

Transition to Careers Subcommittee

April 11, 2016

The final stage of a student's education is post-high school. Transition from school services to adulthood can be a particularly difficult time for many adolescents with significant disabilities, their family members, and professionals. Successful transition for all youth, including youth with disabilities, typically includes completing high school, gaining competitive integrated employment and/or participating in postsecondary education, contributing to a household, participating in the community, and experiencing fulfilling personal and social relationships.

The recommendations presented by the Transition to Careers Subcommittee are grounded in the transition barriers faced by students with intellectual/developmental or other significant disabilities and are based upon findings of current research. It has been found that youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are engaged in general education activities, are in related activities with non-disabled peers, and stay connected to community services following high school through some form of post-high school education, internship, or part time employment, have higher incomes and lower unemployment rates in their twenties than those with only a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Labor [USDOL], 2014a). During the critical transition period and the years leading up to that, families, professionals and youth solidify their decisions about pursuing competitive employment or further educational opportunities. As a result, the transition period is when the student, family members, educators, community employment professionals, and other service providers must collaborate on a shared plan of high expectations and joint responsibility.

Families, educators and other professionals form early expectations about whether youth with the most significant disabilities will achieve competitive integrated employment. Key collaborators must have information and experiences early in the education process to support high expectations for students to be on successful career pathways, even at very young ages.

Strong predictors of post-school success have been proven by researchers (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Baer, 2003; Shandra & Hogan, 2008). Often cited are such predictors as early paid work experiences in authentic settings, student and family focused career planning practices, statement of vocational goals in the student's Individualized Education Plan, inclusion in general education and occupational courses, instruction in self-determination, career awareness opportunities, acquisition of job search and social-related skills, and collaborative funding and practices among key transition agencies, i.e., Vocational Rehabilitation, Education, Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health, Workforce, and other entities specific to the needs of the student.

Research-based predictors guide the Transition Subcommittee's recommendations for congressional and federal agency actions to be taken so that students with significant disabilities

are successful in obtaining their competitive integrated job of choice with the necessary supports funded and in place prior to leaving high school. Further, the subcommittee recommends that federal agencies should draw upon the findings from federal grants regarding transition school to careers and family involvement and engagement practices that have proven effective in improving career outcomes for student participants and their families (i.e., Social Security Administration SSA, PROMISE model demonstration projects and the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD), Partnerships in Employment Systems Change Grants).

Recommendations

1. Early Work Experiences

As determined by research, early paid work experiences prior to the student's high school exit is the best predictor for competitive integrated employment success (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012). Policy and funding provisions that support these experiences must be made available to students with significant disabilities so that they may make informed decisions about their career pathways.

1.1. U.S. Department of Education, within its oversight authority of IDEA, should require the implementation of the following action steps to strengthen opportunities for youth with disabilities to gain paid integrated work experiences:

- annual IDEA Indicator 14 reporting on all school exiters to include the acquisition of postsecondary education and/or competitive integrated employment to include specific data on type of employment that match student choice, hours worked, and wages earned,
- Local Education Agencies to develop improvement plans for lower performing schools as evidenced by IDEA indicator 14 post school outcome data, and
- State Education Agencies to establish policies for technical assistance to lower performing schools as evidenced by IDEA indicator 14 post school outcome data.

1.2. U.S. Department of Education should investment in high quality multivariate correlational research to move from promising practices to evidence-based practices which would document new models and transition assessment methods and/or tools to move youth from school to careers.

1.3. Congress should reauthorize IDEA and the Carl Perkins Act, to align with the WIOA intent, to expand responsibilities of programs funded through the Act to support early paid work experiences for youth with the most significant disabilities. Specifically, Congress should amend IDEA to support:

- setting of transition goals that are based on competitive integrated employment first and “presumed employability” of all individuals,
- a requirement for a minimum of one competitive integrated job prior to high school exit that is documented as a transition service,
- required participation, at the IEP meeting of a transition age youth, of both the state vocational rehabilitation services agency and state intellectual/developmental disabilities agency, and/or or other agencies likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services,
- prohibition of 14c employment or services as an allowable transition service, post-school outcome, or goal, and
- the age of transition no later than when a youth turns 14.

2. Family Expectations and Support

Research evidence informs us that students are successful in pursuing their career pathways when their families expect them to be employed and when their families are supported in navigating linkages with public post-school entities to include vocational rehabilitation, intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health, workforce development, and other public government agencies based on transition support needs of the youth. Families must be supported early in their child’s life and during their involvement in their students’ transition process so that they have the information necessary to support the expectation of their student working in competitive integrated settings.

- 2.1. U.S. Department of Education should issue guidance to SEAs and LEAs that ongoing progress monitoring and reporting to parents must be at least quarterly and include a review of transition services implemented and progress made toward achieving transition to careers goals.
- 2.2. U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Social Security Administration should incorporate into grant priorities, training requirements, and activities stronger guidance on available transition to careers resources to families. Grants, that support families taking responsibility of children and youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as other significant disabilities, include Parent Training and Information Centers, Community Parent Resource Centers, Family-to-Family Health Centers, IDEA Parts B and C Grantees, Family Support Programs, and Statewide Family Network Programs.

Stronger guidance and requirements are needed in these areas:

- Information to families of students with disabilities about strong predictors of post-school success, to include paid community, integrated work experiences prior to school exit.
- Family engagement strategies to include:
 - support for the whole family in working toward shared goals for their children,
 - a clear role for family participation,
 - a role for successfully employed self-advocates and their families to mentor students/ families who are learning about their own possible career pathways,
 - career exploration opportunities,
 - building student's self advocacy and self determination abilities,
 - progress monitoring at key transition stages to achieving career job of choice (from early intervention, middle school, high school, to post school to include CIE and/or postsecondary education).

3. Professional Development and Training

A critical component for the effective implementation of high quality transition services, for youth with significant disabilities, is competency-based professional development programs that are focused on the services and supports that will lead to CIE outcomes. Rigorous scientific research is needed to guide professional practices in the field (Mazzotti, Rowe, Cameto, Test & Morningstar, 2013).

3.1. U.S. Department of Education should improve professional support and training to help students make meaningful progress toward competitive integrated employment by:

- updating all personnel and professional development grant programs and related funding priorities (for general and special educators) to incorporate provisions related to predictors of post-school success for youth with disabilities,
- incorporating assessment of the ability of teacher trainees within special education teacher preparation programs, and
- disseminating information to State Education Agencies about the provision of predictors of post-school success in teacher preparation programs and the correlation to post-school outcome data of youth.

3.2. Congress should reauthorize the Higher Education Act to:

- reflect predictors of post-school success for youth with significant disabilities, and

- update personnel and professional development evaluation monitoring components accordingly to ensure general and special education educators are prepared to facilitate high quality post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities.

4. Systems Integration and Seamless Transition

To effectively serve youth with significant disabilities and their families, key transition policy makers and other professionals must create an integrated, seamless system that aligns with predictors of post-school success and, ensures a comprehensive set of services and supports that are consistently available to promote access to competitive integrated employment and opportunities for career advancement.

- 4.1. Congress should provide limited authority to the four relevant federal agencies -- ED (RSA, OSEP, OCTAE), HHS (CMS, ACL, SAMHSA); DOL (ETA; ODEP); and SSA -- to waive requirements that make it challenging for states to effectively use and braid funds targeted to transition-age students with the most significant disabilities (those students participating in Alternate Assessments as defined in ESEA as amended by PL 114-95, section 1005 (2) (D)).
- 4.2. Congress should require the federal agencies to collaborate in order to develop opportunities for states to support local pilots that can demonstrate success when provided the opportunity to combine resources across federal programs to implement ambitious yet achievable plans for comprehensive reform to create coordinated, seamless and sustainable competitive integrated employment outcomes for youth with the most significant disabilities.

Authority should be secured to:

- Waive statutory and/or regulatory requirements that make it challenging for states to effectively use and braid funds due to payer of last resort policies,
- Structure a pilot that allows flexible use of funds and incentive payments for achieving competitive integrated employment outcomes for youth with the most significant cognitive disabilities,
- Support alignment of required outcomes and reporting across relevant federal funding streams supporting youth with the most significant disabilities,
- Support presumptive eligibility processes across programs participating in the pilots.

The Pilot Projects should:

- Target youth with the most significant disabilities whose achievement is measured against alternative academic achievement standards (these students constitute a small group for initial investment are at most risk of being referred to 14c employment and are the most costly to serve in adult systems.),

- Require adoption of best practices for transition-age youth with the most significant disabilities, including elements of National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Y) Guideposts for Success: (1) school-based preparatory experiences, (2) career preparation and work-based experiences, (3) youth development and leadership, (4) connecting activities, and (5) family involvement and supports,
- Incentivize capacity building efforts, including technical assistance and training, within federal employment programs to serve youth with the most significant disabilities,
- Include a robust data collection and evaluation component that tracks participant outcomes for a minimum of five years after exiting post-secondary education,
- Support state and local programs to develop innovative best practices for the hardest to serve populations, focused upon students with the most significant disabilities including those in rural communities and those who are disproportionately underserved, by incentivizing outcomes and considering pay-for-performance models.

If such pilots can demonstrate on a limited basis that increasing flexibility across federal programs results in improved longitudinal outcomes for this small group of students who have traditionally experienced very low success rates, the models could be scaled to incorporate a broader group of students with significant disabilities. Additionally, by limiting these pilots to this small group of students, the likelihood of granting a broader flexibility is higher.

4.3. U.S. Departments of Justice and Education should collaborate to issue specific joint agency guidance regarding the provision of Assistive Technology and quality Assistive Technology assessments as connected to the interpretation of Least Restrictive Environment, WIOA Section 511, and Americans with Disabilities Act Olmstead provisions.

Specific guidance should include:

- evidence-based practices that require supplementary aids and services to be provided in a competitive, community-based, integrated employment setting,
- requirements that local and state entities (including LEAs, SEAs, DVR, and Medicaid agency) develop joint policies to fund assistive technologies required by the student to access competitive integrated employment, eliminate barriers to continued access to assistive technology as a work accommodation, and allowing the technology to follow the student from school to the workplace,
- a strengthened review of access to assistive technology for students with the most significant disabilities as part of state oversight, monitoring, and enforcement strategies.