



Summary of Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

March 1, 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?

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.

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:

- Transition planning begins too late; however, simply starting earlier isn't enough if what you're doing isn't useful
- 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 outcome data currently collected by TEA

TEA Performance Indicators #13 and #14

Performance indicator #13 addresses the requirement to develop post-secondary goals.

Percent of youth with IEPs aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that are annually updated and based upon an age appropriate transition assessment, transition services, including courses of study, that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals, and annual IEP goals related to the student's transition service needs. There also must be evidence that the student was invited to the IEP Team meeting where transition services are to be discussed and evidence that, if appropriate, a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority.

Indicator #13 is only meaningful if it is comprehensively addressed by defining specific goals, identifying activities that will take place to accomplish those goals, and specifying who is responsible for making sure the activities are carried out. It is also important to re-evaluate those goals and activities each year to ensure that they are still appropriate. Too often, perfunctory attention is paid to this requirement – the goals are too broad, the same ones are repeated each year, and the activities are inconsequential and do little to support real development of post-secondary potential.

Performance indicator #14 is intended to measure post-secondary outcomes for students.

Percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and were:

A. Enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school.

B. Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school

C. Enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school.

This indicator is fairly meaningless as it provides no information regarding post-secondary outcomes. Asking if the individual was "enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school," doesn't tell you if the individual held a job for six-months, or six hours. It doesn't tell you if an individual completed a semester of post-secondary education or a day. It doesn't tell you if the young adult had one job for six months, or eight jobs in six months. This current indicator provides no true outcome data.

Revising the transition indicators is one step that should be taken to improve outcomes for young adults. The state has been paying to educate these individuals for 13-16 years. It is a waste of both potential and taxpayers dollars to have them leave school with little possibility for employment.

Recommendations:

1. Change state requirements to begin transition planning at age 14 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. 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 you "google" "transition outcomes for youth with disabilities," there are 3,790,000 sites identified. 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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