

## Summary and Overview

The Bridges for Learning in Applied Science and Technology Services (BLAST) at Iowa Western Community are designed for secondary students receiving special education services. The services are to assist students participating in the vocational/technical training programs at IWCC by providing special education support and instructional services. This provides students with disabilities an opportunity to develop career or occupationally specific skills.

The services are a collaborative effort between Iowa Western Community College, Loess Hills Area Education Agency 13, and the Local School Districts of Area 13.

BLAST is not a career exploration or skill development program. Students requesting services from BLAST must be registered in an Applied Science and Technology Program at IWCC. Students are enrolled in a specific career program, not BLAST. This is not a “stand alone” program.

The student must complete the core courses of study and still have unmet vocational needs which could be addressed through BLAST if appropriate in order to be eligible.

If a student is receiving BLAST services, his/her tuition, fees, and special education instructional support services are the financial responsibility of the local school district. Special education funds will be used for this purpose. Billing will be handled by Iowa Western Community College.

The student’s IEP team must determine whether the student has unmet vocational or employability skill goals that cannot be met at the local high school. If so, the IEP team, with added members from the community college, will develop an individualized education plan for the student. Students remain eligible for AEA support services as indicated on their IEP.

It should be noted that BLAST provides just one of many options for vocational/ employability skill training. The IEP team should explore other opportunities as well. These might include vocational courses at the high school, Vocational Rehabilitation services, Job Corps, sheltered or supported employment providers, on-the-job training, regular attendance at the community college, etc. IEP teams, including students and parents, should consider all opportunities for transition into the adult world, so that the student’s options are not limited to one choice.

**BLAST Support Services is designed to meet the needs and be consistent with the interests and abilities of an individual student with successful completion of the individualized education plan.**

## Eligibility

High school students with IEPs (receiving special education services) who are under the age of 21 may be considered for BLAST services. Vocational training and/or employability skill goals must be found in their current IEP. If these needs cannot be met appropriately at the high school, the student may be a candidate. If the IEP team finds that the student’s vocational/ employability goals cannot be met appropriately at the high school, the team may make a referral for BLAST Support Services. The local school district must put in place a 28-E Agreement with Iowa Western Community College prior to enrollment.

## Considerations for Transition to BLAST

- Students **must** be referred to the program through the local district’s multidisciplinary team and be recommended to participate in the applied science and technology program at IWCC, as documented in the transition services in the IEP.
- Vocational training needs **must** be identified through the transition planning process and goals are listed on the student’s current IEP.
- Students **must** have completed the core academic requirements (Math, English, Social Studies, Science) for graduation at their local high school.
- Local high schools **must** complete the BLAST Support Services Checklist.
- Students **must** complete an interview with the program chair over the program of study in which they wish to enroll.
- Students **must** be enrolled full-time at IWCC—a minimum of 12 semester hours each during the Fall and Spring sessions and up to 6 hours during the summer session (student does not have to attend summer session).
- Students **should** have had instruction on what reasonable accommodations help him/her learn or work best.
- Students **should** have identified career goals which their IEP team supports and can be achieved through coursework (begun) in this program.
- Students **should** have the ability to perform the essential skills of the selected coursework with or without reasonable accommodations.
- Students **should** demonstrate good attendance, punctuality, and at least a “C” average in high school.
- Given appropriate accommodations and instructional supports, students **should** be able to function successfully within a college environment.
- Students **must** demonstrate independence, yet a willingness to ask for and accept help when needed and to let teachers know that he/she has a disability as appropriate.
- Students **must** show a desire and motivation to be successful in their program through participation in the IEP planning team and an interview on campus with the program chair for their career area and the BLAST Advisor.
- Students **must** comply with the attendance, behavior, and other student policies as established by Iowa Western Community College.

## **High School Graduation and Diploma Issues**

In order to receive BLAST services, students must NOT have graduated from their local high school. To comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) limitations and state code, the student's high school diploma is not issued by the local high school until completion of the IEP goals or the student terminates special education services at IWCC.

Criteria for graduation shall be defined by the student's Individual Education Plan. The student's local school district will determine whether or not the student participates in the graduation ceremonies and when/how the diploma is actually awarded. These issues should be resolved during the IEP meeting at which the BLAST services are discussed prior to the student leaving his/her high school.

## **Grades and Credits**

Students will have several options for credit while receiving BLAST Support Services. Each high school or district must decide how they will award "high school" credits to participating students. It is possible to earn both high school and college credits at the same time. Local high schools will need to decide how to do grade reports for students involved in BLAST. The community college will provide mid-term and semester grades for students enrolled in credit courses only.

## **Support Services**

In addition to the regular vocational-technical curriculum, students participate in a structured study program to receive individualized support services as identified by their Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

## **BLAST Staff**

The primary staff position for BLAST Support Services is the BLAST Advisor. The advisor will be available to assist local high school IEP teams in considering BLAST's appropriateness for particular students. He or she will also serve as liaison between students and faculty/staff at the community college. While it is anticipated that students will generally have the skills and abilities to advocate for themselves in the college setting, the BLAST advisor is there to assist when needed.

Other support persons may also be working with students, for example, tutors for specific courses provided by Iowa Western Community College. Coordination for these services would be provided by the BLAST advisor.

## Career Programs Available

All Applied Science and Technology programs are available to students who wish to receive BLAST services, including all completion options—the Individual Career Plan leading to a Certificate, a Diploma, or an Associate of Applied Science Degree.

Students are expected to meet the program prerequisites and COMPASS score cutoffs to enter any program offered at Iowa Western. High school counselors generally have the list of programs with the recommended cut-off scores for the COMPASS or the list can be obtained from the BLAST Advisor at IWCC. Accommodations are available for students taking the COMPASS test if necessary. A plan to make up any deficiencies will have to be considered on an individual basis.

Other programs and training options may be considered on an individual basis.

## Exit Considerations

The goal of BLAST Support Services is to provide an opportunity for students to continue developing the vocational and employability skills which may lead to independent employment. It is not the goal of BLAST Support Services to exit students with college diplomas or associate degrees. A student exits BLAST based upon completion of the goals and objectives outline in his or her IEP. A student also exits BLAST upon reaching the age of 21. (The student may complete the year if his/her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday occurs after the school year begins.)

At times, a student may choose to exit BLAST through the IEP process prior to the anticipated exit date. Whether or not the student “completes” his or her program outlined for BLAST, the IEP team must meet at the time of the student’s exit to assure a smooth transition for the student into employment, further community college education, or other vocational training alternatives, depending on the student’s interests, preferences, and needs. In any case, interagency responsibilities and linkages should be discussed and documented in the IEP process throughout and upon exit from BLAST. **The decision on awarding the high school diploma goes back to the student’s IEP team and the local school district should a student choose to withdraw early.**

Student participation, amount of time in this program, and exit date will vary based upon the individual needs of the student and the student’s access to appropriate vocational options through the high school.

## **Financial Procedures**

The student must have a current IEP.

**The following items are provided through the local school district special education funding at no cost to the student or the student's family.**

- The district will pay the tuition and fees costs for the specific courses in the community college program in which the student enrolls to complete IEP goals and objectives. Courses not identified in the IEP as part of the student's program shall not be included in the tuition costs paid for by the district.
- Local districts will be billed for BLAST staff time on a pro-rated basis, depending on the number of students enrolled.
- Local districts may cover additional costs ONLY IF previous arrangements have been made through the IEP process.

**The following items are the responsibility of the student or the student's parents:**

See Parent/Family/Guardian Participation page.

### **Transportation:**

- Transportation methods and costs should be discussed and documented as part of the IEP prior to the student leaving his/her high school. Options include, but are not limited to: student drives him/herself (with parent permission); public transportation; school district transportation. School district transportation is considered a last choice due to the need for students to develop more independent mobility skills in preparation for adult life, particularly competitive employment.

**All questions regarding costs of educational supplies for participation in IWCC courses and personal assistive technology should be discussed and determined during the student's IEP meeting.**

## **Parent/Family/Guardian Participation**

Parents/guardians are an integral part of the IEP process which will lead up to a student's enrollment at IWCC with BLAST services. Hopefully, they will continue to be involved in the IEP process throughout the student's participation in this program. The reports sent from the BLAST Advisor to the local high school are available to parents/guardians as well. These reports should be accessed through the local high school.

As students evolve from high school students into college students, the need to develop further self-determination skills is critical. If there are specific concerns about the student's inability to advocate for him/herself in the college setting, these should be discussed and documented with goals related to these concerns written as part of the IEP.

Families and students should be aware that at the age of 18, all students, including student with disabilities, become legal adults in Iowa. The rights of the parents, as outlined in the "Parental Rights in Special Education" booklet, transfer to the student (at age 18), unless legal guardianship is obtained by the parents. However, Parents/Guardians can continue to obtain information about their student if a release of information form is signed.

### **Financially, family (and/or student) participation is as follows:**

- Purchase of books, unless other arrangements have been made with the local high school.
- Typical general school supplies such as pencils, pens, notebooks, binders, etc.
- Tuition costs not associated with the student's program area or emphasis (Example: An automotive student who would also like to take the Certified Nursing Assistant coursework.)
- Various equipment costs such as automotive tools, carpentry tools, or such equipment that the student may require to get a job in a career field following completion of their vocational coursework, unless other arrangements have been made with the local high school.
- Workplace uniform costs, unless other arrangements have been made with the local high school.
- Independent living costs (dorm or apartment), if the family chooses to have the student live on campus and the student resides within reasonable driving distance.