

VIII. SECONDARY TRANSITION

The National Longitudinal Transition Study states that the rate of competitive employment for youth with disabilities out of school for three to five years was 57 percent, compared to an employment rate of 69% for youth in the general population.¹⁰ The study identifies several factors that were associated with post-school success in obtaining employment and earning higher wages for youth with disabilities. These factors include completing high school, spending more time in regular education, and taking vocational education in secondary school. The study also shows that post-school success is associated with youth who had a transition plan in high school that specified an outcome, such as employment, as a goal. The secondary transition requirements of IDEA focus on the active involvement of students in transition planning, consideration of students' preferences and interests by the IEP team, and the reflection, in the IEP, of a coordinated set of activities within an outcome-oriented process which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation. Through parent and student involvement, along with the involvement of all agencies that can provide transition services, student needs can be appropriately identified and services provided that can best meet those needs.

NJSDE's 1999 Biennial Performance Report submitted to OSEP for the period of 1997-1999 states that the graduation rate for special education students was virtually the same for general education (97%) and special education students (96%) for the 1997-98 school. Thirty percent of students in special education who graduated passed either the High School Proficiency Assessment or the Special Review Assessment. Data were unavailable for 1999.

NJSDE has the responsibility of ensuring the provision of secondary transition services, either as special education when provided as specially designed instruction, or as a related service, if required to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education. Transition services are essential supports to assist students with disabilities secure the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

In a recent U.S. Department of Education-funded secondary transition implementation study in three states, onsite interviews were conducted with administrators, policy makers, and stakeholders considered by nationally recognized experts in transition policies and practices.¹¹ Seven common themes related to the successful implementation of transition policies were identified: (1) creating an environment (both within and outside the public agency) conducive to implementation of transition policies and practices; (2) using a direct policy approach to create changes related to transition; (3) sharing leadership; (4) engaging in substantive collaboration around governance and practice; (5) building capacity for long-lasting change; (6) linking

¹⁰ Blackorby, J. and Wagner, M. (1996). Longitudinal Postschool Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities: Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study. *Exceptional Children*.

¹¹ In these studies, success is defined as substantial progress in implementing the transition requirements of IDEA as judged by a national panel of experts. For a more complete description of this process, see Furney, Hasazi, and Destefano (1997) and (1998).

transition to other restructuring efforts; and (7) using results of research and evaluation to enhance policy and practice.

Validation Planning and Data Collection

Prior Monitoring

OSEP made findings of noncompliance in 1994 to 1998 that IEPs did not include statements of needed transition services. The corrective action plans required NJSDE to ensure compliance with §300.346(b)(1) (now §300.347(b)(1)).

The corrective action plan included in the 1999 OSEP Monitoring Report required NJSDE to develop and implement a plan, with detailed steps and timelines, that would ensure that, within one year from the date of the Report, beginning no later than age 16 and at a younger age, if determined appropriate, each student's IEP includes a statement of the needed transition services as defined in 34 CFR §300.18. The plan required NJSDE to include the procedures used and provide documentation to OSEP that the corrective actions had been taken.

NJSDE Self-Assessment

The NJSDE Self-Assessment Report included accomplishments related to secondary transition: (1) providing technical services to transitioning students; (2) implementing transition initiatives; (3) increased awareness, dissemination of information, and resources, development of guidelines and technical assistance document development due to the transition systems change grant; (4) student involvement in their own transition planning; (5) SEA monitoring of transition planning and outcomes; and (6) students placed in private schools are prepared for independent living, etc.

The Steering Committee highlighted several areas in need of improvement including: increased student participation in transition planning; (2) student preparation to participate in transition planning and decision-making; (3) standardized competencies for transition coordinators; (4) need to utilize community resources to complement learning; (5) increase community participation in transition planning to facilitate improved post-school outcomes; (6) provision of vocational assessments; and (7) parent and student education regarding rights as they relate to transition services.

State and public agency level initiatives were underway during the September 2000 OSEP monitoring visit, with evidence of positive impact on seven of eight of the local education agencies visited by OSEP. These initiatives, along with the new monitoring system and the self-assessment, have translated into overall improved practices with regard to secondary transition. The self-assessment indicated that it is noteworthy that students under the authority of the NJSDE receive instruction in the core curriculum standards and receive regular high school diplomas upon successful completion of their program. NJSDE embraces the premise that students with disabilities who are involved in and progress in the general curriculum are more likely to have positive postsecondary outcomes.

A. AREA OF STRENGTH

NJSDE Statewide Training/Technical Assistance Initiative to Enhance Local School District Practices in Meeting Secondary Transition Requirements

NJSDE has provided extensive systemic technical assistance to public agencies and has demonstrated potential promising practices in meeting the requirements of transition services such as the development of a statewide Transition Coordinator Network; the development of the School to Careers Program (with a Comprehensive Career and Planning program option; and conducting six statewide Student Leadership Conferences on Self-determination. NJSDE is co-sponsoring a new Secondary Transition Newsletter with the New Jersey Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN). Future projects include developing a transition web site and conducting a transition outcome study.

Collaborative efforts with the State Learning Resource Centers to provide training to high-risk public agencies were reported by the State.¹² Monthly meetings, with local Special Education Directors, School-to-Work and Human Services Administrators, augment the state's efforts to analyze all documents regarding policy and procedural requirements impacting the provision of transition services. A state model IEP containing transition planning has been a byproduct of such meetings. The model IEP also incorporates the transfer of rights requirements into the document to ensure that this new IDEA requirement is met.

B. SUGGESTION FOR IMPROVED RESULTS

Effective Technical Assistance and Training for Parents, Students, Educators and Agency Personnel

As defined at §300.29, transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The services are based on the individual student's needs, taking into account his or her preferences and interests and includes: instruction; related services; community experiences; and the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives.

OSEP observed varying factors and levels of implementation that impeded local education agencies' ability to effectively implement the transition requirements. Although NJSDE extensive training has been provided by the state at the administrative level, a major contributor to the disparate practices and implementation of the transition requirements is that technical assistance and training are needed at the practitioner level. Other factors found by OSEP that impede the local agency's ability to implement the transition requirements, included a lack of parent, student and agency participation, especially those agencies that may be responsible for providing or paying for transition services. The failure of the public agency to design a coordinated set of activities within an outcome oriented-process undermines one of the primary

¹² During OSEP's follow-up visit (June 2001), OSEP saw evidence of the impact of NJSDE's extensive technical assistance efforts in creating positive secondary and post-secondary outcomes for youth with disabilities.

purposes of the IDEA, "to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living".

As suggested in the OSEP funded three-State implementation study, state and local level agencies should create an environment conducive to implementing transition requirements through capacity-building activities including inter-professional in-service and pre-service development opportunities for educators and adult services providers; summer institutes; conferences for students (especially focusing on developing self-advocacy skills), parents and educators (emphasizing empowerment through providing opportunities and resources to learn about and implement innovative transition practices and services); and promoting more systemic changes across agencies.

In those local education agencies where ineffective implementation of the transition requirements persists, OSEP encourages NJSDE to assist local education agencies in adopting the State's IEP transition forms for developing IEPs where transition is the subject of the meeting. Additionally, the recently released publication, IDEA' 97 Transition Requirements: A Guide for States, Districts, Schools, Universities and Families, offers a set of suggested activities before, during, and after the IEP meeting which may assist practitioners develop transition plans for students with disabilities to assure positive postsecondary outcomes.¹³ Model forms and other supporting documents are included in the guide for consideration.

As noted in the General Supervision section of this Report (Section VI), Section 612(a)(14) of IDEA, which incorporates a portion of section 653, indicates that each state must develop strategies that it will use to address the identified needs for in-service and pre-service preparation to ensure that all personnel who work with children with disabilities (including professional and paraprofessional personnel who provide special education, general education, related services or early intervention services) have the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the needs of children with disabilities. This plan must include a description of how the state will provide joint training to parents along with special education, related services and general education personnel. NJSDE must continue to provide technical assistance and training in the development of and implementation of transition requirements in the IEPs of eligible youth with disabilities, including opportunities to increase knowledge of school personnel, parents and youth with disabilities.

OSEP Follow-Up Visit in 2001

In four of the districts visited by OSEP in June, 2001 two of the districts had corrected noncompliance in the area of secondary transition and the other two districts were in the process of beginning implementation of their corrective action plans approved by NJSDE in March 2001. New Jersey is providing direct oversight and targeted technical assistance in these two districts to ensure effective correction of noncompliance in the area of secondary transition.

¹³ Storms, J., O'Leary, E., and Williams, J. (May, 2000). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 Transition Requirements: A Guide for States, Districts, Schools, Universities and Families. Minneapolis, Minnesota: National Transition Network