



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT EVALUATION BRIEF

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Implementing the College of Direct Support: Important Considerations

Purpose

The College of Direct Support is committed to ongoing evaluation of the quality of its curriculum, its ease of use to learners, the usefulness of its human resource functions and its contributions to the lives of persons with disabilities. A wide range of quantitative and qualitative evaluation activities are being undertaken to provide this information. The Evaluation Brief provides a sampling of findings from CDS data collection activities occurring at the national, state, agency and individual levels. If you have questions about, suggestions for, or requests of the College of Direct Support in the area of evaluation, please let us know at: lakin001@umn.edu

People are saying that...

"Implicit in our efforts to increase recognition and value the critical work done by direct support professionals is the need for life-long learning and development. The College of Direct Support is an excellent example of how to serve that need in a creative, flexible and cost-effective manner."

--Renee Pietrangelo, Ph.D.,
Chief Executive Officer,
American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR)

Technology has become a part of the work life of most Americans. From e-mail to word processing to inventory management, most businesses and employees find computers an essential part of carrying out the responsibilities of contemporary work roles. Though many cannot imagine life without computers or the Internet, they are relatively new to the direct support profession as human services organizations are just beginning to exploit technology to become more efficient and effective in meeting the needs of their organizations and the people they support.

Growing out of the technology are new tools to connect, inform and train employees and to increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency in doing so. One such tool is the College of Direct Support (CDS). Its training curriculum and learner management system have been adopted by hundreds of organizations, and is now a feature in the work life and preparation of tens of thousands of DSPs. Many organizational leaders have noted that the success of the CDS is directly linked to the quality of implementation of CDS within the organization, including the ability of DSPs to effectively use the training system. To assure that DSPs do have access to the full benefits of the CDS instructional program it is important to understand the technological skills of DSPs, as well as the barriers DSPs are facing in using CDS within their organizations.

Ongoing evaluation conducted by the University of Minnesota have produced preliminary information on the computing abilities of DSPs using the CDS training platform, as well as their access to the needed technology. A major component of this evaluation includes the surveying of DSPs at two time points-upon their entry into the evaluation and after completing at least one CDS course. These surveys were randomly administered to DSPs from nine organizations in seven different states, and 154 initial and 94 follow-up surveys have been completed thus far.

Those employed in the direct support profession bring with them a wide range of vocational, educational, and personal experiences that equip them with varying skill and ability levels. This variability is also present with respect to the DSPs' computer skills. As Table 1 shows, most (57% total) DSPs feel their computer skills are at an intermediate or expert level. However, nearly 45% believe their skills are at a beginner or advanced beginner level.

Table 1. Computer Skills of Direct Support Professionals (N = 144)

Skill Level	% of respondents
Beginner	15
Advanced beginner	28
Intermediate	46
Expert	11

The College of Direct Support is an internet-delivered multimedia, competency-based training curriculum for direct support professionals and frontline supervisors supporting individuals with disabilities. The College of Direct Support is available for review at <http://collegeofdirectsupport.com>. For more information about the College of Direct Support write Bill Tapp (bill@collegeofdirectsupport.com) or Donna Kosak (donna@collegeofdirectsupport.com) or call the College of Direct Support (toll-free) at 877-353-2767. The College of Direct Support is a program of MC Strategies and the University of Minnesota

Interestingly, DSPs' use of computers in their day-to-day life reflects a wide understanding of many different applications. As Table 2 shows, the vast majority of DSPs use computers to send and receive e-mails (85%) and surf the web (77%). Approximately two-thirds complete word processing and data entry, or play games on computers.

Fifty-percent of DSPs use spreadsheet or database programs and 18% use them to do other things such as shop, get directions, or complete college coursework. It should be noted that the DSPs using the CDS are computer users as their training is delivered over a computer platform, therefore, DSPs included in this evaluation may not be typical of all DSPs.

An important first step to maximizing the use of the CDS training system is to understand the skills and abilities of the people using it. Though the majority of DSPs in an organization will likely have the computer skills and knowledge to immediately begin CDS training with little assistance other than orientation, many may require development and support to first become comfortable with computers and the CDS platform. One way to overcome this is for an organization to provide a basic training to guide learners through the basic key strokes and mouse navigations needed to access the CDS material.

The computer skills of DSPs are only one component needing consideration during the implementation of the CDS. Organizations must also consider the availability of the needed technology, which includes computers and Internet connections. As summarized in Table 3, DSPs do have wide access to computers both at home (84%) and at work (97%). Of those who have access at home, 93% have an Internet connection. For those who have computer access at the workplace, all have access to the Internet. A large majority of DSPs report having access to high-speed Internet connections, however, 15% of home and 5% of work Internet connections are dial-up.

Table 2. Computer Use of Direct Support Professionals (N = 154)

Computer Uses	% of respondents
E-mail	85
Surf the Internet	77
Word processing	67
Data entry	64
Playing games	62
Spreadsheets/databases	50
Other	18

Table 3. Computer and Internet Access of Direct Support Professionals¹²

Have access to a computer at home		Type of Internet Connection at Home (%)				
		Dial-up	DSL	Cable/Ethernet	Do not know	Not connected
Yes	84	15	24	45	9	7
No	16					

Have access to a computer at work		Type of Internet Connection at Work (%)				
		Dial-up	DSL	Cable/Ethernet	Do not know	Not connected
Yes	97	5	21	41	33	0
No	3					

¹ Sample size for computer access items is 146.

² Sample size for Internet access items includes those that responded 'Yes' to computer access item. $N_{home} = 122$ and $N_{work} = 138$.

College of Direct Support Continues to Grow

As of January 2008 the College of Direct Support (CDS) has grown to include 61,482 enrolled learners, an increase of nearly 20,000 learners over the last year. The CDS has also delivered 599,923 lessons to enrolled learners, 344,763 of which were completed in 2007. It should be noted, these data are slightly underestimated as a result of the CDS's transition to its new user platform.

For more information about the evaluation of the College of Direct Support being conducted by the University of Minnesota, please contact Derek Nord. He can be contacted at nord0364@umn.edu or 612.624.0386.

Chart 1. Growth in Enrolled CDS Learners, January 2004 to January 2008

