race or walk-a-thon)
- Volunteer (organization, community garden, event of interest such as an anime convention)
- Tour a facility
- Observe a specialist or a process in a facility (glassblowing, making doughnuts)
- Internship
- Putting up flyers for an event
- Scavenger hunt
- Shopping (items for a project, ingredients for a recipe, school supplies)
- Attending a rally or protest
- Outdoor performances
- Entertainment
- Shadow a professional for a day
- Informational interviews
- Mock interviews
- Job interviews
- Reporter interviews (for a school newsletter, article)
- Dining out
- Learning how to do something (tire changing demonstration at auto shop, firemen show how to check batteries in smoke detector)
- Exercise (YMCA, park, hiking)
- Fact-finding mission (go to army recruitment to ask questions about being in military)
- Compare places (style, environment, feel, etc.)
- Outings just to get acclimated to being in public – destination – *where* not as important as *the process*)
- Attend a lecture/audit a class
- Meet a professor/someone with expertise on a subject of interest (tour robotics lab at local state college)
- Understand community systems (tour police station, do mock traffic court improvisation, sit in police car, attend a public trial, etc.)

- Join a club or attend a club meeting
- Participate in a community cleanup or group volunteer event
- Participate in fun activities (city wide scavenger hunt, local 5k race)

13.17.02 Managing Individual Differences in Core Capacities When Out and About

Regulation

The ability to self-regulate or receive regulation support can determine whether someone is able to navigate successfully being out and about in a public milieu. It is important to have a thorough understanding of an individual's regulatory capacities in selecting readiness for and appropriateness of community outings and experiences.

Engagement and Reciprocity

Successful social interaction requires both engagement and reciprocity. Some community experiences can be shaped or controlled to limit the range of social interactions – these make previewing and preparing students for the outing much simpler. Many other community experiences have inherently unexpected aspects and would require a more sophisticated level of engagement and reciprocity.

When selecting community experiences, keep in mind each individual's level of development with respect to engagement and reciprocity. Identify opportunities that offer an appropriate level of challenge.

Social Problem-Solving

Most community-based learning experiences provide opportunities for both planned and spontaneous practice with social/shared problem solving. It is wise to select experiences appropriate to each individual's level of skill in this area. It is best to keep the problems appropriately challenging but not surpassing the threshold beyond which the challenge becomes overwhelming.

Self-Reflection/Self-Knowledge

The reactions, feelings, thoughts, and actions resulting from our interaction with the environment provide rich data about who we are. However, much of our self-understanding grows only when we see ourselves in relation to others.

Interacting with other people, we see ourselves in a new light. The interactions give us perspectives impossible to achieve when we are isolated or in predictable and limited relationships.

Self-evaluation is a high-level function. However, most people can engage in it to some degree given support, adjustment of language, and adaptation of the process to their capabilities. Community-based activities offer very effective opportunities to support individuals in building self-awareness through experience, interaction, and feedback sessions.

13.17.03 Organization and Planning for Community Outings

Planning and organizing community-based learning experiences require attention on three levels: individual, group, and the community itself.

Individual experience guidelines

- Align plans with the individual's goals. Establish clearly defined relationships between the outings and the therapeutic and big picture treatment plan. Do they support timeline, expectations and goals?
- Design plans that match the individual's profile:
 - select realistic choices given individual's expectations, challenges, and current functioning
 - match the individual's affinities and aim to build or expand on interests
 - make plans compatible with environmental needs (sensory, sensitivity to crowds, triggers, phobias, etc.)
 - incorporate individual's strengths & weaknesses; ideally capitalize on strengths and use them to minimize weaknesses
 - maintain appropriate levels of challenge in light of individual's resiliency, adaptability & flexibility
 - design highly individualized support
 - provide optimal amount of time and modalities for previewing (online research, discussion, visit, meet someone from place, drive by, etc.)
 - permit time for sufficient experience
 - anticipate potential problems and triggers, discuss with individual
 - plan contingency / exit strategies (both with individual and with staff)
 - provide a comfort person on-site and who will also support in other sessions or aspects of program
 - establish the context and meaning of the outing with each individual: What is the goal of outing? (social, anxiety management, learning something, practice, managing logistics, exposure, reality testing, career exploration, job exploration)
 - if relevant, support individual in deciding what to disclose and when regarding his disability
 - post-experience support/debriefing sessions: extremely important when working with individuals who have a tendency to distort or omit key aspects of an experience. Debriefing sessions should follow an experience immediately and also be ongoing to ensure meaning is gleaned from the experience, reinforced, and incorporated
- Ensure use of *step-wisdom* (proper ordering and sequencing as applied to processes or tasks)
 - assess individual readiness and use as guidance to design rate, volume and complexity of experience

- recheck: How does this experience fit into the individual's short- and long-term goals and planning?
- timing: Is the timing right for this experience given what else is going on in student's life?

Group Experience Guidelines

- Form compatible groupings (size, personality, ratio of support staff to clients, logistics)
- Offer group sessions pre- and post-experience to process, validate, normalize, and inform
- Provide opportunities within experience for group consensus, problem solving, and planning
- Build in frequent previewing that includes not only dissemination of information and discussion, but also experiential activities such as role playing and improvisation of possible scenarios (supports preparing for the unexpected, creative problem-solving, collaboration, negotiation, social appropriateness, and emotion regulation in a wide range of situations)

Community Guidelines

- Assess community opportunities for good matches (events, locations, environmental factors, level collaboration, latitude for accommodations, advantages/disadvantages to a given event or venue, etc.)
- Establish community relationships (individuals and organizations)
- Outline the terms, timing, expectations, and parameters of outing with the organization, venue, or individual in charge
- Follow-up (thank you, post-event communication from both the program and students)
- Maintain and grow partnerships beyond a single visit (develop internship and work possibilities, identify ongoing or future opportunities)

13.17.04 Preparing for Potential Risks and Obstacles

There are obstacles and risks inherent in the pursuit of anything of value. It is unrealistic to think they can be eliminated, and often these barriers become valuable learning opportunities.

Many of the unknowns involved with community outings can be discovered in advance by staff, finding the wisest ways to proceed. The goal is to enter community-based learning experiences equipped with contingency plans, bypass strategies, and any other tools needed to calm and soothe, or if necessary, quickly remove the individual from a stressful situation.

Remember, the goal is not to remove all obstacles and risks but to know them well enough going in, and to know the individuals involved well enough so that any difficulties that surface can become learning opportunities for problem solving and coping rather than showstoppers.

Risks

When staff members fully understand the neurodevelopmental profile of each participant, they are equipped to plan community-based learning activities. They will know which risks are worth taking and which should be delayed.

The primary areas to watch for clues predicting how well an individual will manage distress in a public, unfamiliar environment:

- Emotional and regulatory responses
- Social anxiety
- Social awareness and thinking
- Maturity
- Impulsiveness
- Reactivity
- Rigidity
- Resilience

Some individuals on the autism spectrum are vulnerable to being traumatized by distress and will avoid returning to a location associated with that distress. Therefore, trial and error should be planned and parceled out in manageable bites.

Key questions for assessing whether a risk is worthwhile:

1. *Based upon the evidence gathered (above), what is the predicted severity of the individual's reaction?*
2. *How likely is it that the severity might cause a negative chain reaction counterproductive to the student's growth?*

More typical risks that might surface during community outings:

- Individual is unprepared – not enough previewing, discussion, or other readiness strategies.
Note: Some students may do fine during the previewing and planning phase, but when it comes time to go out into community they may stall out or have spikes of anxiety.
- Too much too soon – improperly individualizing rate, volume, timing, and complexity of the community experience
- Activities that don't fit well with the individual at his current state of development, causing him to avoid similar activities in the future. (*Example: Eating at a busy fast food place during lunch hour, which requires deciding quickly what to eat, having to wait a long time for the food, not being able to get a table in the corner or have music turned down, etc. The environment is too rushed or complicated for the individual and the situation does not allow for accommodations.*)
- Feeling overwhelmed and dysregulated, which leads to socially unacceptable behaviors (public meltdowns, yelling profanity, etc.)

Obstacles

Typically, fielding obstacles consumes quite a bit of staff energy while out in the community, whereas risks can be often predicted and accommodated for in the planning phase. The following are some common obstacles that can arise:

- Environmental factors that spark sensory sensitivities or dysregulation
- Lack of understanding, compassion, or collaboration on the part of community members
- Logistical challenges that cause changes in plans (bus late, flat tire, etc.)
- Safety concerns arising
- Crowds – it can be difficult to find events where sensitivities to large groups of people or long lines can be made manageable. Look for times of day and week when attendance at large events is low.
- Resource availability (destination is closed, not enough of something to go around, etc.)
- The unexpected

By implementing all guidelines above carefully – together with large doses of optimism, creativity, and flexibility – staff can support transition students successfully in understanding, exploring, and participating in their communities.

When students show readiness, the next natural steps following this module are threefold: (1) ongoing practice and refinement, (2) developing long-term options for community relationships and involvement, and (3) expanding understanding to include one's larger society.

13.18 Part 2: Understanding Why We Learn About Society

Note: Part 1 of *Understanding and Participating in Community* should be covered prior to beginning this section. This sequencing increases readiness to tackle societal topics by expanding the scope of student thinking beyond just the immediate surroundings.

Understanding the society we live in broadens all of our lives. It illuminates where we came from, what forces and influences have impacts on our daily lives, and where we fit into the big picture. It helps us to expand our thinking beyond our immediate neighborhood or community and invites us to experience a larger sense of connectedness. Once we awaken to the dimensions, expectations, and rules of our society, doors open for us to:

- Explore new ideas with creativity
- Follow current passions and interests and discover new ones
- Identify potential new jobs and careers
- Develop and pursue our new curiosity about current events, politics, environmental issues, and other societal concerns
- Find options unavailable in our local communities (cultural, economic, political)

Building meaningful awareness of the larger world around us can be challenging for individuals on the autism spectrum, because it challenges their ability to feel safe and calm in the face of so many new and unfamiliar experiences. The vastness of “the world” may give rise to anxiety, and a potential overload of new information (both factual and conceptual). Abstract concepts like government may be difficult to comprehend. Additionally, some individuals on the autism spectrum have spent so much time and energy mastering discrete tasks that they haven’t had the opportunity to think or be curious about society and the world.

Once again, the process we utilize consistently throughout the Transition Curriculum proves useful in this module as well. Staff should use creative, individualized approaches with each student that capitalizes on their interests and passions. Always use enthusiasm to ignite wonder and curiosity. Acknowledge and support an individual’s regulatory needs so the student is available to engage and learn. Finally, adapt language level, rate, complexity of the material, and volume to match each individual learning style.

Awareness and a growing understanding of society will encourage students to *choose to participate*. Participation comes in many forms, but whatever shape it may take, celebrate it. The conscious choice to participate with the outside world prompts an individual to engage and contribute in her own creative way; this in turn adds great meaning to the student’s daily life.

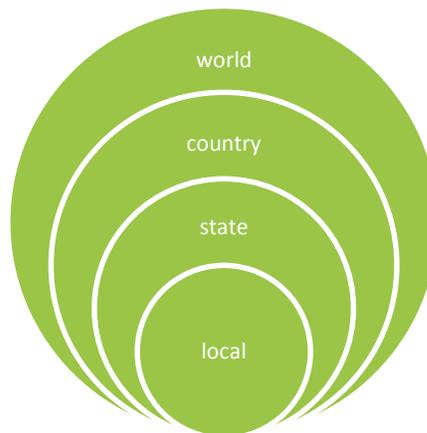
Before starting, establish the general climate for studying this module. Lay out what will be covered and ways in which information can impact their lives, both directly and indirectly. It will be helpful to keep a list of topics each student wants to learn more about – community, state, country, and world – as these will become personal goals for this section.

Individuals with autism present great variation in terms of their interest in and/or awareness of the larger society in which they live. Some individuals are largely unaware of society and societal issues, while others may already possess some understanding. However, all will benefit from starting with this question:

Why should we learn about this?

All students, even those with considerable background knowledge, should begin here, as there may be gaps in knowledge worth addressing. Taking the time to build a foundation will pay off later on.

We suggest presenting the material in this module by creating a set of concentric rings. Staff can use a white board or large poster board to draw the concentric rings presented below. As students explore wider realms of knowledge (local community, state, country, world), fill in the rings with notes or pictures. This helps students to visualize, make connections, and track what was covered. It also serves as a visual record for review.



Students who already have passions or interests in topics related to society (*Examples: they love politics, are interested in world geography, care about the environment, etc.*) will likely bring a lot of their own knowledge, interest, and excitement to this section.

If their interests are narrow (*Example: only interested in military battles*), the challenge lies in widening their awareness to see how other societal topics relate to their favored topic.

If a student's interests are more confined (*Example: individual can list names of countries but does not know anything else about them*), the challenge will be to activate critical thinking and expand their understanding starting with what they already know.

Capitalize on existing societal knowledge and interests by using creative methods to keep students engaged, such as designating certain individuals as "experts" or "fact checkers" within their preferred areas. This provides opportunities for sharing their interests with others in meaningful ways. Students who become dysregulated or dominate the conversation by talking about their areas of interest may need support to reign

in their excitement and manage their contributions so as not to overwhelm fellow students or control the discussions.

Students who come to this section with their knowledge reserves empty will benefit greatly from creative teaching strategies designed to awaken interest, introduce new concepts, explore meaning, make connections to their own lives, and discover new potential interests and passions.

The contributions of more knowledgeable peers will enliven discussions and deepen knowledge. Establishing the importance of being aware and involved in one's society gives these students a starting point.

Society is an abstract concept based on common beliefs. You cannot touch a society, hold it in your hand, taste it, or otherwise experience it directly through the physical senses. For this reason, it is possible to be too focused on information dissemination, which can overwhelm students. To make this module more fun and creative:

- Emphasize that the point of understanding society is so students can identify areas of interest, form their own opinions, and discover ways to participate and contribute
- Information should be broken down into manageable portions and brought to life using activities involving movement, the senses, humor, creativity, interaction, and other forms of engagement.
- Use visual materials to establish abstract concepts. All information should be paired with visual support – maps, media clips, articles on the web, concept maps, pictures, etc.
- Play popular board games such as Monopoly or Risk. In Monopoly, players are capitalists intent on amassing great wealth. The premise of the game will generate great discussion about social values and society's winners and losers. Likewise, Risk is about world domination. Why does a country want to dominate another? These games and others can be played with single players or small teams. They will generate a great deal of discussion and reflection about societal interactions.
- Use examples from the students' direct experiences
- Engage in projects and group research as fun ways to explore society
- Use field trips, guest speakers, and create mock situations in the program that model or highlight content
- Examine decisions made on a societal level through explicit examples. Include an experiential component so students can connect cognitively and emotionally (incorporate visuals and film clips, make analogies to their lives, conduct mock votes, etc.). *Examples of societal decisions include: choosing presidents, protecting national parks/endangered species, declaring war, water restrictions during a drought, gas prices, immigration, World Health Organization, Global AIDS relief, helping poor nations, international disaster relief, etc.*

Most of the information needed for teaching this section is accessible on the internet. This can be a double-edged sword because although surfing the net is fun and easy, it is also time-consuming and not

always interactive. Staff should seek to download information ahead of time to design fun and interactive activities, games, and debates.

13.19 Developing a Community View

This will be a review of material gained from *Part 1: Understanding and Participating in the Community*.

Depending on the individual memory, processing, and attention of students, the extent to which students were able to grasp information presented in Part 1 of this module might vary significantly. For some students this section may be a relatively easy review. You will also encounter students who appear to be learning this material for the first time. In such cases, jogging memories through experience rather than information can be very helpful.

For example, a student may come up blank when asked about famous local places covered in the Community module but when reminded of a field trip (an incident, something he ate, or something he saw) the information may come back to him. Peers can also be helpful with students who cannot recall information covered previously.

One area that may prove challenging for some students to tackle on a societal level is voting. In the Community module, the conceptual and practical foundation on voting is established with students: what is voting, how it is done, what the results mean, etc. Part 1 of this module offers many opportunities to understand voting through both language and experience, starting with simple low-stakes voting topics (*Example: best restaurant in town*) and moving into more hearty and complex topics (*Example: should our town vote on a new recycling program*) as skills and understanding strengthens.

Even though all students will receive exposure and practice in the Community module, each individual student will emerge with his or her own understanding of voting based upon their unique cognitive and language processing profile. Teachers should be prepared for a range in sophistication and readiness to apply voting on a societal level:

- Students who experience difficulty understanding abstract concepts and applying them to real-world situations will need continuing exposure and practice voting on a concrete level. Until this is anchored, addressing the meaning of voting within a society may be too abstract. These students may need exposure to ongoing opportunities to vote on small, low-stakes concrete issues until their skills strengthen.
- Students who understand voting on a conceptual, non-verbal level but have language processing challenges and become bogged down in the process will need non-verbal and verbal language support to learn how to approach and navigate voting. Until the right language-based strategies and accommodations are put into place, a discussion on society and voting may be too much of a demand on their receptive and expressive language systems. These students may need ongoing voting experiences that pair action, visual supports, nonverbal communication, and language together until they are able to navigate the process with success and are ready for more language-based work on voting.
-

- Students who understand the basic concept of voting, but need significant coaching and facilitating to navigate the process will need continuing practice to learn how to become more independent. Until they reach a level of independence with real-time voting, a discussion on the meaning of voting in a society may be too overwhelming. These students may need ongoing practice voting on a wide range of low-, medium-, and higher-stake topics with support weaned off slowly as they become more adept and independent.
- Students who are very rule-oriented are often able to navigate voting activities independently but may struggle when the process strays from the expected rules (Example: someone votes twice, a vote is done then redone because something was not done right, other students do not follow the voting rules). This can lead to emotional dysregulation and hyperfocus on details at the expense of the big picture. Until they can learn to manage their emotional reactions, understand the role flexibility might play, and not get too bogged down in details, a discussion on voting and society may feel upsetting and confusing.
- Students who enjoy the activity of voting and are also fascinated by the concept will likely be energized by discussions on voting and society. Those who also have an interest in history, politics, and other social sciences are often quick to understand voting in society on a more abstract and sophisticated level. These students may be best served by forming their own small groups so they can navigate the content at a pace and complexity that does not overwhelm other peers.

Cover or review the following:

1. Famous or well-known things (historical sites, popular places, items associated with community, local celebrities, etc.). *Examples: Boston Red Sox, cheese head hats in Green Bay, Georgia Tech vs. UGA sports rivalry, Philly cheese steak.*
2. Cultures, ethnicities, religions
3. Population
4. Current local events, popular culture, local sports teams
5. Responsibilities as a community member
 - Legal (abiding by local laws, voting)
 - Ethical (Do I have a responsibility to my community as a member, community issues, local elections?)
 - Having choices/making changes (volunteering, raising awareness to community issues, attending a rally, should I recycle, etc.)
6. In review
 - Most interesting facts about my community
 - Goals: Things I may want to learn more about, places I would like to visit, activities I want to engage in (*Examples: recycling, attending local farmer's market, etc.*), people I would like to meet
 - Any new ideas come from this? (career paths, hobby ideas, creative insights, new interests)

A word about the right to vote

Unlike other classes of disabled people, people with developmental disabilities can be denied the right to vote based entirely on the nature of their disability. Loss of voting rights can occur under state Constitutions and election laws that deny the vote to people judged “mentally incompetent,” including those under guardianship.

These laws, intended to prevent voter fraud and to protect vulnerable people from manipulation, have been applied too broadly in some locales.

More recently, though, courts in many areas have taken action to mitigate the disenfranchising of disabled people by ruling that guardianship for financial reasons need not necessarily result in a loss of the right to vote, and that individuals with developmental disabilities are entitled to accommodations, including a person to help them at the polls.

More information and resources are available online from Disability Justice:

<http://disabilityjustice.tpt.org/right-to-vote/>

13.20 Developing a State View

For those students who come from a different state, staff can decide what would be more meaningful – exploring their original home state or their new one. It is recommended that the focus be on the state where the program is being delivered since that is where they will be living for the next few years.

There are many creative ways for staff to weave other states into the discussion. This will give students a chance to stretch their thinking skills (*Example: comparing and contrasting this state with where students came from*).

Explore these topics:

- History and Geography
- Government
- Local government
- Political parties
- Voting (right/responsibility, when, how)
- Major issues and events
- Population
- Cultures, ethnicities, religions
- Current state events and statewide pop culture
- Famous/well known things (historical sites and events, popular places, celebrities, and items associated with state)
- Sports teams
- Responsibilities as a citizen of my state
- Legal (abiding by state laws)
- Ethical (Do I have a responsibility to my state to stay aware of state issues?)
- Choice (*Examples: volunteering, raising awareness to state issues, attending a rally at capital, etc.*)

In review:

- Most interesting facts learned about my state
 - Goals: Things I may want to learn more about, places I would like to visit, activities I want to engage in, people I would like to meet (Fall Garlic Festival, state fair, Native American burial mound, etc.)
 - Any new ideas come from this? (career paths, hobby ideas, creative insights, new interests)

13.21 Developing a Country View

A discussion about United States government may be a hot button for some students. Talk radio shows, blogs, and other media that express extreme views with high affect and strong language can influence all individuals, including individuals with autism. Some students may adopt extreme viewpoints without understanding the associated implications or meaning of the content, because they are drawn to the high affect used to express views. This provides staff with an opportunity to discuss content separate from the inflammatory rhetoric so students can first evaluate the content and then consider how different viewpoints can affect how we interpret the content.

Explore these topics:

- States of the country, famous or popular cities
- Geography, famous sites, and national parks
- Cultures, ethnicities, religions
- Government
- Branches of government
- Political parties
- Voting (right/responsibility, when, how)
- Major issues and historical events
- Monetary
- Stock market
- Economics
- Imports/exports
- National debt
- American symbols, country identity, meaning, etc.
- Country-wide current events
- American pop culture
- Responsibilities as an American
- Legal (abiding by federal laws)
- Ethical (Do I have a responsibility to my country?)
- Choice (Examples: volunteering, raising awareness to country-wide issues, attending a rally, working for a political campaign or party, etc.)

In review:

- Most interesting facts learned about my country
- Goals: things I may want to learn more about, places I would like to visit, activities I want to engage in
- Any new ideas come from this? (career paths, hobby ideas, creative insights, new Interests)

13.22 Developing a World View

Developing a gestalt of the entire world is more complex than developing a national or country view. The following guidelines will be very familiar by now but are especially important during this section:

- Adjust the complexity to fit each student’s cognitive, language, and processing style
- Use visual charts and other representations so connections are easier to make
- Deliver content or parts of the content at a speed that the student can digest and find meaningful
- Media (websites, movies, clips, etc.) are very helpful for presenting concepts in ways that are engaging and fun
- Use projects, field trips, and other experiential methods for understanding information
(Examples: trying foods from different cultures, trying to learn a popular dance such as Gangnam Style, looking at pictures and images that are visually compelling and represent a lot of information that can be broken down and discussed)

Explore these topics:

- Geography of the world and its component parts (continents, oceans, north/south, east/west)
- Nations and national identity
- Cultural identities
- Religious identities
- Government and Politics
 - Different types of government
 - Major issues
 - Major historical events
 - World court/ International Court of Justice
 - United Nations
 - Allies to America
 - Countries in conflict with America (war, disagreements, etc.)
- Global current events
- World pop culture *(Examples: viral videos on You Tube like Gangnam Style dance, latest craze from other countries such as Anime from Japan, etc.)*
- Global issues *(Examples: war, poverty, historical events, global warming, world peace)*
- Responsibilities as a citizen
 - Legal (abide by international laws)
 - Ethical (do I have a responsibility to the world since I live in it)
- Choice *(Examples: volunteering, raising awareness to global issues such as world hunger, attending a rally, signing a petition to free a political prisoner in another country, stay up on world news, etc.)*

In review:

- Most interesting facts learned about the world
- Goals: things I may want to learn more about, places I would like to visit (*Examples: Great Barrier Reef, Pyramids*), activities I want to engage in (*Examples: join global animal or nature conservation club, etc.*)
- Any new ideas come from this? (career paths, hobby ideas, creative insights, new Interests)

13.23 Teacher Resources and Links

- The History Chanel has several compelling series. For example, World Without People is a powerful way of representing how people keep the infrastructure of cities and nations going: <http://www.history.com/shows/life-after-people>
- Jamestown Publishers has several high interest books geared towards adolescents that include lesson plans, charts, visuals, and project ideas. For example, their series “World Works”: http://www.glencoe.com/gln/jamestown/world_works.html
- Many societal/global issues have websites dedicated to them. They often include links to lesson plans and project suggestions for teachers. For example, understanding the importance of water quality: <http://www.safewaterscience.org/>
- YouTube has an abundance of excellent content. However, there is also a lot of inappropriate and poor content as well. Staff should screen all clips before showing them. Also, keep in mind some individuals on the autism spectrum find YouTube quite compelling because of the high energy and high affect in many of the videos. Some young adults on the spectrum are vulnerable to obsessive or repetitive watching of YouTube clips because it excites their regulatory systems. Often dysregulation can occur when they reach overload. Staff can be sensitive to a student’s desire to share favorite clips by separating it out as an activity done 1:1; as a tool to engage, share, discuss, and even raise self-awareness related to regulation. Use of YouTube requires clear boundaries to keep it within the context of a lesson plan.
- Interactive teaching strategies that can be applied to enliven the module content: http://www.fctl.ucf.edu/teachingandlearningresources/coursedesign/assessment/content/101_tips.pdf
- There is a board game called “Modern Society” that can be modified and used as an interactive teaching tool: <http://www.coolstuffinc.com/p/136744>
- SimCity Societies takes real world information and applies it in a virtual world setting, allowing students to visualize and experience content: <http://www.ea.com/simcity-societies>

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