



Summary of Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

Interim Charge #6

June 16, 2010

Issue:

Are youth with disabilities receiving the quality and quantity of transition services needed to be prepared to transition successfully to post-secondary education or competitive employment?

According to the 2007 U.S. Census data:

- There were approximately 219,000 youth with disabilities ages 16 – 24 years in Texas;
- 61% of these youth between the ages of 18 – 24 years were unemployed;
- 33% of these youth between the ages of 18 – 24 years did not finish high school.

Quality outcomes should be the priority when making policy decisions relating to transition services for youth with disabilities, and currently, many youth are not experiencing successful outcomes after exiting the public school system. Too many of our children are still unemployed, without social connections, and with few opportunities for independence in sight.

Parents' Perspective:

Below is a sampling of the responses received from parents after an inquiry regarding their child's transition experience. In a few places, meaningful transition is taking place or at least attempted; in many districts, however, little more than daycare is offered and, in some places it is obvious to parents that the goal is to exit the student from the district as soon as possible. Some of the responses:

- *It isn't happening. Need I say more? (East Texas)*
- *Transition services in Texas are successful if the parent knows what the services are about... transition services are successful for the few-and outright non-existent for the rest. This is my opinion and experience.*
- *Transition services for those with significant disabilities are basically non-existent. That is one reason why homeschooling got Nathan where he is today. (Austin)*
- *DARS fails with these people (people on the autism spectrum) because the expectations are for these individuals to learn how to write a resume and be able to find a job. We need a special plan for individuals within the autism spectrum. We need training for DARS. We need training for schools working with these individuals. (San Antonio)*

Quality transition planning takes commitment and the belief that these kids have the potential to contribute, and the right to a life that includes more than sitting on mom's sofa for 8 hours a day. Unfortunately, that is what is happening for far too many of our students with disabilities.

The Barriers to Meaningful Transition:

Some barriers are attitudinal and ingrained in local education culture (how priorities are set), but many are inadequacies in practice and policies such as:

- No standardized policies across districts as to what services and transition supports should be available
- No accountability for quality transition plans and meaningful outcomes
- No meaningful information provided to parents regarding their child's right to comprehensive transition services
- Little collaboration among agencies
- No meaningful data collected by TEA (Quality Indicators 13 and 14 tell us nothing)

Caution:

The results of the HB 1230 Monitoring Report: Transition Experience of Texas Youth with Disabilitiesⁱⁱ, should be reviewed with significant qualifiers including:

1. ***The survey did not address the quality or quantity of TEA/ISD transition services (only HHS services).*** By the time youth exit the public education system, they should have received anywhere from 4-8 years of transition planning and services. The quality and quantity of these services are critical when evaluating transition outcomes of Texas youth with disabilities.
2. Individuals selected to participate in the focus groups were connected to various advocacy organizations; this increases the likelihood of a higher level of knowledge regarding transition services than that of the general population. Often, the level of knowledge and veracity of the parents impacts the quantity and quality of the services received.
3. Individuals selected to participate in the telephone survey conducted by North Texas State University were selected from the data bases of the various agencies. These data bases only include those currently in the system, or those who have contacted the various agencies for services. ***It does not include the vast number of youth who have never entered or requested services from health and human services agencies.***
4. When individuals/families don't know what services ***should*** be available or what services they have a right to receive, they are often "satisfied" with whatever they can get. However, if they knew what should be available based on best-practices, what they are currently getting may no longer seem satisfactory.
5. Several sections of the report reflect on "Current Employment Status." This is only a point-in-time measurement and does not provide significant information on how long the individual was employed, how many job transitions the individual has experienced, and the quality of the match between the current employment and the individual's skills, abilities, interests, and desires.

Recommendations:

1. Change state requirements to begin transition planning at age 13 years. *However*, starting earlier doesn't help if what you're doing is not meaningful.
2. Planning needs to be about the whole child and not simply employment or post-secondary education. Cross agency responsibility and collaboration must improve. Developing employment opportunities means little if you don't have a place to live or someone to help you get out of bed in the morning.
3. Direct TEA to develop quality transition planning and service standards that include a full spectrum of transition services based on the individual student's needs. Additionally, direct TEA to develop these transition standards based on true outcomes for the youth, and use these standards in school monitoring to build accountability into the delivery of transition services.

4. Require TEA to revise the transition quality indicators (#13 and #14) to collect meaningful outcome data.
5. Direct TEA to develop and distribute a Texas specific comprehensive guide for transition services for students with disabilities, to be distributed to the student and the parents beginning at age 13 years.
6. Require each district and/or cooperative to identify a transition specialist, with specific training requirements developed by TEA.
7. Consider developing unique programs that have been successful in other states, e.g. the certification program for individuals with intellectual disabilities at East New Mexico State University; Project Search developed in Ohio and now in more than 80 states (happening in a very few places in Texas).

Special Considerations:

- Children with serious emotional disturbance
- Children in/leaving the child protective services(CPS) system

Without meaningful and comprehensive transition planning, children with developmental disabilities often spend their days at home watching TV, or worse, in an institution. For youth with serious emotional disturbance, the consequences of poor transition planning can be much worse and can result in homelessness, placement in a state hospital, or incarceration in the criminal justice system.

Additionally, many of the youth aging out of the CPS conservatorship have experienced significant mental health challenges and therefore need significant support and preparation for life after CPS. For these youth, comprehensive transition planning is imperative to avoid the consequences mentioned above. The HB 1912 Workgroup has developed a series of recommendations specific to transition for children with disabilities in the CPS system.

Summary:

Too many of our children are leaving the school districts ill-prepared for competitive employment or post-secondary education. This negatively impacts the student's quality of life and has a negative impact on the Texas economy. The benefits of meaningful transition planning have been proven over and over again in research. It's not rocket-science and we know what needs to happen. When "transition outcomes for youth with disabilities" is "googled," there are more than 3 million sites. We don't need to re-invent the wheel but we do need to look at what works and put that into place throughout Texas.

Some things that we know work include:

- individualized person-centered planning (need to plan for transition based on the student's interests, skills, etc. and not on what is convenient, e.g., everyone bags groceries at the grocery store),
- early transition planning with meaningful and measurable outcomes,
- cross agency/environment use of positive behavior supports,
- effective cross-agency collaboration
- commitment of adequate resources
- commitment to transition planning that addresses the needs of the "whole child."

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ⁱ American Community Survey, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/disability/2006acs.html>, 2007.

ⁱⁱ *H.B. 1230 Monitoring Report: Transition Experience of Texas Youth with Disabilities*, Health and Human Services Commission, May, 2009.