

# A summary of the

# 2005

# National Leadership Summit on Improving Results for Youth

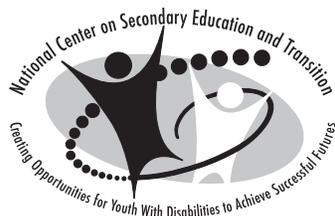
**Policy and Practice Implications for Secondary and Postsecondary  
Education and Employment for Youth with Disabilities**

## Background

There is strong commitment and support at the national, state, and local levels to ensure that youth with disabilities fully benefit from their high school experiences and graduate prepared to successfully participate in postsecondary education, enter meaningful employment, and live independently in their communities. While significant progress has been made over the past decade, far too many youth with disabilities continue to experience difficulties in achieving these postschool outcomes (National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, 2005).

National studies and reports have repeatedly documented that compared to their non-disabled peers, students with disabilities are less likely to receive a regular high school diploma; drop out twice as often; enroll in and complete postsecondary education programs at half the rate; and, of those aged 18-64, are employed at approximately one-third the rate (32 percent as compared to 81 percent) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000; National Council on Disability, 2003; National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, 2005). We also know that difficulties in achieving positive academic and postschool outcomes are exacerbated by other factors, such as disability characteristics (e.g., emotional disturbance, developmental disabilities), race and ethnicity, limited English proficiency, and poverty.

Central to accomplishing a successful transition to adult life for a young person with a disability is the need for collaborative partnerships that include youth and families, schools, and multiple agencies at the community, state, and national levels. The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET), a technical assistance and dissemination center funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, has responded to this need by providing technical assistance; disseminating research-based practices and strategies; creating a network of national organizations, state agencies, and local programs; increasing state leadership capacity; and promoting broad leadership and interagency collaboration among key stakeholders. These and other strategies have all been directed toward enhancing state and



local capacity to improve academic and postschool results for youth with disabilities and their families.

## Overview of the Summit

NCSET hosted the first *National Leadership Summit on Improving Results for Youth* in September 2003. More than 250 state agency leaders, policymakers, families, youth, and professionals representing general education, special education, career and technical education, postsecondary education, workforce development, vocational rehabilitation, and other agencies participated. A total of 42 teams representing 40 states, Pacific Rim entities, and the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs attended. The purpose of the two-day event was to build state leadership capacity to develop results-driven state systems focused on achieving desired academic and postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities.

In an effort to continue to support state and local improvement activities, NCSET, in partnership with 23 federal agencies and national organizations, hosted a second *National Leadership Summit* in Washington, DC on June 14-15, 2005. This Summit brought together more than 500 individuals participating on 50 teams representing 46 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Pacific Rim entities, and the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Most of these teams also participated in the 2003 Summit. Teams averaged eight members and represented a broad range of state agencies and personnel representing general education, special education, career and technical education, postsecondary education, workforce development, and other interests. Youth and families also were significantly represented not only on the leadership teams, but also as presenters and content experts.

The leadership teams met to initiate action plans or to further develop their action plans from the 2003 Summit. The process for developing the action plans was organized around the recently released *National Standards for Secondary Education and Transition for All Youth* (2005), developed by the National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (NASET) – a voluntary group of more than 40 national organizations representing general education, special education, career and technical education, youth development, postsecondary education, workforce development, and families. NASET was formed in November 2003 to help NCSET identify and build consensus on a set of research-based standards and indicators that reflect quality education for *all* youth. NCSET has facilitated the work of NASET since its inception, and the resulting standards and indicators are critical to NCSET's high quality technical assistance to states.

The NASET standards and quality indicators reflect practices that are necessary to create quality secondary education and transition experiences for all youth. They

were designed to guide state and local administrators and practitioners responsible for planning and implementing comprehensive transition systems for youth, ultimately becoming a catalyst for constructive change in transition practices and policies nationwide. The NASET standards and quality indicators were used by the leadership teams: (a) to conduct a self-assessment and identify high-priority areas in need of improvement prior to attending the Summit, and (b) as a strategy to support the development of individual team action plans focused on the improvement of secondary education and transition services.

Featuring powerful technical assistance strategies, the National Leadership Summit provided an unparalleled opportunity for leadership teams to engage in substantive dialogue and strategic planning. With support from highly-skilled facilitators and consultation from nationally-recognized experts, empowered teams engaged in planning that was described by participants as “breakthrough opportunities” that couldn't have occurred in their home states.

“The Summit did not just provide information but offered us guidance and leadership in our planning. NCSET recognizes that states have capacity and creates opportunities for us to mobilize into action.”

— David Sienko, Education Specialist,  
Rhode Island Department of Elementary and  
Secondary Education; UCE/Rhode Island College

## What We Learned

During the 2005 Summit, each leadership team completed an action plan specifically focused on improving results for youth with disabilities. In these action plans, leadership teams were encouraged to: (a) identify a minimum of three priorities for improved secondary education and transition services; (b) develop three to five goal statements for each identified priority; and (c) identify the technical assistance needed to implement and sustain these actions within their state. Each leadership team submitted a completed action plan to NCSET's team at the close of the Summit.

Prior to participating in the 2005 Summit, the leadership teams completed a pre-Summit assessment. Like the action plan, the pre-Summit assessment was based on the NASET standards and quality indicators. The pre-Summit assessment was used to support team development, identify needs, set priorities, and prepare the team for the Summit action planning process.

Following the 2005 Summit, the action plans were reviewed and analyzed by NCSET staff to identify cross-state (national) priorities communicated by the leadership teams. The 2005 priorities were similar to those identified at the 2003 Summit. The areas of greatest concern to states

fall into three broad categories: (a) building state-level infrastructure; (b) improving programs and services; and (c) supporting youth and families. The analysis of the leadership team action plans revealed that collecting, reporting, and using outcome data to improve state-level infrastructure, programs, and services were of strongest concern to team leaders, and that data collection, data use, and data sharing were necessary across agencies and states to improve services for graduation, employment, postsecondary enrollment and completion, and career preparation. The plans also noted that data collection should inform professional development activities at the state level.

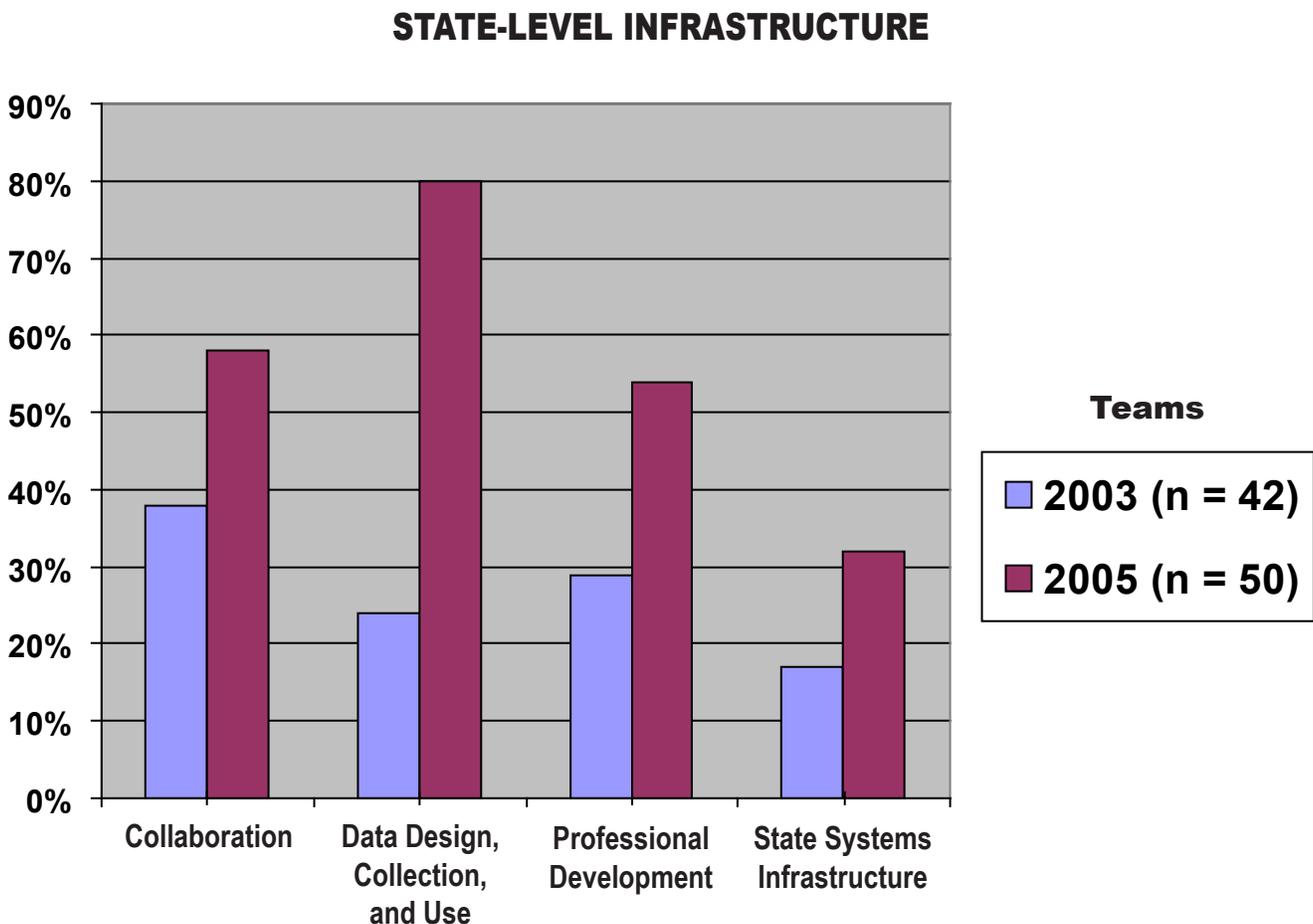
Similar to the findings that emerged from the 2003 Summit, the teams continue to stress the importance of developing collaborative relationships and aligning programs with broader education and workforce reforms so that all youth have access to opportunities that support successful academic, occupational, and social outcomes. In particular, strategies identified in the 2005 Summit action plans included support for interagency agreements, training to map and align existing community resources,

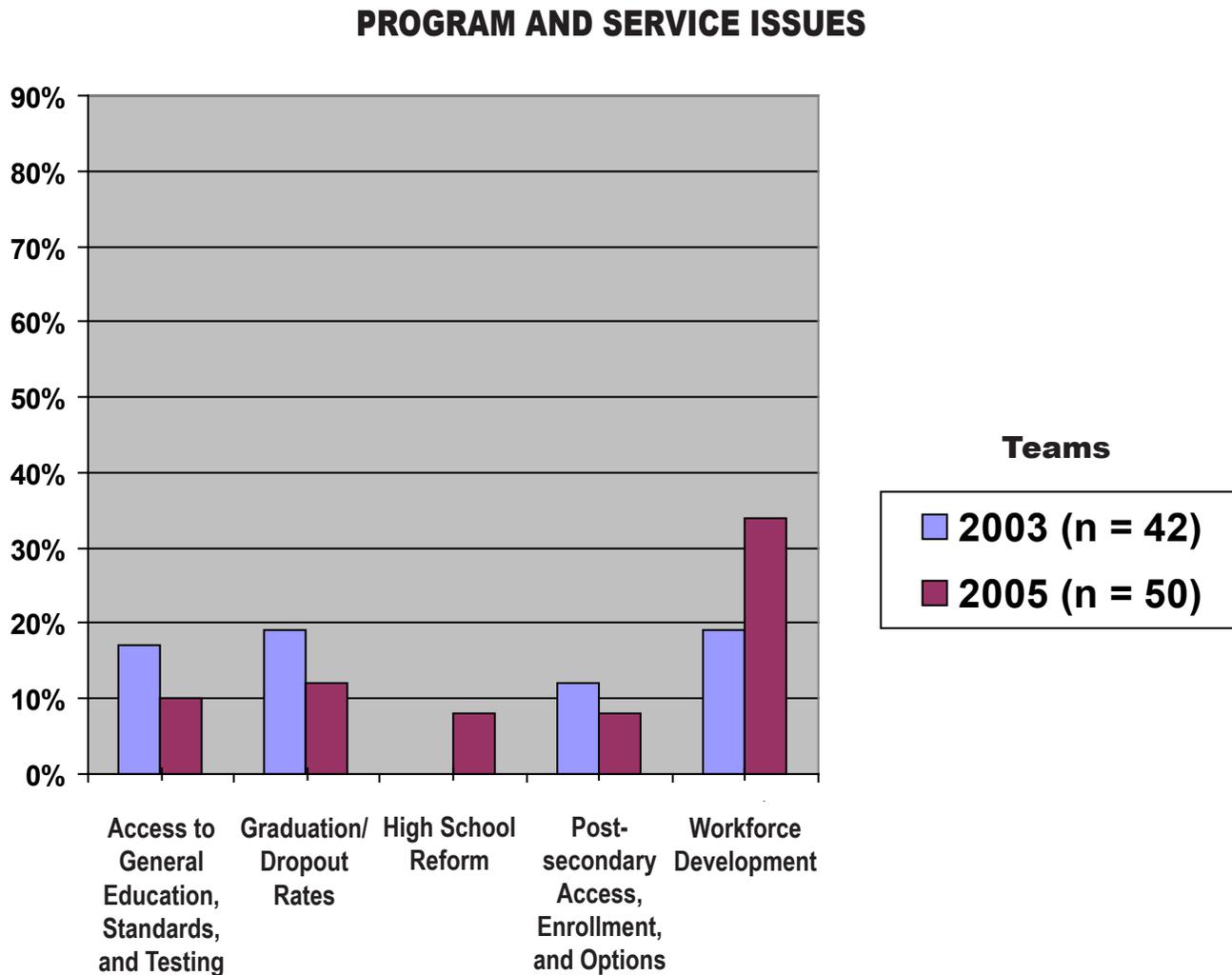
and expanded opportunities to participate in leadership development and training focused on facilitating and managing interagency teams at the state, regional, and local levels. Professional development was another high priority for the leadership teams. In particular, the teams called for additional professional development opportunities for administrative staff as well as relevant and accessible information and trainings for families and youth.

Two new priority areas emerged from the 2005 data. Within the broad theme of Programs and Services, states reported the need to connect and align special education with general education high school reform initiatives. Several action plans identified the Career Academies, the President's *High School Intervention Initiative*, and the National Governors Association's *Redesigning the American High School* initiative as important to explore.

Figures 1-3 identify and compare the three major themes and priority areas identified at the 2003 and 2005 Summits. Table 1 (see page 6) provides an additional view of the priorities in relation to specific issues identified by the leadership teams.

**Figure 1. Comparison of 2003 and 2005 Leadership Team Priorities**



*Figure 2. Comparison of 2003 and 2005 Leadership Team Priorities*

## Discussion

The analysis of the leadership team action plans revealed that collecting, reporting, and using academic and post-school outcome data to improve programs and services were the highest priority and need for further development across states. The action plans also documented the importance of using these data to inform professional development programs, to guide the creation of inter-agency agreements and the coordination of services, and to develop state and local policies. Data system compatibility and the capacity to share data across agencies within states continue to be a concern.

Youth development and youth leadership also emerged as a new priority content area within the theme of Youth and Family. In particular, the leadership teams indicated the need to expand youth involvement and participation in state and local planning and decision-making. At the Summit, several states decided to start including youth representatives on their state interagency teams.

## Implications

Federal education policy, coupled with high school reform initiatives, is intended to hold high schools accountable for teaching all students, improve teacher quality, restructure schools to support student learning, provide effective interventions for those students who are not learning at grade level, and promote collaborative relationships to improve school and postschool results for all youth. The priorities identified during the Summit align with these important initiatives. The U.S. Department of Education, NCSET, and other national technical assistance providers must continue their work with states to build leadership and the capacity for more effective results-driven systems. Based on the analysis of the leadership teams' action plans and feedback from attendees, NCSET identified the following essential components for improving state and local systems:

*Develop new and expand existing technical assistance strategies to effectively improve secondary*

*transition services and practices, specifically in the high priority areas of: (a) academic and postschool data collection and use; (b) interagency collaboration and planning; (c) professional development; (d) access to workforce development services and employment opportunities; (e) youth development and youth leadership programs; and (f) inclusion of students with disabilities in current and emerging high school reform initiatives.* These represent the highest priority needs for action identified by the 50 leadership teams participating in the Summit. Technical assistance, training, and dissemination of research-based practices on these priority areas are necessary to support state and local improvements and to inform policies and practices.

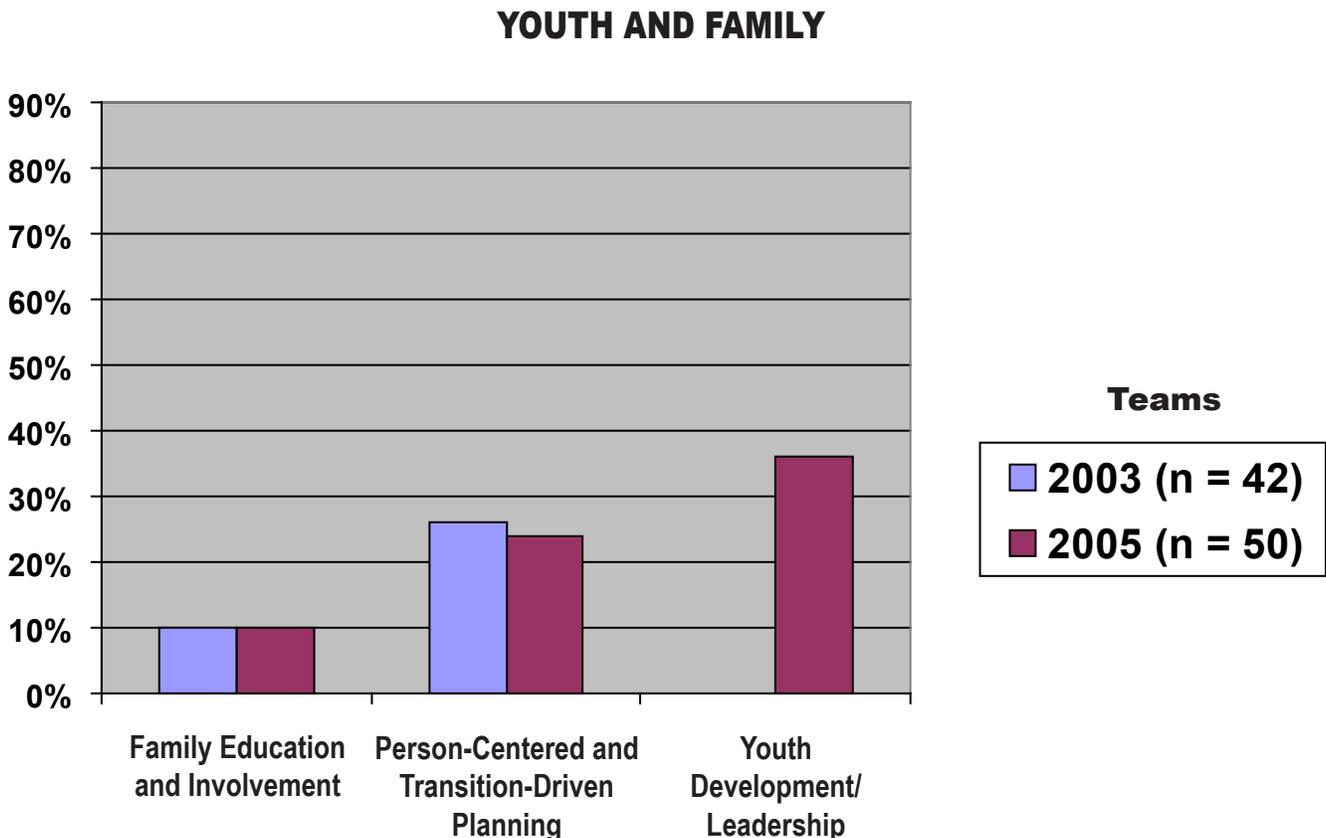
*Continue to engage in comprehensive interagency strategies that promote joint planning and delivery of services at all levels (federal, state, and local).* The Summit brought together cross-agency state teams representing a broad range of perspectives on secondary education, transition, and workforce development. Each team was shaped to meet their state's unique priority issues. In addition, twenty-three federal agencies and national organizations were engaged in planning and conducting the 2005 Summit. By modeling interagency collaboration

in planning and implementing this groundbreaking event, the Summit served as an important demonstration of the type and level of interagency collaboration states are being expected to achieve in addressing the secondary education and transition needs of youth with disabilities.

*Assist states in adopting and using the national standards on secondary education and transition for planning and monitoring purposes.* The NASET national standards and quality indicators served as the organizing framework and structure for identifying state needs, setting priorities, and developing goals and action plans for all teams participating in the 2005 Summit. Since the Summit, several states have demonstrated an interest in using the national standards and indicators as part of their state improvement planning and monitoring processes. As result, technical assistance strategies are being designed for states as they use the NASET standards for planning and other improvement activities. It is imperative that states receive the technical assistance needed to implement the national standards and quality indicators in their states and local districts.

*Ensure students with disabilities have access to and participate in current and emerging high school reform initiatives.* High school reform initiatives emerged as a

**Figure 3. Comparison of 2003 and 2005 Leadership Team Priorities**



new trend at the 2005 Summit. States indicated a need and an interest to learn more about and connect with emerging high school reform initiatives; therefore, opportunities to gain information and implement practices on reform initiatives need to be available.

***Involve youth and families in state and local planning and improvement efforts.*** A significant increase in youth and family participation from the 2003 to the 2005 Summit was noted. Several leadership teams reported that they will continue to involve youth and family representatives on their planning teams following the Summit in order to better inform planning and decision making efforts at the state and local level. NCSET will continue to work with parent training and information centers to fully inform and engage families.

***Develop and implement high-quality professional development opportunities that are consistent with evidence-based research.*** Professional development continues to be an area of concern to states. They suggest that collaborative staff development programs need to be promoted, including cross-training, train-the-trainer,

team-building, and other approaches involving collaborative relationships between state and local agencies, institutions of higher education, parent centers, and consumer and advocacy organizations. Additionally, a variety of methods are needed to promote collaboration and coordination between general education and special education in transition planning and programming.

***Continue to offer strategies, like the National Leadership Summit, for strengthening state capacity and building communication networks among state leaders on critical secondary education and transition issues and challenges.*** The leadership teams overwhelmingly indicated that the 2003 and 2005 National Leadership Summits provided critical and important opportunities for them to communicate, collaborate, network, and share information and strategies. Particularly, states valued the time to plan and meet with experts representing diverse content areas of interest to them. State agency personnel expressed a high level of interest in continuing their participation in these events.

**Table 1. Priorities Identified by State Teams**

Category	State Team Priorities
<b>STATE-LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	
<b>Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting and supporting the use of evidence-based practices</li> <li>• Creating an interagency system for continuous improvement</li> <li>• Decrease fragmentation/collaborate with agencies to align missions, policies, procedures, data, and resources</li> <li>• Create statewide newsletter through interagency collaboration</li> <li>• Increase number of interagency transition councils</li> <li>• Implement cross training amongst agencies</li> <li>• Develop system to improve resource mapping</li> <li>• Examine viability of resource mapping</li> </ul>
<b>Data Design, Collection, and Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create effective new data collection systems</li> <li>• Improve/modify existing data collection systems</li> <li>• Determining quality of data</li> <li>• Collect data on postschool outcomes</li> <li>• Data-driven decision making</li> <li>• Develop data sharing system</li> <li>• Identify strengths/weaknesses of existing data collection models</li> <li>• Collect best practices data</li> </ul>
<b>Professional Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development to all stakeholders regarding transition issues/services</li> <li>• Provide professional development on youth leadership/development issues</li> <li>• Create a system to distribute professional development materials to stakeholders (web casts, teleconferences, web seminars)</li> <li>• Open professional trainings to families</li> <li>• Create professional development tools through the establishment of partnerships with community stakeholders</li> <li>• Effective preservice and inservice teacher training</li> </ul>

<b>Category</b>	<b>State Team Priorities</b>
<b>STATE-LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE (Continued)</b>	
<b>State Systems Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen state-level transition planning teams</li> <li>• Increase the ratio of transition planning teams to school districts served</li> <li>• Coordinate interagency priorities around transition policy</li> <li>• Alignment and integration of agencies, resources and services</li> </ul>
<b>PROGRAM AND SERVICE ISSUES</b>	
<b>Access to General Education, Standards, and Testing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate general education and special education classroom transition strategies</li> <li>• Develop appropriate learning interventions for all students</li> <li>• Diploma options</li> </ul>
<b>Graduation/ Dropout Rates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve graduation rate and decrease dropout rate</li> </ul>
<b>High School Reform</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create universal assessments across school districts</li> <li>• Increase math and reading supports for struggling students</li> <li>• Collect information on Career Academies</li> </ul>
<b>Postsecondary Access, Enrollment, and Options</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Align state accountability systems to better prepare students for successful postsecondary education experiences</li> <li>• Increase student access to core curriculum</li> <li>• Expand postsecondary options</li> </ul>
<b>Workforce Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate how technology can enhance career preparation activities</li> <li>• Increase access to career preparatory programs</li> <li>• Increase postsecondary employment/education options for students</li> <li>• Engage employers in career preparatory programs</li> <li>• Align career preparatory programs across districts</li> </ul>
<b>YOUTH AND FAMILY</b>	
<b>Family Education and Involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase youth and family involvement</li> <li>• Technical Assistance for students and families</li> </ul>
<b>Person-Centered and Transition-Driven Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage self-sufficiency through person centered planning</li> <li>• Increased independent learning</li> <li>• Improved transition services and planning</li> <li>• Advocacy and self-determination training for students, families, and agencies</li> <li>• Increase students role in development of IEP</li> <li>• Agencies connect students to programs, services, accommodations, and supports based upon person-centered planning</li> <li>• Student-focused outcomes</li> </ul>
<b>Youth Development/ Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design a network of state and local youth leadership skills development opportunities</li> <li>• Increase information available to youth</li> <li>• Increase youth awareness of their own strengths and future goals</li> <li>• Identify schools that are successful in implementing student-led IEP meetings</li> </ul>

## Summary

The National Leadership Summit format offered the leadership teams a variety of opportunities and resources to explore their unique secondary education and transition issues. Through facilitated discussions, each leadership team either expanded their strategic action plan from the 2003 National Leadership Summit or developed a plan that identified their priority issues and goals for improved secondary education and transition policies, systems, and practices. Additionally, each leadership team identified action steps to address their priority issues. The strategic action plans completed at the Summit, along with the pre-Summit assessments, were analyzed to identify the national priorities for improving postschool results for youth with disabilities. As a result of the data findings and follow-up to the Summit, NCSET will refine its range of technical assistance strategies available to states to help them address their secondary education and transition needs as outlined in their plans.

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