

Transition Practices: A Study of Progressive States
Overview
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The transition from adolescence to young adulthood can be challenging, but for those with disabilities this time is too often filled with barriers to their desired independence and engagement in society. More specifically, these youth face much higher rates of unemployment and lower participation in higher education or training than their peers without disabilities (Blackorby, & Wagner, 1996; Wagner, Newman, & Cameto, 2004; Sanford, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2011). To address these issues, transition services for youth with disabilities were first mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Act in 1990. Since this time researchers and practitioners have sought to identify practices that result in meaningful post-school outcomes for students with disabilities.

Early in the development of the field of transition several models were introduced to identify the components that should be included in transition programs (e.g., Will, 1984; Halpern 1985). Each of these initial models identified desired post-school outcomes (e.g., employment and community integration) for students with disabilities; however, both lacked specificity in the description of services needed for their delivery of transition services. Contemporary models have identified program elements that are supported by empirical evidence and/or best practice. In her model, Kohler (1996) identifies five main elements of transition programming, (a) family involvement, (b) program structure, (c) interagency collaboration, (d) student development, (e) student-focused planning. Each of these elements is further broken down into practices that have been suggested as best practice. For example, family involvement has been found to be central to students' successful transition from high school (Greene, 1996; Sample, 1998). Although models have been developed that identify components of transition programs an understanding of "what works" and under "what conditions" has been difficult to determine. Differing state policies and practices as well as unique program structures have made it challenging for researchers to identify variables associated with effective transition programs.

The purpose and expected outcome of this proposed study is to describe the transition practices and policies of states identified as being progressive in their transition programs and services for youth with disabilities receiving special education services so that effective practices and policies held in common, if any, can be identified. More specifically, the research questions posed for this study and the data sources for this study are as follows (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Research Questions, Data Sources, and Participants' Time Commitments.

Research Questions	Data Sources/Time commitment
(1) What are the transition practices and policies considered effective according to state administrators and specialists in four states?	Interviews with (1) the lead state administrator responsible for the administration and oversight of transition programs and services and (2) state education specialists charged with providing technical assistance and monitoring of transition programs and services.
(2) What are issues and barriers associated with the delivery of transition services according to state administrators and specialists in four states?	Interviews with (1) the lead state administrator responsible for the administration and oversight of transition programs and services and with (2) state education specialists charged with providing technical assistance and monitoring of transition programs and services. (time commitment for each interview: approximately

45 minutes to 1 hour).

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| (3) What practices, activities, and/or policies support data-based organization, development, and delivery of transition services and programs in four states? | Individuals with Disabilities Education and Improvement Act, Part B, State Performance Plans will be reviewed by the lead researcher and another member of the research team prior to on-site visits. |
| (4) What transition practices and policies are being implemented in four states considered as progressive in their delivery of transition services? | Responses to the <i>Transition Practices Survey</i> to be completed by a sample of (1) special education teachers who deliver transition services to youth with disabilities and (2) local education agency (i.e., school district) administrators of special education programs responsible for the administration and oversight of transition programs and services (time commitment: 15 minutes) |
| (5) What transition services and practices are being delivered to students with disabilities in four states considered as progressive in their delivery of transition services? | Responses to the <i>Transition Program Rating Scale</i> to be completed by a sample of special education teachers who deliver transition services to youth with disabilities (time commitment: 20 minutes each scale) |
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This study will be a mixed methods design which includes data collected from four states through (a) review extant data available from publically available Individuals with Disabilities Education and Improvement Act, Part B, State Performance Plans, (b) interviews with state directors of special education and state transition specialists (d) completion of a *Transition Program Rating Scale* by a sample of secondary special education teachers, and (e) completion of a *Transition Practices Survey* completed by a sample of transition professionals (i.e., local special education administrators and special education teachers).

Participants

Six states have been identified for participation by gaining input from lead staff at two national transition technical assistance centers. Specifically, the directors and supporting administrative staff of these centers were asked to identify states that were making substantial progress toward meeting the requirements of their transition-related federal indicators. After both national centers provided their feedback, these states were divided into regions representative of the nation's (e.g., Northeast, Southeast, Midwest and Western regions).

Upon the identification of states interested in participating in the study, state special education leaders from four of those states (one per each region) will be contacted. If more than one state per region responds, a flip of the coin will determine which states participate in Wave One of the data collection. Due to travel timelines, funding, and availability only four states (i.e., three regions) will limit Wave One data collection to three states in the spring of 2012. Wave Two data collection will occur in the fall of 2012 and involve the data collection of the selected state for the southeastern region. This region is being collected at a later time because it has fewer of restraints for data collection as described above and it is the region in which the researchers are located.

Instrumentation

SPP Review Form. The *SPP Review Form* was developed to provide a structured approach for the researchers to review participating states' evidence of using data to support and/or determine their transition policies and services.

Semi-structured Interview Questions. The semi-structured interview questions use in this study were originally used in a similar study conducted by Furney, Haszai, and Destefano in 1996 in which they conducted a qualitative study of policies and practices from four states. Examples of topics included in these questions include transition planning, services, and program organization.

Transition Program Rating Scale. The *Transition Program Rating Scale* is an 85 item instrument that requires teachers to reflect on the services being provided to a select number of students they serve. Each item has a corresponding Likert Scale with the response options to identify the degree to which the item describes a student's experience in his or her transition program: "1" = The item does *not at all* represent the student's transition experience, "2" = when the choice between "1" and "3" is difficult, "3" = The item *adequately* represents the student's transition experience, 4 = Use this number when the choice between "3" and "5" is difficult, and "5" = The item *precisely* represents the student's transition experience. The number of rating scales to be completed by each teacher is determined by the number of students on his or her case load.

Transition Practices Survey. The *Transition Practices Survey* was developed to identify transition practices that transition professionals employ in their delivery of services to youth with disabilities. This 50 item survey includes six sections that address content such as transition planning, transition practices, and program supports. Each item has a corresponding Likert Scale with the response options of "0" = don't know/not applicable, "1" = never, "2" = seldom, "3" = sometimes, "4" = often, "5" = always. The content of this survey represents (1) federally required program requirements as well as (2) transition practices that have been identified as being evidenced-based or supported by best practice recommendations.

Data Collection

Document Analysis. Prior to an on-site visit at each state, a document analysis of the states' Individuals with Disabilities Education and Improvement Act, Part B, State Performance Plans (SPPs) will be conducted. The SPP Review Form will be used by two reviewers to document the presence of criteria in these SPPs that indicate that data are being collected to shape the development of activities to improve the services for youth with disabilities. Each reviewer will read the SPPs and independently document indices of data-driven services. Once each reviewer has completed their analysis, interrater reliability of the two raters will then be determined.

Interviews. The lead researcher will make personal visits to progressive transition services states in three of the four regions in late spring 2012 (i.e., Northeast, Midwest, and West). Two groups of individuals have been identified as potential interview participants for this study: (1) the lead state administrator responsible for the administration and oversight of transition programs and services and with (2) state education specialists charged with providing technical assistance and monitoring of transition programs and services. Each participant will be presented a set of semi-structured interview questions by the lead researcher. Interviews will be conducted in a private location in the working area of the participant (e.g., participant's office or behind a closed door of an unoccupied conference room). Probing questions will be asked to encourage more in-depth responses and questions will be restated if participants do not respond to one of the interview questions. The sessions will be digitally audio-taped and the digital recordings transcribed. Each interview is expected to take between 45 minutes to an hour.

Transition Program Rating Scale. The *Transition Program Rating Scale (TPRS)* will be completed by sample of a sample of (1) special education teachers who deliver transition services to

youth with disabilities and (2) local education agency (i.e., school district) administrators of special education programs responsible for the administration and oversight of transition programs and services. The local education agency (school district) administrators responsible for the oversight of transition programs and services will receive an e-mail from their state special education administrator or specialist containing an invitation to participate in the study and a link to the *Transition Program Rating Scale*. The LEA administrators will decide at that point whether or not they will participate in the study by following the link and completing the scale and then forwarding the message to randomly selected special education teachers or simply deleting or ignoring the message. Once teachers receive the e-mail message and if they choose to click onto the link, they will view an information letter about the study and instructions on completing the *Transition Program Rating Scale*. Depending on the number of students on their case load teachers will complete one to up to four *Transition Program Rating Scales*, reflecting on the services provided to randomly selected students. It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete each scale, so the total possible time commitment for the teachers would be no more than 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Transition Practices Survey. The *Transition Practices Survey* will also be completed by the local education agency administrators and the same sample of special education teachers. As part of the same e-mail describe above another link will be provided to the *Transition Practices Survey*. Completion of this survey will take approximately 15 minutes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis will be conducted from four sources (a) document review of SPPs, (b) interview notes and transcripts, (c) *Transition Practices Surveys*, and (d) *Transition Program Rating Scales*. Descriptive statistical analysis will be conducted with the data collected from completed *Transition Practices Surveys* and *Transition Program Rating Scales* (i.e, means, frequencies, standard deviations).

Qualitative analysis of SPPs and interviewees' responses to semi-structured questions will be conducted. The SPPs will be reviewed by two reviewers to document the presence of criteria that indicates that data are being collected to shape the development of activities to improve the services for youth with disabilities. Each reviewer will read the SPPs and independently document indices of data-driven services. Once each reviewer has completed their analysis, interrater reliability of the two raters will then be determined. Interview participants will be e-mailed the transcription for review and verification and/or clarification of their responses and comments during the interviews. Interview notes and transcripts will be reviewed and coded for themes by the lead researcher and another member of the research team. Coding reliability checks between the two reviewers will be set at 85% for agreement.

The significance of this study will be the identification of effective transition practices and policies that are consistent across four states. This information can be beneficial in the design and delivery of transition programs and services in other states and local education agencies. Ultimately, students with disabilities will be the beneficiaries as quality transition programs are provided that effectively prepare them to assume their young adult roles and responsibilities.