

Transition to Careers Subcommittee Chapter

Background

The Transition to Careers Sub-Committee is one of four created by the full ACICIEID committee to examine and make recommendations concerning the transition of youth with significant disabilities to competitive integrated employment (CIE). The charge of the Sub-Committee was to examine what needs to be done to build or improve transition from school to careers systems and services. Committee members determined their preference for working on specific sub-committees. This Sub-Committee is comprised of the following members:

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- **Valerie Brooke**, Co-Chair, Director of Training and Business Connections, Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research & Training Center
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- **Santa Perez**, Project Co-Coordinator, People First of Nevada
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After an in-depth review of the literature and practice across the nation, the Sub-Committee organized its work into five thematic areas as a framework for findings and conclusions and recommendations to increase competitive integrated employment (CIE) for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and other significant disabilities: early work experiences, postsecondary education, family expectations, systems integration/seamless transition, and professional supports and incentives. **Early work experiences** refers to youth discovering personal career interests in authentic, community-based employment settings as a part of their secondary education. The section on **Postsecondary education** discusses the inclusion of educational options for youth and young adults with disabilities post-high school as an option for these individuals to build knowledge and skills alongside their typical peers. **Family expectations** refer to engagement of families early and often in their student's transition planning and post-school supports. **Systems integration/seamless transition** focus on federal,

state, and local level early alignment of funding and service resources to match the services needed by youth to achieve CIE. And finally, the last thematic area on **professional supports and incentives** examines qualifications and competencies needed by all professionals across systems to deliver quality transition from school to careers services.

The following section of this chapter provides a general overview for which the Sub-Committee has based findings and conclusions related to building and/or improving systems, services, and professional capacity needed by youth to transition to CIE. The next section presents findings and conclusions focused on each of the five thematic areas described in the above background section. The final section of the chapter contains the preliminary recommendations of the Transition to Careers Sub-Committee for increasing CIE for youth with I/DD and other significant disabilities.

Findings and Conclusions

The challenges facing youth with significant disabilities as they prepare for the transition from public secondary education to adult employment have been well documented. These challenges are reflected in several distinct factors that distinguish youth with disabilities from their nondisabled peers. First, they are less likely than their nondisabled peers to finish high school (Chapman, Laird, Ifill & Kewal Ramani, 2011; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005). Second, they are less likely to pursue postsecondary education that will prepare them for good jobs and careers (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002; Wagner et al., 2005). Third, they are significantly more likely to be unemployed for much of their adult life (Harris & Associates, 2010). And fourth, some groups of students who receive special education services will need connections to ongoing support to sustain the benefit of public education (Certo, Luecking, Murphy, Brown, Courey & Belanger, 2009).

Such circumstances are often compounded by several other factors related to transition planning and services. These factors include gaps and lack of coordination in employment-related school-based services; sporadic availability of integrated work experiences and competitive integrated employment during the secondary school years (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006; Luecking, 2009); limited direct participation of youth in their own transition planning (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013); inconsistent engagement of families in transition planning and services (Landmark, Roberts & Zhang, 2013); and, the often sporadic, disjointed, or even nonexistent connections to post-school supports that are necessary to maintain a path toward long-term adult employment (Certo et al., 2009; Wehman, 2013).

Thus, despite more than 25 years of focused federal policy on transition to employment of youth with disabilities to address these known barriers, there continues to be a need for the identification of proven pathways to college, employment, and careers for youth with significant

disabilities. Of significance, even though the strong research support for work-based educational services for transitioning youth (Test et al., 2009), opportunities available for integrated work experiences and competitive wage jobs varies widely. Available opportunities may be based on whether the student is on track to receive a diploma or certificate of school completion, whether the state education agency and/or local school districts embrace work-based experiences as essential adjuncts to the course of study, and whether there is strong collaboration with youth and adult employment entities which can assist in helping procure and support work experience (Fraker & Rangarajan, 2009).

These barriers must be mitigated to minimize the impact of disjointed service delivery as schools and post-school service providers prepare youth for employment and careers. These longstanding challenges to effective school-to-career transition for youth with disabilities have led to recent attempts to synthesize what works in transition and to suggest approaches to address these challenges. In fact, the increasing knowledge base about effective transition practice has resulted in an emerging consensus among researchers and professionals about the factors that contribute to the delivery of optimal transition services (Cobb & Alwell, 2009; National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition [NASET, 2005]; National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability/Youth [NCWD/Y, 2005]). Youth empowerment, family involvement, activities that connect transition resources, solid academic preparation in conjunction with transition planning, and work experiences have been found to be potentially important influencers of post-school employment outcomes. In particular, there is a growing body of evidence that work experience and competitive integrated employment during secondary school years predicts successful post-school employment (Carter, Austin & Trainor, 2012; Test, et al., 2009). Proven demonstration models (e.g., Project Search, Schall, Wehman, Brooke, Graham, McDonough, & Allen, 2015; Transition Systems Integration Model, Certo, et. al. ,2009; Seamless Transition Model, Luecking & Luecking, 2015) illustrate how these optimal transition practices lead to high levels (60% - 70%) of competitive integrated employment outcomes (CIE) for students with significant disabilities, including students with I/DD.

The impact of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) on state and local practices is yet to be known. However, the intent of WIOA holds the promise of insuring that transition from secondary education and/or postsecondary education to competitive integrated employment is the primary goal for youth in transition, including youth with significant disabilities.

After a review of research and practice evidence, the overall conclusion of the Transitions to Careers Sub-Committee is that:

Youth should leave their secondary education with integrated work experiences and/or a competitive integrated job. This should be true for all students, and must include students with intellectual/developmental disabilities and other significant disabilities.

Area 1: Early Work Experiences

Research has proven that early exposure to competitive integrated employment and/or integrated work experiences during high school is the number one predictor of post-school employment success for youth with I/DD (Luecking & Luecking (2015); Carter, Austin, & Trainor (2012); Test, Mazzotti, Mustian, Fowler, Kortering, & Kohler (2009). Other predictive factors including individualized planning, career development activities, and transition programming that support work experiences and attainment of individualized transition goals lead to more positive employment outcomes (Carter, Brock, & Trainor (2014).

Earlier, timely, and more seamless access to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services play an important intervention role of diverting workers with disabilities from public benefits. Partnerships in Employment (PIE) grant (AAIDD initiative, 2014) reports early connection to vocational rehabilitation counselors as the most important change in practice that has improved employment outcomes for youth in their projects. Earlier and more seamless access to vocational rehabilitation services can offer youth with significant disabilities the supports that they need to benefit from integrated work experiences. Youth with I/DD or other significant disabilities often need additional enhancements to access early work experiences. These enhancements include support provided by professionals with specific skill sets, higher success expectations, incentives built into funding and service systems, and extended time to secure permanent competitive, integrated employment - longer than the typical expected VR closure of 18 months (Luecking & Luecking (2015); Schall, Wehman, Brooke, Graham, McDonough, Brooke, & Allen (2015).

However, it is well documented that youth categorized by IDEA as I/DD or having other “significant disabilities” experience low employment outcomes (31% students with ID, 47% with autism, 33% with multiple disabilities) (National Longitudinal Transition Study 2, (2005) . Employment for youth with I/DD generally falls into low status, low wage jobs (West, Sima, Wehman, Chan, & Luecking (In press). Overall engagement in any category of activity post-school for youth with the most significant disabilities is low. Only two-thirds of the students are doing anything four years out of school – and that includes sheltered employment.

State systems struggle to align policy and practice that prevent the support of integrated work experiences for youth with the most significant disabilities (Oertle & Trach (2007); Plotner (2009). Secondary education does not adequately prepare some youth with disabilities for employment after high school (Carter, Austin, & Trainor (2012); Cobb & Alwell (2009). Lack of dedicated resources (for instance, transition teacher time and specialized skill training) to build

relationships with local employers, VR, employment service providers, and Medicaid DD/Waiver personnel is another barrier for youth to gain access to integrated work experiences (Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Cole, Swedeen, Ditchman, & Owens (2009). Some state VR systems deem that youth must have the assurance of long-term employment supports; Medicaid DD/Waiver agencies believe they must secure a denial from VR before they will provide employment supports.

Area 2: Postsecondary Education

Benefits of youth with significant disabilities engaging in postsecondary education (PSE) have been widely documented (Rojewski, Lee & Gregg, 2015; Wehman, 2013; Getzel & Wehman, 2005). Engagement in any type of postsecondary education (e.g., vocational education classes, college certificate, 2- year and/or one college class) significantly enhances ability for youth with disabilities to secure competitive integrated employment outcomes. Those who engage in PSE and who are clients of vocational rehabilitation are more likely to secure competitive integrated employment than those who do not. Students with I/DD who have even one or two PSE classes can earn up to 70% higher wages than those who do not participate in PSE.

There are known enhancers that will provide the opportunity for students to have quality PSE experiences, and necessitates that secondary and postsecondary education programs/ institutions make improvements in these areas:

- ***Self-Determination*** broadly implemented at the secondary education level so that students can self-identify and request accommodations needed to address their own learning style (Berry, Ward & Gaplan, 2012; Getzel & Wehman, 2005; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2002).
- ***Community-based functional and individualized assessment*** is very important within the secondary education transition planning process as students with significant disabilities, like all adolescents, clearly possess unique amalgamations of strengths and needs. Assessments across systems must be aligned to maximize and streamline resources while broadening the opportunity for stakeholder input (Neubert & Leconte (2013).
- ***Academic career planning (ACP)*** for students with I/DD conducted early in secondary education to ensure their access to coursework and experiences that are necessary for them to pursue a pathway to a skilled job. Success is more likely when strategies are implemented to ensure that youth with significant disabilities are fully included in individualized learning planning (ILP) or ACP activities (Solberg, Wills, Redmond, & Skaff, 2014).
- Student access to the ***General Education curriculum*** so that they have the basic academic foundation to enter PSE that leads to successful in competitive integrated employment (Berry, Ward, & Caplan, 2012).

- Improvement of the *student secondary education completion rate* (Wehman, 2013).
- Use of *data by PSE programs/institutions* to understand individual academic strengths and accommodation needs rather than to use placement testing to screen students out of the system.
- *Universal instructional design* broadly implemented in PSE institutions to support students with a variety of learning and support need (Getzel & Wehman, 2005).

These identified improvements are based on unique challenges faced by students with I/DD as they attempt to gain access to postsecondary education. “Learned helplessness” among students with significant disabilities remains due to their education occurring in segregated settings, thus, excluding them from core academic coursework and employment preparation through community-based work experiences. As a result, there exists a low expectation for students with I/DD to succeed in PSE. Students along with their families, teachers, and counselors have limited opportunity to learn about postsecondary education opportunities as well as the education and/or support needed to meet PSE requirements. Often students, parents, and teachers misunderstand the accommodations and support differences between the secondary and postsecondary environments.

Placement testing continues to be used, especially in 2-year colleges, and remains to be a significant barrier to accessing PSE for youth with ID/DD and other significant disabilities. Higher education institutions have been slow to embrace policy changes that allow their full participation. College faculty/instructors lack background and receive little training in learning style accommodations and designing coursework aligned with career pathways that will lead to skilled jobs.

Some youth with I/DD participate in postsecondary programs. Some of these programs remain largely segregated from the mainstream college campus life. Many of the existing PSE programs are not focused on career pathways that include integrated work experiences that lead to skilled jobs.

Area 3: Family Expectations

Family expectations are among the strongest predictor of educational outcomes, including college and employment (Carter, et. al., 2012). Family expectations start early in a child’s life (Bailey, Bruder, Hebbeler, Carta, Defosset, Greenwood, 2006). Expectations about self-determination, employment, and valued social roles have a significant impact on adult outcomes. Expectations that their child with I/DD would eventually be self-supporting are highly associated with employment (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza & Levine, 2005). Students, with and without disabilities, are reported to have higher career expectations when their families are

engaged with them in an Individualized Learning Plan/Academic Career Planning approach (NCWD/Y, 2005).

Pediatricians and health-related professionals, as well as early childhood professionals and K-12 educators influence family expectations. Beginning early in the student's education, families of children/youth with disabilities need assistance in learning about and creating expectations, aspirations, and a vision for the future not just this year's program/plan, but the long range goal that focuses on adult life. Waiting until students are "transition age" to talk about employment is too late. Families receive too many negative messages from system personnel. Often they feel that the roles and responsibilities of post-school systems are not defined and find transition planning puzzling. As a result, many families feel powerless due to their lack of knowledge about the systems (Sitlington, Neubert & Clark, 2010; Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson & Beegle, 2004).

Challenges faced by families of youth with disabilities are compounded greatly by multiple variables that must be addressed for youth to achieve successful transition outcomes. Cultural and language differences in our diverse society may impede families from getting involved (Harry, 2008). Many youth with ID/D and their families live in poverty and need basic human needs met before a job search. Family economic security cannot be ignored and needs to be taken into consideration (Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak & Shogren, 2011). Access to meaningful, individualized work incentive benefits counseling that takes into account the informational needs of a youth and their family can support greater family engagement Participating in support networks with family peers can be an important influencer to improve family expectations for their child to participate in career pathways toward achieving PSE and/or competitive integrated employment outcomes (Hastings & Beck, 2004).

Research is needed to explore the ways in which family influencers interact with other influencers to shape the skills, services, and supports provided during and after high school for transition-age youth with significant disabilities (Blue-Banning et. al., 2004). It would be useful to know more broadly the difficulties that family's face, which in turn negatively impacts participation.

Area 4: System Integration/Seamless Transition

Students with significant disabilities navigate complex systems in moving from high school into adult life, i.e., IDEA K-12/transition services, SSI/SSDI, vocational rehabilitation, Medicaid/Long Term Supports and Services (LTSS), postsecondary education, employment supports, etc. These systems are often poorly coordinated and do not share aligned outcome goals (Plotner, Trach, & Shogren (2012). Despite requirements in IDEA, often transition planning for youth is weak and does not incorporate/coordinate all of the services and supports

(Carter, et. al., 2014). Payer of last resort policies result in roadblocks to funding. Medicaid or Vocational Rehabilitation funded supports and services are either not promoted or not readily available to enable summer, weekend, and after-school employment youth experiences (Wehman & Kregel, 2012; Wehman, 2006).

Alignment of these multiple system expectations and outcomes is necessary to expedite service delivery so that the student acquires, prior to high school exit, community-based work experiences and/or a competitive integrated job. Jurisdictions in which there has been opportunity to “create a table” for systems collaboration and focus on the coordination and sequencing of funding and activities have shown some success in improving employment outcomes. WIOA attempts to foster greater collaboration across agencies to facilitate increased seamless school-to-work transition strategies, but may fall short in key areas of the statute where participation of key partners is encouraged but not mandatory. For example, Section 511 of WIOA does not mandate all players to be at the table to coordinate around the needs of youth with significant disabilities.

Area 5: Professional Supports and Incentives

Many systems touch and influence youth with I/DD as they transition to adulthood including secondary and postsecondary education, Social Security, Medicaid, welfare, Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP), workforce development (One-Stops), VR and others. Under WIOA, youth with disabilities will receive extensive pre-employment transition services. This new direction provides an opportunity for systems to cross-train staff at all levels.

As youth transition from an entitlement system to an eligibility system, the One-Stop Career Center staff is available to provide training on labor market information, career exploration and career readiness skills to its partners. However, staff in these systems often lacks direct experience working with youth with I/DD or other significant disabilities on employment goals, knowledge about resources available across the systems, opportunities to learn how other systems function, and a strong understanding of what services other agencies in the community/state can provide to support competitive integrated employment for youth between 16-24.

National data show that less than half of all special education personnel preparation programs address transition standards, and only 45% offer a stand-alone course on transition (Morningstar, Kim, & Clark, 2008; Miller & Stayton, 2006; Anderson, Kleinhammer-Tramill, Morningstar, Lehmann, Bassett, Kohler, & Wehmeyer, 2003). Teacher expectations begin in these preparation programs. High expectations of teachers correlate with better employment outcomes. In a 2010 study, students whose teachers expected them to work during the summer were 15 times more likely to work than teachers without that expectation (Carter, et al., 2010).

Specifically, special education professionals require better understanding of:

- work incentives and correlations with benefits programs
- the role of the vocational rehabilitation system
- Medicaid funded supports and services available to youth and families to support employment, long-term
- How least restrictive environment policies and new WIOA regulations apply to work experiences
- Supplementary aids and services and assistive technology available and necessary to facilitate competitive integrated employment for an individual youth.

There is a wide variation in state VR transition statistics suggesting VR could improve its services for transition-age youth. Specific standards and guidelines for VR agencies and staff serving youth between 16 and 24 could be developed and adopted. In addition, systems could encourage and possibly provide incentives for VR and school systems staff to coordinate early in a youth's educational career.

Medicaid Waiver case managers do not have training on evidence-based practices in supported employment. Clear state guidelines complemented by the targeted training in evidence-based employment practices of direct support professionals across systems should lead to a reduction on the high reliance of adult day services with no employment components, and shift to an increase in resources that lead to and support competitive integrated employment.

Transition to Careers Subcommittee Preliminary Recommendations

The Transition to Careers Sub-Committee has concluded that in order to promote the outcome of competitive integrated employment for youth with I/DD, the transition from high school to careers process that requires active interagency collaboration and coordination, keyed to the outcome of CIE, must be improved. Recommendations for improvement are as follows.

Area 1: Early Work Experiences

1. RSA should analyze policies and practices that act as barriers for youth in accessing early vocational rehabilitation supports and services (i.e. paperwork and application burden, language barriers) and provide such analysis to states with specific guidance on improvement in policy and practice.
2. The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) should provide guidance to State Education Agencies (SEAs) on a vocational rehabilitation referral protocol and timeline. A mechanism

should be in place to ensure that a family has been provided with meaningful information on the benefits of vocational rehabilitation services.

3. DOE should make a priority to focus on Post-School Outcomes in Results Driven Accountability for all States. DOE should transition States to a process of using IDEA Indicator 14 (post-school outcomes) for annual benchmarking, compliance and quality improvement purposes. Indicator 14 should be further enhanced to differentiate sheltered work outcomes from competitive integrated employment outcomes.
4. Any reauthorization of IDEA must:
 - a. Re-establish the age of transition to no later than when a youth turns 14.
 - b. Require early connection to and participation in vocational rehabilitation services at the earliest stage of transition as coordinated in a youth's IEP.
 - c. Further define a summary of performance to include a record of a youth's integrated work experiences and require in the description of the transition services – the integrated work experiences that will be provided to assist in reaching postsecondary goals.
5. Federal Research grant priorities should be expanded to explore the research connection related to quality, evidence-based general education inclusion practices and access to the general education curriculum that leads to college and workforce skills and improved post-school outcomes.
6. DOE should increase investment in high quality multivariate correlational research to move from promising practices to evidence-based practices including determining the combination of practices that will guide the field to improved outcomes as youth transition from school to careers of choice.

Area 2: Postsecondary Education

7. DOE and State Educational Agencies (SEAs) must act to improve secondary teacher education requirements and paraprofessional training on appropriate strategies to prepare students with disabilities for PSE and include such areas as the value of PSE, setting high expectations, academic career planning / individualized learning planning, disability support services, universal design, and accommodations based upon learning style.
8. DOE, RSA and SEAs must review policies and issue joint guidance to ensure that prior to each student's secondary education graduation, the student's IEP team has identified and engaged the responsible agencies, resources, and accommodations required for PSE that would include the specific types and levels of supports needed by the student for success.

9. DOE must require PSE experiences to involve multiple competitive integrated employment experiences to include paid internships in integrated settings to ensure that the entire experience is oriented and coordinated to support the student's identified career of choice.
10. The DOL should direct the workforce system to provide youth with I/DD who are attending PSE, the same orientation toward careers through work experience, career planning, and career counseling. , as with all students attending PSE.

Area 3: Family Expectations

11. Federally funded grantees that have early contact with parents of children with significant disabilities (i.e., Parent Training and Information Centers, Family-to-Family Health Centers, IDEA Part B/C, Family Support Programs) should be required to engage with families earlier to support them in acquiring higher expectations that leads to transition long-range planning.
12. DOE should prioritize the use of Student-led IEPs at an early age to improve family expectations for positive employment outcomes.
13. DOE must issue guidance on developing embedded discussions in the IEP process, during the pre-transition age, that lead to long-range post-school outcomes planning vs. year-to-year planning. With any reauthorization of IDEA, the IEP process must be updated and provide funding sources related to a focus on a vision that builds toward long-range post-school outcomes planning.
14. RSA should issue guidance to States on how to provide Work Incentives Benefits Counseling that is tailored to individual youth and is considered a service under Pre-Employment Transition Services.

Area 4: System Integration/Seamless Transition

15. Interagency alignment of outcome goals, and coordination of supports, services, and funding oriented toward competitive integrated employment must be mandated among DOE, DOL, RSA, Department of Health/Human Services and Community Living, and Medicaid Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS). A lead federal agency must be designated. These key federal agencies must provide implementation guidance to the States and States to the local communities to support the following: lowering the age of transition to 14, specifying practices for braiding of resources, clarifying funder of last resort mandates, clearly identifying roles and responsibilities, benchmarking milestones, sharing data collection processes and analyses, tracking outcomes of collaboration over time, and having a plan for dissemination of this information to families and professionals.
16. DOE, SSA, RSA, and Medicaid LTSS must work toward presumptive eligibility and a common application process across state agencies for youth with I/DD to the greatest degree

possible with a focus on securing automatic VR eligibility for waiver eligible youth who desire employment.

17. Federal agencies must coordinate to develop a pilot or demonstration project to increase flexibility and potentially waive requirements across multiple authorities (IDEA, Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA), RSA, SSA, DOL, and Medicaid LTSS) so funds may be streamlined to support youth achieving successful competitive integrated employment outcomes.
18. DOE and RSA should ensure that policies allow transfer of assistive technology devices required through the IEP to follow a student into the workplace and/or postsecondary environment.
19. DOE in collaboration with RSA should issue guidance specifically on ways in which schools and VR can and should fund transportation as a service to support integrated work experiences as part of a student's IEP and/or IPE.

Area 5: Professional Supports and Incentives

20. Medicaid LTSS must tie professional certifications and Medicaid provider qualifications to specific competencies related to understanding competitive integrated employment opportunities for Medicaid beneficiaries.
21. DOE, RSA, DOL must promote and fund pre-service and in-service training for professionals and paraprofessionals across the systems that focuses on building high expectations related to CIE and evidence-based practices to include family engagement strategies, use of labor market information, an understanding of career counseling and pathways, availability of CIE services, person-centered employment services, and employer relations.
22. Federal agencies must update core competencies, standards and pre-service requirements for early childhood and other pediatric medical and social service professions to embed values related to high expectations for children with significant disabilities.
23. Highly Qualified Special Education Teacher" should be redefined to reflect the unique skills necessary to effectively plan and provide required transition services that lead to competitive integrated employment outcomes, in turn, these qualifications should become competencies that are embedded in all special education personnel preparation programs.

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