The Rural Institute Transition Projects E-News.

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A Quarterly Newsletter Produced by the Rural Institute Transition Projects.

In This Issue:

- Transition Assessment and Planning Guide.
- Upcoming Training.

Transition Assessment and Planning Guide:
A tool to assist students, families, and schools to coordinate meaningful transition activities for youth with disabilities by Ellen Condon and Kim Brown.

This tool was developed as a guide to assist youth and their families, schools, and support staff to conceptualize and plan for a young person's transition from school to adult life by taking a strengths-based, student-centered approach. In using the guide, teams can identify post-secondary goals, relevant skills and experiences that will lead to the achievement of those goals, the student's present levels of performance within environments that they find meaningful, and accommodations and supports that are currently successful for the student. Supports and services students might need after graduation are identified, again in relation to the desired post-school goals, and timelines to connect with those appropriate adult service agencies are outlined. It is never too early to start planning, which is why this tool is designed to be used with middle-school-aged students.

The process can be conducted by several IEP team members simultaneously or by the lead teacher alone; it can be incorporated into a class assignment that students work on; or it may be initiated by a parent. The document can be updated annually before IEP meetings to help focus the team on developing a meaningful transition plan for each individual student. IDEA 2004 legislation now requires transition assessments in the areas of education, employment, training and independent living (if appropriate) to be completed prior to the student's IEP. For students who need an ecologically referenced assessment, this tool could be quite effective in gathering information for the Employment, Training and Independent Living sections, and in some cases for the Education section as well.

For certain students, generic assessments, inventories or readiness-focused checklists will not provide the depth of information and insight into who they are, where they are at their best, and what they need in terms of transition services. Instead, these tools could even screen the students out of community-based instruction and employment by

comparing them against other students or prescribed lists of "needed employment skills" and then labeling them as "not ready."

In contrast, the Transition Assessment and Planning Guide begins with suggestions of opportunities to get to know a student "at their best." This allows the team to develop a strengths-based perspective of who the student is in their natural environments in terms of interests, abilities, strengths, and contributions. The philosophy of this tool is that all students have something to contribute to their communities and prospective employers. Many of us perform better in some environments than in others and better with certain supports and accommodations over other supports.

This tool leads team members to discover the student's current level of performance and necessary or typically used supports in activities at home, in the community, and at school. It provides meaningful and valid information about strengths, interests, and skills in an effort to guide transition planning. Through this process, the team identifies functional skills for each particular student, as well as accommodations and/or technology that could increase their participation in various activities. This allows students to be as prepared as possible when they reach the end of their high school years.

Part of the discussion that needs to happen in order to create a transition plan involves identifying what a student is *transitioning to* in terms of work, community participation, community living, recreation or leisure activities, and ongoing education. Families and students should be encouraged to start thinking about what they want a typical day to look like after graduation. Where will the young person be living? Where will they be working? What will they be doing for fun and with whom?

Teams should not limit the post-school outcome ideas to the structured support systems currently available in the community. Instead, they should encourage families and students to "think big"! Does the student want to own their own home with a yard and a garden? Or does the student want to live in an apartment with friends or family nearby? This vision will become clearer as graduation nears, but teams should start having the discussion as early as possible with families and young adults with disabilities. It is difficult to design a meaningful map of curriculum and transition activities without a clear destination.

The next section of the planning tool asks about funding or supports that the young adult currently receives. This information can help identify services within the adult system for which the student might be eligible. For example, if a young person currently receives Child and Family Developmental Disabilities services, they most likely will qualify as an adult (although they will need to apply). It is important to find out what "level" of service the student is receiving because some services (such as the Medicaid Waiver) transition with the student into adult life.

Section four asks the team to think about what kind of skills and strategies the student will need to learn, or what support services would be helpful to assist them to reach their

desired post-school outcomes. The team will look to the young person's future in terms of living in the community, working, self-advocacy, and participating in ongoing education. This section is intended to help the team think about which adult agencies or funding streams to connect with, visit, and invite to the student's IEP meetings. The IEP team needs to create a road map for the student to get from where they are now to a quality adult life.

The last page of the guide includes a timeline to be developed for each student to organize the next steps of their transition process, dates when they can apply for various services, and a place to track who is responsible to complete each activity.

Transition is an ongoing, coordinated process with a definitive goal. Many players need to be involved, including the student, their family, school staff, and agency staff. **It is never too early to start planning for adult life!**

Text box.
The student's high school program should thoroughly prepare him or her for achieving his or her desired post-school outcomes.
End text box.

Highlights of IDEA 2004 Transition Requirements.

As explained by representatives from the Office of Public Instruction at the April 2007 Council for Exceptional Children conference in Missoula, Montana.

Transition must be addressed for students receiving Special Education services at age 16 or younger if appropriate. This means that at the IEP which covers the time period in which a student turns 16, transition must be addressed and then revisited annually. The student must be invited to their IEP meeting but is not required to attend.

Text box.
The student's IEP should reflect the services and supports needed to assist the student to gain the necessary skills and also should include experiences and connections to make his or her post-school goals a reality. (MT Office of Public Instruction, adapted from Storms, et. al, 2000).
End of text box.

A new change with IDEA 2004 is that age appropriate **Transition Assessments** need to be completed prior to the IEP meeting in the areas of:

- Education,
- Employment,
- Training, and

- Independent Living Skills (if appropriate).

These assessments can be formal or informal but information **must** come from a variety of relevant sources such as the student, their family, job coaches, people who know the student well, agencies that work with the student outside of the school, and school staff.

The transition assessment should:

- Provide information,
- Indicate strategies,
- Provide present levels of functional performance,
- Suggest accommodations, and
- Provide a basis for measurable post-secondary goals and measurable annual goals.

The results of these assessments need to be summarized for each of the above areas on the IEP form. Measurable postsecondary goals are required in the following areas:

- Education or training,
- Employment, and
- Independent living skills, if needed.

The IEP must provide course of study information and credit information for the student to ensure movement toward post-secondary goals.

"Transition Services Needed" is the section which maps out a coordinated plan of activities for each individual student to move from their current levels of performance to their desired post-school goals.

Transition services areas that must be considered for all students include:

- Instruction,
- Employment,
- Community experiences,
- Post-school adult living,
- Related services,
- Daily living (if appropriate),
- Functional Vocational Assessment.

Montana's Office of Public Instruction transition web site has many more expanded definitions and examples of measurable post-secondary goals, transition services activities, and clarification of IDEA 2004 requirements.

Reference:

Storms, J., O'Leary, E, & Williams, J. (2000). <u>Transition requirements: A guide for states, districts, schools, universities and families.</u> Minnesota: National Transition Network, Institute on Community Integration (UAP), University of Minnesota.

Transition Assessment and Planning Guide link:

http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/Transition_Assessment.doc .

For ideas of post-secondary goals and formal and informal assessment tools link to Montana's OPI webpage: http://opi.mt.gov/ .

Agencies to Consider Contacting for Information, Services, and Assistance with Transition Planning.

 WIA.   Workforce programs can provide assistance to locate employment. Each local office operates somewhat differently. Youth are eligible from age 14 to age 21. Adult services are also available. Most offices have information on employment, housing subsidies, and heat assistance.
http://wsd.dli.mt.gov/wia/wiayouth.asp   .

Developmental Disabilities Program.   In Montana, youth can apply for adult Developmental Disabilities services at age 16. Services may include residential, employment and community participation supports, and case management services. While case management services are an entitlement, waiting lists do exist for other services.
http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/dsd/ddp/index.shtml   .
http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/forms_tools.asp   .

Community Supports Services (through the DD Program).   Youth who have been determined eligible for DD services can place their name on this wait list at age 17 1/2. Community Supports Services provides an annual budget of $7,800 (in 2007) to meet the individual's prioritized needs.

Social Security.   A child might be eligible for SSI earlier than age 18 if their family meets income and resource limitations. However, at 18, only the child's income and resources are counted in the determination process. In 2007, the monthly Federal Benefit rate for SSI is $623.00.
http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work/ .
http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work/ServiceProviders/WIPADirectory.html .
http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/SSAworkincent.asp .

Job Corps.   Or other technical training programs might be an option for other students. http://jobcorps.dol.gov/centers/MT.htm

Mental Health services. Might include case management, counseling, Comprehensive School and Community Treatment, day treatment, or residential supports. http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/mentalhealth/index.shtml .

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). The summer before their last year of high school students can apply for VR funding. VR can fund services such as: job development, job coaching, assessment, technology that is necessary to perform a job, accommodations to make the workplace accessible, and some assistance with education. VR doesn't usually provide services themselves but is more likely to contract with an employment vendor to provide the services for someone. http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/dsd/vrs/index.shtml . http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/dsd/vrs/transitionslist.pdf .

Disability Services for Students. Based on college campuses to assist students with disabilities to access services they might need, and advocate for necessary accommodations. Disability Services for Students is an excellent resource for teachers and students who have questions about how to best prepare youth for college.

 Independent Living Centers.   Have resources such as: 1) Peer mentoring programs; 2) Information and referrals; 3) Individual and systems advocacy; 4) Independent living skills training. http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/dsd/independentlivingservices/index.shtml .

Montana Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF). http://www.montanaylf.org .

Housing. HUD: http://www.hud.gov/local/index.cfm?state=mt . Section 8 housing: http://www.section8programs.com .

Resources.

University of Montana's Rural Institute Transition Projects: http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/ .

Parents, Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK): http://www.pluk.org/ .

Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities: http://www.mtcdd.org/ .

Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) - Special Education: http://www.opi.mt.gov/SpecEd/ .

OPI - New IEP Form: http://www.opi.mt.gov/SpecEd/forms.html .

MYTI - IEP Recommendations: http://marcgold.com/myti/presentations/IEPVCUPresentation5406.pps .

Upcoming Training.

You may register for the teleconference session by contacting Kim Brown at least two weeks in advance by either email at: brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu or calling: (406) 243-4852.

May. 5/14/07, 1:00-2:30, Teleconference: "Post Secondary Education Planning for Students with Disabilities." 20 sites – To Be Determined.*

 * If you are interested in hosting a teleconference site in your community, please contact Kim Brown at: brown@ruralinstitute.umt.edu or by calling (406) 243-4852.

Handouts, PowerPoints, and video streams from previous trainings can be found at the PLUK Video/Training Archive: http://www.pluk.org/ITVarchive .

Past topics include:

- Discovery and Transition Planning,
- Creating Transition Portfolios,
- Transition Planning for Middle Students with Disabilities, and
- Partnerships for Transition.

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