



**National Standards
& Quality Indicators:**

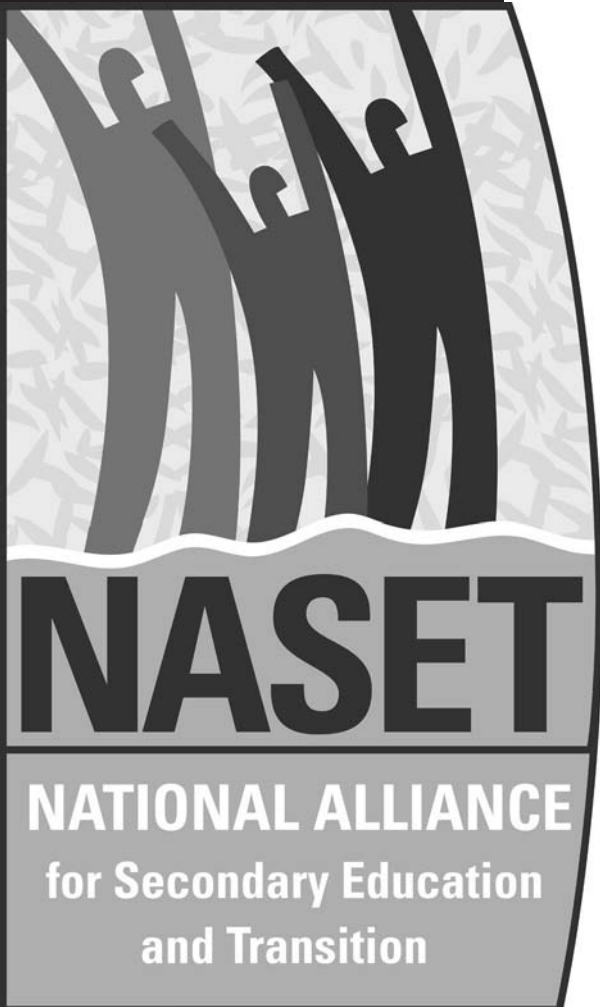
*transition
toolkit
for systems
improvement*

2005 National Leadership Summit Edition

Supporting Evidence and Research

Research must serve as the foundation for state and local technical assistance and improvement efforts. The five key areas of Schooling, Career Preparatory Experiences, Youth Development and Youth Leadership, Family Involvement, and Connecting Activities provide a useful structure for examining critical areas of need for all youth and their families. The standards and indicators developed by the National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition are based on sound evidence and research that supports their utility in the field. This document highlights the evidence and research that supports each of the key areas and the specific standards and indicators found in this document.

This document identifies and presents research, federal government documents, commissioned reports, and other sources that serve as the foundation upon which the National Standards for Secondary Education and Transition for all Youth are based. This compilation should not be viewed as all-inclusive, but rather as illustrative of the range of research and expert analysis currently available. Cited documents were identified through a variety of sources and strategies including: (a) literature searches within each of the five NASET organizing domains, (b) recommendations by staff of NASET member organizations, (c) members of the five workgroups that developed the standards and indicators, and (d) consultation with recognized experts. It is important to note that this document, and the Standards themselves, will require regular updating in response to new research developments and advancements in professional practice.



1. Schooling

Standards

- 1.1 SEAs/LEAs provide youth with equitable access to a full range of academic and non-academic courses and programs of study.
- 1.2 SEAs/LEAs use appropriate standards to assess individual student achievement and learning.
- 1.3 SEAs/LEAs systematically collect data on school completion rates and postschool outcomes and use these data to plan improvements in educational and postschool programs and services.
- 1.4 SEAs/LEAs offer educators, families, and community representatives regular opportunities for ongoing skill development, education, and training in planning for positive postschool outcomes for all youth.
- 1.5 SEAs/LEAs establish and implement high school graduation standards, options, and decisions that are based on meaningful measures of student achievement and learning.

Ensuring Access to Academic and Non-Academic Courses and Programs of Study

To prosper and gain the knowledge and skills necessary for success in a variety of settings, all students—including students with disabilities—must have access to educational curriculum and instruction designed to prepare them for life in the 21st century (Murnane & Levy, 1996). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) underscores this assumption, as does federal legislation in the areas of workforce development, youth development, postsecondary education, and other areas. For students with disabilities, this assumption was the basis, in part, for the requirements included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) legislation of 1990, 1997, and 2004. Under IDEA, states must provide students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum, including: the identification of performance goals and indicators for these students, definition of how access to the general curriculum is provided, participation in general or alternate assessments, and public reporting of assessment results. All of these requirements are embedded within a context of standards-based education, in which standards for what students should know and be able to do are defined at the state level, appropriate standards-based education is provided, and success in meeting expectations is measured through large-scale assessment systems.

The need for access requirements in legislation was supported by research demonstrating both a lack of educational success (or a lack of any information about educational success) for many students with disabilities (e.g., McGrew, Thurlow, & Spiegel, 1993; Shriner, Gilman, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1994-95), and the all too common provision of an inappropriately watered-down curriculum (Gersten, 1998) or a curriculum undifferentiated for students with disabilities (McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, & Lee, 1993). According to Nolet and McLaughlin (2000), the 1997 IDEA reauthorization was “intended to ensure that students with disabilities have access to challenging curriculum and that their educational programs are based on high expectations that acknowledge each student’s potential and ultimate contribution to society” (p. 2). Within the educational context of the late 1990s and early 2000s, this means that all students with disabilities, regardless of the nature of their disability, need to have access to standards-based education.

Providing meaningful access to the general curriculum requires a multifaceted approach. Appropriate instructional accommodations constitute one piece of this picture (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000). Other elements include the specification of curriculum domains, time allocation, and decisions about what to include or exclude (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000). The process of specifying the curriculum in a subject matter do-

main requires cataloging the various types of information included in the domain (facts, concepts, principles, and procedures) and setting priorities with respect to outcomes. Allocation of time for instruction should be based on the priorities that have been established. Decisions about what to include or exclude in curriculum should allow for adequate breadth (or scope) of coverage, while maintaining enough depth to assure that students are learning the material. Universal design is another means of ensuring access to the general curriculum (Orkwis & McLane, 1998). When applied to assessment, universal design can help ensure that tests are usable by the largest number of students possible (Thompson, Johnstone, & Thurlow, 2002).

Research indicates that a variety of instructional approaches can be used to increase access to the general curriculum and standards-based instruction (Kame'enui & Carnine, 1998). Approaches such as differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 1999), strategy instruction (Deshler et al., 2001), and technology use (Rose & Meyer, 2000) are showing that access to the curriculum can be substantially improved, with positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

Other researchers have examined the teaching and learning conditions and strategies in schools that lead to positive outcomes for students (Wagner, 1993). Gersten (1998), The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (2004a), and Nolet and McLaughlin (2000) noted that students with disabilities and other at-risk students need access to the full range of curriculum options, not watered-down versions, if they are to meet content and performance standards. Research by Tralli, Colombo, Deshler, and Schumaker (1999) indicated that many low-achieving students can be taught strategies that will raise their performance to meet content standards. Other academic and non-academic components that have been linked to positive youth outcomes include: (a) a broad spectrum of work-based learning components such as service learning, career exploration, and paid work experience (American Youth Policy Forum & Center for Workforce Development, 2000; Benz, Yovanoff, & Doren, 1997; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1997; National Commission on the High School Senior Year, 2001); (b) academic and related standards (Nolet and McLaughlin, 2000), and a full range of postsecondary options (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004a); (c) universally designed curricula and materials (Bowe, 2000; Orkwis & McLane, 1998) including culturally appropriate strategies (Burnette, 1999; Hale, 2001); (d) instructional approaches that include the use of technology (Rose & Meyer, 2000) and learning supports including advising and counseling (Aune, 2000); and (e) a move to smaller learning communities (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2001; Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Ort, 2002; Stern & Wing, 2004).

Basing Assessment on Appropriate Standards

States and districts have become engaged in the work of identifying content standards and setting performance standards for what students should know and be able to do in the 21st century (American Federation of Teachers, 2001; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003). While these standards-setting efforts may not initially have considered students with disabilities (Thurlow, Ysseldyke, Gutman, & Geenen, 1998), as time has passed, many states have reconsidered their standards in this light. This reconsideration occurred, if for no other reason, because the IDEA assessment requirements indicate that states need to develop alternate assessments for those students who cannot participate in general assessments. The alternate assessments, like the general assessments, are to be aligned to the state's standards, a requirement reinforced by the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

The IDEA requirements for inclusion of students with disabilities in assessments and access to the general curriculum have been reinforced strongly by NCLB, which requires that students with disabilities

participate not only in assessments but also in accountability systems. The purpose of these requirements is to ensure that schools are held accountable for access to the general curriculum, high expectations, and improved learning. Requirements for students with disabilities to be included in state accountability systems and for measuring whether schools have achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP) have heightened the importance of access to the general curriculum for all students with disabilities, while also raising concerns about access to transition-related curricula and experiences (Furney, Hasazi, Clark/Keefe, & Hartnett, 2003).

Research (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 1998) and reviews of standards-based approaches (Elmore & Rothman, 1999; McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997; Thurlow & Johnson, 2000) indicate that assessments and standards must be aligned and that all youth, including those with disabilities, must be included in large-scale assessments and other accountability measures to ensure that accountability systems are valid. Further, schools should provide the supports and resources to help all students meet challenging standards (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004). Assessment accommodations, alternate assessments, and other performance indicators should be addressed within accountability systems (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004a; Thurlow et al., 1998), and assessment results should be used in individualized educational planning. Standards should also look beyond purely academic goals and include the knowledge and skills required for desired postsecondary outcomes such as employment, higher education, and civic engagement (Achieve, Inc. 2004; National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004a).

No Child Left Behind requires that educational decisions be based on student performance data and research-based instructional strategies, and that performance data be shared with parents and other stakeholders. Components of this data-based decision-making process that have been identified through research and best practice reviews include: (a) reporting data in understandable language and in useful categories (Halpern, 1990; Hogan, 2001), (b) sharing data and analyses with a broad range of stakeholders and the general public (Halpern, 1990; Hogan, 2001), (c) including stakeholders in the process of developing data collection instruments (Florio & DeMartini, 1993; Halpern, 1990; Hogan, 2001), and (d) using data to evaluate programs and develop additional programs and services (Halpern, 1990; Hogan, 2001).

Improving School Completion

The prevalence of students dropping out of school is one of the most serious and pervasive problems facing special education programs nationally. The National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) found that more than a third of students with disabilities exited school by dropping out. The NLTS data also revealed that factors such as ethnicity and family income are related to dropout rates, and that some groups of special education students are more apt to drop out than others. Of youth with disabilities who do not complete school, the highest proportions are among students with learning disabilities and students with emotional/behavioral disabilities (Wagner et al., 1991).

National data indicate that there has been some improvement in the overall graduation rate of students with disabilities in the United States. Between the 1995-1996 and 1999-2000 school years, the percentage of youth with disabilities graduating with regular diplomas, as reported by states, grew from 52.6% to 56.2%. During the same period, the percentage of students with disabilities reported as having dropped out of school declined from 34.1% to 29.4% (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). While these data are encouraging, the dropout rate for students with disabilities still remains twice that of students without disabilities.

Concern about the dropout problem is increasing because of state and local education agencies' experiences with high-stakes accountability in the context of standards-based reform (Thurlow, Sinclair, &

Johnson, 2002). State and local school districts have identified what students should know and be able to do and have implemented assessments to ensure that students have attained the identified knowledge and skills. However, large numbers of students are not faring well on these assessments. For youth with disabilities, several factors beyond academic achievement affect their performance on these tests, including accurate identification of their disability, provision of needed accommodations, and availability of educational supports that make learning possible regardless of disability-related factors. The provision of accommodations is of particular importance in helping to ensure students' success within state standards and reform initiatives.

In the United States, dropout prevention programs have been implemented and evaluated for decades, but the empirical base of well-researched programs is scant, and well-done evaluations of dropout prevention programs specifically targeted towards students with disabilities are rare. Perhaps the most rigorously researched secondary level program for students with disabilities at risk of dropping out is the Check & Connect program (Christenson, 2002; Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1999). Using randomized assignment to experimental and control groups, these researchers found significant positive effects of their program. Check & Connect includes the following core elements: (a) a monitor/advocate who builds a trusting relationship with the student, monitors the student on risk indicators, and helps problem-solve difficult issues between the student and the school; (b) promotion of student engagement with the school; (c) flexibility on the part of school administrative personnel regarding staffing patterns and use of punitive disciplinary practices; and (d) relevancy of the high school curriculum to students.

The empirical literature on dropout prevention programs for at-risk students (including, but not limited to, students with disabilities) is somewhat broader but still lacking in high-quality research designs. Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, and Christenson (2003) analyzed dropout studies published between 1980 and 2001; 45 research studies were included in the final integrative review. Of these, less than 20% employed randomized assignment procedures, and not a single study was a true experiment. Nonetheless, the findings were quite consistent with well-researched components of the Check & Connect model and were also consistent with a number of other empirical sources of information. Two common components of successful secondary dropout prevention programs are work-based learning and personal development/self-esteem building (Farrell, 1990; Orr, 1987; Smink, 2002). Equally important, however, is tailoring or contextualizing these and other intervention components to the particular school environment (Lehr et al., 2003). Finally, early intervention also appears to be a powerful component in a school district's array of dropout prevention strategies. In an experimental study collecting longitudinal data for 22 years, Schweinhart and Weikart (1998) documented impressive outcomes of their High/Scope Perry preschool project, which involved three- and four-year-olds who were at risk of school failure.

Skill Development as a Means to Improve Educational Results

Training and professional development for educators and other stakeholders have been identified as critical components of school reform and improving student achievement and other outcomes. Research studies and analyses of best practices have identified the following essential components of training and development programs: (a) ensuring that school personnel have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively perform their duties (Joyce, 1990); (b) incorporating student performance data and effective strategies for improving student achievement into professional development (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1996; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2001); (c) including educators, family members, and other stakeholders on school leadership teams (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition,

2004b); (d) person-centered planning activities for youth, such as involving them in individualized school- and career-related decision-making and planning (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004b); and (e) collaborative leadership (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2001).

Many new teachers are entering the field without the specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to support transition. Miller, Lombard, and Hazelkorn (2000) report that few special education teachers have received training on methods, materials, and strategies for developing meaningful Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that include goals and objectives on transition or that specifically address students' transition needs through curriculum and instruction. Further, many special education teachers underutilize community work-experience programs and fail to coordinate referrals to adult service providers.

Beyond preservice training, high-quality continuing professional development is needed to ensure that teachers are up-to-date and fully able to support students in the transition from school to adulthood. Miller et al. (2000), in a national study, found that nearly 8 out of 10 teachers (79%) reported receiving five hours or less of inservice training regarding inclusion of students with disabilities in their districts' school-to-work programs. Further, nearly half (49%) indicated they had received no inservice training related to inclusionary practices for students with disabilities. These findings are consistent with the report published by the National Center for Education Statistics regarding the preparation and qualifications of public school teachers (Lewis et al., 1999). This report notes that fewer than 2 out of 10 teachers (19%) spent more than eight hours per year on professional development activities to address the needs of students with disabilities, despite the fact that teachers report that professional development of longer duration is more effective. The promotion of improved levels of collaboration between general education and special education is in response to another area of need. General education classroom teachers, work-study coordinators, career and technical education instructors, and high school counselors all play an important role in supporting the transition of students with disabilities. These general education personnel need training and other support to help them work effectively with students with disabilities. A recent study of personnel needs in special education (Carlson, Brauen, Klein, Schroll, & Willig, 2001) found that general educators' confidence in serving students with disabilities was dependent on their relationship with special education teachers: those who often received instruction-related suggestions from special educators felt significantly more confident.

Basing Graduation Requirements on Meaningful Measures and Criteria

Requirements that states set for graduation can include completing Carnegie Unit requirements (a certain number of class credits earned in specific areas), successfully passing a competency test, passing high school exit exams, and/or passing a series of benchmark exams (Guy, Shin, Lee, & Thurlow, 1999; Johnson & Thurlow, 2003; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Anderson, 1995). Currently, 27 states have opted to require that students pass state and/or local exit exams in order to receive a standard high school diploma (Johnson & Thurlow, 2003). This practice has been increasing since the mid-1990s (Guy et al., 1999; Thurlow et al., 1995). States may also require any combination of the above requirements. Variability in graduation requirements is complicated further by an increasingly diverse set of diploma options. In addition to the standard high school diploma, options now include special education diplomas, certificates of completion, occupational diplomas, and others.

Many states have gone to great lengths to improve the proportion of students with disabilities passing state exit exams and meeting other requirements for graduation. Strategies have included grade-level retention,

specialized tutoring and instruction during the school day and after school, and weekend or summer tutoring programs. While these may be viewed as appropriate interventions and strategies, there is little research evidence supporting these practices. Available research indicates, for example, that repeating a grade does not improve the overall achievement of students with disabilities (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1992; Holmes, 1989).

The implications of state graduation requirements must be thoroughly understood, considering the negative outcomes students experience when they fail to meet state standards for graduation. The availability of alternative diploma options can have a considerable impact on raising graduation rates. However, the ramifications of receiving different types of diplomas need to be considered. A student who receives a non-standard diploma may find their access to postsecondary education or jobs is limited. It is also important for parents and educators to know that if a student graduates from high school with a standard high school diploma, the student is no longer entitled to special education services unless a state or district has a policy allowing continued services under such circumstances. Most states do not have such policies.

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2. Career Preparatory Experiences

Standards

- 2.1 Youth participate in career awareness, exploration, and preparatory activities in school- and community-based settings.
- 2.2 Academic and non-academic courses and programs include integrated career development activities.
- 2.3 Schools and community partners provide youth with opportunities to participate in meaningful school- and community-based work experiences.
- 2.4 Schools and community partners provide career preparatory activities that lead to youths' acquisition of employability and technical skills, knowledge, and behaviors.

Youth Benefit from Career Preparatory Activities in Schools and Communities

Several positive academic and vocational effects are attributed to school-based career development—specifically, career advising and curriculum-based interventions such as computer-based career guidance. These positive effects include higher grades, better relationships with teachers, increased career planning, greater knowledge of careers, improved self-esteem, improved self-knowledge, and less career indecision (Hughes & Karp, 2004; Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997).

Participating in Career and Technical Education (CTE) results in short- and medium-term earning benefits for most students at both the secondary and postsecondary levels and increased academic course taking and achievement by students, including students with disabilities (Castellano, Stone, Stringfield, Farley, & Wayman, 2004; Plank, 2001; Stone & Aliaga, 2003). Those who complete both a strong academic curriculum and a vocational program of study (*dual concentrators*) may have better outcomes than those who pursue one or the other (Silverberg, Warner, Fong, & Goodwin, 2004; Plank, 2001; Stone & Aliaga, 2003). CTE participants are more likely to graduate from high school (Schargel & Smink, 2001; Smink & Schargel, 2004), be employed in higher paying jobs, and enroll in postsecondary education (Hughes, Bailey, & Mechur, 2001).

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 reinforces the need for career preparatory experiences for all youth. WIA services include: (a) comprehensive career development services based on individualized assessment and planning, (b) youth connections and access to the One-Stop career center system, and (c) performance accountability focused on employment.

While work experiences are beneficial to all youth, they are particularly valuable for youth with disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Colley & Jamison, 1998; Kohler, 1993; Kohler & Rusch, 1995; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Mooney & Scholl, 2004; Morningstar, 1997; Rogan, 1997; Wehman, 1996). Youth who participate in occupational education and special education in integrated settings are more likely to be competitively employed than youth who have not participated in such activities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Colley & Jamison, 1998; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Mooney & Scholl, 2004; Rogan, 1997).

Activities in School-Based and Community Settings

Career preparation components that are related to positive secondary and postsecondary school outcomes include: (a) opportunities for both school-based and community-based experiences that expose youth to a broad array of career paths, experiences, and occupations; (b) opportunities for youth to build relevant skills, academic knowledge, and personal competencies required in the workplace and for continued

education; and (c) opportunities for youth to tailor their career experiences to meet their individual needs (American Youth Policy Forum & Center for Workforce Development, 2000; Castellano, Stringfield, Stone & Lewis, 2002). School-based and community-based career preparatory activities provide the skills and knowledge young people need to make more informed decisions, to progress toward postsecondary education, and to be successful in a career (National Commission on the High School Senior Year, 2001). Career preparatory activities also provide youth with the opportunity to test academic theories through real-world applications (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003). Contextual learning is at the core of career preparatory activities; community-based learning helps youth to build upon their life experiences and apply existing knowledge at the workplace (Pierce & Jones, 1998). Additionally, such activities allow students to see the practical value of the high school curriculum (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004).

Quality career development goes beyond simple academic or vocational guidance to help align academic experiences with student interests and strengths, learning preferences, and education goals. Through activities such as career awareness in the elementary years and career exploration in secondary grades, youth not only learn about a variety of careers and occupations but also begin to identify the skills required to succeed in these areas, allowing them to make better-informed career decisions (American Youth Policy Forum & Center for Workforce Development, 2000; Castellano, Stringfield, Stone & Lewis, 2002).

Integrated Career Development Activities

Effective career development approaches that integrate academic and non-academic components include: (a) a process for career planning and goal setting (Benz, Yovanoff, & Doren, 1997; Goldberger, Keough, & Almeida, 2001), (b) alignment of school-based career preparatory experiences with employer and occupational requirements and with postsecondary education plans (Bremer & Madzar, 1995; Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003; Haimson & Bellotti, 2001), and (c) teaching of basic skills needed for career success and growth (Haimson & Bellotti, 2001; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997).

Meaningful School- and Community-based Work Experiences

Through partnerships with employers, schools are able to provide a range of learning experiences for students. Nearly 55% offer job shadowing, 44% offer co-op programs, 40% provide school-based enterprises, 35% provide mentoring activities, and 34% offer student internships (Medrich, Ramer, Merola, Moskovitz, & White, 1998). With the number of school/employer partnerships on the rise, participating businesses are now recognizing that improved work-based learning for youth means better-prepared future employees, reduced recruitment costs for firms, and reduced employee turnover (Wills, 1998).

Components of meaningful school- and community-based work experiences include high-quality work experiences, careful planning to match work experiences with each youth's interests and assets, linkages between work experience and academic content or school curriculum, and individual supports and accommodations (American Youth Policy Forum & Center for Workforce Development, 2000; Benz et al., 1997; Bremer & Madzar, 1995; Colley & Jamison, 1998; Goldberger et al., 2001; Haimson & Bellotti, 2001; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Mooney & Scholl, 2004; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997; Scholl & Mooney, 2005).

Acquisition of Employability and Technical Skills, Knowledge, and Behaviors

Work-based learning is an integral part of the academic curriculum, reinforcing academic and occupational skills learned in the classroom, providing career exploration and a broad understanding of an occupation or industry, motivating students, introducing generic workplace skills, and teaching entry-level

technical skills (American Youth Policy Forum & Center for Workforce Development, 2000). Working closely with employers allows schools to define the knowledge and skills necessary for graduates to successfully perform in college and the workplace (Achieve, 2004).

Through formal and informal work-based learning, students begin to apply academic knowledge to workplace settings and gain greater respect for and facility in the types of learning required by the workplace. Students acquire skills and develop attitudes that are critical to on-the-job success, including: (a) an understanding that learning often is related to a clear and meaningful goal, (b) the need for quality and the consequences of compromised quality, (c) critical thinking, (d) different approaches to problem-solving, (e) the importance of immediate feedback for learning and improvement, (f) improved skills for working in teams, (g) appreciation of the importance of deadlines, and (h) a higher motivation to examine a particular subject more deeply (Center for Workforce Development, 1998).

Strategies leading to the acquisition of employability and technical knowledge, skills, and attitudes include: (a) instruction in employability skills (Bremer & Madzar, 1995; Kohler, 1994; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997); (b) assessments of career interests and abilities (Bailey & Hughes, 1999; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1997; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997), (c) exposure to and understanding of workplace expectations and conditions (Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997); (d) life skills instruction and development in areas such as self-determination, self-evaluation, planning, and social-behavioral skills (Kohler, 1994; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997); and (e) job-seeking activities (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997).

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3. Youth Development and Youth Leadership

Standards

- 3.1 Youth acquire the skills, behaviors, and attitudes that enable them to learn and grow in self-knowledge, social interaction, and physical and emotional health.
- 3.2 Youth understand the relationship between their individual strengths and desires and their future goals, and have the skills to act on that understanding.
- 3.3 Youth have the knowledge and skills to demonstrate leadership and participate in community life.
- 3.4 Youth demonstrate the ability to make informed decisions for themselves.

Youth Develop Skills, Behaviors, and Attitudes That Enable Them to Learn and Grow

Ferber, Pittman, and Marshall (2002) identified five areas in which youth development should be promoted: learning (developing positive basic and applied academic attitudes, skills, and behaviors), thriving (developing physically healthy attitudes, skills, and behaviors), connecting (developing positive social attitudes, skills, and behaviors), working (developing positive vocational attitudes, skills, and behaviors), and leading (developing positive civic attitudes, skills, and behaviors). While noting the limited amount of quality research on youth development and leadership (Benson & Saito, 2000; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Edelman, Gill, Comerford, Larson, & Hare, 2004), a number of studies and program evaluations have identified components of effective youth development programs and curricula. These components include: strong relationships with adults (Boyd, 2001; James, 1999; Moore & Zaff, 2002; Woyach, 1996); training in mediation, conflict resolution, team dynamics, and project management (Edelman et al., 2004); new roles and responsibilities based on experiences and resources that provide opportunity for growth (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003); teamwork and peer networking (Boyd, 2001; Woyach, 1996); and opportunities to practice communication, negotiation, and refusal skills (ACT for Youth, 2003).

Youth development is best promoted through activities and experiences that help youth develop competencies in social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive domains (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The Konopka Institute (2000) identified components of effective youth development programs, including: decision-making; interaction with peers; acquiring a sense of belonging; experimenting with their own identity, with relationships to others, and with ideas; and participating in the creative arts, physical activity, and health education. The American Youth Policy Forum conducted a national review of 50 evaluations of youth interventions and identified nine basic principles of effective youth programming and practice, including: (a) high quality implementation; (b) high standards and expectations for participating youth; (c) participation of caring, knowledgeable adults; (d) parental involvement; (e) taking a holistic approach; (f) viewing youth as valuable resources and contributors to their communities; (g) high community involvement; (h) long term services, support, and follow-up; and (i) including work-based and vocational curricula as key components of programming (James, 1999). The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS) *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education* (1997) included: (a) providing accurate information about human sexuality; (b) providing an opportunity for young people to question, explore, and assess their sexual attitudes; (c) helping young people develop interpersonal skills, including communication, decision-making, assertiveness, and peer refusal skills; and (d) helping young people exercise responsibility regarding sexual relationships.

Youth Understand the Relationship between Their Strengths and Their Goals, and Have the Skills to Act on That Understanding

Research on social-emotional learning has found that instruction in self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making results in greater attachment to school (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Greater attachment to school, in turn, leads to less risky behavior, more developmental assets, better academic performance, and improved long-term outcomes such as higher graduation rates, higher incomes, lower arrest rates, and fewer pregnancies (Blum, Beuhring, & Rinehart, 2000; Wilson, Gottfredson, & Najaka, 2001).

Youth who participate in organizational leadership roles, planning activities, making presentations, and participating in extra-curricular activities show higher levels of self-efficacy, self-advocacy, and self-determination (Edelman et al., 2004; Larson, 2000, Sagawa, 2003). Other components of effective youth development programs include discussing conflicting values and formulating value systems (Konopka Institute, 2000); developing ethics, values, and ethical reasoning (Boyd, 2001; Woyach, 1996); developing personal development plans; assessing individual strengths and weaknesses; and skill-building in goal-setting, planning, and self-advocacy (Edelman et al., 2004). Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) identified similar self-determination and self-advocacy skills needed by students with disabilities such as communicating interests and preferences, setting achievable goals, planning and time management, problem-solving, negotiating and persuading, leadership skills, and self-monitoring and reinforcement.

Youth development and youth leadership experiences can have positive effects on behaviors and skills including self-efficacy, self-determination, communication, and problem-solving. Each of these skills is linked to higher student achievement, lower dropout rates, and/or better postschool outcomes (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem & Ferber, 2003; Sagawa, 2003). Adolescents involved in community volunteer service-learning programs that featured both community volunteering and classroom activities were less likely to be sexually active and become pregnant than teens not involved in such programs. Combining sex education with youth development activities (such as educational mentoring, employment, sports, or the performing arts) also reduced frequency of sexual activity as well as pregnancies and births (Manlove et al., 2002).

Youth involved in civic engagement programs were more likely “to be more involved in school, to graduate from high school, to hold more positive civic attitudes, and to avoid teen pregnancy and drug use than those who are not” (Zaff, Calkins, Bridges, & Margie, 2002, p. 1). Teens’ relationships with adults outside their families—teachers, mentors, neighbors, and unrelated adults—can promote their social development and overall skills. These relationships can be informal or part of formal mentoring programs (Hair, Jager, & Garrett, 2002; Tierney & Grossman, 1995). Research by Gambone, Klem, and Connell indicates that supportive relationships, particularly with parents, have “strong, positive effects on adolescents’ learning to be productive and to navigate by the end of their high school years” (2002, p.38).

Youth Develop the Knowledge and Skills to Demonstrate Leadership and Participate in Community Life

A study by Woyach (1996) identified 12 principles for effective youth leadership programs, including knowledge and skills related to leadership; the history, values, and beliefs of communities; leadership styles; awareness, understanding and tolerance of other people, cultures and societies; experiential learning and opportunities for genuine leadership; and service to others in the community, country, and world. Boyd (2001)

and Ferber et al. (2002) also found experiential learning, such as service-learning projects, to be an effective method for teaching leadership skills and applying academic skills. Additional experiential learning or on-the-job leadership experiences that have proven to be effective include mentoring and counseling, formal leadership training programs, internships, special assignments, and simulations or case studies (James, 1999; Lambrecht, Hopkins, Moss, & Finch, 1997); activities that convey information about life, careers, and places beyond the neighborhood, as well as community service opportunities (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995); and activities providing a sense of connection to the community, problem solving and social skills, and after-school recreation programs (Komro & Stigler, 2000).

Effective youth leadership experiences identified by research include placement in a variety of challenging situations with problems to solve and choices to make under conditions of manageable risk; and placement in a supportive environment with supervisors who provide positive role models and constructive support, and mentors who provide counseling (James, 1999; Lambrecht et al., 1997). For many youth, leadership skills are developed during structured extracurricular (recreational and social development) activities, such as clubs, service organizations, sports programs, and fine arts (Larson, 2000; Wehman, 1996). Few youth with disabilities participate in these types of activities and groups unless teachers, families, and other advocates facilitate these conditions (Amado, 1993; Halpern et al., 1997; Moon, 1994). Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) found that students with disabilities who have self-determination skills have more positive educational outcomes and have a greater chance of being successful in making the transition to adulthood, including achieving employment and community independence. For youth with disabilities, the importance of developing self-advocacy skills (those skills individuals need to advocate on their own behalf) has been well-documented (Agran, 1997; Sands & Wehmeyer, 1996; Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1994; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998).

Research on factors promoting resilience in youth at risk has shown that the consistent presence of a single caring adult can have a significant positive impact on a young person's growth and development (Garmezy, 1993). Well-designed programs include experiences that promote positive relationships with both peers and adults (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disabilities for Youth, 2004).

Successful youth development programs must be able to adapt to the social, cultural, and ethnic diversity of the young people that they serve and the communities in which they operate (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Programs that promote understanding and tolerance in their participants have been shown to promote the development of positive social behaviors, attitudes, and skills (Edelman et al., 2004; Ferber, Pittman & Marshall, 2002).

Youth leadership is part of the youth development process and has internal and external components, such as the ability to analyze one's own strengths and weaknesses, set and pursue personal and vocational goals, guide or direct others on a course of action, influence the opinions and behaviors of others, and serve as a role model (Wehmeyer et al., 1998). Evaluations of youth development programs have demonstrated that young people who participate in youth leadership and civic engagement activities consistently get the supports and opportunities needed for healthy youth development (Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, 2003).

Youth Have the Ability to Make Informed Decisions

Parents, educators, and researchers agree on the need to promote self-determination, self-advocacy, and student-centered planning. Self-determination, the combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior, has become an important

part of special education and related services provided to individuals with disabilities (Abery & Stancliffe, 1996). Self-determination skills include self-advocacy, social skills, organizational skills, community and peer connection, communication, conflict resolution, career skill building, and career development and computer/technological competency (Martin & Marshall, 1996; Wehmeyer, Kelchner, & Richards, 1996). Research has found that helping students acquire and exercise self-determination skills is a strategy that leads to more positive educational outcomes. For example, Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) found that one year after graduation, students with learning disabilities who received self-determination training were more likely to achieve positive adult outcomes, including being employed at a higher rate and earning more per hour, when compared to peers who had not received the training. Youth development programs foster self-determination by increasing participants' capacity for independent thinking, self-advocacy, and development of internal standards and values. (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002).

Starting with the 1990 IDEA legislation, transition services must be based on students' needs and take into account students' interests and preferences. To accomplish this goal, students must be prepared to participate in planning for their future. The IDEA 1997 regulations support students' participation in planning for their future by requiring that all special education students be invited to their IEP meetings when transition goals are to be discussed. The U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has played a major role in advancing a wide range of self-determination strategies through sponsored research and demonstration projects.

Research indicates that many students are attending their IEP meetings (Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999; Johnson & Sharpe, 2000). There remain, however, a significant number who are not involved. This raises questions as to whether these students are not being extended opportunities for involvement, or are simply choosing not to attend. Effective student participation in the IEP process requires that students have the skills to move their lives in the directions they themselves choose, and have the support of their school and family and the adult service system in accomplishing their goals.

A common element of many exemplary self-determination programs is the presence of an individual with a philosophy, and the accompanying motivation, to see self-determination practices implemented or enhanced in his or her school or district. Exemplary self-determination programs also have strong administrative support encouraging the implementation of self-determination programs in schools. Without administrative support, student self-determination programs are often limited to individual classrooms and teachers who are dedicated to doing what they can to further their students' self-determination despite limited resources and inadequate administrative commitment (Wood & Test, 2001).

Educators, parents, and students consistently recommend that self-determination instruction begin early, well before high school. This recommendation is consistent with published recommendations for self-determination instruction (Wood & Test, 2001). Natural opportunities for making choices occur throughout life, and increased opportunities to express preferences and choices, beginning in early childhood, can heighten an individual's sense of self-esteem and self-direction. Izzo and Lamb (2002) suggested that schools seeking to encourage self-determination and positive postschool outcomes for students with disabilities should: (a) empower parents as partners in promoting self-determination and career development skills; (b) facilitate student-centered IEP meetings and self-directed learning models; (c) increase students' awareness of their disability and needed accommodations; (d) offer credit-bearing classes in self-determination and careers; (e) teach and reinforce students' internal locus of control; (f) develop self-advocacy skills and support student application of these skills; (g) infuse self-determination and career development skills into the general education curriculum; and (h) develop and implement work-based learning programs for all students.

Youth who participate in developmentally appropriate decision making activities and those who have access to meaningful youth development supports and opportunities are better equipped to make a successful transition to adult life (Gambone, Klem, and Connell 2002). Effective practices relating to decision-making include: opportunities for critical thinking and active, self-directed learning (ACT for Youth, 2003); setting goals and solving problems (Boyd, 2001; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995); and gaining experience in decision-making (Boyd, 2001; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995; Konopka Institute, 2000).

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4. Family Involvement

Standards

- 4.1 School staff members demonstrate a strong commitment to family involvement and understand its critical role in supporting high achievement, access to postsecondary education, employment, and other successful adult outcomes.
- 4.2 Communication among youth, families, and schools is flexible, reciprocal, meaningful, and individualized.
- 4.3 School staff actively cultivate, encourage, and welcome youth and family involvement.
- 4.4 Youth, families, and school staff are partners in the development of policies and decisions affecting youth and families.

Demonstrating Commitment to Family Involvement and the Family's Role in Supporting High Achievement and Postschool Results

A number of research studies, literature reviews, and program evaluations have linked family involvement and support to positive outcomes for youth with and without disabilities (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hughes et al., 1997; James & Partee, 2003; Keith et al., 1998; Kohler, 1996; Sanders, Epstein, & Connors-Tadros, 1999; Shaver & Walls, 1998; Simon, 2001; Yap & Enoki, 1994). These outcomes include improved achievement test results, decreased risk of dropout, improved attendance, improved student behavior, higher grades, higher grade point average, greater commitment to schoolwork, and improved attitude toward school. Some studies have found that characteristics of family involvement are correlated with social, racial/ethnic, and economic variables (Catsambis & Garland, 1997; Harry, 2002; Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Lamorey, 2002; Muller & Kerbow, 1993). Research findings indicate the appropriateness of refraining from broad generalizations with regard to family involvement and its relationship to increased student achievement, as such generalizations mask the complexity of the issue. The research literature indicates that student achievement outcomes differ depending on: (a) the particular component(s) of family involvement studied, and whether data analyzed were provided by parents or by schools; (b) achievement measure(s) used (e.g. achievement test scores, grades, GPA); (c) cultural or racial/ethnic groups involved; (d) the subject matter (e.g. mathematics, reading, science) being tested; (e) income levels of the parents; and (f) gender of the parents (Harry, 2002; Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Lamorey, 2002; National Middle School Association, 2000).

Although several studies have examined the relationship between family involvement during the K-12 years and student outcomes (Cotton & Wicklund, 1989; Desimone, 1999), the majority have focused on the elementary school setting. Much less is understood about the impact of family involvement on middle and high school students (Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1998; Brough, 1997; Keith et al., 1993; Rutherford & Billing, 1995; Trivette et al., 1995). Morningstar, Turnbull, and Turnbull (1995) found that secondary students with disabilities themselves report the need for their families to guide and support them as they plan for the future.

Components of effective family involvement identified in the literature include: (a) engaging and supporting families in a wide range of activities from preschool through high school (Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; James & Partee, 2003; Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Sanders & Epstein, 2000), (b) collaborative plans based on annual feedback (Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000; Mapp, 1997), (c) regular staff development on student and family involvement (Boethel, 2003; Furney, & Salembier, 2000; Harry, 2002; Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; James & Partee, 2003;

Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Kohler, 1998; Lamorey, 2002; National PTA, 1997; Rutherford & Billing, 1995), and (d) clear information on school or program expectations, activities, services, and options (Catsambis, 1998; Grigal & Neubert, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 1997; Leuchovius, Hasazi, & Goldberg, 2001; National PTA, 1997; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997).

Strengthening Communication Between Youth, Families, and Schools

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (National PTA, 1997) states that “communication between home and school is regular, two-way and meaningful.” Outreach, communication, and relationships with families have been identified as key ingredients of effective programs and schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; James & Partee, 2003; Keith, et al., 1998; Mapp, 1997; Rutherford & Billing, 1995; Sanders, et al., 1999; Yap & Enoki, 1994) and are especially important for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Espinosa, 1995; Martinez & Velazquez, 2000). Effective communication strategies identified in the literature include: (a) a variety of communication methods (James & Partee, 2003; National PTA, 1997; Sanders & Harvey, 2000), (b) communication based on individual student and family needs and that includes alternate formats and languages as needed (Brough & Irvin, 2001; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Harry, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; James & Partee, 2003; Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Kohler, 2000; Lamorey, 2002; National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research, 1999), (c) reports of positive student behavior and achievement (Epstein et al., 1997; National PTA, 1997), and (d) improving the literacy skills of English Language Learners (Boethel, 2003; Espinosa, 1995; Yap & Enoki, 1994).

Family relationships and support can play a particularly influential role in the lives of youth from diverse cultural communities (Harry, 2002; Hosack & Malkmus, 1992; Irvin, Thorin, & Singer, 1993; Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Lamorey, 2002; Leung, 1992). Despite recognition of the importance of student and family involvement, families are resources that have been underutilized by transition and vocational rehabilitation professionals (Czerlinsky & Chandler, 1993; DeFur & Taymans, 1995; Marrone, Helm, & Van Gelder, 1997; Salembier & Furney, 1997). Although parents and professionals are working to forge new relationships, there remains a need to build the level of trust and collaboration between them (Guy, Goldberg, McDonald, & Flom, 1997).

The importance of establishing credibility and trust with culturally and racially diverse populations cannot be overemphasized; cultural responsiveness is essential to establishing such confidence (Harry, 2002; Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Lamorey, 2002; National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research, 1999). Tailoring training to the cultural traditions of families improves recruitment and outcome effectiveness (Kumpfer & Alvarado, 1995). For example, parents from culturally and racially diverse populations may prefer one-on-one meetings rather than more traditional training formats such as workshops (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 1998; National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research, 1999). Additional strategies may include family-mentoring programs, needs assessment surveys, and working with culturally specific community organizations that have created relationships of trust (Harry, 2002; Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Lamorey, 2002; National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2002). Establishing effective levels of communication between youth, families, and school professionals is critically important in relation to these research findings.

Embracing Youth and Family Involvement

While the value of family involvement is well-understood, the current system does not make it easy for families to be effective partners in the transition process. Multiple service programs form a confusing,

fragmented, and inconsistent system (General Accounting Office, 1995). Parent centers report that families of young adults with disabilities are deeply frustrated by the lack of coordinated, individualized services for high school students and the paucity of resources, programs, and opportunities for young adults once they graduate (PACER, 2000). Cultural differences may further complicate relationships with professionals (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998).

Recent surveys indicate that families seek information on a variety of issues including: helping youth develop self-advocacy skills; balancing standards-based academic instruction with functional life skills training; inclusive education practices at the secondary level; postsecondary options for young adults with developmental and cognitive disabilities; pre-employment experiences and employment options that lead to competitive employment; financial planning; resources available to youth through the workforce investment, vocational rehabilitation, Medicaid, and Social Security systems; better collaboration with community resources; housing options; and interacting with the juvenile justice system (PACER, 2001).

A number of studies and program evaluations highlight the importance of actively encouraging family involvement and creating a welcoming school or program climate for families (Boethel, 2003; Brough & Irvin, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; James & Partee, 2003; Rutherford & Billing, 1995; Simon, 2001; Yap & Enoki, 1994). Strategies for cultivating family involvement include: (a) a formal process identifying strengths and needs and connecting families and students to support and assistance (Kohler, 1993; Rutherford & Billing, 1995); (b) meeting schedules that accommodate scheduling, transportation, and other family needs (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Martinez & Velazquez, 2000; National PTA, 1997); (c) family training on positive family-child relationships (James & Partee, 2003; National PTA, 1997; Simmons, Stevenson, & Strnad, 1993); (d) staff development on welcoming and working collaboratively with families and students (Boethel, 2003; Espinosa, 1995; Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000; Kreider, 2002; National PTA, 1997); (e) supports and materials that reflect community diversity (Boethel, 2003; Furney & Salembier, 2000; Harry, 2002; Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Lamorey, 2002; Martinez & Velazquez, 2000); and (f) referrals to community resources (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Youth, Families, and School Staff as Partners in Policy Development and Decision Making

Family involvement as well as training in program design, planning, and implementation are significant factors leading to positive youth outcomes (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1998; Sanders et al., 1999; Simon, 2001). Research also indicates that parent participation and leadership in transition planning are important in successful transitions for youth with disabilities (DeStefano, Heck, Hasazi, & Furney, 1999; Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997; Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999; Kohler, 1993; Taymans, Corbey, & Dodge, 1995). Strategies for effective partnering of families, educators, and community members include: (a) an accessible and understandable decision-making and problem-solving process for partners (National PTA, 1997); (b) dissemination of information about policies, goals, and reforms to families and students (Kohler, 2000; Lopez, 2002; National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research, 1999); (c) policies that respect diversity (Boethel, 2003; Harry, 2002; Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Lamorey, 2002; National PTA, 1997); (d) adequate training for families on policy, reform, and related issues (James & Partee, 2003; National PTA, 1997); and (e) the inclusion of students and families on decision-making, governance, and other program and school committees (Furney & Salembier, 2000; James & Partee, 2003; National PTA, 1997; Sanders et al., 1999).

Further, meaningful family involvement and participation must expand beyond the individual student level. Student and family involvement are important in making service systems and professionals aware of their needs (Gloss, Reiss, & Hackett, 2000). Family members can be fully included in the research process (Turnbull, Friesen, & Ramirez, 1998) and at all levels of policy and service delivery planning. Involving family members in the development and evaluation of federal, state, and local policies and practices helps assure that the services and supports available to youth with disabilities are of the highest quality (Federal Inter-agency Coordinating Council, 2000). In addition, research indicates that family participation and leadership in transition planning practices enhances the implementation of transition policy (President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). In order for family members to expand participation beyond their own child, they must have opportunities to increase their own knowledge and develop leadership skills.

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5. Connecting Activities

Standards

- 5.1 Organizations coordinating services and supports align their missions, policies, procedures, data, and resources to equitably serve all youth and ensure the provision of a unified flexible array of programs, services, accommodations, and supports.
- 5.2 Organizations connect youth to an array of programs, services, accommodations, and supports, based on an individualized planning process.
- 5.3 Organizations hire and invest in the development of knowledgeable, responsive, and accountable personnel who understand their shared responsibilities to align and provide programs, services, resources, and supports necessary to assist youth in achieving their individual postschool goals.

Organizations Collaborate to Serve all Youth Equitably With a Variety of Programs and Services

Effective transition planning and services depend upon functional linkages among schools, rehabilitation services, and other human service and community agencies. However, several factors have stood as barriers to effective collaboration. These include: (a) lack of shared knowledge and vision by students, parents, and school and agency staff around students' postschool goals and the transition resources necessary to support students' needs and interests (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002); (b) lack of shared information across school and community agencies, and lack of coordinated assessment and planning processes (Benz, Johnson, Mikkelsen, & Lindstrom, 1995); (c) lack of meaningful roles for students and parents in a transition decision-making process that respects both students' emerging need for independence and self-determination, and parents' continuing desire to encourage and support their children during the emancipation process that is part of becoming a productive, contributing young adult (Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997); (d) lack of meaningful information on anticipated postschool services needed by students, and lack of follow-up data on postschool outcomes and continuing support needs of students that can be used to guide improvement in systems collaboration and linkages (Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999; Johnson & Sharpe, 2000); (e) lack of effective practices for establishing and using state and local interagency teams to build capacity for collaboration and systems linkages; and (f) lack of coordinated eligibility requirements and funding for agency services (Luecking, Crane, & Mooney, 2002).

These barriers to effective collaboration are not insurmountable. Research suggests that systems can work more effectively together, and student achievement of meaningful secondary and postschool outcomes can be improved, through: (a) the use of written and enforceable interagency agreements that structure the provision of collaborative transition services (Johnson et al., 2002); (b) the development and delivery of interagency and cross-agency training opportunities; (c) the use of interagency planning teams to facilitate and monitor capacity building efforts in transition (Furney et al., 1997); and (d) the provision of a secondary curriculum that supports student identification and accomplishment of transition goals and prepares youth for success in work, postsecondary, and community living environments (Hasazi et al., 1999). Promising collaboration strategies have been proposed to link secondary education systems with employers and community employment services funded under the Workforce Investment Act (Luecking, Crane, & Mooney, 2002; Mooney & Crane, 2002) and with postsecondary education systems (Flannery, Slovic, Dalmau, Bigaj, & Hart, 2000; Hart, Zimbrich, & Whelley, 2002; Stodden & Jones, 2002).

Collaborative approaches bring together community agencies to focus their collective expertise and combined resources to improve the quality of transition planning and services for youth. This sharing of resources, knowledge, skills, and data requires planned and thoughtful collaboration among all participants. The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002) suggested connecting special education to outside services such as vocational rehabilitation, as a way to improve postschool outcomes for youth. The Commission also found that not enough interagency activity occurs between schools and vocational rehabilitation agencies. Further, fiscal disincentives should be removed and waiver options provided to promote cost-sharing and resource-pooling among agencies to improve the availability and cost effectiveness of transition services and supports for students with disabilities.

Knowledgeable, Responsive, and Accountable Personnel are in Place to Help Youth Achieve Their Goals

In addition to the need for collaboration among youth-serving organizations, these organizations must be committed to supporting the development and retention of personnel who are knowledgeable, responsive, and accountable. State and local education agencies across the United States are experiencing a shortage of qualified personnel to serve children and youth with disabilities. In 1999-2000, more than 12,000 openings for special education teachers were left vacant or filled by substitutes (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Further, an additional 31,000 positions were filled by teachers who were not fully certified for their positions (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

New teachers are entering the field without the specific knowledge and skills needed to support transition. Miller, Lombard, and Hazekorn (2000) reported that few special education teachers have received training on methods, materials, and strategies for developing meaningful IEPs that include transition goals and objectives and specifically address students' needs through curriculum and instruction. Further, many special education teachers underutilize community work-experience programs and fail to coordinate referrals to adult service providers.

Teachers and others assisting students in the transition from school to adult life need specialized skills and knowledge. Several states have developed state licensure or certification for transition coordinators, support services coordinators, work experience coordinators, and school vocational rehabilitation counselors. However, these licensure and certification programs are few in number and have been difficult to maintain, due to costs and competing demands for personnel in other, broader classifications of special education teacher licensure, such as learning disabilities and emotional/behavioral disorders.

Rehabilitation and career counselors are often the only link that school programs have to postschool environments, including employment. Concern about the quality of services in the area of rehabilitation counseling led to the mandate for the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) in the 1992 and 1998 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This directive seeks to ensure that personnel are qualified by establishing CSPD minimum standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). However, the CSPD initiative is being implemented in the context of what may be the largest turnover and retirement of counselors in the history of the state-federal system of rehabilitation (Bishop & Crystal, 2002; Dew & Peters, 2002; Muzzio, 2000). Turnover and retirements have been reported to be as high as 30-40% of personnel in some states (Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 2001). In general, job openings across all categories of counseling occupations is expected to increase 36% or more through 2010, faster than the average for other employment categories (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002a). The existing counseling training programs

cannot be expected to meet this expanding need. Bishop and Crystal reported that in the preceding five-year period, less than one-third of vacant positions were filled by staff with a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. The implications of losing experienced qualified professionals and replacing those individuals with less qualified and inexperienced staff are clear. This trend will have a tremendously detrimental impact on transition services, and the situation warrants a concerted effort to address this concern. In the immediate future, the collaboration needed to provide effective transition services may be in jeopardy until new counselors fill the vacant positions, stabilize their workload responsibilities, and receive needed training.

As young people with disabilities prepare to exit their public school programs, a significant number will need access to community services that address their community living, social and recreational, health, and other related needs. Persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, in particular, will need to rely on service program personnel to support their everyday living needs. Significant worker shortages and the associated factors of compensation, recruitment, training, and support and supervision have become increasingly prominent issues within the adult service-delivery system for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Larson, Lakin, & Hewitt, 2002). As the national movement from institutional to community settings has occurred, community service agency professionals and direct support personnel have been requested to do more with greater individual responsibility, less direct supervision, less structure, and greater competency, but without preparatory or ongoing training. Direct support staff, in particular, have been the most difficult to recruit, retain, and provide with proper training to ensure that they have the ability to address the residential and employment needs of the individuals they serve in community settings.

Direct support professionals play a key role in the lives of young people with disabilities exiting public schools by supporting them in their own homes, in community employment situations, and in other community settings. There are over 410,000 direct support professionals working in community residential programs and 90,500-120,000 of these personnel are working in vocational and employment settings (Larson, Hewitt, & Anderson, 1999; Prouty, Smith, & Lakin, 2001). In addition, the number of personal and home care aides and home health aides supporting adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities is estimated respectively at 414,000 and 615,000 nationwide (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002b, 2002c). In the past quarter-century, annual staff turnover rates have consistently averaged between 43%-70% in community residential settings alone (Larson, Lakin, & Bruininks, 1998). Low average wages and lack of training for those filling these positions have compounded these difficulties.

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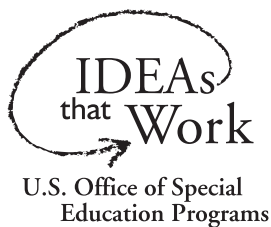
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