Building Alliances

A How-To Manual to Support Transitioning Youth

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Contents

Introduction
Collaborating to Deliver Effective Transition Services

Over the last two decades, postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities have improved, but these youth are not experiencing postschool outcomes at the same rate as their typically developing peers in the areas of education, employment, and independent living (Newman et al., 2011). Research indicates that when youth with disabilities access collaborative services during high school, they are more likely to experience positive postschool outcomes (Noonan, Gaumer-Erikson, & Morningstar, 2013; Test et al., 2009). To ensure these youth have the skills and supports needed for a successful postschool life, school personnel and community service providers should collaborate throughout the transition planning process to support youth with disabilities in all aspects of the school environment while they are still in high school. According to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2006), *transition* is

> A coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed to be within a results oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. (34 C.F.R. § 300.43[a][1])

Defining transition services as a "coordinated set of activities" makes collaboration among stakeholders at the secondary and postsecondary levels a key factor in implementing the law. Therefore, *effective collaboration*, defined as an "interactive process characterized by mutual respect, trust, and open communication" (Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013, p. 129), is necessary to support students' transition into postschool life.

Successful transition planning requires a partnership among students, families, school-age service or program providers, postschool service or program providers, and local community members to ensure the process supports youth with disabilities (Benz, Lindstrom, & Halpern, 1995; Hands, 2010; Kohler & Field, 2003). A collaborative transition team should meet regularly to plan and coordinate services to ensure youth with disabilities have a satisfactory transition experience that provides opportunities for meaningful work and living environments postschool (Test, Aspel, & Everson, 2006). These kinds of collaborative partnerships predict positive postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities (Rowe et al., 2015; Test et al., 2009). For example, Bullis, Davis, Bull, and Johnson (1995) found that students with disabilities who received support from three or more agencies in high school were more than twice as likely to engage in employment and educational opportunities postschool than students who received support from two or fewer agencies. In addition, Repetto, Webb, Garvan, and Washington (2002) found that interagency council activities, such as creating agency directories, providing general

Chapter 1

Find the Right People: Identifying Critical Stakeholders

CEC-DCDT Collaboration Competencies for Transition Personnel addressed in this chapter...

Knowledge	Skills
• Roles and responsibilities of educators, employers, and other stakeholders in a variety of settings related to postsecondary outcomes.	• Promote active involvement of families, especially those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, throughout the transition decision-making and implementation processes. • Communicate with employers and other professionals to develop and monitor natural support networks. • Disseminate transition information and resources to stakeholders. • Participate in community-level transition teams.

For students to successfully transition to postschool activities, stakeholders must collaborate. *Stakeholders* include, but are not limited to, students with disabilities, families, school personnel, employers, and community service providers. During school, youth can be inundated with the programs and services provided by different individuals (e.g., general education teachers, special education teachers, speech and language pathologists, transition specialists, guidance counselors). Although these individuals offer different services, they share the same ultimate goal: to prepare youth for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living (Hein, Smerdon, & Sambolt, 2013). In order to achieve this goal, these individuals must communicate on a regular basis and collaborate with one another to align all services in preparation for a successful transition.

One challenge youth and families face during the postsecondary transition process is the shift from entitlement of services to a system in which youth must meet eligibility requirements (Steere, Rose, & Cavaiuolo, 2007). The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2006) requires state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to provide students with disabilities a free, appropriate public education. Therefore, the K–12 educational system is a system of *entitlement*. Special education and related services are required to meet an individual's unique needs and to provide preparation for further education, employment, and independent living (Wood, Kelley, Test, & Fowler, 2010).

Chapter 2

Put It Together: Building Collaborative Teams

CEC-DCDT Collaboration Competencies for Transition Personnel addressed in this chapter...

Knowledge	Skills
• Roles and responsibilities of educators, employers, and other stakeholders in a variety of settings related to postsecondary outcomes.	• Promote active involvement of families, especially those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, throughout the transition decision-making and implementation processes. • Communicate with employers and other professionals to develop and monitor natural support networks. • Disseminate transition information and resources to stakeholders. • Participate in community-level transition teams.

Several types of collaborative partnerships can occur when planning and implementing a student's transition to postschool. The need to identify roles and responsibilities of key team members is just the first step in the collaborative process. Community-level teams can be formed to help one or multiple districts connect schools with the community. School-level teams can be developed to support the transition planning efforts for all youth in a school, and individual-level teams can be developed to support the transition needs of individual students. After identifying the roles and responsibilities of collaborative team members, the next step is to pinpoint strategies for building and facilitating the collaborative process.

Building Collaborative Teams

To build an effective team, identify initial members, select a team leader, establish rapport among members, and agree upon a common goal (Blalock, 1996; Noonan, 2014). Fabian, Luecking, and Tilson (1994) suggested five fundamental characteristics that must exist to develop an effective team:

Chapter **3**

Put It in Motion: Mapping the Community

CEC-DCDT Collaboration Competencies for Transition Personnel addressed in this chapter...

Knowledge	Skills
• Employment trends and needs in the community.	• Promote active involvement of families, especially those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, throughout the transition decision-making and implementation processes. • Communicate with employers and other professionals to develop and monitor natural support networks. • Disseminate transition information and resources to stakeholders. • Participate in community-level transition teams. • Implement student and family referrals to postsecondary and community services.

Effective collaboration on behalf of transitioning youth with disabilities cannot happen without involvement from the community. *Collaborative exchange* is the level of collaboration that most involves the community and best serves transitioning students with disabilities (Test, Aspel, & Everson, 2006; Wehman, Moon, Everson, Wood, Barcus, 1988). It requires being aware of all the services and supports available to students and families in the school and the community and identifying issues within the community that may create barriers for a successful transition (Rutgers Safe and Drug Free Schools Community Project, 2009). *Community mapping* is one way to organize information and give direction to meeting a common goal related to secondary transition program planning, allowing youth with disabilities and their families more flexibility as they move from a system of entitlement to one of eligibility.

The primary purpose of community mapping is to improve the transition from secondary school to postschool for youth with disabilities by identifying areas of need and aligning available services and resources from schools, employers, and community service agencies (Stodden, Brown, Galloway, Mrazek, & Noy, 2004).

Chapter **4**

Put It in Writing: Developing Collaborative Agreements

CEC-DCDT Collaboration Competencies for Transition Personnel addressed in this chapter...

Knowledge	Skills
• Strategies for collaborating with stakeholders to ensure and increase effective transition services, supports, and outcomes for youth with disabilities and their families.	• Promote active involvement of families, especially those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, throughout the transition decision-making and implementation processes. • Coordinate interagency agreements and partnerships to use and share data to achieve postsecondary outcomes. • Communicate with employers and other professionals to develop and monitor natural support networks. • Disseminate transition information and resources to stakeholders. • Participate in community-level transition teams. • Ensure compliance with federal and state policies affecting transition (e.g., Fair Labor Standards Act). • Implement student and family referrals to postsecondary and community services. • Communicate regularly with employers, businesses, and worksite personnel.

Collaboration among school personnel and community service agencies is imperative to ensure effective transition planning for youth with disabilities. Services are often administered by dozens of inflexible agencies and programs with diverse needs and objectives that have their own funding, guidelines, and requirements. Rules governing expenditure of funds and services provided vary as well (Steere, Rose, & Cavaiuolo, 2007). Without collaboration, it is difficult to align services and maximize benefits for youth with disabilities. Most important, unlike public education, there is no legal mandate for provision of services after a student leaves high school.