


Chapter 25

Teaming for Transition: A Model for Interdisciplinary, Collaborative Preparation of Secondary Education Professionals


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ABSTRACT

This chapter, developed by faculty who self-organized as an interdisciplinary, collaborative team in the implementation of these two 325K projects, Teaming for Transition, funded at the University of Arkansas, describes a shared, core focus to better prepare professionals to support youth with disabilities in transition to adulthood. The authors share how across disciplines of Special Education, Communication Disorders, Vocational Rehabilitation, School Counseling, Social Work, and School Administration, the projects Teaming for Transition and Teaming for Transition – Preparing Youth for Work and Community have been designed and implemented around a shared framework, using innovative online learning technologies, with an inquiry-based approach to understanding the challenges of transition for youth in Arkansas and beyond. They share lessons learned and implications for faculty seeking to de-silo across programs, colleges, and disciplines.

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Individuals with disabilities with high-intensity support needs (e.g., intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, multiple disabilities, comorbid mental health concern) experience adult outcomes that are far worse on most indicators (e.g., employment, time with friends, engagement in community, access to internet) compared to people with other disabilities or those with no disability (Trainor et al., 2020; Carter et al., 2012; Newman et al., 2011). Youth with disabilities are underemployed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), especially if they have high need disabilities (Bates-Harris, 2012), and undereducated compared to their peers without disabilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Youth continue to not have access to the lives they and their families desire despite efforts by the field of special education transition and relevant federal laws to mitigate barriers and mandate practices known to impact outcomes (Trainor et al., 2020). Collaboration within school systems and beyond to future systems is known to predict postschool outcomes (Mazzotti et al., 2021).

To impact outcomes of youth, interdisciplinary team members, including educators, related service providers, school administrators, and adult service providers must be prepared to apply evidence-based practices in partnership with students and their families in in-person and virtual learning environments. Practitioners working in concert with educational and allied health professionals have a shared mission to support individuals with high-need disabilities to access systems, develop skills, and develop relationships aligned with their desires and priorities for their future. The goal of interdisciplinary preparation programs is to encourage collaborative learning among future professionals from diverse fields so that scholars acquire attitudes, competencies, and knowledge needed for effective interactions with professionals in their shared field of practice. To impact the outcomes of youth with high-need disabilities, interdisciplinary team members, including educators, related service providers, school administrators, and adult service providers must be prepared to apply evidence-based practices in partnership with students and their families. The critical time for these efforts is in the transition from educational services to adult life.

Criticality of Interdisciplinary and Interagency Transition Services

While interdisciplinary collaboration is a core component of special education across educational ages, its application during transition planning and service provision is especially critical. Schools are federally mandated to provide transition services beginning by the age of 16 for student with disabilities which include a “coordinated set of activities” (20 U.S.C. 1401 sec. 603[34]) and “must invite to the IEP meeting a representative of any participating agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services” (34 CFR §300.321(b)(3)). These expectations are reinforced in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act of 2015 which requires collaborative activities between vocational rehabilitation and educational systems in support of youth with disabilities through pre-employment transition services. To enact these expectations of federal law interdisciplinary transition teams, inclusive of youth and their families, must collaborate with interagency (beyond school systems) and interdisciplinary partners (within school systems) in the planning and delivery of transition services.

Importantly, beyond compliance with federal law, collaboration within school systems and beyond with future service systems is a known predictor of positive transition outcomes for adults with disabilities (Mazzotti et al., 2021; Oertle & Seader, 2015). The National Technical Assistance Center on

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