

STATEWIDE TRANSITION PARTICIPANTS AND SERVICES PROJECT

Study Conducted by the New Mexico Statewide Transition Coordinating Council

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PURPOSE

The Statewide Transition Participants and Services Project was a multifaceted study of New Mexico's school-to-adulthood transition services framework for persons with disabilities as it currently functions and, to some extent, as it has functioned over the past 10 years. Specifically, this study was intended 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. "Transition services" have been defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, Public Law 105-17) as:

- ... (a) . . . a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that-
- (1) is designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;
 - (2) is based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests; and
 - (3) Includes-
 - (i) Instruction;
 - (ii) Related services;
 - (iii) Community experiences;
 - (iv) The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and
 - (v) If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

(b) Transition services for students with disabilities may be special education, if provided as specially designed instruction, or related services, if required to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education. (34 CFR Section 300.29)

A dual goal structure was implemented by the Statewide Transition Coordinating Council to carry out this study of New Mexico's practices designed to meet the mandate of this and related legislation. First, a multi-feature study of, and a series of recommendations about, the transition issues and supports affecting youth and young adults with disabilities were completed. Second, development of a database aligned with existing state databases was attempted, with partial success, (a) to aggregate the disparate documentation that resides within the agencies assigned to provide transition-related services, and (b) to project future figures about the needs for transition services.

This study was primarily descriptive in nature, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Descriptive research is predominately focused on gathering information about the current status of the practice or phenomenon of interest (rather than examine cause-and-effect relationships) (Borg, 1963). The *qualitative* methods included analysis of legislatively mandated transition services, analyses of existing surveys and reports related to transition (both examples of historical research), consumer co-facilitated focus groups (survey research, broadly speaking), and review of related research findings in the professional literature. *Quantitative* methods included varied analyses of relevant portions of existing state agency databases in an attempt to identify the status of transition services in the state, as well as outcomes of youth with disabilities exiting secondary schools (ex post facto research, according to Wiersma, 1986). This 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.

A. BACKGROUND

The Statewide Transition Coordinating Council (STCC) was established in January 2000 through legislative support, to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from secondary education to post-school opportunities. This interagency partnership consists of approximately 40 partners who represent students, families, educators and schools, all state agencies supporting transition (Labor, Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, Health, Human Services, Children Youth and Families, Commission for the Blind, Corrections), employers, community youth-oriented organizations, and higher education. STCC serves as an advisory committee to agencies primarily responsible for transition-related functions and has, since its inception, worked to create the following changes in our systems:

- (1) A database that can be shared among all interested parties that informs the state about the status of transition services and the outcomes of youth exiting schools;
- (2) Professional development opportunities to help all stakeholders know about transition issues, resources, and opportunities;
- (3) Marketing of information about transition issues, resources, and opportunities;
- (4) Rehabilitation counselor licensure and funding for New Mexico schools;
- (5) A state interagency transition plan that specifies all agency roles and duties; and
- (6) Local interagency transition teams that facilitate improved outcomes for students.

STCC's mission led the members to seek the award to conduct the study at hand, and it received the award in October 2000.

New Mexico's stakeholders have a lengthy but fragmented history of studying transition services, as will be seen in Section III of this report which analyzes studies disseminated between 1990 and 2001. Currently and in the past, information concerning transition has been gathered from a variety of agencies and grant projects. These data have not been brought together in a comprehensive manner to provide a complete set of information for evaluation, planning, and implementing improvements in the state transition service delivery system. In fact, each agency and initiative has functioned independently, resulting in many excellent programs but, unfortunately, in a fragmented set of services that fall short of meeting the needs of all individuals with disabilities, including those with developmental disabilities and traumatic brain injury. The Statewide Transition Participants and Services Project was an effort to combine evidence from multiple sources, collected over the past 10 years, so that a more complete portrait of our services, gaps, and outcomes might be visible.

B. RATIONALE

General Rationale

“Post-school studies conducted in the past decade document the difficulties youth with disabilities experience when they leave school. These studies report high levels of unemployment and underemployment, economic instability, social isolation, and low levels of participation in post-secondary education and training programs.¹ As a result, there has been increased attention and emphasis on the transition to post-school options for youth with disabilities. Since the early 1980s, the school to work transition for youth with disabilities has been a major emphasis of the federal government and state agencies” (Bowman, 2001, pp. 5-6). The need for this comprehensive view of New Mexico's transition service provision arose from ongoing requests, by multiple stakeholders, for accurate findings about the impact of this emphasis across the state and among varied constituencies.

The outcomes of this study may impact individuals who currently participate in transition support programs or services, but the data are more likely to impact future participants in transition support programs. The findings and recommendations will also assist (a) the State Legislature in planning for funding needs, (b) state agencies, secondary and postsecondary schools, and community service providers in planning for and improving service delivery, (c) families in becoming aware of the transition possibilities, and (d) employers in receiving better prepared employees.

Overview of National Data in Transition

Issues related to the transition from school to postschool environments were identified early in the implementation of IDEA. In 1990, IDEA required a formal statement regarding needed transition services in the IEP, and in 1997 the IDEA amendments required the development of a statement of transition service needs focusing on the student's course of study (U. S. Department of Education, 1999). The transition requirements of IDEA have stemmed from several years of research and experience with providing services to youth with disabilities.

¹ Horne, R.L. & Morris, S.H. (1998). Transition of youth with disabilities. *Liaison Bulletin*, 28.

According to OSEP, the requirements with the strongest links to improved educational outcomes for students with disabilities include:

- involvement and progress of students with disabilities in the full range of curricula and programs available to students without disabilities including general curricula and vocational education and work-experience programs;
- the participation of children with disabilities in state- and district-wide assessments of student achievement;
- the provision of transition services to enable students with disabilities to move effectively from school to postsecondary independence and achievement;
- educating children with disabilities with children without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate; and
- parent, student, and regular education personnel participation in the development and implementation of educational programs for children with disabilities.

Moreover, effective transition practices include facilitating self-determination among students, participation of family and cultural perspectives in planning, interagency collaboration, and the establishment of community networks and services (U. S. Department of Education, 1999). Indeed, in a recent study by Hasazi, Furney, and DeStefano (1998), lack of available community programs and fragmented/unsystematic planning were identified as barriers to effective transition planning.

Williams and O'Leary (2001), in a review of OSEP's monitoring reports conducted during the 1993-94 through 1996-97 monitoring cycles found that:

- despite continued emphasis on the value of student involvement in transition planning, many LEAs are not inviting students to their IEP meetings;
- interagency involvement in transition planning is lacking, that is, state and local education agencies consistently deliver transition services without the benefit of adult agencies in the planning, identification, and delivery of programs, services, and supports. Educators are unaware of community agencies within their geographic location, procedures for referral, etc.
- there is a lack of compliance with statements of needed transition services on the IEP, with approximately 50% of the states and entities not having statements of needed transition services that contained the required components (instruction, community experiences, development of employment, and other post-school living objectives).

A Review of Transition Outcomes

The information provided below highlights some recent transition outcomes for students with disabilities over the past 5 years. Areas discussed include: *High School Graduation Rates, Employment, Postsecondary Education/Training, and Community Living Outcomes.*

High school completion. In 1997-98, 147,123 students ages 17 through 21 with disabilities graduated with a standard high school diploma. This represented 25.5 percent of all students with disabilities ages 17 and older and 61.6 percent of students with disabilities exiting the educational system (i.e., graduating, receiving a certificate of completion, reaching the maximum age for services, and dropping out). The percentage of students with disabilities graduating with a standard diploma has increased gradually, but consistently, since 1994-95, from 23.5 percent to 25.5 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

High school graduation rates for students with disabilities vary considerably by disability. In 1997-98, more than 30 percent of students with deaf-blindness, speech or language impairments, specific learning disabilities, or visual impairments received a standard diploma. The rate for deaf-blindness, however, is extremely variable with the percentage of students with deaf-blindness receiving a standard diploma considerably lower in previous years (e.g., 14.2 percent in 1996-97). Among those least likely to graduate in 1997-98 were students with mental retardation (14 percent), multiple disabilities (10 percent), and autism (8 percent).

The percentage of students with disabilities graduating with a standard diploma also varied considerably by State, with a low of 6.8 percent and a high of 45.4 percent. This variation may be a factor of State graduation requirements, the characteristics of students receiving special education services, or other differences in State policies and procedures. States with the largest percentage of students with disabilities who graduate with a standard diploma included New Jersey (45.5 percent), Connecticut (38.7 percent), and Minnesota (38.5 percent). States with the smallest percentage included Mississippi (6.8 percent), South Carolina (10.4 percent), and Alabama (13.0 percent).

Employment and related factors. Data from Blackorby & Wagner (1996) indicate that 56.8% of youth with disabilities are competitively employed 3-5 years after they exit the school system. Youth with learning disabilities and speech/language impairments have the greatest employment rate (70% and 65.4% respectively), and youth with deaf/blindness, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, and mental retardation have the smallest rates (range from 16.1% to 37%). In terms of type of job placement, recent data from a national study by Morgan, Ellerd, Jensen, and Taylor (2000) indicate that the highest frequency job placement for both youth with disabilities in transition programs and adults in adult rehabilitation programs is food and beverage preparation services (14.7% of total placements). Other high frequency job categories included: building and related service occupations, miscellaneous work occupations, miscellaneous sales occupations, sales in consumable commodities, production, stock clerk and related occupations, domestic service occupations, and personal service occupations.

In terms of factors related to employment, work-based learning, especially paid employment, is highly correlated with more successful work outcomes (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Colley & Jamison, 1998). In addition, students who participate in occupational education in high school are more often in paid competitive jobs and working full-time, as compared to students who do not participate in occupational education (Colley & Jamison, 1998). Finally, respondents in the Colley and Jamison study indicated that the Vocational Rehabilitation system was a key resource in job obtainment.

Postsecondary education/training. The numbers of students with disabilities who exit the school system and go on to post-secondary education are less than optimal. For instance, Colley and Jamison indicate that of the 40% of their sample who graduated with a high-school diploma, only 17% were attending post-secondary education programs (vocational, technical, or college program). The majority of this group were attending college programs.

Community living. Blackorby and Wagner (1996) report that one-third of youth in the general population are living independently less than two years after secondary school. However, as these youth are out of high school for longer periods of time independent living is much more prevalent, with approximately 60% of young adults living independently five years after high school. For youth with disabilities the same trend is evident, however, fewer young adults with disabilities are living independently as compared to their peers without disabilities. Estimates suggest that 11% of all young adults with disabilities are living independently two years after high school, 37% five years after high school. Similar results were found by Colley and Jaimson (1998) with 79% of the participants still living at home within a few years after exiting the school system.

Regional Picture

Transition-related findings from four states (Arizona, Colorado, Texas, and Utah) were identified as important to review, in order to provide context for the “Statewide Transition Services and Participants Project”. Requests were made by telephone, email and website request to obtain copies of reports that had addressed transition services and outcomes during the past 5-10 years. Following is a summary of those findings, organized by state.

ARIZONA

Statewide Surveys

A statewide survey of special education directors in Arizona found that 65% stated that no school official was officially responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities were transitioned to postschool services (Love & Shafer, 1992). In addition, fewer than 10% reported that their districts had carried out needs assessments, follow-up, or follow-along studies of their special education graduates. As a result, the Arizona Follow-Along Project (AFAP) was created to collect and use follow-along data at state and local levels to improve students’ transition outcomes (Love & Malian, 1997). Overall, those findings suggested that parents of both students who graduated from special education programs and students who dropped out reported that student achievement and independent functioning were accomplished, with those who completed their programs achieving more academically. Most parents and students surveyed said that securing a job was not a problem, and jobs were generally in service occupations. Both groups of students seemed happy with their postschool personal and social lives.

OSEP Monitoring Report

In 1995, OSEP had identified findings of noncompliance related to transition:

- Some districts did not include all of the transition requirements

- Notice to parents of the IEP meeting did not indicate that one purpose of the meeting would be transition planning and that the student was invited
- Districts did not always invite the required participants to the IEP meeting.

OSEP's analysis of data collected during its 1998 Validation Planning period included a review of the Arizona Self-Assessment ... (which) provided information on the status of transition services in the state by the Arizona Department of Education staff and the Steering Committee. ... OSEP (also) obtained information on InterAct Arizona, a multi-agency and multi-level interactive system for improving the design and delivery of transition services. These two documents, the Arizona Self-Assessment and the InterAct Arizona Manual, provided sources for data on the identification of possible transition services issues in Arizona. The public input meetings held in Phoenix, Holbrook, and Sierra Vista provided an additional source for the identification of these issues. (OSEP Arizona Monitoring Report, 2000, p. 36)

Thirteen local education agencies (LEAs) were monitored by the State during the 1996/97 and 1997/98 school years. In the **Arizona Self-Assessment**, the following findings were generated:

- 63% of the IEPs reviewed for students 16 years old and above addressed transition planning as part of the IEP (AZDE determined the need to discuss transition services during all IEP meetings for students with disabilities, regardless of age);
- 28 of 164 LEAs that provide high school services have a School-to-Work program called Career Pathways that includes students with disabilities;
- Approximately 20 non-education agencies provide services to support school to work employment and postsecondary activities (eg., private agencies, sheltered workshops, and state agencies), but LEAs report frustration with the lack of available transition services and outcomes for exiters;
- Within Arizona, written agreements at state and local levels outline responsibilities for transition from secondary to postsecondary activities:
 - 18 districts have Youth Transition Programs in conjunction with the DES/Rehabilitation Services Administration and ten more school districts have agreements for specific transition services (eg., orientation and mobility)
 - 18 Interagency transition councils are in place in communities
 - 18 school-business partnerships have been developed
 - A Statewide Advisory Council on transition services is in effect.
- 32 transition-related trainings were conducted in 1997 within 68 LEAs or organizations; 29 were conducted in 1998 within 91 LEAs or organizations (OSEP Arizona Monitoring Report, 2000).

Arizona's state systems change grant on transition was funded in 1996, Project InterAct Arizona. The InterAct Arizona Advisory Council is representative of students, parents, state agencies, universities, and advocacy organizations. Five goals address the improvement, expansion, and implementation of transition services in Arizona:

1. Redefining state-level and statewide policies, procedures, agreements and funding mechanisms;

2. Enhancing the ability of youth with disabilities, families, professionals, advocates, and employers to plan for and implement effective transition services;
3. Providing more effective transagency transition services within communities;
4. Evaluating the effectiveness of InterAct Arizona in achieving changes in state systems for transition services for youth with disabilities; and
5. Disseminating information to stakeholder audiences on the impact and outcome of activities. (OSEP Arizona Monitoring Report, 2000, pp. 37-38)

Public input meetings generated a number of concerns:

- Limited employment opportunities in some communities for high school graduates and in general for lower functioning students and students residing on reservations;
- Lack of knowledge among school staff in grades 7-9 about IDEA transition requirements;
- Lack of collaboration between the school and relevant adult agencies;
- Lack of understanding among staff and parents about how to complete AZDE's Transition Services Plan forms.

As a result of its investigation, OSEP identified as a strength that AZDE has determined that all IEP meetings for students ages 3-21 will address transition services needs. In addition, OSEP noted a need for training of district personnel regarding the secondary transition requirement, community resources, and relevant agencies.

Institute for Human Development Arizona Status Report

The Institute for Human Development at the University Affiliated Program of Northern Arizona University completed a report on the status of transition from school to work and adulthood (Hegenauer, 1999). This study found "a mixed picture of comprehensive, community-wide development and very limited and partially delivered services" (Hegenauer Executive Summary, 1999, p. 2). The conclusions noted similar findings across secondary and postsecondary institutions, in the following areas:

1. there are not nearly enough trained providers, either in educational or in relevant adult service agencies;
2. most educators recognize the need for transition programming, but have not been able to convince peers and administrators;
3. employers, community members, and postsecondary institutions generally support the idea of transition from school-to-work, but are not linked to each other or the schools;
4. the notion of transition being a community responsibility has not yet taken hold; and
5. communication and collaboration between and among stakeholders has not yet gained momentum. (Hegenauer Executive Summary, 1999, p. 6)

<i>COLORADO</i>

Colorado Systems Change Project

In the mid to late 1980s, Colorado's key stakeholders joined to develop policy, pilot projects, and programs to address transition issues. From 1991-1996, the Colorado Systems

Change Transition Project focused statewide on the following objectives, working with 50 special education administrative units serving 176 districts:

- creating developing an interagency transition planning process in every community
- refocusing the school curriculum and process to address transition
- empowering students and families to facilitate the transition process
- developing support for transition from community, including employers
- ongoing coordination and reorganizing service delivery among agencies to support transition
- staff training
- shifting policy at state and local levels to respond to the barriers and gaps in services
- evaluating student and community outcomes to enhance transition service.

Data collected from school teams on their year-end reports indicated strong agreement that these goals had been accomplished. However, the same survey's responses generated by the local Transition Governing Boards were split in their agreement about accomplishments, with roughly half affirmative and half negative.

Their operational indicators for meeting these transition outcomes included the following:

1. Convene local Interagency Transition Teams in every community
2. Convene local Transition Governing Boards
3. Incorporate transition into the special education planning process
4. Provide a plan for parent education and empowerment
5. Refocus school program and curriculum to support transition and student empowerment
6. Demonstrate ongoing involvement among schools, agencies, and communities

OSEP Monitoring Report

In spite of their 10+ years of effort, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) found Colorado out of compliance in transition between 1996 and 1999. Lack of transition services was cited in 8 of 20 administrative units (40%) (the highest noncompliance area of all special education areas). According to Bassett and Rude (2000), employment of a full-time transition coordinator by districts had decreased from a majority to approximately half. Missing factors included lack of interagency involvement, lack of transition goals and objectives in the IEP, and lack of identified transition services needs for 14 year olds. ***Similarly, OSEP found 21 of 32 districts in New Mexico also out of compliance in transition (66%).***

In a synthesis of state needs identified by State Education Agencies (SEAs) in the 1998 State Improvement Grant (SIG) applications, Colorado was cited by OSEP in 2 areas related to transition: (a) ensuring that IEPs for students aged 16 or older had transition statements, and (b) ensuring that public agencies are consistently inviting students to IEP meetings when transition needs are considered.

In comparison, New Mexico was cited for IEPs that failed to include statements of transition services and criteria for transition-related goals and objectives. Overall, OSEP viewed New Mexico as having an inadequate system of transition services (Federal Resource Center for Special Education, 1999).

Other Statewide Findings

Bassett and Rude (2000) reported feedback from teachers gathered informally at CDE onsite visits that indicated a lack of awareness regarding transition requirements, lack of

knowledge about how to align the transition needs of students with general education curriculum and content standards, lack of means to implement transition plans with limited resources, and lack of eligibility and services available through adult service agencies. They also reported feedback from postsecondary special services personnel about students' lack of understanding of their disabilities and lack of documentation necessary to qualify for disability-related services in higher education. Colorado's recent history led the authors to caution against leaning so exclusively toward mandated academic content standards and benchmarks and related assessment procedures that transition competencies are not addressed.

A survey on Barriers to Transition generated 80 respondents in 1995, among role groups of districts (39), BOCES (7), and developmental disabilities system personnel (3), and others. Their top 5 barriers included: academic focus of schools, parent and family involvement, self-determination, lack of adult services, and a seamless transition system (or lack thereof).

TEXAS

Texas Effectiveness Studies

The *Texas Effectiveness Studies* (Education Service Center Region XI, 1996, 1997) have been this state's primary tool to assess performance in the provision of appropriate transition services to youth with disabilities. The studies were originally mandated by the 71st Legislature in Senate Bill 417, Section 3.05. At the same time a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on transition planning for students in special education was authorized by Texas Education Code (TEC) 21.510 and incorporated into the State Board of Education rule (19 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Sec. 89.246), effective September 1990. These studies include (1) a Longitudinal or Adult Outcome Component (following students for up to a minimum of their fifth year after existing high school), (2) a Transition or In-School Component (examining the formal transition process for students exiting the school system), (3) a Retrospective Component of students who graduated by the summer of 1990, and (4) a Family-Community Case Study content analysis of student, family, and staff interviews.

The Region XI Education Service Center (ESC) was given primary responsibility to conduct this study on a periodic basis. They contracted with local districts to identify students who were in high school and others who had exited the system and to make sure that surveys were distributed effectively. Statewide focus groups were conducted at nine locations about the state to provide additional information to the state through the following questions:

Q1: How could you tell that a special education transition program is effective? For the student? For the community?

Q2: If you were to plan for such a program in your community, what kinds of information would you need?

Q3: What are the key factors that make a transition program from school to adult life successful?

Q4: What barriers do you see to the success of such a program? Can you propose solutions? (Education Service Center Region XI, 1996, p. 5)

Since these questions do not directly address the status of transition services in Texas, the reader is referred to the ESC report for a summary of these responses. Instead, the results of the

survey administered to both a longitudinal sample (1990-96) and a recently transitioned sample are summarized within the following major adult outcomes categories:

Employment

- Most students found jobs either through friends and family or on their own, with agencies playing a minor role.
- School personnel were cited as job referral sources as often as service agencies, after graduation from high school.
- Most participants had no resume or information sheet.
- One quarter to one third of all former students worked service occupation jobs, and another 20-30% worked in miscellaneous jobs; most had been employed for the six months prior to answering the survey.
- Twice as many longitudinal (former) students worked full-time in competitive employment compared to the transitioning students.
- About 20% of both transitioning and exited students were unemployed.
- More than 50% of the former students and 85% of the transition students earned less than \$12,000 annually; one-third of the former students and almost two-thirds of the transition students earned less than \$5.00 per hour; nearly half of both samples received no fringe benefits of any kind.
- The vast majority of both samples reported being satisfied with their current jobs.
- Most former students felt that their high school experiences prepared them for their current jobs.
- Barriers to employment most commonly identified were lack of training, lack of local jobs, and scarcity of local jobs for which graduates were trained; in addition, the most common barrier in the transition group was health and/or medical conditions.
- Most of the longitudinal sample expected to keep current jobs, while a little more than half of the transition students felt the same.
- Most of the longitudinal sample and only 25% of the transition sample expected to be employed competitively, full time and without support in the next year.

Independent Living

- Most graduates lived at home with parents or other family members.
- About one fifth of the longitudinal sample and less than 5% of the transition group were married with children.
- Most students in both samples were currently receiving social security income and Medicaid benefits; transportation was the service most commonly received but also the most prevalent need [one third or less of each group relied on family members for transportation; over 50% of the longitudinal group drove themselves; very few graduates relied on public transportation (<5%)].
- Other prevalent needs were family support services and help with budgeting and money management.
- Slightly over 50% of the longitudinal sample and 35% of the transition sample were registered to vote, while <25% of the former group and <12% of the latter group actually voted in the last election.
- Nearly half of each group expected to live at home with parents during this next year. Twice as many longitudinal students expected to live independently.

Recreation/Social/Leisure

- Most of both groups participated with family and friends in recreation/leisure activities, with the former group much more involved in independent activities as well.
- Most of both groups meet their current friends, with or without disabilities, while still in school.
- Nearly all in both groups reported happiness with their current friendships.

Postsecondary Education and Training

- Most in both samples did not continue education after high school; only 10% of both groups went to a 2-year or 4-year school.
- Almost one-third of both samples had no intention of pursuing postsecondary education.
- Frequently cited reasons for dropping out of further education were lack of money, lack of confidence, lack of prerequisites, and medical or health reasons (Education Service Center Region XI, 1996).

OSEP Monitoring Report

The other major source of data for transition status is the OSEP (1997) report for the state. Their monitoring process found that Texas Education Agency (TEA) had not ensured that IEPs included a statement of needed transition services that met IDEA requirements, because their Memorandum of Understanding on Transition Planning for Students Receiving Special Education Services allowed public agencies to develop separate IEPs and individualized transition plans in separate meetings. However, TEA submitted their Schedule 5C as the document used to ensure that agencies comply with all Part B requirements, about which OSEP agreed, noting that IEPs are the document where such information must be found. In addition, OSEP found that notice to parents of IEP meetings did not indicate that a purpose of the IEP meeting would be transition services consideration nor that the student was invited (OSEP Texas Monitoring Report, 1997).

UTAH

OSEP's monitoring report of 1994 did not include any findings of noncompliance related to transition. Based on Utah's self-assessment and the public input data, the steering committee recommended that OSEP investigate the following in the 1998 review:

1. The need for better collaboration between agencies;
2. Student participation in the transition planning process;
3. The effectiveness of training of school staff, parents, and students about transition issues;
4. The need for more age-appropriate settings in which to provide a free appropriate public education to 18-22 year old students who have not yet graduated.

OSEP did not identify violations of the IDEA requirements related to these issues. (OSEP Utah Monitoring Report, 1999, p. 28)

The Utah State Office of Education (USOE) was found to have several areas of strengths:

1. Its systems change grant in transition was funded from 1991-96 and the state has sustained most of the efforts that began with that project, as well as initiated new

activities: Community Transition Councils, district transition coordinators, a state level cooperative agreement between education and rehabilitation, and local agreements between education and rehabilitation.

2. A statewide transition conference conducted annually with 500-600 participants, providing orientation for new teachers and networking for all transition-related staff.
3. Collaborative efforts that include: interagency committees at the state level that reduce barriers to service delivery and seek additional federal grant 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.

One major need to improve student outcomes emerged from OSEP's visits to local districts, where staff consistently shared concerns about the lack of appropriate options for some students with disabilities who completed or aged out of high school. Sheltered workshops were the only option for some students with severe disabilities, and many with moderate and severe disabilities were staying home awaiting more appropriate opportunities. Inadequate legislative appropriations for postsecondary programs were identified as a barrier. Thus, a need for greater collaboration across relevant agencies was supported in order to improve options and outcomes (OSEP Utah Monitoring Report, 1999).

C. PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The scope of work outlined below was the result of final negotiations between the funding agency (DDPC) and the STCC.

GOAL #1: To complete a comprehensive study and a series of recommendations on transition issues and supports affecting young adults with disabilities.

Objective #1: To identify the roles and responsibilities of all appropriate agencies (including preK-12 through postsecondary education) related to effective facilitation of young adults' movement to adult life and compile a directory of agency roles and responsibilities.

Activities:

1. Collect and analyze existing studies, reports, plans, etc. concerning agency roles and responsibilities.
2. Collect and analyze State and Federal laws and regulations concerning transition agency roles and responsibilities.
3. Analyze information on State agencies' roles and responsibilities.
4. Compile a directory of current State agencies' roles and responsibilities.
5. Make recommendations on State agencies' roles and responsibilities in providing transition supports and services.

Objective #2: To identify the available supports needed and gaps in those supports, as young adults with disabilities (including developmental disabilities) make successful transitions from school to adulthood.

Activities:

1. Collect, analyze, and report on existing studies, surveys, reports, plans, and other information from the past ten years concerning transition services.
2. Design a Focus Group Protocol based on results from 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 2.1.
3. Conduct search and analysis of national and other state comparative data (Arizona, Colorado, Texas, Utah), in relation to New Mexico transition services.
4. Conduct 10 regional Focus Groups (later reduced to 6 with reduced funding) based on Focus Group Protocol to help evaluate the state's transition systems.
5. Develop a summary report evaluating the state transition systems based on activities 1.2, 2.1, 2.3, and 2.4.
6. Make recommendations concerning needs and gaps in transition services.

GOAL #2: To develop a comprehensive data base aligned with existing state databases to aggregate the current New Mexico youth and young adult population with disabilities, as well as project future figures for transition services across geographic and demographic perimeters.

Objective #1: To integrate various data sources into an integrated data structure that will identify the current number of individuals ages 0-22 with identified exceptionalities, including developmental disabilities (analyzed by various demographic, geographic, and economic factors).

Activities:

1. Identify existing state agency databases including data elements and platforms that contain needed data.
2. Analyze various data bases to define a set of data to allow a statewide count and projections.
3. Design a centralized transition data structure from existing data bases.
4. Develop programs and structure to input data from existing data bases into a transition data base.
5. Populate the transition data base from existing data bases.
6. Establish reports to provide required information (geographic, demographic, disability type and severity, etc.)
7. Make recommendations for current transition support and services needs based on gaps and services analysis and population analysis.

Objective #2: To develop an integrated data structure that will project the numbers of individuals ages 14-22 by district, county, and REC/RCC areas of the state, who will benefit from effective transition supports at 1, 3, 5, and 10 years of age.

Activities:

1. Analyze data base and develop a report structure to project counts from individuals 14 to 22 who will be needing transition services at 1, 3, 5, and 10 years.
2. Make recommendations on future transition support and services needs based on gaps and services analysis and population projection analysis.

D. METHODOLOGY

In order to accomplish the goals, objectives, and activities listed above, five major components of the project were conceived:

1. A descriptive study of state and local agencies' roles and responsibilities in the provision of transition-related services;
2. A primarily descriptive study, with some quantitative findings, of the successes and failures, or gaps, in the transition-related services provided by agencies identified in Component 1;
3. A series of focus groups to gather more in-depth descriptive information about issues highlighted during Components 1 and 2, and needing richer or more targeted data;
4. Development of a shared database of aggregated information about transition services and student outcomes, as well as project future needs.
5. A review of related research literature at the national level, with a review of related project reports, studies, and literature disseminated by 4 surrounding states, designed to portray a backdrop against which the status of transition services in New Mexico might be compared;

Highly qualified consultants were sought (even during the proposal writing phase) to collaboratively design, conduct, and summarize results of four of the components, each one a mini-study on its own. Two of these consultants or teams provided significant input into the design of the proposal and its multiple facets (#3 and #4 below). Upon award of the contract to the fiscal agent (the University of New Mexico), the following consultants or subcontractors were employed to work very closely with the two principal investigators in carrying out their respective "mini-studies."

- (1) Dr. Cynthia Bowman, as a research assistant, completed Component I, analyzing Federal and State agency roles and responsibilities related to provision of transition services.
- (2) The Arc of New Mexico (specifically Mr. Michael Allen) accomplished Component 2, analyzing 26 studies and reports on various aspects of transition in New Mexico that had been conducted between 1990 and 2001.
- (3) The University of New Mexico Center for Development and Disability (specifically Ms. Judy Stevens and Ms. Barbara Ibanez) planned and conducted six focus groups around the state, in collaboration with a self-advocate who prepared to, and did, serve as a co-facilitator for all six events.
- (4) The Horizon Company (i.e., Mr. Oliver Johnson) carried out the database access and analysis component, accessing 3 state agencies (Education, Health's Developmental Disabilities Long-Term Services Unit, and Vocational Rehabilitation).

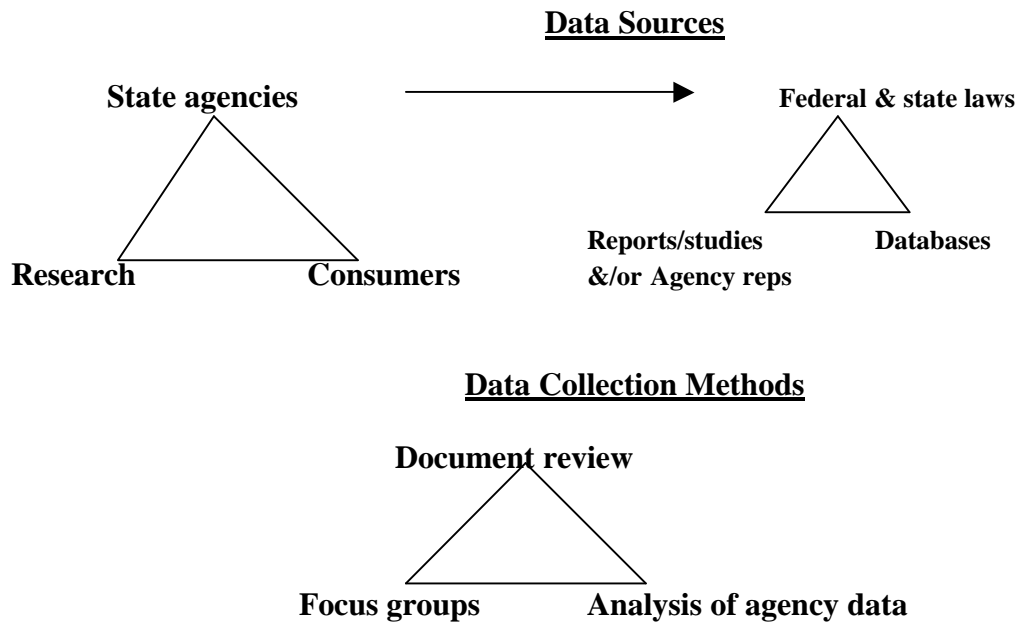
In addition, other aggregate data emerged that helped to shape a more complete picture of transition status in N.M. (Department of Labor, Transition Outcomes Project, and statewide school district results on a NMSDE questionnaire).

The initial proposal, under the auspices of the STCC, proposed an organizational structure that would support quality completion of the project’s goals and objectives. A Core Advisory Team (CAT) of ten STCC members was nominated to help guide the study throughout its implementation. This CAT met bi-monthly throughout the project’s duration to help advise, ask questions, help ameliorate barriers, and support communication with the larger STCC.

The principal investigators continuously monitored the progress of each component and shared those interim achievements as appropriate with (first) the Core Advisory Team, and then the entire STCC. These overlapping groups were asked to read, react, and possibly revise the recommendations emerging from each Component, in line with the findings presented.

A “triangulation” effect at two levels was originally designed, in order to verify the accuracy and thoroughness of information gathered (see Figure 1 below). At the global level, data were collected from 3 primary sources: state agencies, professional literature, and consumers. Within state agencies, data were collected from 3 to 4 sources: federal and state legislation, (in some instances) extant reports or studies, (in some instances) agency representatives who were STCC members, and extant databases. Triangulation also occurred through the methods chosen to collect data (document review, focus groups, and quantitative data analysis).

**Figure 1
Data Triangulation**



In order to create the final set of shared findings and recommendations, the principal investigators completed a series of steps. We examined each of the components’ findings and recommendations, created and compiled categories within which the recommendations fell, condensed a few categories where items numbered very few, and sought recurring themes in the recommendations and findings that emerged from the four major components. We used the national/regional literature reviews as critical backdrops against which to scrutinize the mini-studies’ outcomes.