

Key Issues in Transition from School to Competitive Integrated Employment and a Life of Community Belonging and Contribution



Illinois Center for Transition
And Work Symposium
Champaign, Illinois
April 24, 2025
Allan I. Bergman

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1

THINKING POINT

YOU CAN'T PREPARE KIDS
FOR AN INTEGRATED LIFE IN
A SEGREGATED CLASSROOM

~LOU BROWN~



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2

Educational Environments by Amount of Time Per Day by IEP Diagnosis; 2018

6,315,228 students, IEP, ages 5-21 (9.5% of all)

S.L.D., 37.7%; Speech-Lang, 16.4%; Ortho Impairment 16.2%; Autism, 10.5%; I.D., 6.7%; Emot. Disturbance, 5.5%; Other, 7.0%

	80%	40-79%	<40%	Other
Autism	39.7%	18.4%	33.4%	8.5%
Emot D	49.2%	17.3%	17.4%	16.1%
I.D.	17.4%	27.2%	48.6%	6.8%
Multi D	14.3%	17.6%	44.8%	23.3%
Ortho I	54.3%	15.5%	21.9%	8.2%
S.L.D.	72.3%	21.2%	4.7%	1.8%
SpLang	87.5%	47.0%	3.9%	3.9%

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Youth Employment Data, August 2018, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Youth Without Disabilities

- 29.2% for youth between the ages of 16 to 19
- **62.9%** for youth between the ages of 20 to 24

Youth With Disabilities

- 13.2% for youth between the ages of 16 to 19
- **31.2%** for youth between the ages of 20 to 24

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Quotes from Stephen Covey

Educator & Author(1932 -2012)

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

“Reducing children to a test score is the worst form of identity theft we can commit in school.”

“Strength lies in differences, not in similarities.”

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Introduction to Transition

Transition planning is the **student's road map to life after high school...**



Transition is a journey ... NOT a place or program!

What will the student achieve and
how will he/she get there?

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IDEA Transition Amendments of 2004 - identical in Rehab. Act!

“The term ‘transition services’ means a coordinated set of activities for a child 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.....

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IDEA Transition amends. of 2004, cont.

postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment) continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

- Is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s **strengths, preferences and interests**; and,

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Vision 2023.....

“Each citizen should plan
his part in the community
**according to his
individual gifts.”**

Plato, 427 – 327, BCE

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IDEA Transition amends of 2004, cont.

- Includes instruction, related services, **community experiences**, the **development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives**, and, if appropriate, **acquisition of daily living and functional vocational evaluation.”**
 - OSEP has begun to move towards monitoring for outcomes rather than compliance with paper; a slow process

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IEP Must Include

- Appropriate **measurable post-secondary goals** based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to **training, education, employment and where appropriate, independent living skills.**
- The **transition services** (including courses of study) **needed** to assist the student with a disability in **reaching those goals.**

"A Transition Guide" To Postsecondary Education & Employment for Students & Youth with Disabilities"-OSERS, May2017

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Assistive Technology Defined:

"...any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized that is **used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities** of individuals with disabilities."

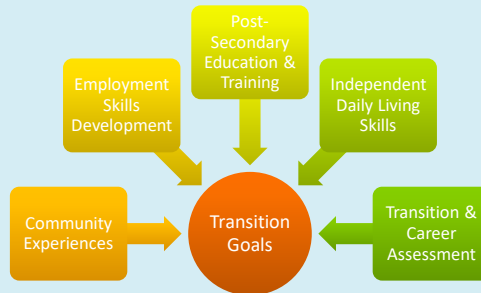
- **Includes accessibility adaptations to the workplace and special equipment to help people work;**
- Definition in 4 federal laws: IDEA; Rehab. Act; Assistive Technology Act; DD Act;

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IDEA 2004 says that transition is...

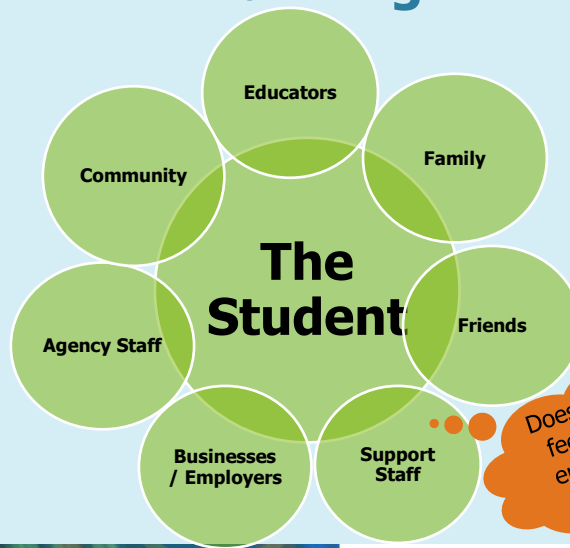
"A Coordinated Set of Activities"
Planning must begin no later than age 16



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Who is Involved in Transition Planning?



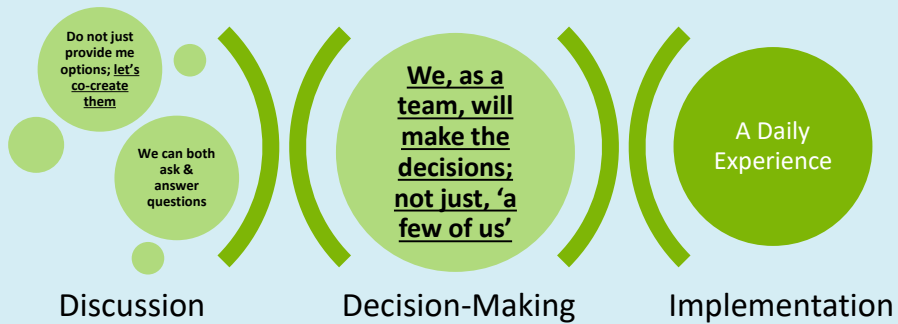
Does the student feel 'invited' or engaged in the process?



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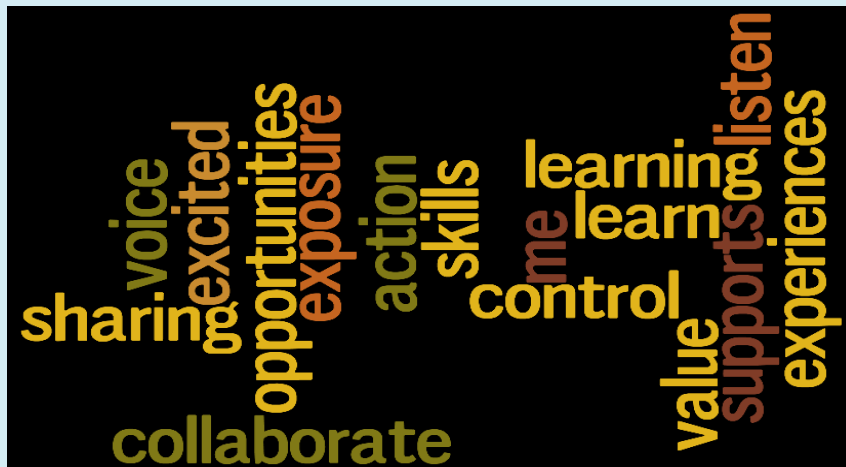
What does youth engagement look like in transition?



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15

I feel engaged in transition when...



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16

I do not feel engaged in transition when...

You tell me to
be a self-
advocate...



But your
actions show
otherwise



*I feel like I shouldn't even be
there if they are not going to
ask me questions or
acknowledge me.*



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How have adult allies shared leadership with you, by empowering you?

What can we do, to
help you reach your
goals?

*I feel empowered
and supported, to
lead my Transition
Journey!*

You can do this!
How can I be
helpful?



Transition is a
process! Not an 'ad
hoc' event!



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18

The Dignity of Risk

" You cannot help people permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves."

Abraham Lincoln

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The Impact of Early Transition Services on Employment Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities

**Robert Evert Cimera,
Ph.D.
Kent State University
rcimera@kent.edu**

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20

Do Transition Services Matter? - 1

Rates of Employment – ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder)

	By Age 14	By Age 16
2006	80.8%*	58.9%
2007	77.9%*	60.4%
2008	75.2%*	52.4%
2009	69.1%*	52.2%

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Do Transition Services Matter? - 2

Rates of Employment – ID (Intellectual Disabilities)

	By Age 14	By Age 16
2006	74.3%*	57.8%
2007	61.7%*	57.0%
2008	69.7%*	53.8%
2009	42.8%*	28.2%

7,520 Transition-Age Students with Intellectual Disabilities (Source: Cimera et al., 2017)

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1 Factor Predicting Post School Career Success

WORK EXPERIENCE DURING SCHOOL

- **Optimum Career Preparation includes:**
 - Youth empowerment
 - Family involvement and supports
 - Academic preparation paired with work experience
 - Connections to ancillary services
 - **WORK**
- Richard Luecking, Ed.D.

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Expectations Matter...A Lot!!!

**"The best predictor of post school outcomes are the following:
Parental Expectations.....
Teachers' Expectations....."**

Expectations change the path of what experiences are made available and what is taught to the child/student...."

"Changing introductions from deficits and what cannot do, to strengths, preferences, interests, gifts & contributions"

...Relationships matter; Location matters.

Erik Carter, Ph.D. Vanderbilt University
December 3, 2015

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The Guideposts for Success: A Holistic Transition Framework

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info>



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The Guideposts for Success

- An extensive literature review of research, demonstration projects and effective practices covering a wide range of programs and services--- including lessons from youth development, quality education, and workforce development programs--- has **identified core commonalities across the disciplines, programs and institutional settings.**
- The review also points out that **no one institution or organization can provide the full range of services;** thus, highlighting the **interdependence of agencies that requires communities, states, the federal government and multiple organizations at all levels to collaborate with one another in order to help assure quality transitions for all youth.**

26

26

Grounding Principles

The applicable literature suggests that all youth need:

- Access to high quality standards-based education regardless of the setting;
- Information about **career options and exposure to the world of work; including structured internships;**
- Opportunities to develop social, civic, and leadership skills;
- **Strong connections to caring adults;**
- Access to safe places to interact with their peers; and,
- Support services and specific accommodations to allow them **to become independent adults.**

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The Guideposts for Success

The five Guideposts are the following:

- School-based Preparatory Experiences
- Career Preparation and Work-Based Learning Experiences
- Youth Development and Leadership
- Connecting Activities
- Family Involvement and Supports
(Always divided to two levels)

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School-Based Preparatory Experiences

All Youth Need:

- academic programs that are based on clear state standards;
- **career and technical education programs that are based on professional and industry standards;**
- curricular and program options based on universal design of school, work and community-based learning experiences;
- learning environments that are small and safe, including extra supports such as tutoring, as necessary;
- **supports from and by highly qualified staff;**
- access to an assessment system that includes multiple measures and,
- graduation standards that include options.

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School-Based Preparatory Experiences

In addition, youth with disabilities need to:

- use **their individual transition plans to drive their personal instruction, and strategies to continue the transition process post-schooling;**
- access specific and individual learning accommodations while they are in school;
- develop knowledge of reasonable accommodations that they can request and control in educational settings, including assessment accommodations; and
- **be supported by highly qualified transitional support staff that may or may not be school staff.**

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Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning

All youth need information on career options, including:

- Career assessments to **help identify students' school and post-school preferences and interests;**
- Structured exposure to post-secondary education and other life-long learning opportunities;
- **Exposure to career opportunities** that ultimately lead to a living wage, including information about educational requirements, entry requirements and income potential; and,
- Training designed to improve job-seeking skills and work-place basic skills (sometimes called soft skills).

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Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning

To identify and attain career goals, all youth need

- Opportunities to engage in a range of work-based exploration activities such as site visits and job shadowing;
- **Multiple on-the-job training experiences, including community service (paid or unpaid) that is specifically linked to the content of a program of study and school credit**
- Opportunities to learn and practice their work skills ("soft skills"); and,
- **Opportunities to learn first-hand** about specific occupational skills related to a career pathway.

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Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning

Youth with Disabilities Need to:

- **Understand the relationships between appropriate financial and benefits planning and career choices;**
- **Access supports and accommodations for work and community living; and**
- Learn to communicate their support and accommodation needs to prospective employers and service providers.
- Learn to request, find, and secure appropriate supports and reasonable accommodations at work, at home, and in the community.

33

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Youth Development/Leadership

All Youth Need:

- Mentoring activities designed to establish strong relationships with adults through formal and informal settings;
- **Peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities;**
- Exposure to **role models** through a variety of means;
- Training in skills such as self-advocacy and conflict resolution
- Exposure to personal leadership and youth development activities, including community service; and,
- Opportunities that allow youth to exercise leadership.

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Youth Development/Leadership

Youth with Disabilities Need to:

- **Have mentors and role models who include persons with and without disabilities; and,**
- **Understand disability history, culture, and disability public policy issues as well as their rights and responsibilities.**

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Connecting Activities

All Youth Need:

- **Mental and physical health services;**
- **Transportation;**
- **Housing;**
- **Tutoring;**
- **Post-program supports through structured arrangements in post-secondary institutions and adult serving agencies; and,**
- **Connections to other services and/or opportunities (e.g. recreation)**

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Connecting Activities

Youth with Disabilities may also need:

- **Acquisitions of appropriate assistive technologies;**
- **Community orientation and mobility training** (e.g. accessible transportation, bus routes, housing, health clinics);
- **Exposure to post-program supports** such as independent living centers and other consumer-driven community-based support service agencies;
- **Personal assistance services**, including attendants, readers, interpreters, or other such services; and
- **Benefits-planning counseling including information regarding the myriad of benefits available and their interrelationships so that they may maximize those benefits in transitioning from public assistance to self-sufficiency.**

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Family Involvement & Support

All youth need parents, families and other caring adults who have:

- **High expectations which build upon the young person's strengths, interests, and needs and fosters their ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency;**
- **Been involved in their lives and assisting them toward adulthood;**
- **Access to information about employment, further education and community resources;**
- **Taken an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners;**
- **Access to medical, professional and peer support networks.**

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Family Involvement & Support

In addition, **youth with disabilities need parents, families and other caring adults who have:**

- An understanding of their youth's disability and how it affects his or her education, employment and/or daily living options; (and accommodations, etc,)
- **Knowledge of rights and responsibilities under various disability-related legislation;**
- Knowledge of and access to programs, services, supports and accommodations available for young people with disabilities; and,
- **An understanding of how individualized planning tools can assist youth in achieving transition goals and objectives.**

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Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act - 2014

- **Pre-employment transition services** are defined as, and **15% \$ must be used for all students with disabilities in need of the services**
 - Job exploration counseling & support
 - Work-based learning experiences
 - Counseling on post-secondary opportunities
 - *Workplace readiness training*
 - Training on self-advocacy
- Each local VR office must engage in pre-employment transition coordination with all local schools & workforce system**

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Availability of Pre-Employment Transition Services

- Must be made available statewide **to all students with disabilities, regardless of whether the student has applied or been determined eligible for vocational rehabilitation services**
- Under final regulations, **includes post-secondary**

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**WHO NEEDS
THESE
SERVICES?**

**How are they
defined?**

- Job exploration counseling
- Work based learning experiences
- Counseling on post-secondary opportunities
- Workplace readiness training
- Instruction in self-advocacy

42

Richard G. Luecking, Ed.D

- “ Any service that **isolates** students/youth with disabilities in groups focused on **‘readiness’ rather than actual work**, which are not proven to affect competitive integrated employment, should not be initiated by field VR counselors or authorized by VR leadership. **To proceed otherwise only perpetuates dismal employment rates for youth with I/DD and other significant disabilities**, failing to maximize the return on VR service investment” **5/2016**, CPSP Policy Brief

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43

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- **WIOA Definition:**
- May include in-school or after school opportunities, or experience outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that is provided in an integrated environment in the community to the maximum extent possible.

44

**Pre-Employment Transition Services as Part of An
Array of Services**
*Based on Explanatory Comments from WIOA Final
Regulations*

- **Pre-employment transition services:** earliest set of services available to students with disabilities.
 - ***Designed to help students with disabilities begin to identify career interests that will be further explored through additional VR services, such as transition services***
- Job placement assistance is not included among the listed **pre-employment transition services**, but could constitute a **transition service**

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“Congress makes clear that youth with significant disabilities ***must be given every opportunity to receive the services necessary to ensure the maximum potential to achieve competitive integrated employment.***”

46

The Ideal Collaboration for Students and Taxpayers

Youth are jointly served by school system and adult employment agencies
BEFORE school exit.

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The Winning Result!

Seamless transition
from students to employed
adults

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What is “Seamless Transition”?

(Richard G, Luecking, Ed.D.)

A sequential delivery of specific preparatory and coordinated services that:

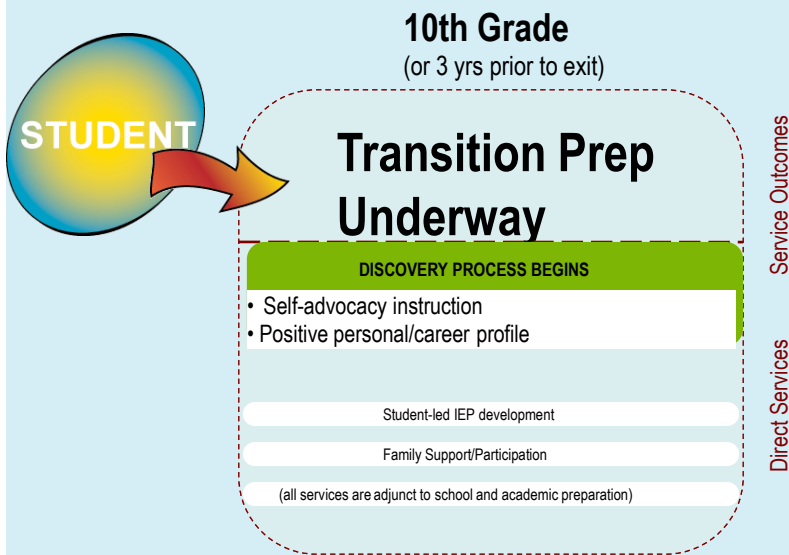
- ❖ *begin in early high school and*
- ❖ *continue through post-school follow-up supports,*
- ❖ *with the intended **outcome** of each student employed in an individualized, integrated job of choice and/or enrolled in postsecondary education prior to school exit.*

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49

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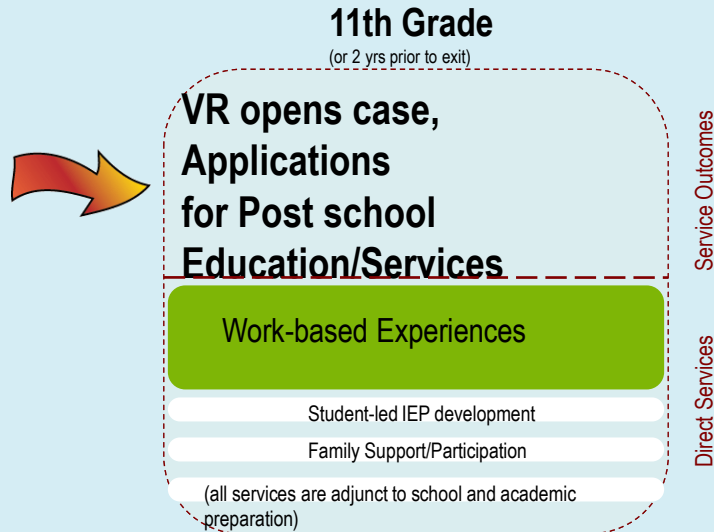
Flow of Student Services



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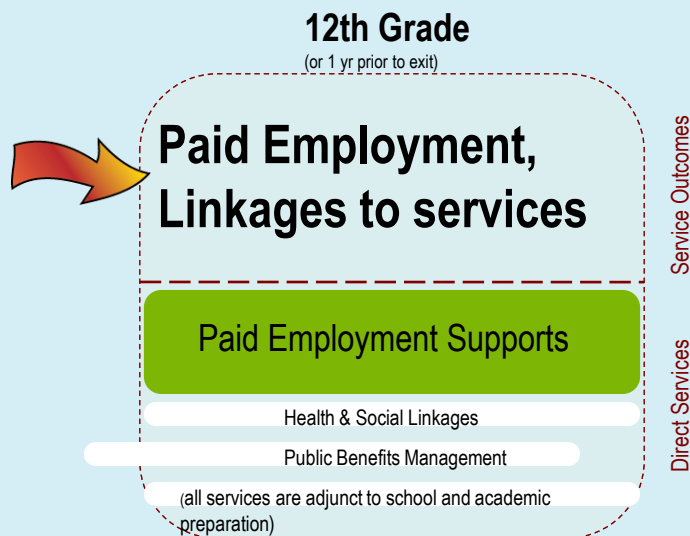
Flow of Student Services



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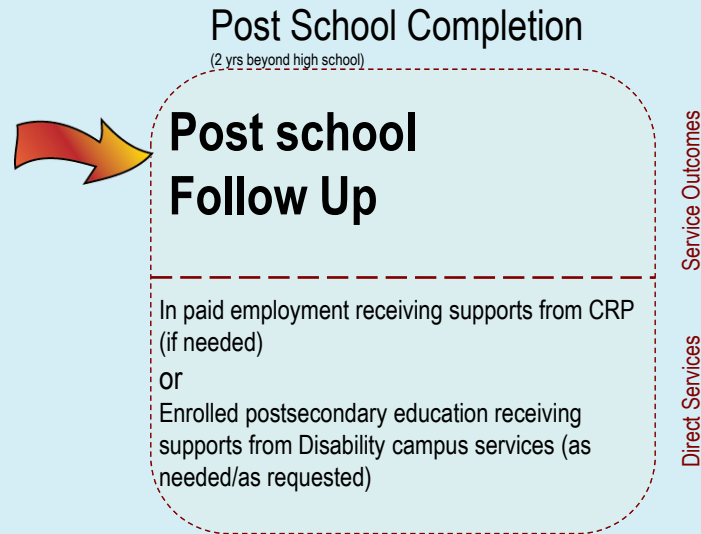
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Flow of Student Services

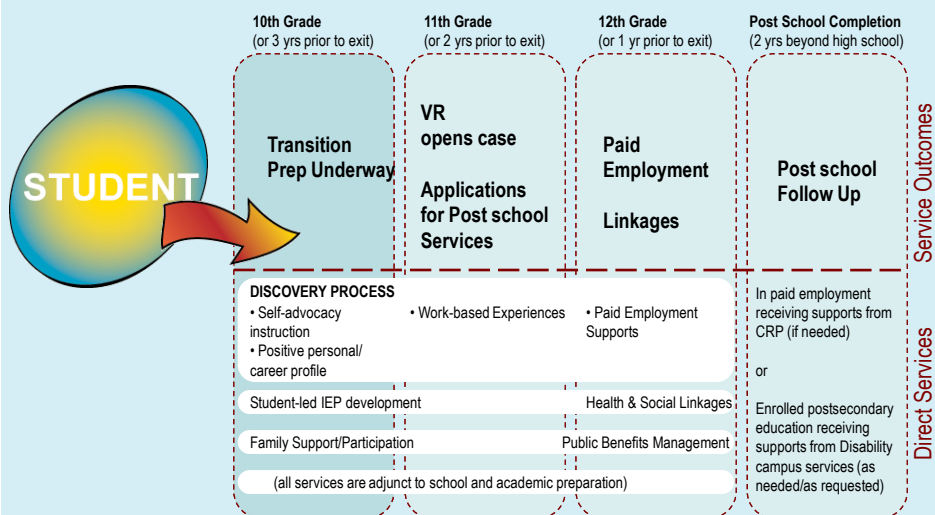


52

Flow of Student Services



Flow of Student Services



How might the WIOA help?

- Pre-Employment Training Services (PETS) is a new category of VR funding
 - Job exploration counseling
 - **Work-based learning experience**
 - Counseling on opportunities for enrollment post-secondary education programs
 - Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living
 - Instruction in self-advocacy

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How might the WIOA help?

- Interagency **collaboration** between VR and schools is required for joint planning and coordination
- Services can be provided to youth potentially eligible for VR services but for whom a “case” has not yet been initiated
- VR Case service funds spent on youth before school exit **can be a good return on VR investment**

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Possible Implications of using the best features of WIOA

- Work experiences early and often!
- Paid work as both a key transition intervention and the desired outcome
- Collaborations between schools, VR, and their partners focus on the **employment outcome** for commonly served youth (not just the “hand off”)

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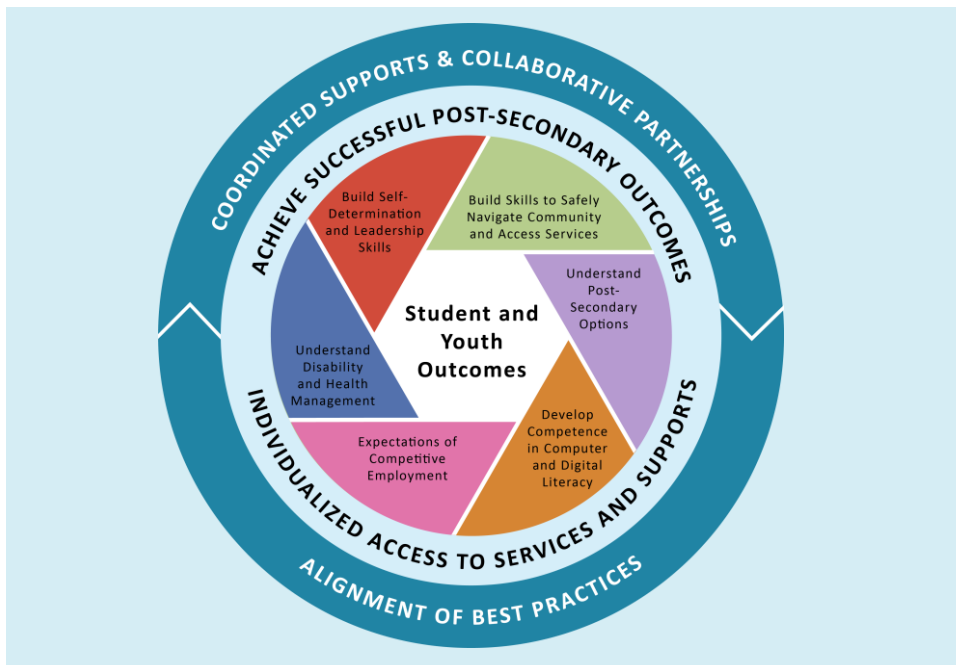
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Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act

- Supported Employment in VR Act:
 - Definition modified to clarify that **S.E. is integrated competitive employment**, or an individual working short-term in an integrated employment setting toward integrated competitive employment
 - **50%** of the State's Supported Employment funds **must be used** to support youth with **the most significant disabilities (up to age 24)** & they **may receive supports for up to 4 years.**

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58

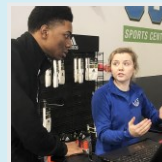


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Pathways to Competitive Integrated Employment

- Business Partnerships
- Internships
- Apprenticeships
- Vocational Education
- Supported Employment
- Customized Employment
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Dept. of Labor Engagement
- Post Secondary Education



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A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – A PATHWAY TO COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT

August 3, 2022

A joint statement from the: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), Administration on Community Living (ACL) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

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A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – 2

“Employment – paid work – **leads to economic opportunity, equity, and independence.** Individuals with disabilities optimize their ability to enjoy these benefits of employment through careers and jobs available to all individuals that provide competitive earnings (wages equal to or exceeding applicable minimum wage rates), integration (interaction with coworkers and others without disabilities similar to that experienced by their non-disabled peers while performing their job duties), and opportunity for advancement (i.e., “competitive integrated employment”). Individuals with disabilities also **strengthen their economic security through employment that provides health insurance and paid leave.** The employment of individuals benefits our communities and our nation as **they maximize their skills & talents & contribute fully to the economy.**

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62

A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - 3

However, far too often, individuals with disabilities are unemployed, underemployed, or employed at low wages **because society often views their potential with low expectations. Community engagement**, supported by a variety of service systems, enables individuals with disabilities **to expand skills and experience so that they may secure high-quality and personally satisfying careers and jobs and the benefits of employment.**

This brief paper, targeted to both policymakers and service providers, presents **a joint Federal vision for community engagement.** It describes why this vision is important and how it may lead to better employment outcomes, as well as identifies the types of supports necessary and available through multiple service systems **to facilitate community integration for individuals, including youth, with disabilities.**

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A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - 4

Maximizing all opportunities for community engagement through collaborative and coordinated service planning and delivery that **support personal interests and goals keep individuals on the path to competitive integrated employment.”**

...”**Engagement in the community provides opportunities to:**

- **Build relationships and social networks**
- **Sharpen workplace and social skills**
- **Learn work skills**

...”To effectively expand opportunities for the employment of individuals with disabilities, community engagement should be:

- **Individualized**
- **Interactive**
- **Supported**

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Competitive Integrated Employment Advantages & Opportunities



- Community Engagement
- **Social Role Achievement**
- Economic Opportunity
- Health Outcomes
- **Mental health benefits**
- Personal well-being

(Modini et al., 2016)

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Psychological Benefits of Competitive Integrated Employment

- Higher quality of life observed (e.g., Kraemer et al., 2003)
- **Increase in personal independence (e.g., Taylor et al., 2014)**
- Increased autonomy and self-determination (Wehmeyer & Bolding, 2001)
- **Reduced daily living support needs. (Wehman et al., 2017)**

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Employment First



“Employment is nature’s best physician and is essential to human happiness.”

— Galen, Greek physician

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V.R. Employment Outcome, **2001**

“Employment outcome means, with respect to an individual, entering or retaining full-time or, if appropriateas defined in 361.5(b) (11), **in the integrated labor market, supported employment, or any other type of employment in an integrated setting, including self-employment, telecommuting or business ownership, that is consistent with an individual’s strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests & informed choice** 34CFR361.5(b)1

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“INFORMED CHOICE”

“Informing each applicant and eligible individual...through appropriate modes of communication, about the availability of and opportunities to exercise informed choice, including the availability of support services for individuals with cognitive disabilities who require assistance in exercising informed choice throughout the rehabilitation process.”

34 CFR 361.52

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The Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination

“IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO LIVE WITHOUT FAILING AT SOMETHING, UNLESS YOU LIVE SO CAUTIOUSLY THAT YOU MIGHT AS WELL NOT HAE LIVED AT ALL – IN WHICH CASE, YOU FAIL BY DEFAULT.”

J.K. Rowling, Commencement Address,
Harvard University, June 5, 2008

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Why is Employment Becoming Part of Medicaid's Focus?

CMS's commitment: (2011)

"Work is a fundamental part of adult life for people with and without disabilities. It provides a sense of purpose, shaping who we are and how we fit into our community. **Meaningful work has also been associated with positive physical and mental health benefits and is a part of building a healthy lifestyle as a contributing member of society.** Because it is so essential to people's economic self sufficiency, as well as self esteem and well being, people with disabilities...who want to work should be provided the opportunity and support to work competitively within the general workforce in their pursuit of health, wealth and happiness. **All individuals, regardless of disability and age, can work – and work optimally with opportunity, training, and support that build on each person's strengths and interests. Individually tailored and preference-based job development,** training, and support should recognize each person's employability and potential contributions to the labor market."

➤ Highlights CMS's goal to promote integrated employment options

82

71

1915(c) and 1915(i) HCBS Person-Centered Service Plans

- **Offers choices to the individual regarding services and supports the individual receives and from whom**
 - Provides method to request updates
 - Conducted to reflect **what is important to the individual to ensure delivery of services in a manner reflecting personal preferences** and ensuring health and welfare
 - **Identifies the strengths, preferences, needs (clinical and support), and desired outcomes of the individual**
 - May include whether and what services are self-directed
- Includes **individually identified goals and preferences related to relationships, community participation, employment, income and savings, healthcare and wellness, education and others**



72

Benefits of Employment

- ✓ Get out of poverty; pay taxes
- ✓ More independence
- ✓ Make Friends
- ✓ Make a contribution to the community
- ✓ Positive image and valued role within the family and community
- ✓ Opportunities for learning and expanding relationships

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73

Financial Stability for People With Disabilities

Slide 74

Old Paradigm:

- One must accept a life of poverty in exchange for public assistance.

New Paradigm:

- The full promise of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living and economic self-sufficiency
- Opportunity to earn income through employment
- Ability to use safe and affordable financial services
- Encouragement to save and build assets/resources/savings
- Right to exercise control over personal finances
- Right to develop money management skills, practice self-determination and design a person-centered service portfolio

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74

Wisdom from President John F. Kennedy

“ The **great enemy of the truth** is very often not the lie – deliberate, contrived and dishonest – but **the myth** – persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.”

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75

Achieving a Better Life Experience Act: ABLE Act, 2014.

Goal: To help people with disabilities and their families save to meet their long-term ongoing support needs

- Public Law 113-295; December 19, 2014
- Passed with huge bipartisan support
- Parallels the Section 529 tax free qualified college tuition savings accounts
- Each state must act to make this available
- Up to \$100,000 and no loss of SSI (Supplemental Security Income) or Medicaid benefits

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76

Relationship between ABLE Accounts and SSI and Medicaid

- SSI cash payments suspended at \$100,000 in account; SSI eligibility remains intact
- SSI cash payments re-start when account drops below \$100,000 (no re-application)
- Medicaid payback provision included
 - At death (or if disability ceases), funds left in account pay back Medicaid (up to amounts paid on individual's behalf during period account was held).

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77



Diversity is a fact.
Equity is a choice.
Inclusion is an action.
Belonging is an outcome.

Arthur Ashe

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78

**“Let the shameful walls of exclusion
finally come tumbling down.”
President George H.W. Bush,
July 26,1990**



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79

“Equal Justice Under the Law”



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80

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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