

Transition planning and evidence-based research

David W. Test^{a,*} and Teresa Grossi^b

^a*University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC, USA*

^b*Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA*

1. Introduction

While high school special education teachers have always helped prepare their students for life after school, it was not until the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (PL 101–476) that student individualized education programs (IEPs) were mandated to include transition services. Transition services were to be designed to help facilitate a student'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" (20 U.S.C. §[602][34]). Although the 1997 and 2004 IDEA amendments include various transition-related revisions, the two most important changes might have been the required starting age and Indicator 13 for accountability.

First, while IDEA 1990 mandated IEP transition planning beginning at 16, IDEA 1997 changed the age to 14 since it was important to start transition planning before, or as, students entered high school. While IDEA

2004 changed the age back to 16, almost half the states kept the age at 14. Because of this, readers must find out what is required in their state.

Second, IDEA 2004 introduced a set of accountability procedures for states to follow by requiring each state to first write a state performance plan (SPP) and then provide an annual performance report (APR) to the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education. One of the indicators (Indicator 13) for Part B (children ages 3–22) was related to transition and stated that each student's IEP must include:

Appropriate measureable postsecondary goals that are annually updated and based upon an age-appropriate transition assessment, transition services, including courses of study, that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals, and annual IEP goals related to the student's transition services needs. There also must be evidence that the student was invited to the IEP Team meeting where transition services are to be discussed and evidence that, if appropriate, a representative of any participation agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority (20 U.S.C 1416[a][3][B]) [2].

Because Indicator 13 is considered a "compliance" indicator, states are expected to report that 100% of all IEPs of students with disabilities, aged 16 and above, contain eight components required in all IEPs, (see nstac.org). Data from the most recent analysis of state

*Address for correspondence: Professor David W. Test, Department of Special Education and Child Development, Co-Principal Investigator, National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center, UNC Charlotte, 9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28223-0001, USA. Tel.: +1 704.687.8853; Fax: +1 704.687.2916; E-mail: dwtest@unc.edu.

APRs indicated performance on Indicator 13 ranged from 3% to 100% with a mean of 80.3% and a median of 87.4%.

While making sure IEPs include all the required transition planning information, it is also important to remember that transition planning is more than a paper document. It is a plan designed to ensure each and every student with a disability is prepared to achieve their desired post-school goals. It is the transition individualized education program that designs the high school programs and services to help a student move toward and reach their postsecondary goals. As a result, it is important to have each student actively involved in the process. Konrad and Test [4] suggested students could be involved in the transition process in at least four ways including (a) planning the IEP, (b) drafting the IEP, (c) meeting to write the IEP, and (d) implementing the IEP. Research has demonstrated students can be involved in each part of the transition planning process.

1.1. Planning

Planning involves much more than before and at the end of an IEP meeting. Planning should be determining a student's strengths and needs, setting goals, and organizing materials for the IEP meeting. All planning should be student-centered (i.e., person-centered) and self-determined. Cross, Cooke, Wood, and Test [1] compared the effects of The McGill Action Planning System with Choosing Employment Goals and found both curriculum improved students' ability to choose and express goals.

1.2. Drafting the plan

Drafting the plan refers to students choosing and writing goals and objectives, as well as other parts of the plan. Konard and Test [4] taught seven middle grade students with disabilities how to complete an IEP template as a draft of these transition-components of their IEP.

1.3. Meeting to write the IEP

This phase can involve simply attending the meeting, being an active participant, or leading the meeting. Most of the published research about student involvement in the transition IEP phases has been conducted in this area. In fact, Test et al. [8] identified high-quality research to identify two evidence-based practices in this area including the Self-Advocacy Strategy [9]

and the Self-Directed IEP [6]. Recently, the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center has updated the list to include a third practice, *Whose Future Is It Anyway?* [10].

1.4. Implementing the plan

Implementing the Transition IEP involves teaching students how to set, monitor, and evaluate goals. Research has shown that both the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction [11] and Take Action: Making Goals Happen [5] having successfully taught students to set an monitor performance on IEP goals.

While Indicator 13 has focused special educators' attention on transition planning, research has demonstrated students can be involved in all parts of the transition planning process, including leading the meeting, there is still much work to be done before these practices are regularly implemented with all students.

1.5. Some things we still need to know to improve transition planning

A great deal of progress has been made since transition was defined in IDEA 1990, however there is much work remaining to do to help students actively plan for life after high school and improve outcomes. Indicator 13 compliance has heightened the focus on transition education and services. However, having a compliant transition IEP may or may not correlate to what is actually occurring in practice or the provisions of transitions services. One question we do not know is if a compliant transition IEP equates to quality services and improved outcomes.

Secondly, it is clear that when students take an active role in planning and leading his/her conferences or IEP meetings, it promotes self-determination skills, including goal setting. While the evidence-based practices described above show the benefits to students, wide-scale implementation is still needed. Based on Indicator 13 performance data, we know students are being invited to IEP meetings. While Martin et al. [7] began to look at what happens at teacher-led IEP meeting, research is needed on what happens at student-led meetings. Are they actively participating? Are they providing input and leading the discussion? What occurs for students who have difficulty with communicating or have other challenges?

Thirdly, with the demands to meet state standards and graduation requirements, teachers have limited time to implement a specific self-determination curriculum.

There is a need to understand how to use evidence-practices in a variety of settings with a variety of students. Additionally, it appears that many of the practices can be infused into content area subjects, e.g., English, Social Studies. For example, Konard and Test [3] infused a self-determination skill into languages arts by teaching students to write paragraphs about their IEP goals. More research is needed to show how the curriculum can be infused into content areas and be aligned to state standards while benefiting all students with and without disabilities.

Finally, there are currently 22 states using Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for all students. However, what is unclear is the level of alignment of the ILPs or graduations plans with Transition IEPs and use of the ILP or graduation plan for all students with disabilities, including students with higher support needs.

We have made progress... but we are just out of the starting gate!

References

- [1] T. Cross, N.L. Cooke, W.M. Wood and D.W. Test, Comparison of the effects of *MAPS* and *Choicemaker* on student self-determination skills, *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities* **34** (1999), 499–510.
- [2] Individuals with Disabilities Education. Improvement Act of 2004, Public Law No. 108–446, **20** U. S. C. 1400, H. R. 1350.
- [3] M. Konrad and D.W. Test, Effects of GO 4 IT. . . NOW! strategy instruction on paragraph writing and goal articulation of middle school students with disabilities, *Remedial and Special Education* **28** (2007), 277–291.
- [4] M. Konrad and D.W. Test, Teaching middle-school students with disabilities to use an IEP template, *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals* **27** (2004), 101–124.
- [5] L.H. Marshall, J.E. Martin, L.M. Maxson, T.L. Miller, T. McGill, W.M. Hughes and P.A. Jerman, *Take Action: Making goals happen* (1999), Sopris West, Longmont. CO.
- [6] J.E. Martin, L.H. Marshall, L. Maxson and P. Jerman, *Self-Directed IEP* (1996), Sopris West, Longmont. CO.
- [7] J.E. Martin, J.L. Van Dycke, B.A. Greene, J.E. Gardner, W.R. Christensen, L.L. Woods and D.L. Lovett, Direct observation of teacher-directed IEP meetings: Establishing the need for student IEP meeting instruction, *Exceptional Children* **72** (2006), 187–200.
- [8] D.W. Test, C.H. Fowler, S.M. Richter, V. Mazzotti, J. White, A.R. Walker, P. Kohler and L. Korterling, Evidence-based practices in secondary transition, *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals* **32** (2009), 115–128. doi:10.1177/0885728809336859.
- [9] A.K. Van Reusen, C.S. Bos, J.B. Schumaker and D.D. Deshler, *The Self-Advocacy Strategy* (1994), Edge Enterprises, Lawrence, KS.
- [10] M. Wehmeyer, M. Lawrence, N. Garner, J. Soukup and S. Palmer, *Whose Future is It Anyway? A Self-Directed Transition Planning Process* (2004), University of Kansas, (2nd Ed.). Lawrence, KS.
- [11] M.L. Wehmeyer, S.B. Palmer, M. Agran, D.E. Mithaug and J.E. Martin, Promoting casual agency: The self-determined learning model of instruction, *Exceptional Children* (2000), **66**, 439–453.

Copyright of Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation is the property of IOS Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.