

# Leading the way- CDD developing employability skills curriculum for high school students with disabilities in Texas

## About BEST Mission

**Basic Employability Skills Training (BEST)** research project funded by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). This project includes conducting research to identify employability skills that are essential for students with disabilities to gain and maintain employment, collecting and developing a curriculum for the high school elective course and analyzing research data from field-testing of the curriculum.

The goal of the project is to develop Basic Employability Skills Training (BEST), an innovative curriculum for employability skills training based on research evidences. The curriculum can be used in Texas high schools for teaching employability skills to high school juniors and seniors who are eligible for pre-ETS services with the potential to gain employment. The curriculum can be a Pre-ETS Elective Course.

## Introduction

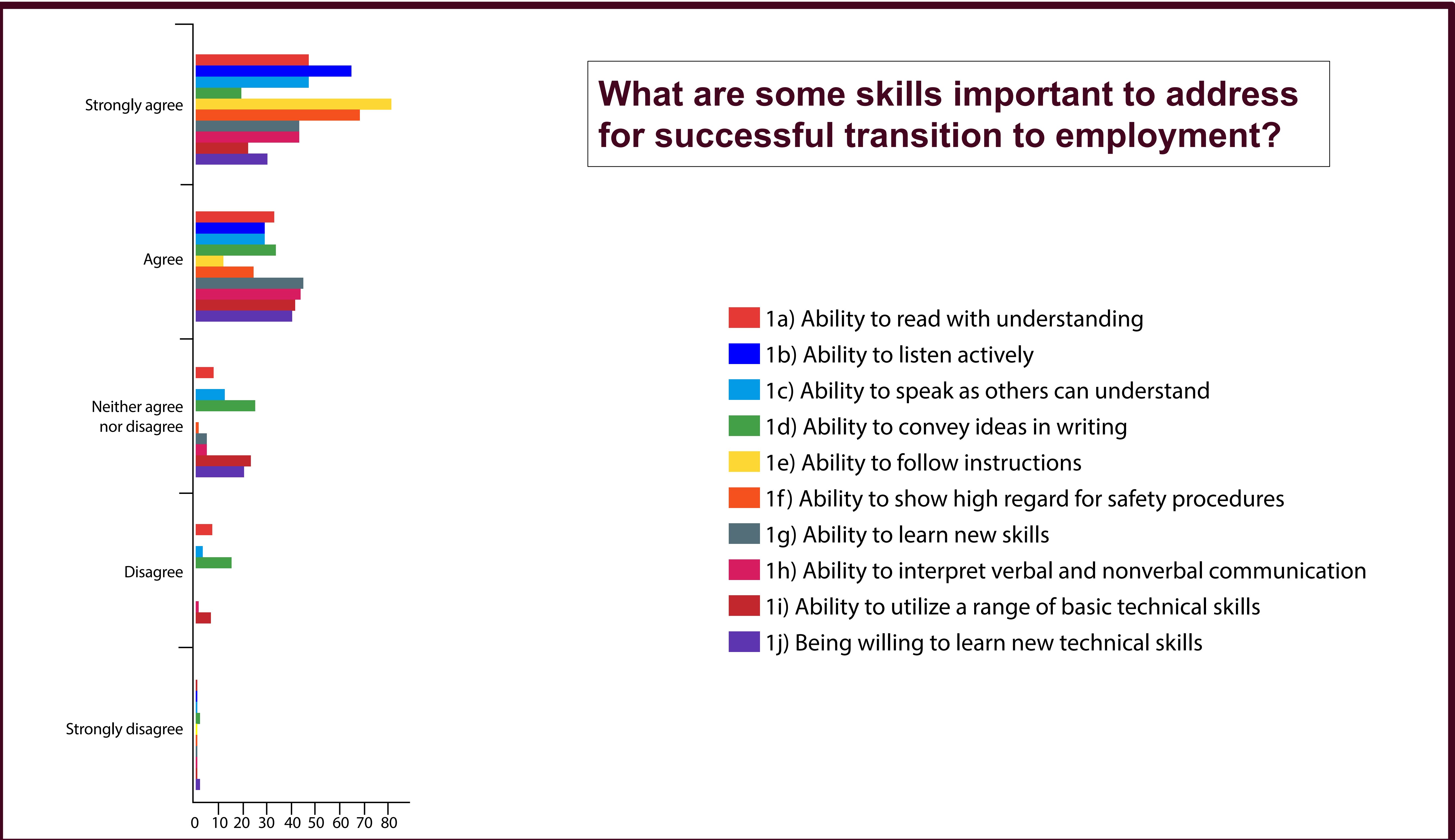
Employment is a central aspect of the well-being for people with disabilities. Studies have shown that employment has positive impacts on social interactions, living arrangements, self-perspectives and self-esteem, economic safety, and productivity (Priebe, Warner, Jubschmid, and Eckle, 1998; Butterworth & Gilmore, 2000; Stephens, Collins, & Dodder, 2005). However, individuals with disabilities have achieved poorer employment outcomes compared to people without disabilities.

One of the major obstacles that impedes people with disabilities obtaining employment is the lack of employability skills. “Employability skills” refer to general and nontechnical competencies required for performing all jobs, regardless of types or levels of jobs. They are not job specific, but are considered attributes of employees that make them an asset to employers (Buck & Barrick, 1987).

However, there is no existing curriculum that is specifically designed to teach employability skills to students with disabilities, especially a curriculum to meet with needs of high school students with disabilities in Texas. Hence, there is a need to develop a Pre-ETS Elective Course for high school students to learn these important skills before transitioning out of high school. This will assist in preparing students for employment after high school graduation.

## Abstract

Despite educators’ efforts to prepare students with disabilities for transition after high school, this population continues to lag behind in successful preparation for employability. While numerous factors account for this, recent literature has highlighted the significant low numbers of elective courses offering employment preparation. In the current study, we explored current courses offered in Texas to prepare students with disabilities for transition. Results indicate that there are no current programs or curriculum specifically on employability training for Texas high schools. These results highlight the need to provide individuals with disabilities with skills to prepare for a successful future in the work field. The process for determining which specific employability skill areas are relevant for individuals with disabilities are discussed.



## Results

The results show that people who participated in the survey value Basic Work Skills more than the other three skill domains, followed by Basic Skills, and Personal Traits. The domain of Higher Order Thinking Skills received only 50% or less votes. The three most valued skill are “ability to follow instructions,” “ability to be on time,” and “ability to show respect for others.” On the other hand, “ability to adapt to new situations” received only 39% votes and “ability to recognize and correct own mistakes” received 49% votes.

## Selected References

Buck, L. L., & Barrick, R. K. (1987). They’re trained, but are they employable? *Vocational Education Journal*, 62(5), 29-31.

Butterworth, J., & Gilmore, D. (2000). Are we there yet? Trends in employment opportunities and supports. *TASH Newsletter*, 26, 5-7.

Priebe, S., Warner, R., Hubschmid, T., & Eckle, I. (1998). Employment, attitudes toward work, and quality of life among people with schizophrenia in three countries. *Schizophrenia bulletin*, 24(3), 469-477.

Stephens, D. L., Collins, M. D., & Dodder, R. A. (2005). A longitudinal study of employment and skill acquisition among individuals with developmental disabilities. *Research in developmental disabilities*, 26(5), 469-486.

## Research Question

1. To what extent are employability training being given in transition planning for students with disabilities?
  - *H1. Employability skills are briefly covered during transition; no specific employability courses are being regularly offered in Texas high-schools.*
2. What are some skills important to address for successful transition to employment?
  - *H2. Basic employment search skills are expected to be important, including appropriate communication and interview preparation skills. Soft skills are expected to be voted as important, such as non-verbal communication. Additionally, the ability to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of the employer are also expected to be important.*

## Methods

### Participants:

- 240 individuals with experience in transition were contacted through email to complete a Qualtrics survey
  - **Areas of Expertise:** transition specialists, and special education teachers

### Instruments:

- Qualtrics survey

## Next Steps

- Identify curriculum components that help students develop employability skills
- Develop lessons of the Basic Employability Skills Training (BEST)
- Gather feedback from stakeholders and subsequent revisions
- Field-test the Basic Employability Skills Training (BEST) and subsequent revisions
- Finalize the Basic Employability Skills Training (BEST)
  - For additional information, please visit our website at [cdd.tamu.edu](http://cdd.tamu.edu) or contact Dr. Jacqueline Turner at [jsturner@tamu.edu](mailto:jsturner@tamu.edu)**