

Collaborative Strategies for Improved Transition Outcomes

Kelli Crane and Marie Parker Harvey
Center for Transition and Career Innovation
Jade Gingerich
Maryland Department of Disabilities

The Promoting the Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE) project is a 5-year, two-group, randomized controlled trial funded by the U.S. Department of Education in October 2013. Six sites were awarded funding to test the effectiveness of a multicomponent experimental intervention for improving academic, career, and financial outcomes for youth with disabilities receiving supplemental security income (SSI) benefits and their families. Awardees include Arkansas, ASPIRE (a consortium of six western states), California, Maryland, New York, and Wisconsin.

Implemented statewide, Maryland PROMISE delivered and evaluated the effectiveness of promising school-to-work transition practices for youth recipients of supplemental security income (SSI). The key features of the Maryland PROMISE intervention included assertive case management, work-based learning experiences, benefits counseling, and provided the family information about and connect them with existing resources and services. In order to best facilitate these quality services, PROMISE staff often needed to and were encouraged to collaborate with school personnel to learn about student skills, strengths, and support needs.

Overview

Students with disabilities often require services outside of those provided by schools to attain their postsecondary goals in employment, postsecondary education, and training. As a result, connecting students and their families to these services prior to exiting school can help fill service gaps and support a seamless transition to college and careers. Typically, school professionals assist by identifying community and state agency partners identified through the assessment process in the transition planning that may support the transition interests, needs, and activities of the student. This *Promising Practice Brief* outlines general information on how transition partners can better access and build collaborative relationships with schools based on lessons learned from Maryland PROMISE.

Transition Planning

Community and state agency partners working with transition age students need to make convenient and effective connections with students and assigned school professional. Often these connections begin during the child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting where students and their families are provided information on transition services, including those that are external to the school that might complement and support transition planning. Families and students have the option of inviting whomever they choose to a student's IEP meeting. However, before local IEP teams invite outside agencies and/or partners, they must receive parental consent as mandated through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Once parental consent is obtained, invited community partners may collaborate with the IEP Team, including the student and family, to become informed of services and support needs and ultimately help the student connect to the appropriate agency or program. Ideally, when making this connection, the schools also will take into consideration the student's individualized transition plan that identifies preferences, experiences, and their postsecondary goals. All IEP team members can then better coordinate and collaborate to provide tailored services and opportunities to meet the needs of the student.

Getting Connected

Meeting with school professional and/or students at the school during the regular school day can be the most expedient and useful way to access, coordinate, and collaborate with them. However, each school has its own policies and processes for gaining access to students during school hours. It is important to understand the individual school policies in order to set up meetings with students at school. There should be consideration for missed instruction for students. In some circumstances, school professionals may schedule meetings with community partners to coordinate services during common planning opportunities. Meeting with students and their families to plan for upcoming IEP Team meetings after attaining parental consent through the IEP process is an effective way to share information and discuss progress in preparation for an upcoming meeting.

Local School Systems (LSSs) often have a designated transition professional (coordinator, facilitator, or specialist) who is the main point of contact within a LSS to coordinate and implement secondary transition within their system. This secondary transition point of contact is an effective starting point for

Maryland's Practice for Gaining Consent for Transition Planning

When a purpose of the IEP meeting is to consider transition services, the public agency must ensure that the IEP team invites: 1) the student; and 2) a representative of any other agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services, with the consent of the student's parent or the student, if the student has reached the age of majority in accordance with State law. See 34 CFR § 300.321(b) (3) & COMAR 13A.05.01.07A (3). There is no exception from the parental consent requirement for vocational rehabilitation or any other agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services.

Practices:

- Obtain parental consent at the onset of discussions surrounding secondary transition. This means prior to any discussion of referrals, applications, or invitations to IEP meetings.
- Seek parental consent on an annual basis as part of the annual IEP meeting when transition is discussed. Each local school system may develop or use their own parental consent form.
- Make sure that all participating agencies are on the "Invite List" within the IEP after obtaining parental consent to invite. Although DORS is a division within MSDE, parental consent must be obtained as with any other participating agency.
- Make sure that the parent is aware of all participating agencies that have been invited to attend the IEP meeting. The parent may choose NOT to include invited agencies at the meeting. This must occur at every annual meeting.

(Excerpt from Maryland State Department of Education memo to Local Special Education Directors, May 27, 2016)

community and state agency partners to build collaborative relationships with individual schools.

In many cases, the secondary transition professional will be able to connect agency representatives and community partners to the appropriate people who best knows the students in each school. Other potential school partners may include a school administrator, special and general education teachers, career and technical teachers and staff, school counselors, IEP chairs, and administrative school support staff. Identifying a single point of contact within the LSS or individuals schools helps streamline the collaboration and avoid miscommunication. This person could be a school administrative support professional or an Assistant Principal. It does not have to be the secondary transition coordinator.

How to Be a Valued Partner

Maryland PROMISE collaborated with schools to provide and support important transition services. The PROMISE staff needed access to school professionals and students to implement the transition services. Based on this experience, we offer some helpful lessons on how agency and other professionals can collaborate effectively with schools.

Lesson 1: Demonstrate value

School staff are busy. External partners such as vocational rehabilitation counselors or employment specialists should be a support to the teachers and students rather than burdening them with more work. Agency representatives need to take the time to explain and demonstrate to the school professionals (e.g., transition specialist/coordinator, special education liaison, principal, school counselor, etc.) how their service aligns with and supports the goals for the student(s). For example, PROMISE staff demonstrated their value to schools by working

with students to facilitate work experiences that aligned with their individual goals, preferences, and interests as identified in the IEP. As well, PROMISE staff often had strong relationships with the family. They were able to gain consent from families to share information with the schools thus effectively engaging them in the transition planning discussion.

Lesson 2: Build trust

Communication and follow through with commitments can help build trust with school professionals. Community and agency representatives must show up for appointments on time and call if they will be late or need to cancel. If the student (and team) is expecting a specific outcome, the community or agency representative should deliver and/or communicate any changes to timelines or intended outcomes. If they are unable to follow through, explaining why goes a long way in building trust. Moreover, if attending meetings, such as the IEP meeting, be prepared by bringing all necessary paperwork, forms and ideas to share with students and/or school staff. Maryland PROMISE staff stayed in constant communication with school professionals and shared students' progress and relevant notes of any interactions with the student and their family. This practice not only showed the benefits of collaborating with PROMISE staff, but also demonstrated how staff working with the student influences their progress and complemented the implementation of the transition plan.

Lesson 3: Be consistent/set a schedule

Finding a consistent and least disruptive day and time to meet with students at each school can be helpful. Once a regular time is established (which may include before or after school to have the least interruption on classroom activity), maintain that schedule. Prior to each scheduled visit, send an email ahead of time reminding school professionals of the meeting and the purpose. When first

meeting with schools, Maryland PROMISE staff would ask to be oriented to the school policies on meeting with students. These policies generally meant completing a background check to meet with students at the school. They also would take an initial tour of the school. This practice allowed PROMISE staff to work with students during the school day with minimal distraction to the student and school's activity. Another common practice for Maryland PROMISE staff was to communicate proactively with the school when there were any changes in staff. This simple practice made school staff aware and better prepared for a new staff person in the transition planning process.

Lesson 4: Individualize services

School professionals often interact with multiple programs, entities, and partners at various times as their students move through secondary education. Community and state agency partners working with schools need to offer supports and services based on the individual student's needs and in coordination with school availability and scheduling, not on what happens to be convenient for agency partners. Maryland PROMISE staff worked with schools to develop an asset-based inventory that identified individual student preferences, skills, and need for support. This process not only ensured an individualized approach to transition services, especially work experiences, it also demonstrated benefit to the schools' transition planning and transition activities.

Lesson 5: Share information

Schools welcome additional information on student progress to help support them in the transition process. By sharing information, more informed decisions can be made. For example, Maryland PROMISE staff let schools know if they placed a student in a work experience and shared how that experience worked out for the student. This information is valuable in helping the school identify and plan for additional

Potential Transition Planning Partners

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a primary resource for employment support. These services are available to students in every community and are administered through the state. Students who meet their state's eligibility criteria should be referred to VR services prior to exiting secondary school. Services include work assessment, job exploration counseling, work readiness training, work experiences and paid job placement among other related employment services.

Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) are organizations and programs that are contracted by VR, other state agencies or privately paid by parents to offer job placement, supported employment, customized employment, and other related services. VR counselors typically will refer a student to one or more community rehabilitation provider for these services.

State Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Agencies provide transition services to youth with significant mental health conditions and emotional disabilities as well as youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities as they prepare for adult life including employment, education, and independent living. Each state has a structure for delivering these services and may operate from separate state agencies or from the same administrative structure. As well, they will have different eligibility guidelines for transition age youth.

American Job Centers (AJCs) are designed to provide a full range of assistance to job seekers with and without disabilities. Services may include career consultation, training, computer access, and other support services. Many AJCs offer specific services for youth between the ages of 14-24.

transition services to meet the student’s post-secondary goals. As well, Maryland PROMISE updated the school professionals when they connected a student to other activities or services outside of their school. This may include status of completion of necessary applications or documentation for additional support or services.

Conclusion

Collaboration among agencies, families, and students has been cited in research as a strong predictor of positive post-school outcomes including paid employment (Test et al. 2009; Wehman, et al., 2014). That is, if schools and external community partners effectively collaborate and coordinate services, students with disabilities are more likely to graduate high school, attend postsecondary training or education, and gain adult employment. However, those who work with and/or provide services to students already know that effective collaboration is often challenging to achieve and difficult to sustain. There is no magic formula to create these partnerships. With that in mind, the strategies in this brief have been found to help facilitate collaboration, strengthen relationships and build effective partnerships at the local level between local school systems and community partners.

References

Test, D. W., Mazzotti, V. L., Mustian, A. L., Fowler, C. H., Kortering, L., & Kohler, P. (2009). Evidence-based secondary transition predictors for improving post school outcomes for students with disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 32 (3), 160–181.

Wehman, P., Sima, A., Ketchum, J., West, M., Chan, F. & Luecking, R. (2014). Predictors of successful transition from school to employment for youth with disabilities. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 25, 223-234.

The contents of this brief were developed under a grant from the Department of Education (cooperative agreement #H418P130005). However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government.



COLLEGE OF
EDUCATION
CENTER FOR TRANSITION
AND CAREER INNOVATION

P R O M I S E

