

CONCLUSIONS, PROJECTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Shared Findings

A number of general findings about New Mexico's transition services and gaps were reflected by at least two sources (with one exception). These are discussed below.

Students

- a. Although only documented in one component of the present study, some students with disabilities reported ongoing (not single incident) mistreatment by peers and teachers, while others reported that essential accommodations, therapies, and devices were not provided for a long time.
- b. Student outcome findings are consistent with national data:
 1. Disproportionately high dropout rates and low graduation rates
 2. Disproportionately high rates of living at home or dependent on caregivers
 3. Disproportionately high unemployment rates
 4. Among those employed, many work in a variety of service jobs and a range of other positions
 5. Disproportionately low participation in postsecondary education .

Families

- c. Family involvement in the transition process, and the approaches to support that, remains a critical need.

Self-Determination/Self-Advocacy

- d. A majority of youth (ages 14-22) are attending their IEP meetings, but few are prepared to participate or actively contribute to the decision-making, and many do not know that their IEP includes a transition plan. Of those students who are actively participating in their transition planning, most are from larger districts/urban areas.

Individualized Education Plan/Transition Planning

- e. Only half of students ages 14-15 have IEPs that reflect a statement of needed transition services including a specific course of study that is meaningful and motivating to the student.
- f. The majority (about $\frac{3}{4}$) of students ages 16-22 have statements of transition services needs, but few have specific plans for connections to adult agencies or postsecondary education or training.
- g. Disparities exist in perceptions about transition services needs for students who vary by ethnicity (e.g., lowest needs reported for Asians, highest for American Indians) and (even more so) by exceptionality (lowest needs reported for autism category and highest for learning disabilities category).

Curriculum and Instruction

- h. Many (but not a majority of) students experience teachers, courses, inclusive education, and work-based learning that help them reach their post-school goals.

- i. In general, integrated school-to-work preparation for all students has increased significantly in the past 5 years, but no data strictly about students with disabilities have been compiled.
- j. Coordinated sets of activities (i.e., an individualized package of school-based and community/work-based learning that promotes movement to desired post-school goals) within articulated K-16 systems are atypical and continue to be a significant need area.

Interagency Coordination

- k. Although progress has been made in interagency collaboration, a lack of coordination among transition-related agencies at both state and local levels continues in areas such as service coordination, co-funding, and data coordination.
- l. Progress has also been made in the business community's support of work-based learning opportunities for all students, but systematic connections among schools, agencies, postsecondary institutions, employers, and families remain very difficult to achieve.
- m. Among students with disabilities ages 14-23, only 5% of their records document a need for postsecondary education and vocational rehabilitation services upon exit.
- n. Employment, residential, mental health, and postsecondary education services for young adults with disabilities remain inadequate in quantity and in geographic accessibility across the state.

Geopolitical/Geographic Issues

- o. Different geographic regions of the state show different ways that individuals with disabilities spend their days after exiting school, with larger percentages of individuals from urban areas working than those from remote rural areas, and larger percentages of individuals in remote rural areas doing hobbies and tasks within the home after graduation.
- p. Individuals with disabilities living in rural areas have very limited access to services, facilities, and transportation, which impedes vocational training and employment.

Monitoring and Accountability

- q. New Mexico's districts generally report vague, inconsistent, or incomplete follow-up study activities, with one-third reporting no plans for follow-up.
- r. New Mexico's educational and service agencies lack a connected information management system that monitors individuals' progress across pertinent systems, matches services to individual needs, and supports the agencies' accountability.

School District Personnel Recruitment, Preparation and Retention

- s. Lack of adequate preservice and inservice training of staff (general education, special education, administrators, paraprofessionals) related to transition options, self-determination instruction, work-based learning, and adult agency connections impedes progress in transition outcomes.
- t. High teacher turnover, vacancies, and teachers on waivers contribute to the lack of knowledge and skills among staff and difficulties in maintaining gains in student outcomes.

B. Projections for New Mexico Based on Current SDE Data

These numbers are based on an annual growth rate of 1% of all special education students. However, since these increases tend to occur among younger age students more than older students, the 1% annual increase was computed off the base figures for 2000, rather than compounded annually.

Table 30

Projected Totals of 14-17 Year Olds and 18-22 Year Olds Served by Special Education (Excluding Gifted)

Age Group	2000	2003	2005	2007	2010
14-17	12,997	13,387	13,647	13,907	14,297
18-22	5,713	5,884	5,999	6,113	6,284
14-22	18,710	19,271	19,646	20,020	20,581

(Source for 2000 Figures = NMSDE Dec. 1, 2000 Count)

In general, the reported need upon exit for post-school services (such as vocational rehabilitation, mental health, and post-secondary education) in the current data is very low among students 14-22 years of age (see NMSDE data under Component 4). As a result, those figures are not appropriate to use to project the need for services over the next 10 years. Therefore, the following estimates for numbers of students in each age cluster were calculated using the projected special education total in Table 20 above and the service level distribution of the 2000 population listed below.

Table 31

NMSDE Dec. 1, 2000 Count of Students with Disabilities by Age and Service Level (Frequencies and Percentages)

Age	Minimum Service Level (< 10% of day)	Moderate Service Level (11-49% of day)	Extensive Service Level (50%+ of day but not full day)	Maximum Service Level (up to a full day)
5	6 (.4%)	2 (.1%)	2 (.1%)	1,358 (99.3%)
6	367 (23.1%)	99 (6.2%)	36 (2.3%)	1,088 (68.4%)
7	677 (39.7%)	270 (15.8%)	149 (8.7%)	609 (35.7%)
8	569 (27.9%)	474 (23.2%)	265 (13.0%)	735 (36.0%)
9	404 (16.5%)	706 (28.9%)	450 (18.4%)	882 (36.1%)
10	346 (12.1%)	769 (26.9%)	604 (21.2%)	1,136 (39.8%)
11	282 (9.5%)	800 (27.0%)	682 (23.0%)	1,204 (40.6%)
12	256 (8.4%)	808 (26.5%)	781 (25.6%)	1,202 (39.4%)
13	195 (6.8%)	681 (23.7%)	836 (29.1%)	1,161 (40.4%)
14	169 (6.2%)	645 (23.6%)	865 (31.6%)	1,055 (38.6%)
15	230 (7.2%)	833 (26.1%)	943 (29.5%)	1,191 (37.3%)
16	336 (9.4%)	953 (26.7%)	1,144 (32.1%)	1,132 (31.8%)

17	365 (10.4%)	820 (23.4%)	1,133 (32.4%)	1,183 (33.8%)
18	307 (11.0%)	619 (22.3%)	888 (31.9%)	967 (34.8%)
19	216 (12.0%)	433 (24.1%)	501 (27.8%)	649 (36.1%)
20	43 (6.7%)	121 (18.9%)	148 (23.1%)	328 (51.3%)
21	9 (3.2%)	14 (5.0%)	28 (9.9%)	231 (81.9%)
22	4 (1.9%)	1 (.5%)	8 (3.8%)	198 (93.8%)

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Table 32

Projected No. of Students in Special Education (14-22) by Age Cluster and Service Level

Age Cluster & Service Level	2003	2005	2007	2010
14-17 Total	13,387	13,647	13,907	14,297
Minimum Service (8.3%)*	1,111	1,133	1,154	1,187
Moderate Service (24.9%)*	3,333	3,398	3,463	3,560
Extensive Service (31.4%)*	4,204	4,285	4,367	4,489
Maximum Service (35.4%)*	4,739	4,831	4,923	5,061
18-22 Total	5,884	5,999	6,113	6,284
Minimum Service (6.96%)*	410	418	425	437
Moderate Service (14.13%)*	831	848	865	889
Extensive Service (19.3%)*	1,136	1,158	1,180	1,213
Maximum Service (59.6%)*	3,507	3,575	3,643	3,745
14-22 Total	19,271	19,646	20,020	20,581

*Percentages based on service level distribution of these age groups in 2000 data

The projected figures are rough estimates of the numbers of students who are likely to be served by special education and requiring transition services over the next ten years, disaggregated by service levels. For the 14-17 year olds, the local education agencies will bear primary responsibility for transition programming. Among this group, over 65% may be receiving extensive or maximum services; these service level figures include all disability categories, so a large portion are students with learning disabilities. These projections are based on current service levels across all disability categories, which certainly may change if the state's focused monitoring efforts help diminish the numbers of students inappropriately identified with learning disabilities.

For the 18-22 year olds, these projections will bear greatest impact on adult service agencies and those 18-22 local school programs. The figures suggest that roughly 60% will require significant agency and transition supports. Moreover, IEP teams for students in all levels of support (*especially* minimum through extensive) should seriously consider transitions to postsecondary education and training. The figures indicate that older students who remain in the K-12 education system require much more extensive support overall than the 14-17 group, as would be expected. A limitation of this method of analysis is that the 18 year olds are combined with the 19-22 year olds; in particular, the 20-22 year olds drop off significantly in number, and their needs for maximum supports escalate dramatically (see Table 30 above).

C. Findings from Related Statewide Studies

Findings from Transition Outcomes Project

Four New Mexico districts participated as pilot sites for the Transition Outcomes Project (Storms, O’Leary, & Williams, 2000) IEP file review process. Summary data indicated the following strengths in transition planning within the IEP (Blalock, 2001):

- Inviting students to the IEP meeting (89%)
- Students attending the meeting (70%)
- Ensuring that students’ preferences and interests were considered (75%)
- Provision of parent notice with all detailed information
- Including a statement of needed transition services for students 16 years of age or older (87%)
- Within those statements of needed transition services, addressing instruction (85%), community experiences (90%), employment and other adult living (93%), and daily living skills (75%)
- Including documentation about sharing age of majority information with the student (77%)

Weaknesses across the state, reflecting those across the nation, included:

- Documenting the need for outside agencies likely needed later (44%)
- Inviting outside agencies that will likely provide services later (5%)
- Including statements of needed interagency responsibilities/linkages (38%)
- Including statements of present levels of performance related to transition services (for 14 years of age and older) (67%)
- Including statements of transition service needs that specify the student’s courses of study for each grade (49%)
- Within the statements of needed transition services, addressing related services (35%) and functional vocational evaluation (20%)
- Presenting the activities for needed transition services as a coordinated set of activities (34%) that promote movement to the student’s desired post-school goals (57%)

Cautions in reviewing these data should be taken for the following reasons: (a) districts volunteered for “strangers” to review their IEP files in collecting these baseline data, (b) file reviews were conducted by varying staff members with different levels of understanding about transition (even though all received training on the checklist used), thus decisions were somewhat subjective, and (c) only 84 files from 4 districts were reviewed.

Findings from NMSDE Questionnaire about IEP Transition Planning

The New Mexico State Department of Education attached a series of transition-related questions to the December 1, 1999 count that were recently analyzed (Pattichis, 2001). Districts and state-supported schools were asked to answer the items below based on 5 randomly selected IEP files of 14-22 year olds. Demographic data indicated that all disability categories and

service levels were represented. The questions and responses from 90 districts and state-supported schools are listed below.

	<u>YES</u>
1. <i>Notice of IEP meeting included that one purpose of the meeting was transition planning</i>	73%
2. <i>Notice of meeting included invitation to student</i>	79%
3. <i>Notice of meeting included invitation of appropriate outside agencies</i>	43%
4. <i>Student's preferences are documented within 1 year of meeting date</i>	90%
5. <i>"Responsible person" for transition services is a school employee</i>	91%
6. <i>Student requires linkage with postsecondary school</i>	50%
7. <i>Student requires linkage with community employer</i>	36%
8. <i>Student requires linkage with community mental health provider</i>	13%
9. <i>Student requires linkage with vocational rehabilitation</i>	61%
10. <i>Student requires linkage with adult developmental disabilities service provider</i>	18%

Of importance is that these latter findings show significant differences when disaggregated by service level and exceptionality. For example, primarily students receiving moderate levels of service were reported to need linkages with a postsecondary school; primarily students receiving pervasive service were said to need linkages with mental health providers, vocational rehabilitation, and developmental disabilities services. On the other hand, a small proportion of students with intellectual disabilities were noted to require linkages with vocational rehabilitation.

11. *Describe the type of follow-up studies you are doing with students to measure the effectiveness of your services.*

These responses fell into the categories of:

- have plans to implement follow-up studies in 2000-2001 N = 7
- follow-up was commissioned through outside agency (state or national) N = 8
- no follow-up reported N = 34
- some kind of follow-up reported N = 21
- follow-up was done through personal contact N = 4
- close contact with DVR provides follow-up data N = 15

Discussion. These findings suggest that comprehensive, informed transition planning has improved but remains elusive for many New Mexico districts. Linkages to adult agencies and post-secondary education are particularly problematic. Follow-up studies are being conducted by only a small portion of the districts. Limitations of this study were that the data were self-reported by districts; the selection of the 5 IEP files could have been arbitrary; the number of files (5) reported on carry very disparate weight across very small to very large districts; and the small number of questions (10) could only get at cursory information about transition practices. Strengths were that the study included almost every district and represented the entire state, primarily due to the nature of the questionnaire distribution (requested as part of the 40-day count). The questions need review to see if different information is needed (eg., Did students attend? Did responsible parties include school employee, student, parent, and agencies?).

D. Recommendations

Transition Service Area	Recommendations	Responsible Agency/s
Transition Planning in the IEP	<p>Youth, families, and educators need more information on the importance of student-led, comprehensive, outcome-oriented transition planning that steadily progresses from ages 14-22.</p> <p>Students must not only attend, but need to be taught how to actively guide the decisions made during, transition planning.</p> <p>Transition planning needs to be updated regularly to reflect changing interests, skills, and opportunities.</p> <p>Adult and post-secondary agencies must participate in the transition planning process. Schools need to know a variety of support options for individuals with a wide range of strengths and needs. Responsibilities of relevant agencies must be established long before the individual exits school.</p> <p>IEP statements of needed transition services for students ages 14 and older must specify the student’s course of study that leads to desired post-school goals. IEP statements of transition service needs for students ages 16 and older must specify clear integrated pathways to reach those goals.</p>	<p>NMSDE, Local Education Agencies (LEAs), & Parent Organizations</p> <p>LEAs & Families</p> <p>NMSDE & LEAs</p> <p>DVR, DOH, DOL, CHE, NMSDE, CYFD, HSD, SSA, Commission for the Blind, Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Corrections, & LEAs</p> <p>LEAs & relevant agencies</p>
Family Involvement	<p>Family involvement in the IEP process needs to increase. Opportunities to participate and to share visions need to be provided.</p> <p>Families need to be aware of post-school options for their sons/daughters.</p>	<p>LEAs, Parent Organizations, & relevant agencies</p>

<p>Interagency Coordination</p>	<p>A coordinated, systematic, effective service delivery system that reflects the complex needs of youth with disabilities in New Mexico must be established. This could be facilitated through a <i>State-level interagency agreement</i>, as well as local agreements and community transition teams.</p> <p>A shared database system must be created for systematic tracking and matching of information across agencies regarding availability, cost, and eligibility for services. In addition, documentation of individual support needs, services, and outcomes should be reflected in the database.</p> <p>Access to and information about adult agencies must be provided to individuals living in rural/remote areas.</p>	<p>DVR, DOH, DOL, CHE, NMSDE, CYFD, HSD, SSA, Commission for the Blind, Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Corrections, & LEAs</p> <p>DVR, DOH, DOL, CHE, NMSDE, CYFD, HSD, SSA, Commission for the Blind, Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Corrections, & LEAs</p> <p>Same as above</p>
<p>Monitoring & Accountability</p>	<p>Follow-up studies must be conducted by school districts to determine various post-school outcomes of graduates or exiters with disabilities. In addition, the relationship between transition programming and post-school outcomes needs to be examined at a district/local level.</p> <p>Districts and related agencies must be accountable for ensuring that IEP transition plans are implemented and connected across systems and supports.</p>	<p>NMSDE & LEAs</p> <p>LEAs & relevant agencies</p>
<p>Personnel Preparation and Retention</p>	<p>Preservice and inservice training for educators that addresses transition planning within the IEP, self-determination and adult agency/post-secondary options for students with disabilities must be provided.</p>	<p>Institutions of Higher Education, NMSDE, & LEAs</p>