

Summary

With 544 attendees, the Doubletree Hotel brimmed with life during the two-day Tools for Life Secondary Transition and Technology Fair hosted by the State Department of Education, the Idaho Interagency Council on Secondary Transition, and the Idaho Assistive Technology Project. High school students of every ability, teachers, parents, professionals, and assistive technology (AT) vendors came together to share knowledge, offer support, and gain inspiration, motivation, and tools to help with the transition from high school to post-secondary school, independent living, and/or employment.

Following the keynote addresses by LeDerick Horne, Sujeet Desai, and Marilyn Howard, attendees explored/participated in over 45 breakout sessions on information technology, assistive technology devices and software, services, self-determination, post-secondary education, community living, employment, resources, and recreation. Attendees spent any spare moment visiting the 47 vendor, post-secondary education, and agency booths in the halls and ballroom.

As one of the largest educational conferences in the state of Idaho, Tools '06 impacted those who attended, as well as countless others who were impacted by those attendees who returned to their schools, agencies, and communities to share information gained from one of the most successful technology fairs in Idaho's history.

Introduction

In accordance with the mission of the Idaho Interagency Council on Secondary Transition, that is "to provide and promote a common conceptual framework that leads to opportunities for youth with disabilities in community living, recreation, continued education, and employment... by cooperative planning, information sharing, and collaborative use of resources..." the Tools for Life Secondary Transition and Technology Fair was born. Building on the success of the first Tools for Life Fair in 2005, the 2nd annual Tools attracted over 100 more attendees, thereby providing more students, teachers, professionals, and parents with information and resources for secondary transition. Consequently, the number of attendees taxed the available resources designated to provide support for the fair.



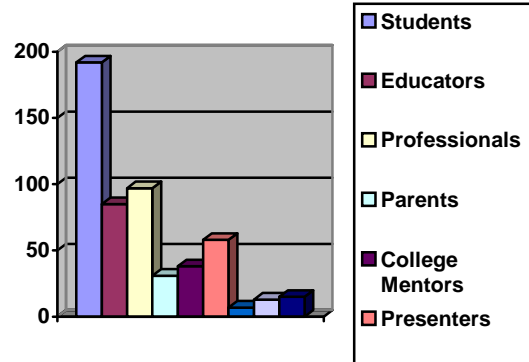
"This conference was a real eye-opener for me. I came to appreciate the student presenters. They have keen minds and great ideas and a lot to contribute to our communities if we allow them to. Thanks so much for this fair."

-Special Educator

Attendees

A breakdown of the attendees is as follows:

Students	192
Educators	85
Professionals	97
Parents/Family	31
College Mentors	38
Presenters	58
Adult Mentors	7
Adults with Disabilities	13
Vendors	15



All regions of Idaho were represented at Tools '06, although the majority of participants represented schools and cities in Region 3. Presenters and vendors came from Idaho, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Keynote Speakers

Packed into the ballroom, buzzing with anticipation, everyone in the room hushed instantly when the first keynote speaker, LeDerick Horne, rose from a table in the audience where he had been visiting with students, and began reciting an original poem of struggle and triumph as he slowly made his way to the podium. Mr. Horne, a successful businessman, poet, and advocate from New Jersey inspired us all with the personal story of his pursuit of a college education and career, in spite of his severe learning disability. With humor, insight, and sensitivity, Mr. Horne revealed to students and educators his path towards independence and success with the aid of school support, self-determination, and assistive technology.

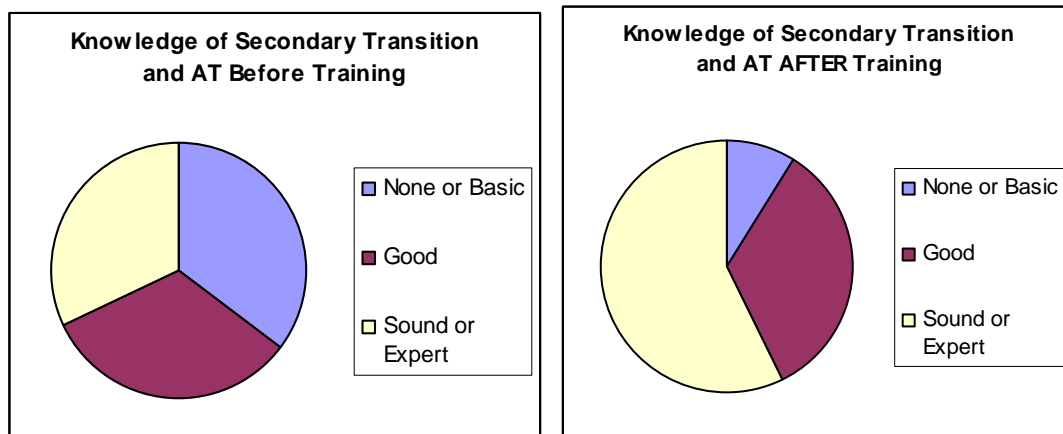


On the second day of Tools '06, Sujeet Desai, an accomplished young musician with Down syndrome, moved and challenged us to help students with all disabilities reach their highest potential. Mr. Desai's story was one of family support and perseverance. Not only did he graduate with honors from his high school, Mr. Desai attended Berkshire Hills Music Academy where he lived independently and studied for two years. In addition to public speaking and playing his music for wide audiences, Mr. Desai is employed as a music instructional assistant in an elementary school.

Marilyn Howard, Superintendent of Public Education in Idaho since 1999, addressed everyone at lunch on the second day of Tools '06. Dr. Howard indicated her pleasure with the number of students in attendance at the fair and the quality of the information and tools available. Dr. Howard challenged the students to take control of their futures and to work hard towards their goals.

Consumer Satisfaction

Ninety-six participants filled out training evaluations at the conclusion of Tools '06. **Before** the training, 35% of participants indicated that they had no or only basic knowledge of secondary transition and AT and skills, 33% indicated that they had good knowledge or skill, and 32% indicated that they had sound or expert knowledge or skill. **After** the training, only 8% of participants reported having no or basic knowledge or skills, 34% reported having good knowledge or skills, and 57% reported having sound or expert knowledge or skills.



According to the training evaluations, **88%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the training objectives were met, **91%** expressed the opinion that the presenters were knowledgeable of the subject matter, and **79%** indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that the training will positively influence their professional and/or personal practices.

Many respondents of the training evaluation praised the keynote speakers, content of the breakout sessions, student presenters, and the conference facilities. Participants also offered helpful suggestions for improving Tools in the future: more representation from employment, community and adult services, more assistive technology sessions, more free and take-home hand-outs for everyone, and more hands-on activities for students that could be displayed in conference hallways. A follow-up survey will be conducted by Life Track, Inc.

*"Keynote speakers were inspiring and talented! Very valuable information --well done!"
- Adult with disability*

Costs/Funding Sources

Generous funding from the State Department of Education, Access STEM, and the Idaho Assistive Technology Project, made the 2nd annual Tools for Life Secondary Transition and Technology Fair possible. The total cost of the fair was \$69,000.00, plus in-kind support. A breakdown of funds and expenditures is attached.

Conclusion

It is clear from the tremendous response to Tools '06 that students, educators, parents, and professionals need and desire information and tools to help students transition successfully to post-secondary education, employment, and/or community life. The Tools for Life Secondary Transition and Technology Fair plays an important part in providing the information and tools that students need to be successful. In order to meet the needs of this population and support Tools in the future, it will be imperative to expand partnerships in funding, apply a cost-saving analysis of Tools '06, and examine the possibility of a small increase in registration from attendees. It would also be beneficial to explore ways to benefit students in other regions of Idaho.



*"Great opportunity to meet other providers and eases the fact that you are not alone out there. Now we have a better idea of where to turn for help on problems that arise."
-Family Service Provider*



*"I am so glad I heard about this conference!! It's been a wonderful resource!!"
-Parent of child with disability*

