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National Leadership Summit on Improving Results for Youth

State Priorities and Needs for Assistance

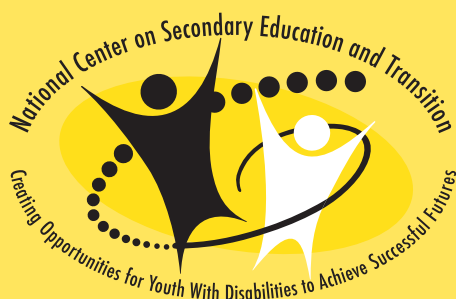
Background

The 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its 1997 Amendments require state and local education agencies to specifically address the needs of students with disabilities as they transition from school to postschool goals such as college or employment. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) similarly places a greater focus on educational outcomes for young people with disabilities. Yet, far too many of the 6 million young people with disabilities who attend our public schools today do not gain the skills or knowledge needed to achieve positive postschool outcomes upon exiting high school. National research data and follow-up studies over the past two decades have found that youth with disabilities have lower than desired academic achievement levels; high dropout rates; substantial levels of under- and unemployment; economic instability; and low levels of enrollment and completion in postsecondary education and training.

To further validate this national data, the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET), a research and technical assistance and dissemination center funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education, identified eight challenges that impact the future of secondary education and transition. These challenges are:

- promote students' self-determination and self-advocacy;
- ensure students have access to the general education curriculum;
- increase the school completion rates of students with disabilities;
- make high school graduation decisions based on meaningful indicators;
- ensure students access to and full participation in postsecondary education and employment;
- increase informed parent participation and involvement in education planning, life planning, and decision-making;
- improve collaboration and systems linkages at all levels; and
- ensure the availability of a qualified workforce to address the transition needs of youth with disabilities

These challenge areas are noteworthy as they mirror the technical assistance activities set forth by NCSET.



IDEAs
that Work

U.S. Office of Special
Education Programs

National Leadership Summit on Improving Results

In response to the need to improve secondary education and postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities, NCSET hosted, in September 2003, its first *National Leadership Summit on Improving Results for Youth*. More than 250 state agency leaders, policymakers, and professionals representing general education, special education, career and technical education, workforce development, vocational rehabilitation, and other agencies participated. Parents and youth with disabilities also participated on several of the state teams. Teams representing 42 States and other entities, including the Pacific Rim territories, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Bureau of Indian Affairs (herein referred to as “States”), attended. The purpose of the two-day event was to build state capacity to develop more results-driven state systems so that youth with disabilities achieve more desirable postschool outcomes. The Summit format was built around the work of state teams rather than individuals which allowed states to harness and channel the collective expertise of a diverse team of stakeholders within each state.

Throughout the Summit, each state leadership team met in facilitated dialogue sessions to complete a strategic action plan that identified policies and practices to help improve access to and success in postsecondary education, workforce preparation, and employment for youth with disabilities. More specifically, states worked to expand or complement their current state improvement plans to address areas of significant need for change and improvement. Several strategies were put into place to achieve this goal and to collect further data on secondary education and transition challenges for states. This data was then analyzed to determine the critical challenges to secondary education and transition appearing across states.

Summit Results – What We Learned

The data collection process included a review of the pre-summit assessment surveys completed by all registered state leadership teams, and the state strategic action plans developed during the Summit dialogue sessions. A self-assessment summary tool was provided to each of the state team leaders prior to their arrival at the Summit. This summary was intended to initiate discussion among team participants concerning state outcomes issues, and provide a “mindset” for participation in the upcoming Summit’s team activities. Each state team leader completed the self-assessment form and forwarded it to the Summit planning committee. The form provided preliminary information about: a) the priority issues the state would focus on at the Summit; b) an assessment of their current performance for continuous improvement in planning,

implementing, and evaluating strategies to address these priority issues; and c) potential needs for technical assistance related to these issues.

At the National Leadership Summit, through facilitated discussions, each state team completed a strategic action plan for improved secondary education and transition results. In these plans, state teams were encouraged to: a) identify at least 3 priority issues concerning improving results of youth with disabilities; b) develop 3-5 state leadership goals/outcome statements for each identified priority issue; c) develop 3-5 state- or federal-level action steps for each identified goal; and d) identify the technical assistance needed to implement and sustain these actions. Each state team submitted a completed State Leadership Strategic Action Plan to the Summit planning team.

Following the National Leadership Summit, researchers from the University of Minnesota and TransCen, Inc. analyzed the self-assessment surveys and the state action plans to identify the cross-state (national) priorities for improving postschool results for youth with disabilities. The ten priority content areas and three overarching themes that emerged from the data are presented below:

State-level Infrastructure

1. State Systems Infrastructure
2. Data Design, Collection, and Use
3. Collaboration
4. Professional Development

Programs and Services

5. Access to General Education, Standards, and Testing
6. Postsecondary Access, Enrollment, and Options
7. Graduation/Dropout Rates
8. Workforce Development and Employment

Youth and Family

9. Person-Centered and Transition-Driven Planning (IEPs, self-determination, independent living)
10. Family Education and Involvement

Figure 1 reveals the number of individual states identifying each of the priority content areas in the state action plans developed at the Summit.

In addition, the researchers reviewed the goals/outcome statements and action steps written in the state action plans, categorized them by state and region, and aligned them with the previously identified priority content areas (see **Table 1**). This analysis illustrates, in more detail, particular secondary education and transition challenges faced by specific states and regions.

Figure 1. Priorities Identified by State Teams

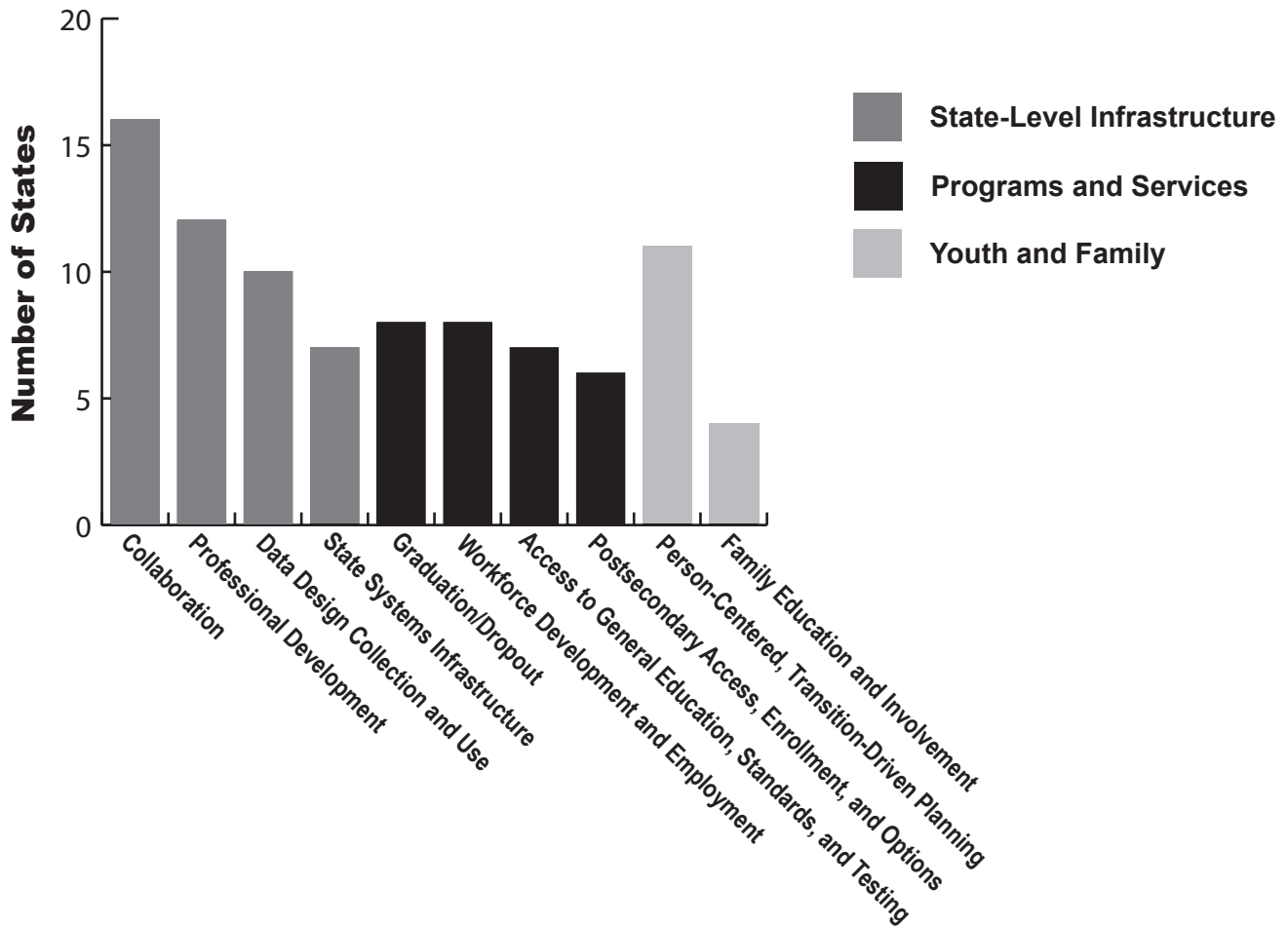


Table 1. Priorities Identified by State Teams

Category	State Team Priorities	Primary Regional Designation
STATE-LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE		
State Systems Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated systems approach to transition • State-level leadership and transition planning team • Formalized central structure • Identify and remediate systemic compliance issues • National awareness of Native American transition issues 	Mountain Plains, Southeast
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build/increase/sustain state and local interagency collaboration • Increase state interagency coordination and system linkages • Interagency collaborative funding and cost-sharing • Earlier interagency collaboration • Build understanding among agencies about access to services and resources • Improve capacity of adult systems to provide postschool support • Create community councils to build awareness, e.g. with WIBs 	Northeast, Mountain Plains, Mid-South, Southeast, Western, Great Lakes

(continued on page 4)

Table 1. Continued

Category	State Team Priorities	Primary Regional Designation
Data Design Collection and Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved and expanded data systems • Effective, efficient data collection system • Establish shared data systems • Data-driven and evidence-based decision making and practice • Collect and use postschool outcomes data 	Mountain Plains, Western, Great Lakes
Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development about IDEA and Rehabilitation Act • Develop understanding of relationship between NCLB and IDEA • Building awareness/recognition of value of transition • Training and Technical Assistance for professionals • Develop a Transition Specialist certificate program • Develop cross-state transition academy at postsecondary level • Effective preservice and inservice teacher training • Refine and disseminate transition curriculum for teachers and others • Provide more support for LEA teachers 	Mountain Plains, Great Lakes, Northeast
PROGRAMS AND SERVICES		
Access to General Education, Standards, and Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align transition with standards-based education • High school reform • Diploma options and high stakes testing • Close achievement gap 	Northeast, Mountain Plains
Postsecondary Access, Enrollment, and Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build capacity of postsecondary system to serve students with disabilities • Improve postsecondary preparation and increase postsecondary enrollment • Improve postsecondary education • Expand and improve postsecondary options 	Northeast, Mid-South
Graduation/ Dropout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve graduation rate and decrease dropout rate 	Mountain Plains, Southeast, Mid-South, Northeast
Workforce Development and Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved career options and employment outcomes • Business/education partnerships; engage employers • Preparation for employment • Increase postsecondary employment options through resource alignment • Collaboration with WIA programs 	Western, Mid-South, Mountain Plains
YOUTH AND FAMILY		
Person-Centered and Transition-Driven Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-determination and advocacy for students and families • Improved transition services and planning • Move transition to middle school years • Transition planning for ALL students • Person-centered planning • Youth participation in IEPs and transition planning • Student-focused outcomes • Increased independent living 	Mountain Plains, Western, Southeast, Great Lakes
Family Education and Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and Technical Assistance for students, families • Family involvement and person-centered planning beyond the IEP • Increased youth and family involvement • Parental involvement, acceptance, and knowledge 	Western

Finally, the technical assistance (TA) needs identified in the state plans were synthesized and categorized into 15 cross-state technical assistance content areas. These TA needs were then aligned with the previously identified priority content areas [see **Table 2**].

Discussion

The priority issues that emerged from states in attendance at the National Leadership Summit are consistent with those identified in various national sources. States continue to stress the importance of developing collaborative relationships and aligning special programs with broader education and workforce reforms so that all youth have the opportunity to achieve successful academic, occupational, and social outcomes. These priorities also revealed strong concerns from state leaders about collecting, reporting, and using outcome data to improve services and programs. Moreover, the education and involvement of youth and families in the transition planning process remains a critical need. The priorities identified during the Summit will continue to challenge NCSET and other national technical assistance providers to work directly with states to focus on developing more effective results-driven systems.

Next Steps

In supporting state improvement efforts identified in state action plans from the National Leadership Summit, the technical assistance needs have been aligned with the technical assistance delivery efforts supported by NCSET. The intention is to use the information gathered at the Summit to determine the content, scope, and delivery methods of the technical assistance provided by the Center. NCSET will draw upon several existing and new technical assistance strategies including, but not limited to: NCSET's Web site, publications (including Essential Tools), capacity-building institutes, and national teleconferences. Additionally, efforts are underway to develop new overarching technical assistance strategies to complement and play a critical role in NCSET's overall state improvement approach. The following four broad strategies, currently being developed, are essential to NCSET's technical assistance plan to support state improvement.

1. *National Alliance on Secondary Education and Transition (NASET)*. A national voluntary coalition, the National Alliance on Secondary Education and Transition (NASET), is currently being formed. NCSET's role will be to support NASET's initial formation and facilitate plans and actions NASET members deem important to address. One of the first tasks NASET will tackle is the development of a set of principles, standards, and/or criteria to serve as a conceptual framework and model to guide policy development

and professional practice in secondary education and transition. Such a framework will also help to support NCSET's overall technical assistance approach in relation to state improvement and other efforts.

2. *Technical Assistance Communities of Practice*. The Technical Assistance Communities of Practice (TA

Table 2. Technical Assistance Needs Identified by State Leadership Teams at the National Leadership Summit

Technical Assistance Content Areas

- Identifying “best practices” and federal directives for efficient data design, collection, sharing, analysis, and confidentiality
- Providing materials/guidance on teaching self-determination/advocacy
- Building interagency teams and developing interagency agreements
- Bridging and aligning standards-based education and transition services/planning
- Examining graduation and diploma options, and dropout issues
- Engaging employers and employer organizations to improve student employability through school/business partnerships and WIA-funded programs
- Facilitating the resource mapping process
- Developing materials and delivering training on transition and disability awareness to administrators, general and special educators, and employers
- Providing guidance on state leadership activities (funding, improvement plans, leadership teams)
- Improving professional development of teachers (pre-service and in-service) on several topics (SSI, testing accommodations, TIEP development, universal design for learning, career awareness curricula, and research-based practices)
- Developing and implementing effective cross-agency training
- Examining “best practices” in informing and involving families through training activities and family/educator partnerships
- Providing information regarding effective mentoring program implementation
- Increasing postsecondary enrollment/options
- Developing databases and outcomes surveys (follow-along and follow-up)

Communities) are groups of state and local education staff and other key stakeholders facing similar program improvement challenges who have decided to band together to share expertise, issues, and solutions. NCSET envisions the establishment of several TA Communities over the next year. The action plans developed by states at the National Leadership Summit will serve as the basis for determining the need for additional TA Communities.

3. *Technical Assistance to Individual States.* Through collaboration with other OSEP TA&D Centers and Partners NCSET will work in partnership with OSEP and several other national technical assistance and research centers to help resolve complex and persistent special education issues in individual states. The intent is to draw upon the combined expertise of several technical assistance entities.
4. *National Leadership Summit II.* NCSET will conduct a second National Leadership Summit in Spring 2005. State action plans from the first Summit have been analyzed to identify technical assistance needs common across several states and/or regions, and those needs which appear to be specific to individual states. The purpose of the second National Leadership Summit will be to assess the progress states have made in addressing their state priorities identified at the first National Leadership Summit and continue to scale up federal and state secondary education and transition policies, practices, and systems.

Summary

The National Leadership Summit was pivotal as it introduced a new way for NCSET to work with states in focusing on developing more results-driven systems. The 42 states represented at the Summit developed a strategic action plan for improved postschool results for youth with disabilities in their states. The action plans were analyzed to determine priority issues and technical assistance needs by state and regions. This initial analysis demonstrated three overarching themes and ten priority issues consistent with national research. NCSET, along with the U.S. Department of Education, the Regional Resource Centers, and other national technical assistance centers, will respond to multi-state and individual state needs based on the plans developed at the initial Summit.

National Leadership Summit Planning Partners:

- Administration on Developmental Disabilities, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Council for State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor
- Maternal and Child Health Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- National Association of State Directors of Special Education
- National Association of Workforce Boards
- National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, University of Minnesota
- National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth
- National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education
- Office of Disability, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor
- Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education
- Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education
- President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities
- Rehabilitation Services Administration, U.S. Department of Education
- Social Security Administration