



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

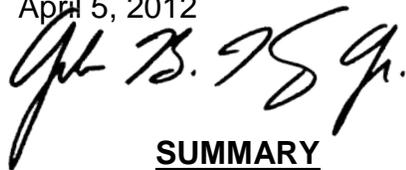
TO: P-12 Education Committee
Adult Career and Continuing Education Services
(ACCES) Committee

FROM: Ken Slentz 
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SUBJECT: Developing a Framework for Effective Transition from
School to Work: A Follow-Up to December 2011
Presentation to the Regents

DATE: April 5, 2012

AUTHORIZATION(S):


SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

The P-12 Office of Special Education and the Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services - Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) each play a significant role in transition planning and services for students with disabilities.

Reason(s) for Consideration

For information and discussion and to update the Board of Regents on the actions taken in response to the recommendations cited in the December 2011 Regents Report on transition planning and services for students with disabilities.

Proposed Handling

This item will come before a joint meeting of the Regents P-12 Education Committee and the ACCES Committee at the April 2012 meeting.

Background Information

Transition from secondary education to employment for youth with disabilities involves multiple challenges. Office of Special Education and ACCES-VR staff provided joint presentations to the Board in June and December 2011. Department initiatives

regarding transition were discussed and a series of recommendations were identified related to strengthening collaborations among ACCES-VR, the Office of Special Education, schools, independent living centers, community-based partner providers and employers to increase opportunities for youth with disabilities to engage in work experiences and obtain and sustain post-school employment.

In December, an update on the implementation of those specific recommendations was provided with a plan to return to the Board in April to share effective practices as we continue to explore ways to improve transition services. Due to the varied range of physical, intellectual and emotional impairments that constitute “disability”, no single model will work for improving transition outcomes. Individualized planning is necessary to match the differing capacities of students with disabilities. In addition, like their nondisabled peers, other factors such as education level also impact each individual’s opportunities to engage and thrive in the workforce.

The Office of Special Education and ACCES-VR are jointly exploring evidence-informed strategies to drive more effective transition outcomes in New York State. Recent research conducted by the Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute (EDI) at the conclusion of the Model Transition Program (MTP) points to several key strategies that can result in improved outcomes if the necessary practices were consistently implemented and sustained. These findings, along with other research and consensus data, serve as benchmarks for effective practices. The Office of Special Education funds the Transition Services Professional Development Support Center through Cornell University EDI to provide research-based transition information and professional development to ensure the State’s work in this area is research and evidence based.

Benchmarking with Research-based Effective Practices

Effective transition planning and services include appropriate assessment of a student’s needs, preferences, strengths and skills; realistic identification of postsecondary goals; development of an infrastructure to support instruction in the Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) learning standards, participation in career exploration and work and community-based learning experience; increased opportunities for students to earn a diploma; and collaboration among regional partners responsible for the transition process and early referral to adult agencies.

The Office of Special Education and ACCES-VR are committed to developing strategies consistent with the following research-based effective practice goals:

- **Promote and sustain collaborative transition activities and leadership by schools, school districts, vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs.** Ongoing and meaningful systems of communication, collaboration and provision of transition services for youth with disabilities among participating agencies need to be developed and supported at the local level.
- **Establish eligibility for adult service systems prior to school exit.** When a student will require VR services in order to achieve an employment outcome or

ongoing support services provided by the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) or other adult service providers, all partners need to collaborate to prevent a break in services and supports to the student transitioning from school.

- **Identify specific post-school partners.** Transition plans are more effective when they identify State and community partners who may offer post-school services and initiate tangible steps to connect students to those partners.
- **Emphasize career development activities.** Work-based learning experiences and sector-based skill development provide opportunities for hands-on learning that cannot be replicated in the classroom or simulated settings. Structured opportunities for students to exercise initiative and a greater role in decision-making, along with the support from parents and/or peer mentors, must be fostered throughout the process.
- **Expand capacity by developing resources.** Resources need to be available that enable students to engage in career development activities leading to postsecondary education, career-oriented training or employment upon school exit. Regional collaboration must focus on generating multiple funding streams to offer a broad range of individualized services.

Several key policies under discussion by the Board, including multiple pathways to a diploma; development of an expanded safety net for students with disabilities; increased opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in career and technical education coursework and community and work-based learning experiences; and development of an exiting credential that documents student attainment of the CDOS standards will further strengthen student preparation for adult living, learning and earning.

Role of the Schools

The goal of transition planning is to identify and provide students with instruction, opportunities and necessary supports while they are in school that will lead the student to achieve his/her post-secondary goals for lifelong learning, community participation, and work for pay. Assuring that students have appropriate transition plans in their individualized education programs (IEPs) and increasing the percentage of students with disabilities who graduate with a high school diploma are two important measures for achievement of this goal.

Obtaining a high school diploma is important to post-school success. Without a high school diploma, opportunities for post-school employment are very limited. Only 44 percent of students with disabilities from the 2004 cohort graduated with a regular high school diploma after four years and approximately 16.7 percent (5,352 students) dropped out of school.

As a State, we have made steady and significant improvement in transition planning at the school district level. As of this year, 79 percent of students with disabilities (based

on a sample of one-sixth of the districts in the State, including New York City) had IEPs that included appropriate transition planning. This data represents a steady improvement from the 33.3 percent of students who were reported in the 2005-06 school year to have appropriate transition plans¹.

In November 2011, the Office of Special Education issued a policy memorandum to school districts regarding transition planning and services for students with disabilities and information about professional development and technical assistance resources that can assist school districts to meet their responsibilities in this area. This memorandum emphasized the following key points:

- The process of transition planning requires a partnership among the student, family and school, and, as appropriate, other agencies that can provide transition activities for the student.
- By its very nature, transition planning is a collaborative effort and must be thought of as an on-going process across multiple school years.
- The provision of meaningful and effective transition services requires the district to have appropriate instructional, career and work-related and community experiences available to students.

The Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential, as approved by the Board of Regents for implementation beginning with the 2013-14 school year, is expected to significantly improve transition planning and results for students with severe disabilities who take the New York State Alternate Assessment. The instruction and accompanying documentation for this credential are directly aligned with the CDOS standards and will provide important information to establish eligibility for ACCES-VR and other post-school resources.

Youth Served by ACCES-VR

Cornell University EDI recently conducted a preliminary analysis of ACCES-VR case management data related to vocational rehabilitation services over the past five years. During this time period, ACCES served nearly 320,000 youth. Cornell studied a random sample of 45,000 youth and found that about one in five of these youth received Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) or Supplemental Security Disability Insurance (SSDI); close to 21 percent were African Americans, 14 percent were Hispanic, 1 percent were Asian and 3 percent were Native Americans; and 40 percent presented with more than one disability (e.g., youth with learning disabilities and other health impairments). Seventy-seven percent of the Cornell sample did not have a high school diploma at the time of their application for services to ACCES-VR.

In terms of outcomes for youth served by ACCES-VR, for Federal Fiscal Year 2011, 4,504 youth achieved an employment outcome after receiving ACCES-VR services. While these outcomes have steadily increased over the years, many youth with disabilities

¹ 2006-07 = 45.8%; 2007-08 = 58.6%; 2008-09= 61.7%; 2009-10 = 67.2%; 2010-11 = 79%

do not complete the vocational rehabilitation process with an employment outcome. Last year, more than 5,000 youth had their ACCES-VR cases closed after receiving services without having achieved employment. ACCES-VR is implementing several strategies to improve employment outcomes for youth and to keep them engaged throughout the vocational rehabilitation process.

Challenges in Implementing Effective Transition Practices

Factors that impact on the quality and outcomes of transition planning include, but are not limited to:

- **Collaborative working relationships.** A strong linkage between school personnel and the local ACCES-VR District Office and other community providers increases the chances that students will remain engaged.
- **Quality referral information and assessments.** Availability of information documenting the youth's disability, as well as strengths, is important to establish eligibility for ACCES-VR and other post-school resources.
- **Availability of employment opportunities for students with disabilities.** Participation in school work-study programs, internships, work-based learning experiences and summer employment improves a student's preparation for post-school employment success.
- **Designated person(s) responsible for transition.** Having designated persons responsible at the school level to coordinate transition planning and activities improves the transition process for the student. ACCES-VR counselors estimate that on average, only about 50 percent of individuals referred to ACCES-VR complete the eligibility process.
- **Fiscal and personnel resources.** Limited fiscal and personnel resources at all levels of transition services impact the extent to which such activities are available to students with disabilities.

Next Steps

1. The P-12 Office of Special Education and ACCES-VR will continue to identify State and national models for benchmarking to refine and further develop strategic direction within the State Education Department (SED). For example, the Youth Transition Program model implemented in Oregon since 1990 has been evaluated (Benz, Lindstrom, Unruh and Waintrup, 2004) and seems to be effective and sustainable, yet flexible to the needs of students and communities. The National Center on Workforce Development/Youth (NCWD/Youth) *Guideposts for Success* for Transition Aged Youth (NWDC/Youth, 2005) also offers broad recommendations consistent with the findings from the Model Transition Program.

2. ACCES-VR will increase its capacity to provide youth with work-based learning experiences, in collaboration with schools, community rehabilitation providers and other community resources. ACCES-VR is currently developing standards for procuring a youth employment service in its next round of core rehabilitation service contracts in order to provide individualized services to youth in a variety of work settings and circumstances. This approach will be flexible to the various needs of the youth to develop work skills and not be locked into any one program model.
3. Both SED offices will continue ongoing work and dialogue with State-level and regional partners to enhance stronger collaborations among the Office of Special Education, ACCES-VR, schools, Independent Living Centers (ILCs), OPWDD, Office of Mental Health (OMH), Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services and community-based partner providers and employers to improve post-secondary outcomes, including enrollment in higher education, participation in training programs, and competitive or other employment. The transition specialists in the Regional Special Education Technical Assistance Support Centers (RSE-TASC) will continue their role in facilitating regional community groups, which include families, students, schools, Special Education Parent Centers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, ILCs and other State agencies such as the OPWDD and OMH. We are working to include local businesses in these groups as well.
4. Youth and families must be essential participants in these dialogues and in the work of developing an integrated approach to transition within New York State. The Office of Special Education, through its RSE-TASC transition specialists and 11 funded Special Education Parent Centers, will be providing workshops throughout the State to facilitate a parent's understanding and participation in the transition planning process.
5. The RSE-TASC Transition Specialists and the State's Technical Assistance Center on Transition through Cornell University will continue to provide targeted regional professional development and technical assistance, based on research and evidence-based practices, to school districts to improve transition planning.
6. The documentation that must accompany award of the Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential for students with severe disabilities will include specific information documenting the youth's level of independence and achievement, as well as strengths, on the commencement level CDOS learning standards. This level of documentation should provide important information to establish eligibility for ACCES-VR and other post-school resources. We will be issuing a field memorandum in the next week or so regarding this credential and provide a State model form for the accompanying documentation.
7. We are working with the P-12 Career and Technical Education Office on the framework for the credential for other students, including students with disabilities who cannot earn a regular diploma. It is our goal to have this second credential available to students at the same time as the IEP diploma sunsets (2013-14 school year).

8. ACCES-VR and the Office of Special Education will continue our collaborative work on a Systems Change Grant funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Administration on Developmental Disabilities. The lead partner managing the grant is the Institute for Innovative Transition at the University of Rochester Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities and the goal of the project is to expand competitive employment in integrated settings for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, resulting in the development of a job readiness curriculum (aligned to the Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential), a resource guide, and establishment of regional consortia and demonstration projects.

References

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