ABSTRACT
With the proportion of persons living with a disability on the rise, it is increasingly important to examine ways to promote optimal health outcomes in adulthood for youth with disabilities. Successful transition from pediatric to adult health care is recognized as a critical factor, yet there are few examples of effective, evidence-based health care transition programs. Our study focuses on the evaluation of a new model that leverages the infrastructure of the public education system to help equip youth with the health literacy and self-determination skills that they need to become self-sufficient, healthy adults.

BACKGROUND
• Preliminary formative research guided program development
• Funded by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc., and produced through Council, Inc., and produced through funding provided by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, of Health and Human Services,

Program Description
Primary program components are:
- Student Curriculum
  - Targeted to high school students with varying disabilities
  - Developed by special education teachers for low level readers, and reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team of health care professionals
  - 8-unit module with practice activities, assignments, tests
data from classroom transition specialists, and other school support staff
- Topics: health-related factors in students’ Transition Individual Education Plan (IEP), strategies to help students prepare for health care transition, community resources
- Includes personal health journal and medical summary
- Educator Training
  - Targeted to special education teachers, school nurses, social workers, transition specialists, and other school support staff
  - Topics: health-related factors in students’ Transition Individual Education Plan (IEP), strategies to help students prepare for health care transition, community resources
  - Includes listing of local, state, and national resources

METHODS
Student Performance Test
- Pre-test/Post-test research design
- Measured knowledge of curriculum content
- Self-report of health-related skills

Educator Survey
- Pre-test/Post-test research design
- Measured knowledge and attitudes about health care transition, and frequency of health-related goals in Transition IEPs

Focus Groups
Teachers and students provided qualitative assessment of curriculum value, relevance, readability, completeness, and interest

RESULTS
1. To what extent did classroom instruction facilitate changes in knowledge and skills among students?
2. To what extent did training facilitate changes in knowledge and practice among educators/teachers?
3. What is the perceived value and relevance of the Demonstration Model?

Student Curriculum
- Piloted in 5 diverse high schools, 13 classrooms
- Of 137 student participants, 82 matched pre/post performance tests were completed (N=82)
- Conducted 3 focus groups with 22 participants (N=3)
- Nineteen family surveys were completed (N=19)

Key findings:
- High level of interest, perceived relevance, value, and satisfaction among students, teachers, and families
- Statistically significant increase in student knowledge
- Consistent but small gains in frequency of performing health-related skills
- Degree of gains were similar among SLD, EMH, and PI students

Educator Training
- Of 332 educator participants, 27 matched pre/post surveys were completed (N=27)

Key findings:
- Statistically significant increase in educator knowledge
- Small overall increase in frequency of addressing health care transition issues in Transition IEPs

Information and Resource Guide
- Among parents of 137 students, 19 family surveys were completed (N=19)
- Informal feedback from service providers
- Over 90% of families were “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with the resource guide
- Providers reported very high degree of satisfaction and usefulness

CONCLUSIONS
The consensus among all study subjects was that the curriculum is highly relevant and useful for students with disabilities. Small but statistically significant increases in post-test scores suggest that classroom instruction facilitated a positive impact in student knowledge of health care transition and health-related skills that adults need in order to live independently. Data from classroom observations and focus groups suggest that the curriculum was most immediately beneficial to PI students. In addition, an increase in educator post-survey scores indicate a positive program effect on knowledge, attitudes, and practice among teachers and school staff.

Importantly, the Demonstration Model was structured to be replicated in other school districts and communities. Recommendations from students and teachers for future implementation include:
- Develop a version of the curriculum for lower functioning students
- Develop a version for general education students
- Allow more time to implement the curriculum
- Add more interactive activities and color pictures
- Add a unit on high risk behaviors (alcohol, drugs)
- Provide concurrent training for parents

Study limitations to be considered are:
- Research design did not establish true causal effect
- Self-report measures raise questions about accuracy
- Low family response rate was not sufficiently representative to generalize findings
- Measured short-term impact only

This project demonstrates the feasibility of bridging systemic gaps between public health and the public education system to serve an underserved population in a very functional way. It also raises provocative questions about whether traditional health education programs are effectively preparing young people – with and without disabilities – to manage the complexities of our current health care system. By empowering students with self-determination and health literacy skills, this model provides a promising framework to better prepare youth with disabilities to be informed health care consumers.

REFERENCES
Institute for Child Health Policy at the University of Florida.