



## CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS WITH DISABILITIES

### CCD Transition Principles October 2009

#### **Background/Overview:**

Today, there continues to be a stubborn dilemma facing youth with disabilities. They are more likely to drop out of high school, not receive adequate job training, become involved in the juvenile justice system, and remain on government programs resulting in a life of government dependence and poverty. Too many youth with disabilities experience poor education as a result of school services and settings that are inappropriate and sometimes improper. Many of these youth will continue to experience high unemployment as well as insufficient opportunities to obtain competitive employment with the potential of career growth. Much of this is a result of low expectations on the part of society.

Today, the picture is bleak:

- Of youth age 14-21 served under IDEA Part B in the 2004-05 school year, 54% graduated with a standard diploma, 28% dropped out, 15% received a certificate of attendance, and just over 1% reached the maximum age to stay in school;
- Youth with disabilities are half as likely as their peers without disabilities to participate in postsecondary education. Many students are not encouraged or adequately prepared to go to college;
- Young adults with disabilities are three times likelier to live in poverty as adults than their peers without disabilities;
- The rate of youth with disabilities entering the juvenile justice system is four times higher than for youth without disabilities;
- More than a quarter million youth with disabilities transitioning to adult services sit on waiting lists for services across multiple systems;
- A large number of youth with disabilities, particularly youth with significant disabilities, tend to be underemployed, working at minimum and sub-minimum wage jobs, and in segregated settings rather than competitive employment in integrated settings;
- Statistics show that almost all youth with disabilities receiving benefits will spend a lifetime receiving government support and not at work; and,
- The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the **official unemployment rate for people with disabilities, meaning those who have lost their jobs and those who are actively seeking employment, in May 2009 was 13.7% (8.9% for those with no disability)**. While this statistic is alarming, even more troubling is the lack of labor force participation by people with disabilities.

BLS reported that for the same month **only 22.9% of all adults with disabilities participated in the labor force as compared with 71.1% of the non-disabled population.**

Youth with disabilities face this reality in spite of years of advancing disability public policy such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Rehabilitation Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, these and other education and employment related statutes and policies are not aligned to solve this crisis. Congress has the opportunity to strengthen its commitment to improving the full participation of youth with disabilities in society and their transition to the workforce and the adult world. Congress should take the opportunity to look at legislation with a lens toward improving opportunities to access appropriate and proper education, competitive employment, community activities, and supportive programs. To achieve these goals transition related programs and services need to be improved. Funding for transition-related programs has been inadequate and in order for programs to work effectively funding must be dedicated and increased.

On behalf of the undersigned member organizations of the CCD Employment and Training Task Force and the Education Task Force, we offer the following policy principles as a guide in the reauthorization and appropriation processes.

### **Essential Transition Principles for Youth with Disabilities:**

- Federal and state policy should promote positive transition outcomes including additional education opportunities, competitive employment, economic self-sufficiency, and community living.
- All transition-related statutory and policy changes should be driven by an underlying belief in high expectations for all youth, self-determination, and equality of opportunity (including nondiscrimination, individualization, inclusion, and integration).
- Transition planning and services must be based on self-determination and be individualized, person-centered, youth driven, and based on the strengths and interests of the youth.
- Transition strategies should be evidenced-based and include school-based preparatory experiences, career preparation and work-based learning experiences, youth development and leadership, connecting activities (such as services, activities, and supports that help youth gain access to chosen post-school options), and family involvement and supports.
- Businesses and employers need to be engaged as partners in the transition process.
- Agencies, programs, and organizations coordinating services and supports should align their missions, policies, procedures, data, and resources to serve all youth,

including youth with disabilities, to provide a unified flexible array of programs, services, accommodations, and supports.

- All youth need to be held to the highest academic expectations and participate in educational programs that are grounded in research-based standards with clear performance expectations. Their academic goals must be aligned with their goals for life after high school and must include the necessary services and supports to prepare them for life after high school.
- Definitions for transition and transition services should be embedded in relevant federal legislation and regulation. Definitions should be consistent while allowing for program focus.
- To achieve positive transition outcomes, federal and state policy should promote interagency coordination, agency responsibilities, and a set of incentives for Labor, Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, Medicaid, and other sources of public funds to maximize funding and develop cross-agency transition strategies.
- Schools and other relevant agencies should have adequate numbers of knowledgeable, responsive, accountable, and culturally competent staff to help youth achieve their goals.
- Public policy should promote innovative strategies for achieving academic and social inclusion and integrate transportation and extracurricular activities.

### **Core Elements of Transition-Related Legislation:**

#### ***Federal Policy:***

- Because youth with disabilities are served by numerous systems, federal and state policy should define and align the following terms where relevant (suggested definitions provided as an attachment):
  - Transition
  - Transition Services
  - Universal Design
  - Universal Design for Learning
- Federal statutes need to be amended to support interagency coordination, cooperation and collaboration, including through state and local planning tools and councils, authorized activities, reporting and data collection systems, and with formalized agreements.
- Federal statutes need to be amended to connect performance systems that recognize multiple stages to achieve outcomes across systems. Data collection and reporting systems requirements need to be aligned and systems offered incentives to do so.

- Changes in federal statutes need to be implemented with vigor and strong leadership. This should include outreach to students with disabilities and their families.

***Education Policy:***

- There is a need for greater education, implementation, enforcement, and accountability for policies already in place regarding inclusion of transition-age youth with disabilities in education programs.
  - Transition planning should start as soon as possible and no later than 14 years old.
  - Students should be supported in maximizing opportunities to participate in and advocate for themselves in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. IEPs must address their unique strengths, needs and preferences and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent community living goals. Students and families should be encouraged to contact disability and family advocacy groups to assist them in driving their IEP process.
  - Diplomas and certificates tied to state standards, have post-school meaning and offer youth options. Similarly, effective assessment tools need to be developed, that can measure the achievement of each student and convey the student's abilities to employers and other stakeholders.
  - Youth with disabilities need to be taught how to effectively exercise their rights and responsibilities.
  - Programs and agencies should expose participants to disability history, culture, pride, mentors and role models with and without disabilities, disability public policy, self-advocacy and self-determination, disability disclosure, and leadership activities.
  - While in school, youth with disabilities should be exposed to career exploration, guidance and counseling, soft skills training and work-based learning opportunities including internships.
  - Programs and agencies should inform young people with disabilities and their families how to access programs, services, activities, and supports that help them gain access to chosen post-school options (including, but not limited to, programs and eligibility requirements, benefits planning, accessible transportation, housing, mental and physical health services, personal assistance services, independent living centers, and assistive technology).
  - Recently enacted programs and policies to support increased post-secondary education participation and success by youth with disabilities should be fully implemented. Existing programs should be expanded.

- Schools and systems should demonstrate a commitment to family involvement and the family's role in supporting high achievement and post school result.

***Professional Development/Recruitment:***

- Interdisciplinary professional standards and in-service/pre-services training programs, including those in post-graduate settings, need to be expanded and updated in the various systems that serve people with disabilities, particularly youth with disabilities.
- The current personnel crisis among agencies and organizations who work with youth with disabilities demands increased opportunities for training and professional development to attract professionals, and those beginning their careers to occupations that support youth in transition (e.g. transition specialists, special education teachers, job developers, service providers, and direct support professionals).

***Funding:***

- Funding levels must be dedicated and increased across programs to achieve these transition-related goals.

**Federal Statutes to be Addressed:**

At a minimum, the following statutes need to be considered for amendment to improve transition outcomes as they come up for reauthorization:

- Workforce Investment Act Titles I, II, III, & IV
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Parts B & D
- Elementary & Secondary Education Act
- Higher Education Opportunity Act
- Developmental Disabilities Act
- Other Youth-focused legislation in the health, mental health, & community service arenas

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) is a coalition of over 100 national disability organizations and advocates for national public policy that ensures the inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. The Employment and Training Task Force is a smaller group within the coalition that addresses Federal disability employment issues, working to secure national public policy that advances self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion in employment for individuals with disabilities.

We hope this document will be useful as you move through the legislative process and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

ACCSES

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

APSE

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf

Council for Exceptional Children

Council for Learning Disabilities

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund

Easter Seals

Epilepsy Foundation

Helen Keller National Center

Inter-National Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation

Learning Disabilities Association of America

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities

National Association of State Head Injury Administrators

National Center for Learning Disabilities, Inc.

National Coalition on Deaf-Blindness

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth

National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

National Disability Rights Network

National Down Syndrome Congress

National Down Syndrome Society

National Organization on Disability

National PTA

Paralyzed Veterans of America

Research Institute for Independent Living

The Advocacy Institute

The Arc of the United States

Tourette Syndrome Association

United Cerebral Palsy

## **Suggested Definitions:**

### *Transition*

The period of time when adolescents are moving into adulthood that involves planning for postsecondary education, careers, and independent living.

### *Transition Services (Education Related Definition)*

A coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that--

(A) is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

(B) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and

(C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives including career exposure and work-based learning experiences, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

### *Transition Services (Employment Related Definition)*

A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post school adult living objectives including career exposure and work-based learning experiences, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

### *Universal Design*

The design of environments, products, and communication practices, as well as the delivery of programs, services, and activities, to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible without adaptation or specialized design.

### *Universal Design for Learning*

A scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that—

(A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and,

(B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient.