

# College and Career Readiness

## Adaptive Curriculum Proves Game-Changer for Student with Autism



*Cory Roth ready for school and work*

When Pam Roth met Theresa Cortney, a Transition and Employment Specialist for Klein ISD, Houston, Texas, she was concerned about her

son's future. Cory has intellectual delays.

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***“How is Cory ever going to make a successful transition to a job and adulthood?”***

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His communication and abstract thinking skills are often amiss. In middle school, Cory's teachers saw his aptitude decline. Mrs. Roth knew that her son did not perform well in traditional education classes listening to teacher-led instruction. Cory liked hands-on activities and learning. She asked his teacher, “How is Cory ever going to make a successful transition to a job and adulthood?”



*Ms. Cortney in red with colleagues*

Ms. Cortney, a seasoned special educator and transition specialist, has worked with hundreds of students, like Cory. Each year, she develops individual

education plans (IEPs), including transition graduation requirements and oversees the

plans under the Texas House Bill 617 or HB5. This law requires schools to prepare students for college and careers.

### ***HB 5 Requirements for students with special needs***

“For general education students, this requirement seems fairly easy,” says Cortney, “but not so for students at risk and with exceptional needs. Career exploration is critical for students with cognitive, physical or behavioral issues. These kids are often labeled ‘unteachable or unemployable,’ and that can lead to a downward spiral in their abilities and confidence. Our district provides an alternative academic and vocational curriculum based on a student's ability levels. This can be a game-changer and a safety net for alternative students who many think about dropping out of school and society.”

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***The Project Discovery curriculum is our first step in helping these students develop their passion and calling.”***

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### ***Career Exploration Compliance with HB 5 for students with special needs***

Students with IEPs graduate in Texas with a [Foundation of 22 credits or an Endorsement of 26 credits](#). Cortney says, “Using an adaptive curriculum and appropriate teaching strategies, more students with severe challenges find a vocational interest and skill set that they are able and eager to perform. Students who are low functioning are taught skills at a basic adaptive or beginning level. Students who are high-functioning take the intermediate and advanced courses. The [Project Discovery curriculum](#) is our first step in

helping these students develop their passion and calling.”

### ***Project Discovery offers career exploration curriculum for all students***

Each of the 113 career kits include job-related equipment and supplies customizable to the interests of students in middle, high school and adult education. The curriculum integrates aligned reading and math skills instruction with vocabulary based on a student’s competency level and abilities. Assessment data provides measurable academic progress reports with work performance benchmarks. Cortney says, “The flexibility, adaptability and progress monitoring guide our instruction and help to comply with our graduation requirements in HB5.”



*Cory caring for his cat.*

### ***Learning Job Skills in an inclusive classroom***

At Klein ISD, students study the curriculum in both inclusive general education and resource classes. They learn skills in automotive repair, small animal care, cosmetology, child and

health care, law enforcement, retail and grocery clerking, graphic arts, accounting, dental care, banking and more. Life skills lessons teach students to prepare for jobs, live more independently, learn what cyber bullying and Internet safety are, learn how to make healthy food choices, learn kitchen safety, money management and more. “Students enjoy the hands-on activities that are practical and fun,” says Cortney. “We’ve seen significant improvements academically and socially.”

### ***Using Job Skills in the Community***

Cory volunteers at a local animal shelter. He can read medical charts, administer medications, feed and bathe animals. He has enrolled in a veterinary assistance program at

a local college. His life skill abilities have improved. He can manage money and complete job applications. His mom says, “Initially, Cory was denied job services, but this curriculum changed his life because he had a natural ability to work with animals. Today, he is more talkative and holds eye contact with classmates and teachers. He realizes he has choices and his confidence level has taken a big step forward!”

Ms. Cortney adds, “When students enthusiastically tell me, “I got into the Future Farmers of America or I’m attending college or I’m working,” it makes our district and educators so proud. Educators always want to dwell in possibilities and give every student the opportunity to succeed.”

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***“Dwell in possibility.”***

***Emily Dickinson,  
American Poet***

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