

Transition

Best Practice Update

Collaborating for a successful transition to adult life

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In order for students with disabilities to successfully transition to life after high school, several elements must work together to create a “seamless transition”. A major element effecting a smooth transition is the student’s ability to advocate for himself. The student must understand that as an adult it will be his responsibility to ask for assistance when needed. For the student to do this successfully he will need to become acquainted with his needs and what services are available to meet those needs. Planning for post secondary goals helps the student learn to advocate while acquainting him with the services available in the adult world.

Successful post secondary planning should include a team of school representatives and any agencies currently serving the student or who may serve the student in the future such as:

- Vocational Rehabilitation,
- Developmental Disabilities,
- Centers for Independent Living,
- Job Services,
- Social Security,
- College/University disability support services,
- Adult Learning Centers, and
- Other community service agencies.

Having everyone actively involved will allow for comprehensive post secondary planning to occur. Early involvement of adult service providers will allow the student and their family to get access to critical information in a timely fashion. This information will allow them to make decisions that their current IEP team may not have experience with such as benefits planning, employment, and eligibility requirements within and across agencies (Crane, Gramlich, Peterson, 2004). In this setting, the student can access information from those who've worked with him over the years and then network with service providers who can help him achieve his post school goals all prior to leaving high school.

As agencies work together to plan for students transitioning from high school to the adult world, there are essentially four ways in which they can interact:

Four ways to work together:

1. “Through **networking**, people gain an awareness of available resources and discover how to access or refer individuals to those services. An example of networking might be a transition coordinator *talking* with local business owners to identify possible job training sites for students. While networking is an essential step in collaboration, it will not be enough for students who have complex transition service needs.
2. “Service **coordination** assists in the selection and scheduling of services. In coordinating, people *arrange* for a student with disabilities to receive specific services from different agencies (for example, one agency making a phone call to another agency to determine their respective roles and to schedule activities).
3. “With **cooperation**, people look for ways to *support and complement* one another's transition services. For example, an adult services agency may accept a student's recent test results from his or her school to determine the student's eligibility for services. This would prevent the student from being tested twice and would save the adult services agency time and expense.
4. “**Collaboration** begins with networking, coordination, and cooperation and then requires team members to *share decisions, responsibility, and trust*. It requires that team members invest time and energy to come up with options and design strategies for carrying out these plans. Because collaboration requires lots of time and energy, it is impossible to make all decisions collaboratively. In some instances, the desired result can be achieved through networking, coordination, or cooperation. Working together, or collaboratively, invites participation of multiple service providers and the use of multiple resources.” (deFur, 1999).

Interagency Collaboration

Collaboration is vital for student success in the adult world (Center for Innovation in Education, 1999). Even with everyone at the table, a student may still experience a less than ideal transition as he encounters gaps in adult services. These gaps are often due to each service agency operating in isolation from one another and under a slightly different set of policies, practices, and procedures with different definitions and standards of eligibility. Through interagency collaboration adult service agencies can direct their collective expertise and combined resources to fill these gaps and improve the quality of transition planning and coordinated services (Crane et al., 2004).

Interagency collaborative partnerships are based on mutual trust and caring which allow all partners to work together in a relationship that will benefit all students with disabilities transitioning in the community (Center for Innovation in Education, 1999). The following is a list of recommended activities that agencies should consider when forming collaborative partnerships:

Suggested activities when forming collaborative partnerships:

- Identify current services, programs, and funding sources provided within the community for secondary- and postsecondary-aged youth with disabilities and their families;
- Facilitate the development of multiagency teams to address present and future transition needs of students in their IEPs;
- Develop a community plan to include mission, goals and objectives, and an implementation strategy to assure that transition needs of individuals with disabilities are met;
- Recommend changes or improvements of transition services within the community system;
- Exchange agency information such as appropriate data, effectiveness studies, special projects, exemplary programs, and creative funding of programs; and
- Prepare an annual summary assessing the progress of transition services in the community, including information about postschool outcomes for individuals with disabilities who were provided transition services. (Koyanagi, Boudreaux, & Lind, 2003)

Interagency Agreements

Once collaborative partnerships are formed, the Rehabilitation Act Amendment of 1973 (amended in 1998) “recommends that states establish teams to develop formal interagency agreements” (Center for Innovation in Education, 1999). “An interagency agreement is a commitment of shared responsibility for student learning and a plan for the school, community, and family to collaborate in achieving positive adult outcomes for youth with disabilities” (Crane et al., 2004). These agreements require consensus on each partner’s duties and financial responsibilities and spell them out in writing. One written form of interagency agreement is called a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). A MOA documents the interagency collaborative efforts and can be used between government agencies, schools, community based organizations, individual vendors, and/or for profit businesses (Timmons, 2007).

In North Dakota (ND) a MOU to cooperate and collaborate in providing services has been signed between:

- Department of Public Instruction (Office of Special Education),
- Department of Human Services (Disability Services Division- Vocational Rehabilitation, Developmental Disabilities, and Children’s Special Health Services Unit),
- Job Service North Dakota
- Department of Career and Technical Education

To view ND's MOU visit:

- Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Cooperation and Collaboration in Providing Services to Students with Disabilities Ages 16-21 in North Dakota:
<http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/transitn/undrstnd.pdf>

Community Resource Mapping

A major activity that collaborative partnerships are undertaking to improve transitional services for students with disabilities is community resource mapping. Most community services are not comprehensive enough to meet all students' needs and if used in isolation from other services are commonly duplicated. Resource mapping identifies these existing community services and resources, looks at how to build on them, develops partnerships, and focuses efforts on an agreed upon goal (Crane & Skinner, 2003). Through resource mapping partnerships can:

- Identify new resources to be developed or enhanced,
- Determine if existing resources are being used effectively,
- Improve coordination of resources,
- Enhance coordination and collaboration of partners with relevant resources, and
- Develop new policies and legislation to better meet goals. (Crane & Skinner, 2003)

For more information on community resource mapping visit:

ESSENTIAL TOOLS: Community Resource Mapping

<http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/mapping/default.asp>

Regional Transition Committees

As services and resources vary from community to community, many collaborative partnerships are formed to address transition issues within a specific community or region. Regional partnerships "provide a forum for establishing mutual goals and objectives" between different service agencies in a specific area (Center for Innovation in Education, 1999). To foster collaborative efforts in the state, the ND Department of Public Instruction and Vocational Rehabilitation have facilitated the formation of regional transition committees to establish common objectives and activities that will strengthen transition efforts for students with disabilities exiting high school. Some regional committee activities in ND include:

- Informational Packets for Parents of students with disabilities of transition age
- Directory of statewide and regional agencies, including information on type of services, eligibility requirements, and agency contact information.
- Universal Referral Forms
- Transition Career and Tech Fairs

Funding Collaborative Activities

Funding collaborative activities can be complex as agencies face personnel issues, bureaucratic barriers, and agency priorities which can preclude funding options that best serve the student (Timmons, 2007). It is important to know that “most funding for state and local transition programs...depends on the authority of three federal laws –

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),
- Title I of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), and
- Vocational Rehabilitation Act, found under Title IV of WIA.” (Timmons, 2004)

This separation of funds and programs often leads to schools and human service agencies functioning in isolation or from uncoordinated agendas (Crane et al., 2004). “To be successful and sustaining, these collaborations must be able to work together, share resources, and find creative and flexible ways to fund programs and share the financial burden” (Timmons, 2007).

Two ways in which agencies can share the financial burden of collaborative activities are called blending and braiding. Both “combine funds from different federal agencies or programs into a single funding stream so they can be used more easily at the point of service delivery” (Timmons, 2007). Blended funding requires more formal agreements and permission from higher level administrators to form a single pool of resources from which funding can be allocated to service providers. Braided funding is less formal and can be administered by local levels as it uses resources from various sources to pay for a service package for an individual. Tracking of funds with braided funding is managed by each individual agency because the funding does not create a single pool of resources (Timmons, 2007).

The following is a list of suggested activities related to pooling resources to fund collaborative activities:

Recommended activities when contemplating pooling financial resources:

- Have a clear vision of the programs stakeholders are trying to finance;
- Engage in collaborative planning across agencies and with families;
- Understand the timeline, recipients’ needs, and reporting requirements for the use of federal funds;
- Create a funding strategy that merges and maximizes different funding sources—federal and other—so that participant needs drive agency decisions on which services to provide;
- Focus on outcomes but recognize the need for accountability—in particular, cost-accounting must be rigorous to demonstrate how program requirements are being met by tracking, documenting, and accounting for funds as well as demonstrating outcomes;
- Possess a data infrastructure that can provide the essential information needed to ensure accountability; and
- Provide training and cross-training of staff (Koyanagi et al., 2003).

Summary

As collaborative partnerships work to improve services for students, it is important to remember to keep our efforts student and family centered. This requires partnerships to build on shared values while developing an understanding of each partner's individual mission and policies. Partners must be willing to challenge perceived policies in order to uncover the real barriers to successful collaboration. In addition, each partner must be flexible and work together to find new and creative ways of providing services so that all students can be benefited.

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