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Delphi Panel Findings, Brief #2: Transition from School to Work

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Background

This is the second in a series of briefs on the findings from a Delphi process conducted by the Employment Learning Community (ELC) in 2013–2014. More information on the ELC and the Delphi process can be found in Brief #1 (Introduction, Values, and Overall Themes). This brief focuses on the panel's recommendations related to effective approaches to the transition from school to work for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), which was the highest-ranked overarching priority among the Delphi panel.

Transition From School to Work

Within the transition category, recommendations fell under the following six sub-categories, presented in rank order with standardized scores:

1. Providing more and better work experiences for transitioning students (72*)
2. Making transition planning practices more effective (62)
3. Empowering students and families (58)
4. Improving partnerships and collaboration at the local level (48)
5. Improving partnerships and collaboration at the state level (35)
6. Improving school and agency policies and practices (25)

Providing more and better work experiences for transitioning students

The highest-ranked priority for transition from school to work was providing students with more and better work experiences. Within this category two priorities rose to the top:

- Providing students with disabilities with meaningful internships, apprenticeships, and summer work (71)
- Ensuring that every student has at least one community-based work experience before they exit high school (49)
- Additional practices under this category that were not as highly ranked were facilitating access to multiple work experiences while in high school (44) and ensuring that students' work experiences more closely approximate a full work day and a job that exists in the community (36).

Making transition planning practices more effective

Effective transition planning was the second-highest priority in this area. Essential practices for transition planning were:

The Employment Learning Community has been developed to assist states in improving employment systems and services that will increase inclusive, competitive employment for individuals with IDD. To gain insights on the most cogent policies and priorities to promote such systems change, the project convened a panel of national subject matter experts to participate in a Delphi process. Nineteen Delphi panel members, including employment researchers, service providers, state vocational rehabilitation directors, developmental disability agency directors, educators, self-advocates, family members and representatives from related programs and initiatives, participated in four rounds of data collection. The values, policies, and practices that emerged from this effort are being presented in this series of seven briefs:

1. Introduction, Values, and Major Themes
2. Transition From School to Work
3. Collaboration Across Agencies
4. Education and Training for Job Seekers
5. Processes Within State Agencies
6. Generation and Use of Data and Evidence
7. Paths Toward Fair Wages

- Developing high-quality, person-focused transition plans for all students (83)
- Exploring each youth's interests as they transition from school to adult life and making connections to career, employment, and possibly their own micro-enterprise (63)
- Incorporating independent living goals in students' Individual Education Programs (IEPs) to address critical factors such as transportation, personal assistance, technology, and the transition from a school-based system to an adult service system (63)
- Starting planning at a younger age (no later than age 13 or 14) (52)
- Including all systems and stakeholders in the transition planning process (52)

Other, less highly-ranked priorities for transition planning were making benefits planning a part of the process (44); talking about postsecondary education during transition planning (43); making sure that parents, students, and teachers are clear that everyone should be referred to vocational rehabilitation (VR) for services and that they understand how to apply (36); giving VR agencies the flexibility to begin working with youth from age 13 or 14 (29); and using labor market information outlining the availability of positions in that geographic area (32).

* Numbers in parentheses are the standardized scores of the item's ranking across panel members. The standardized scores were calculated as follows: Standardized Score = (sum of scores - minimum score) / (maximum score - minimum score)



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Empowering students and families

Empowering students and their families was also recognized as an important part of the transition process. Ranked highly were two specific strategies:

- Involving families from an early age, focusing on the expectations of the adult world and the family's role in preparing their sons or daughters (68)
- Educating parents, families, and youth about the importance of education and work and about available options (57)

One additional recommendation was to educate families about options that go beyond disability-specific benefits, such as Pell grants and tuition assistance programs for higher education (19).

Improving partnerships and collaboration at the local level

The transition to adulthood involves a number of systems, including the education system and various adult services and systems. Partnerships and collaboration across these systems are the focus of the next two sets of Delphi panel recommendations. Specific recommendations related to local partnerships included:

- Connecting each student with an adult employment provider by the last year of school eligibility and embracing the concept of a seamless transition that does not create a bright-line change at the age when adult services commence. (81)
- Conducting joint individual planning meetings across schools and adult service providers (61)
- Engaging VR counselors with schools to increase student referrals and applications (e.g., bringing applications to schools for transition meetings) (59)
- Creating partnerships between school districts and local businesses, and incorporating the development of particular skills that these businesses say they need into transition practice and curriculum (57)
- Fostering outreach and collaboration between local/area offices (developmental disabilities, VR) and local school districts (50)
- Using facilitators and/or technical assistance to bring people together at the local level in order to determine challenges and solutions (45)

Lower-ranked recommendations related to local partnerships were developing local transition communities of practice (40), increasing active outreach by VR within school systems to find potential clients (31), and developing partnerships between local school districts and universities with rehabilitation counseling programs so graduate students can conduct vocational assessments (27).

Improving partnerships and collaboration at the state level

Further recommendations related to state partnerships were:

- Changing state and federal laws to support a shared transition framework that includes joint planning and sharing of resources focused on the needs of the individual (69)
- Ensuring that support teams include the individual with a disability, family members/caregivers, school personnel, a VR counselor, an employment provider, and a state developmental disabilities or mental health care coordinator (61)
- Clearly delineating roles and responsibilities in the transition process for education, VR, and developmental disability services (60)
- Blending education/federal funding with state adult services monies (50)
- Creating state-level transition committees or communities of practices with representation across systems, including adult service providers, advocates, consumers, VR, and education staff. Possible activities include sharing information; reviewing outcomes and policy; learning about one another's priorities, outcomes, and accountability systems; identifying gaps and needs; finding solutions to those gaps or needs; coordinating trainings; and outreaching to policy-makers to explore adjustments to agency policies and practices (50)

Less highly-ranked priorities related to state partnerships included developing a timeline of who does what and when across systems during the transition process (40), increasing the number of students with IDD served in VR transition programs (34), and mandating VR involvement in transition planning (32).

Improving school and agency policies and practices

The final priority area for transition was improving policies and practices within schools and adult service agencies (as opposed to improving collaboration across these entities, which is addressed in the two priorities above). Two priorities rose to the top in this category:

- Training teachers and adult service staff to prepare students with disabilities for postsecondary education and/or integrated employment. Possible areas for training include best practices, resources, program services and limitations, key outcomes for each system, and how to integrate social media and technology into the transition experience (81)
- Creating greater accountability for post-school outcomes by education and adult services systems; stipulating and annually evaluating outcomes and expectations on a state level (62)

Lower priority items were teaching students to use computers, mobile phones, and social media responsibly, including the use of such devices as non-stigmatizing supports and/or accommodations (33), and supporting students' attainment of occupational and industry certificates (24).

Conclusions

Improving policies and practices around the transition from school to work was identified by the Delphi panel as one of the highest overall priorities for systems change. The panel's priorities within this area identified a vision of transition-age youth having access to both meaningful work experiences and effective transition planning. To accomplish this, the panel recommended expanding partnerships and collaboration between education, VR, and IDD agencies, in addition to improving training and practices within each partner agency.

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Advancing employment and opportunity for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities



The Employment Learning Community (ELC) is a project of ThinkWork at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston. ThinkWork is a resource portal offering data, personal stories, and tools related to improving employment outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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