

STATEWIDE TRANSITION PARTICIPANTS AND SERVICES PROJECT

Conducted by the N.M. Statewide Transition Coordinating Council
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The Statewide Transition Participants and Services Project (STPSP) aimed to identify existing transition services, gaps in those services, state agency roles and responsibilities related to transition support, numbers of persons ages 0-22 with disabilities (including developmental disabilities), and statewide demographic projections affecting future transitions from school to adult life. The DDPC wished to support a comprehensive study of our current status in provision of transition services so that key leaders, practitioners, families, and individuals with disabilities understand the needs facing the state over the next ten years.

This study was primarily descriptive in nature, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The *qualitative* methods included (a) analysis of legislatively mandated transition services, (b) analyses of existing surveys and reports related to transition (both examples of historical research), (c) consumer co-facilitated focus groups (survey research, broadly speaking), and (d) review of related research findings in the professional literature. *Quantitative* methods included (a) varied analyses of relevant portions of existing state agency databases in an attempt to identify the status of transition services, as well as outcomes of youth with disabilities exiting secondary schools (ex post facto research) and (b) projections of students likely to require transition services over the next ten years. The full report describes the key findings and recommendations of each of those components and synthesizes them into two parts: (1) "Shared findings" that carry evidence from more than one study component, and (2) a set of recommendations about transition practices that the findings indicate for our state.

New Mexico shares a number of areas requiring improvement with states in our region and with the nation, according to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and confirmed by the STPSP's varied findings. These include:

- Inadequate participation of youth with disabilities in their own transition planning;
 - Lack of knowledge among school staff and families about IDEA transition requirements and available community resources;
 - Failure to indicate that one purpose of IEP meetings would be transition planning;
 - Failure to include adequate statements of transition service needs for students 14 and older, and adequate statements of needed transition services for 16 year-olds plus;
 - Lack of collaboration between schools and relevant adult agencies necessary for appropriate transition programming;
 - Limited employment opportunities in some communities for high school graduates and in general for students with more significant support needs and students residing on reservations;
 - Low graduation rates and high dropout rates among youth with disabilities.

Examples of strengths have also emerged from various states' self-examination and OSEP monitoring. Arizona determined that all IEP meetings for students ages 3-21 will address

transition services needs. Colorado now has distance-delivered transition training for teachers. Utah has sustained, and added to, efforts from their state systems change project: Community Transition Councils, district transition coordinators, a state level cooperative agreement between education and rehabilitation, local agreements between education and rehabilitation, a statewide transition conference conducted annually with 500-600 participants; state-level interagency committees that reduce barriers to service delivery and seek additional dollars; partnerships on 3 federal grants that address self-determination and self-directed planning; collaboration with the Utah Parent Center on efforts and funds to train parents about transition planning; and a state specialist funded by School-to-Careers who recognizes district efforts in inclusive practices in School-to-Work. Texas continues its cycles of transition outcomes studies among youth, families, and practitioners. New Mexico has a number of strength areas as well (local memoranda of understanding in some communities, statewide council, some connections between School-to-Work and transition programs, a transition specialist cadre engaged in long-term professional development as a way to build local capacity, transition information/training provided by Parents Reaching Out, entrepreneurship training in districts around the state, and an annual transition institute).

Each of the major data collection and analysis components of the Statewide Transition Participants and Services Project generated its own set of findings and recommendations, based on that component's results. The full report details each of these conclusions and then synthesizes those into one set of "shared findings" and a set of overall recommendations. The recommendations are presented below.

Overall Recommendations

Transition Planning in the IEP

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 (or earlier if needed).

Students must not only attend, but need to be taught how to actively guide the decisions made during, transition planning.

Transition planning needs to be updated regularly to reflect changing interests, skills, and opportunities.

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.

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.

Family Involvement

Family involvement in the IEP process needs to increase. Opportunities to participate and to share visions need to be provided.

Families need to be aware of post-school options for their sons/daughters.

Interagency Coordination

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 *State-level interagency agreement*, as well as local agreements and community transition teams.

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.

Access to and information about adult agencies must be provided to individuals living in rural/remote areas.

Monitoring and Accountability

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.

Districts and related agencies must be accountable for ensuring that IEP transition plans are implemented and connected across systems and supports.

Personnel Preparation and Retention

Preservice and inservice training for educators that addresses transition planning within the IEP, self-determination instruction, and adult agency/post-secondary options for students with disabilities must be provided.