

Transition

The Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development (GUCCHD) is the designated University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) for the District of Columbia. The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (PL 106-402) requires each UCEDD to establish a Consumer Advisory Council (CAC). The CAC provides guidance and consultation on the development and implementation of the UCEDD five year plan. In the current (2007-2012) approved five year plan one of the activities of the CAC is the development of an annual paper on a pertinent issue impacting the lives of individuals with developmental and other disabilities. The topic selected this year by the members of the CAC is Transition.



Consumer Advisory Council 2010-2011

What is Transition?

Transition is the term used to describe the change or evolution of the life of an individual as they move from one milestone to the next. Transitions occur at many points throughout a person's life. These transitions are usually associated with positive accomplishments such as graduation from high school, attending college, first jobs, and living as an independent adult. Although they are never seamless for anyone, the most significant transition from high school into adulthood can be confusing, delayed, and even blocked for individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities by lack of information, misunderstanding, poor planning, and societal barriers.

There are laws that are in place to make these transitions for students with disabilities smoother and more successful. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), PL 108-446, specifically requires services and an individualized plan to assist individuals who receive special education and related services with transition. IDEA defines these *TRANSITION SERVICES*, as: *a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that—“(A) 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 post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; “(B) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's*

strengths, preferences, and interests; and “(C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

There are five areas that are most important to successful transition according to the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC): student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, family involvement; and program structures. Additionally, high quality transitions have been associated with high expectations for the student by their family, the school, and the community (Girgal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011).

This paper illustrates what the issues and barriers are in the District of Columbia around youth to adult transition, offers recommendations for improving transition services and provides information about some of the initiatives and resources to overcome the challenges to successful transitions for residents with intellectual and other developmental disabilities and their families. There are many entities/resources on transition planning nationwide and a listing of resources can be found at the end of this document, including checklists to assist parents in the transition process.

Overriding Philosophy of Successful Transition

The transition process for all students with disabilities should embody the intrinsic values in every child’s life to plan and dream about their goals enhancing their future dreams through a birth to adult process as mandated by law. The transition process should be a system that defines and builds skills from early childhood through transition to enhance real outcomes and inclusive opportunities at all levels. Transition should provide individuals with life preparation so that they can

implement their plan for life after school. *A plan that includes: their dreams, wishes, goals and desires and skills necessary to prepare them for the next steps beyond high school.*

Issues and Barriers to Successful Transition

The CAC members know first-hand the obstacles encountered by students with disabilities and their families in the development of transition plans that are timely, person centered, encompass strengths, addresses vocational and other related areas, and that result in a comprehensive document that is actually used for a successful transition from school to the world beyond. A thorough Transition Plan should address: postsecondary education, training, employment; and independent living and community participation.

Nationally, students and their families are encountering barriers to comprehensive planning and successful transition. Lack of information about postsecondary education, an overemphasis on sheltered workshop employment, low expectations, very low employment rates or opportunities, and lack of planning for independent living and community participation are frequently experienced by students with disabilities leaving high school, but most especially for students with intellectual disabilities (Girgal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011).

Students in the District of Columbia experience these challenges as well as some unique issues. The main issues in the District are lack of information for families and students, late or no transition planning, lack of resources and knowledge within school systems and the community around transition, lack of information and collaboration about diploma and post secondary opportunities, and the lack of a universal system of transition planning at each stage in a student’s educational life from early childhood through high school.

Specifically, the current issues that impact the successful transition planning in the District of Columbia include:

- **Lack of Information, Resources and Knowledge:**

Families, students, educators and the community at large have limited or no information about transition services and processes for youth in the District of Columbia. Further, families who do not speak English or are guardians, foster parents, or kinship caregivers are even less likely to receive timely transition information. As mandated by IDEA, Individualized Education Programs (IEP) must include a transition plan as early as 14 years of age in order for individuals and their families to navigate the future but many families, students, and even school system personnel such as administrators and educators are not aware of this. Many families are not informed at an early enough age about transition, benefits, and options for their children. All parties need greater awareness and knowledge so they are empowered to maintain high expectations for their children and have the ability to make the choices to meet those expectations for education, work, and life.

- **Incomplete or Late Transitions:** There is a large number of students between the ages of 17 and 22 years with disabilities that have not received transition services. There is an **urgent** need for information and training for this group of students and their families. They need assistance to plan for and complete their transitions, understand and sign up for community benefits, find jobs, find housing or appropriate living situations, and participate in their communities. In addition there is a large number of students age 14-22 that are ready to transition from the District of Columbia Public Schools, a significant portion of whom have intellectual and other developmental disabilities, that should currently be receiving transition services and implementing plans.

- **Diploma vs. High School Certificate:** A lack of understanding exists about diploma options and preparation for transition including post secondary education. Information about the advantages and disadvantages of a high school diploma versus a high school certificate is lacking among education personnel, families and students. Students may be tracked into certificate programs which limit post secondary education choices. Students and their families are sometimes not made fully aware of these choices and often are not active participants in making this decision.
- **Limited Postsecondary Opportunities:** There are limited opportunities for individuals with disabilities to further their education after high school. Transition planning personnel often overlook post secondary education as an option for youth with intellectual disabilities without understanding the opportunities and benefits for this group of individuals. There is a need for more collaboration with post secondary education institutions to provide opportunities for students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities to build capacity of the community to respond to the needs of the students transitioning.
- **Need for a Universal Transition Program:** A program that engages children with disabilities, families and school system personnel from early childhood through adulthood in planning for all of their transitions would increase the awareness and preparation of families and young people for transition. This should encompass training and tools for school principals, teachers, and other personnel to implement a comprehensive system of transition planning and emphasize how to engage families at an earlier age and stage in their child's education so that they understand the transition process and can anticipate the decisions that are ahead of them.

Despite the gaps in services to provide quality, meaningful transitions for youth, there are a number of promising efforts and initiatives that have begun in the District on the part of schools, principals and teachers who are engaged in active transitioning planning and are highly motivated to make a difference. At the same time, leadership from the Chancellor, Deputy Chancellor of Special Education, and other key players in special education have a vision for the future of this transition and strongly support putting in place a transition program that begins in early childhood and continues to adulthood. Charter school representatives and other non-public school leaders have also been involved through the DC Special Education Co-operative in crafting a State Plan that includes transition. Community partners are recognizing and addressing these needs and greater collaboration has started to take root. This next section explores these efforts.

Interagency Cooperation, Collaboration and Coordination

The Department on Disability Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) 2012 State Plan outlines its collaboration and coordination efforts on transition services from school to the world of work for individuals with disabilities. RSA “is working aggressively with local educational leaders in special education to develop strategies to identify students earlier who will need transition services.” The Rehabilitation Services Administration is implementing numerous activities to ensure that students have a smooth transition process:

- RSA has developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to efficiently coordinate data sharing and the early identification of students in need of transition services with the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS).
- The process of student referrals for services has been realigned to facilitate a more efficient transfer to a vocational rehabilitation

counselor so that they can complete the Individual Plan for Employment process prior to the student exiting high school.

- The Administration allocates a large percentage of its staffing resources to transition services for students with disabilities. The staffing resources include four transition specialists and four rehabilitation counselors, who are assigned to all of the secondary schools in the District of Columbia. There is also a rehabilitation assistant and transition unit manager as part of the Transition Team.
- The Administration will provide technical assistance and consultation to the school staff, students (beginning at age 16), and families in planning for the transition of students from school to post-school activities and the development of vocational and independent living goals in preparation for the successful movement from school to employment and/or independent living.
- The Developmental Disabilities Administration will provide service coordination for all eligible students and, will refer students in DDA who are deemed eligible for supported employment or other employment services to RSA. The Administration will provide case management administration for students receiving supported employment services.
- The Administration will provide technical assistance and consultation to the school staff, students (beginning at age 16), and families in planning for the transition of students from school to post-school activities and the development of vocational and independent living goals in preparation for the successful movement from school to employment and/or independent living.
- There is also the provision of technical assistance to students and their families, guardians and surrogates in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from secondary school to post-school activities and inclusion in the adult community.

There are emerging activities occurring designed to improve transition planning. There is a greater coordination of efforts across agencies, rehabilitation staff assigned to schools with targeted tasks and outcomes; and memorandums of understanding between the District of Columbia Public Schools and government entities responsible for the development and implementation of Individualized Plans for Employment. Now it is time for parents to fully understand the various options for life after school for children with disabilities, their rights and responsibilities.

On-going Transition Activities and Initiatives in the District of Columbia

DC Partners in Transition is a group of DC stakeholders who are committed to improving the ability of DC youth with disabilities to successfully transition from school into post-secondary education, employment, and independence. Its members are students, young adults, teachers, community organizations, government representatives, employers, parents, and more. www.dctransition.org

The Youth Empowerment and Advocacy Resource Center (YEARC) provides District of Columbia teens and young adults with disabilities, ages 13 to 30, with ways to learn about policies and services affecting their lives. www.youth-project.org

DC Secondary Transition Community of Practice (CoP) is a broad-based group of public and private partners, whose objective is for all students to have access to a high quality secondary transition educational experience that prepares them to successfully achieve their post school outcome goals. A community of practice is a method to solve problems through building relationships and networks, working on issues together, and putting plans into action. This

community of practice, which is led by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), meets regularly to work on a capacity-building plan for the District and includes family engagement, interagency collaboration, student-focused planning, etc. This group is working on the following around transition:

- *Relationships and Networks*—establishing and building working relationships across the various agencies and organizations that support the transition of youth with disabilities into education, employment, and life.
- *Issues*—working together to identify and prioritize specific issues that need to be addressed to ensure that our youth have the knowledge, skills, abilities, and proper supports needed to achieve their goals.
- *Action*—facilitating collective learning and action by the CoP as well as by individual member organizations to address these issues.

Information about these communities of practice can be found at www.ideapartnership.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=255&Itemid=51.

Project SEARCH is a collaboration between DDS/RSA, DCPS and three Federal departments (i.e., the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services), providing students in their last year of school with a year of work-place emersion, with the support for a teacher and job coaches. The students complete three 10-12 week work experiences during the year, with the goal of integrated employment for all of the student workers, either in the Federal government or in the community. <http://dds.dc.gov/DC/DDS/About+DDS/News+Room/PROJECT+SEARCH>

The on-going collaboration between DCPS and RSA, has resulted in a data-sharing MOA, a joint consent/referral form, and strong coordination between RSA's Youth and Transition Unit,

which has four (4) Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and four (4) Transition Specialists dedicated to transition, and DCPS's staff who work with transitioning youth.

Benefits Network

The DC Benefits and Work Incentives network is a group of Certified Benefits Counselors from different agencies throughout the DC Metropolitan area that provide benefits analysis and counseling services to area residents. Benefits counseling services are designed to support Social Security Administration (SSA) beneficiaries along the employment continuum by promoting greater economic self-sufficiency. Through individualized benefits analysis, counseling, and work incentive management, the DC Benefits Network team actively promotes employment outcomes while assisting SSA beneficiaries in maximizing their financial outcomes and decreasing their dependence on public benefits. To find out more information about the DC Benefits and Work Incentives network contact the DC Department on Disabilities Services, <http://dds.dc.gov/DC/DDS>.

Summary and Recommendations

For a comprehensive, effective, meaningful process that leads to successful transitions for the youth in the District of Columbia, the following goals are recommended:

- **Complete Outstanding Transitions:** Apply an aggressive effort to complete the transitions for the many youth and young adults ages 17-22 that are still in the system that do not have a plan or have received transition services.
- **Increase Awareness and Information:**
 - Implement an awareness campaign targeting families and youth of transition age about the process with contact information. Bring together a diverse advisory group representing all the youth, families, schools, government agencies and

community organizations to have input on the methods and content.

- Design a plan that immediately connects families, principals, teachers, and students to discuss community benefits through the Department on Disability Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, local Universities and other key resources. Current grant activities are doing this but greater numbers need to be reached.
 - Include families as early as possible in the transition planning processes (i.e., early intervention services). Take special care to reach more vulnerable students and families such as those who do not speak English, students in foster or kinship care, and families that need more support.
 - Begin to empower students about choice, their goals in life, their dreams promoting self advocacy within their classroom and planning. This can begin at all stages and should begin immediately along with the awareness campaign and include training for youth, families and education personnel. Training can be connected to efforts already in progress in the schools or community.
- **Develop a Transition Curriculum:** Immediately begin the process of developing a comprehensive and inclusive curriculum that addresses all of the developmental stages, areas of instruction, and outcomes from Pre-K to graduation and beyond. Implement for the FY 2012 school year. A new curriculum should reflect the cultural and linguistic needs of a diverse student and family population.
 - **Redesign Transition:**
 - Ensure that all IEP's include a transition plan according to the requirements of IDEA at minimum of age 16 and redesign a transition program to start the process at age 14. Future planning should include a transition program that begins in early childhood and is successfully implemented by graduation. A meaningful transition plan

includes future goals and outcomes such as: post secondary education, employment, and independent living options.

- Benefit planning with the individual with a disability and his/her family.
- Begin the process to assess students on the Certificate Track and how this can be redefined with more opportunities for a Diploma Track (this occurs in other states). This process will open doors to post secondary opportunities.
- Include students with disabilities in many of the career opportunities now available for youth without disabilities. Engage students in activities to prepare them well for modern employment requirements including computer training and other technological resources and use as soon as possible (elementary age) to allow them the opportunity to write their plans as well as the skills to secure jobs beyond high school.

• Plan for the Future:

- Utilizing current advocacy groups and organizations working with DCPS and other lead education agencies such as charter schools establish meetings and trainings with school officials, principals and teachers on transition planning, tools, and benefits beyond high school.
- Define key activities on transition that are occurring in schools and with OSSE and begin universal approach and discussion around implementation. Build greater partnerships with community advocates and families in this process.
- DCPS and other lead education agencies such as charter schools should partner with local universities around current information on transition, best practices and key initiatives. This can be an on-going partnership to grow future leaders and teachers.
- Postsecondary options for students with intellectual disabilities need to be expanded. Begin collaboration with the area colleges

and university programs, especially the Community College of the District of Columbia, to map out a plan for students who want to continue their education.

- Lastly, there is need for consistent leadership to ensure a smooth and successful system for transition. Shared leadership with one vision from the Mayor, OSSE, DCPS, DDS and the community at large to make this a reality for students with disabilities and their families.

Resources and Sources of Information

The following lists provide some resources and information for families and providers about transition and transition services. This includes contact information for the various agencies and supports available in the District of Columbia.

Advocacy Organizations

Advocates for Justice in Education

1012 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20003
Phone: (202) 678-8060 or (888) 327-8060

4201 Georgia Avenue
Washington, DC 2011
Phone: (202) 265-1730
Fax: (202) 291-2225
www.aje-dc.org

The Arc of DC, Inc.

415 Michigan Avenue, NE, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20017
Phone: (202) 636-2950
Fax: (202) 636-2996
www.arcdc.net

Quality Trust

5335 Wisconsin Avenue, NW, Suite 825
Washington, DC 20015
Phone: (202) 448-1450
Fax: (202) 448-1451
www.dcqualitytrust.org

University Legal Services

220 I Street, NE, Suite 130
Washington, DC 20002
Phone: (202) 547-0198
Fax: (202) 547-2662
www.uls-dc.org

Checklists and Planning Guides for Youth and Families

Transition Checklist: St. Coletta Special Education Public Charter School, Washington DC

<http://gucchdgeorgetown.net/ucedd>

Fairfax County Public Schools Checklist

www.fcps.edu/dss/sei/careertransition/resources.htm

Youth Empowerment Resource Center

What Comes Next?: A Resource Guide By and For Teens and Young Adults with Disabilities
www.youth-project.org/ResourceGuide.html

Community Resources

Georgetown University, University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD)

3300 Whitehaven Street, NW, Suite 3300
Washington, DC 20007
Phone: (202) 687-8807
Fax: (202) 687-8899
Email: ucedd@georgetown.edu
<http://gucchdgeorgetown.net/ucedd>

DC Partners in Transition

www.dctransition.org

Youth Empowerment Resource Center

www.youth-project.org

District of Columbia Agencies

Department on Disability Services (DDS)

<http://dds.dc.gov/DC/DDS>
1125 15th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: (202) 730-1700
Fax: (202) 730-1843
TTY: (202) 730-1516

Developmental Disabilities Administration

(DDA): <http://dds.dc.gov/DC/DDS/Developmental+Disabilities+Administration/About+DDA?nav=1&vgnnextrefresh=1>

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA):

<http://dds.dc.gov/DC/DDS/Rehabilitation+Services+Administration/About+RSA?nav=2&vgnnextrefresh=1>

District of Columbia Public Schools

Office of Special Education

1200 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002
Phone: (202) 442-4800
www.dc.gov/DCPS/In+the+Classroom/Special+Education

Planning for Transition Services and Programs:

www.dc.gov/DCPS/In+the+Classroom/Special+Education/Plan+for+the+Future/Transition+Services+and+Programs

Planning for the Future:

www.dc.gov/DCPS/In+the+Classroom/Special+Education/Plan+for+the+Future/Planning+with+the+IEP+Team

Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE): Special Education

810 First Street, NE, 9th Floor
Washington, DC 20002
Phone: (202) 727-6436
<http://osse.dc.gov/service/special-education>

Person Centered Planning and Transition Assessment Tools

Center for Learning and Leadership, Oklahoma's University

Child Preference Indicators: www.ouhsc.edu/thecenter/products/childpreference.html

Personnel Preference Indicators: A Guide for Planning: www.ouhsc.edu/thecenter/products/personalpreference.html

National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center

Applying Personal Preference Indicators: http://nstattac.appstate.edu/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/4._PPI_Supplement.docweb.doc

Employability/Life Skills Assessment: http://nstattac.appstate.edu/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/6._employability_skills_checklist.pdfweb.pdf

Transition Assessment Toolkit: <http://nstattac.appstate.edu/content/age-appropriate-transition-assessment-toolkit>

Washington State Department of Social and Health Services

Life Skills Inventory: Independent Living Skills Assessment Tool: www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/ms/forms/10_267.pdf

Spanish Language Resources

FYI Transition

www.fyitransition.net/site-Spanish/index.html

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities: Transición a la Vida Adulta

<http://nichcy.org/espanol/temas/transicion>

Transition Timelines and Worksheets

Kent State Center for Innovation in Transition and Employment

Transition Timeline: www.kent.edu/ehhs/cite/publications/upload/ctsp-manual.pdf

National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center

<http://nstattac.appstate.edu/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/TransitionAssessmentImplementationTimeline.pdf>

Kent State Transition Timeline and Worksheet

<http://gucchdgeorgetown.net/ucedd>

Websites

IDEA Building the Legacy of IDEA 2004: Secondary Transition

<http://idea.ed.gov>

IDEA Partnership: Secondary Transition Collection

www.ideapartnership.org

Institute for Education Sciences (IES) National Center for Special Education Research (NCSE)

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncser>

National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition

www.nasetalliance.org

National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center

www.nstattac.org

US Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html>

REFERENCES

Grial, M., Hart, D., & Migliore, A. (2011). Comparing the transition planning, postsecondary education, and employment outcomes of students with intellectual and other disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 34(1), 4-17, doi:10.1177/0885728811399091.

Individuals with Disabilities in Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), Pub. L. No. 101-476, 104 Stat. 1142 (2004).

Newman, L., Wagner, M., Cameto, R., Knokey, A. M., & Shaver, D. (2010). *Comparisons Across Time of the Outcomes of Youth With Disabilities up to 4 Years After High School. A Report of Findings From the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) and the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)* (NCSE 2010-3008). Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.