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## Implications for Policy, Practice, and Priorities in Postsecondary Education and Employment: Report on Proceedings from the National Policy Summit in Washington, DC

presented by:

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**MS. JOHNSON:** Good afternoon, and welcome to Implications for Policy Practice and Priorities in Post-Secondary Education and Employment and this is the report on proceedings from the National Policy Summit in Washington, D.C. I'm Donna Johnson, one of the project coordinators for the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, the organization that's sponsoring the call.

Before we get started, I'd like to review a few logistical items with all of you. The format for today's teleconference will be a 30-minute presentation by Dr. Robert Stodden and Dr. Megan Jones, followed by a question-and-answer period.

Today, we are pleased to welcome the presenters from the National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. We have Dr. Robert Stodden, who is the Director of the Center on Disability Studies and the National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports, Professor of Special Education at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He is also the current president of the Association of the University Centers on Disabilities. Previously, Dr. Stodden has served as Chairperson of the Department of Special Education at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and Coordinator of Career Vocational Needs Training Programs at Boston College. Over the past 25 years, Dr. Stod-

den has served as principal investigator and director of more than 100 research and training projects spanning the areas of secondary school transition, secondary education and employment for individuals with special learning and behavior needs.

We also are pleased to have Dr. Megan Jones, who is an Assistant Professor at the Center for Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Dr. Jones coordinates the Postoutcomes Network of the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition here at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Jones has presented at numerous national and international conferences, and has authored several papers on postsecondary supports for individuals with disabilities.

And with that, I'm going to turn it over to Dr. Stodden and Dr. Jones.

**DR. STODDEN:** Thank you, Donna. And good morning from Honolulu.

What I would like to do is touch on, in my 15, 20 minutes or so, a couple of background notes about the National Summit, some of the continuing issues, findings and then, policy recommendations coming out of the summit.

The National Summit on the Preparation For and Support of Youth with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education and Employment was held in Washington D.C. at the National Press Club

on July 8th, 2002. The basis for the summit was one that there exists a number of positive signs supporting youth and people with disabilities to attend and participate in postsecondary education. Second, was the general impetus to share a number of research findings related to those positive signs. I encourage you to go to the Summit Website, at [www.ncset.hawaii.edu/summit.htm](http://www.ncset.hawaii.edu/summit.htm), and take a look at the Briefing Book for the Summit.

I'd like to make an introductory run through some of the positive signs that are contributing to this field of study, being something of increasing interest at the federal level, and obviously with universities and postsecondary institutions. We're very focused on secondary schools that are responsible for preparing youth with disabilities so that they can access and succeed in postsecondary education. A lot of this comes from the latest OSEP report on outcomes and youth with disabilities. There are increased numbers, over the past two years, of youth with disabilities graduating from high school with a diploma, especially with the same diploma as other students.

And, of course, this is a requirement for many postsecondary educational programs. So this is definitely a positive indication that more students are prepared for postsecondary school.

There are also decreased numbers of youth with disabilities dropping out of secondary school. And so, this trend, even though it's very small at this point, over the past five years, represents a slight drop in those numbers. We've also seen a trend of college freshmen with disabilities increase significantly over the last 20 years since the passage of and reauthorization of IDEA. We're now seeing a generation of young people with disabilities that are better prepared for college and actually have expectations to attend postsecondary school. We're also noticing that increased numbers of students with disabilities are persisting in postsecondary education towards a degree or towards a license or credential of some sort.

Most postsecondary institutions now enroll students with disabilities. Almost all institutions have some students with disabilities, and some institutions have fairly significant numbers. Also, most institutions of higher education provide some

level of support, disability services, and supports to students with disabilities and again with some programs providing extensive support.

We're also noticing that younger people with disabilities have higher employment rates than do older people with disabilities. In other words, for people with disabilities over 40 years of age, employment rates are significantly lower than for youth with disabilities now in their 20s. So this is an indication of higher expectations, better preparation. We're also noticing that a BA degree is somewhat of an equalizer for youth with disabilities in employment settings.

Given these positive signs, there are a number of remaining issues that our program, the National Center for the study of postsecondary supports, has been focused on and has actually generated quite a bit of new information on. Some of those remaining issues are that youth with disabilities in secondary school are still less likely to complete a rigorous secondary school curriculum than are students without disabilities, even though this is gradually changing. They're also less likely than are non-disabled students to graduate with a diploma, and less likely to initiate accessing postsecondary education.

Youth with disabilities are less likely to complete a postsecondary education program of study. If they do complete it, it's more likely that it will take longer than for other students. Most students with disabilities, once they leave secondary school, require some type of service coordination and management assistance. Lack of this assistance is seen as one of the major barriers for youth with disabilities in terms of postsecondary education and employment. Students with disabilities are also less likely to be employed in relation to students without disabilities. They're less likely to earn as much as their peers without disabilities, and they're less likely to have a comparable quality of life.

So these are all issues that we're continuing to address. Some of the findings related to these issues – and again, just a real quick overview: There's data to indicate that the type of and the range of educational supports provided in postsecondary education varies significantly across institutions and all the way from almost no supports or services to some programs that have very extensive sup-

ports and services targeted toward specific disability areas. Also, supports in postsecondary education are typically not linked to instruction, and they're not linked to the instructor or to learning on the part of the student. And it becomes the responsibility of the student to make this linkage. Students are often responsible for describing and advocating for their own supports in postsecondary school, which many students aren't prepared for. Supports in postsecondary education are typically not as individualized as they are in secondary education. So it's up to the student typically to advocate for and determine that individualization. Typically supports are not related, or they're related solely to access. They're not, under the ADA, related to success or completion of one's program. There is a lot of concern about the lack of awareness on the part of faculty in postsecondary education regarding disabilities. Often, there are low expectations. And there are a number of other issues in this area. The use of technology is often an equalizing support for youth with disabilities. There are a lot of implications for findings in that area. And there's little support typically for transition to professional employment after postsecondary education. This is perceived as a major area of need for study right now - looking at what happens to persons with disabilities after they complete a professional program of study.

Based on this kind of background information, I'm going to touch on a couple of the issues and recommendations that came out of the National Summit. One set of issues focused upon the range and types of services, supports, and accommodations that persons with disabilities receive in postsecondary education. We know that range and the types of supports vary extensively across different types of postsecondary education programs. We also know that there's no directory or there's very little information available to youth with disabilities and to parents of youth with disabilities regarding this variation. So if you're a young person with a disability and your parent and you are seeking to find the best place or the most supportive campus, there is little information available to help you out. One of the recommendations coming out of the summit was to look at the development of a national network of technical assistance programs within

postsecondary education settings. The intent of these programs or centers would be to work collaboratively in the areas of faculty development and disability support provision in postsecondary education within the institution of higher ed that they might be located.

So part of the recommendation is that such centers would do things like provide effective practice models for institutions of higher ed. They would provide faculty training, support personnel training, technical assistance to programs and persons with disabilities. And they would also provide information on a ready basis. The specific recommendation from the summit was that either under the Higher Ed Act or possibly IDEA or another piece of legislation – most of these pieces of legislation are up for reauthorization in the next year or two. An appropriation, or first an authorization, be placed in one or more of these pieces of legislation whereby competitively, an institution of higher education in each of the states would apply to develop such a training and technical assistance center. And that center would then be responsible for upgrading disability services and supports and supporting faculty training in the higher ed institutions within their state.

So in some states like California, where you have a large number of higher ed institutions from numerous community colleges, vocational technical programs, four-year and graduate training programs and universities, as well as the University of California system, this would be a tremendous amount of work and would probably need to be fairly focused. Whereas in states that are a little bit smaller, there may be five or six institutions that might work collaboratively in putting something together to address the technical assistance, training and support needs of faculty and disability support personnel in that state. So that was one of the policy recommendations.

Another recommendation to address the issue of a lack of an organized database on postsecondary education programs for youth with disabilities, family members, and counselors, was to develop a national web-based register of postsecondary and education institutions focused upon the type and level of education support services and accommodations provided within those institutions. Such a

database would have a search function that would be geographically regional, would focus on the type and range of support provision by type and level of disability, and would include other features, such as special scholarships and other kinds of things that a postsecondary education institution might provide.

So the thoughts around this are focused on the needs of parents, counselors, and youth with disabilities to have access to some sort of a database about disability support provision, and just overall receptiveness of an institution of higher education towards youth with disabilities and particularly youth with disabilities maybe with a certain type or level of disability.

So, again, the recommendation was that this type of activity should be considered in an authorization, for an authorization, and an appropriation, within the Higher Ed Act or within IDEA, which is currently being or in the process of being reauthorized, and that the appropriation should provide support for ongoing planning, implementation, and evaluation of this need and the value of the service to counselors, persons or youth with disabilities and their family members.

Those were two policy recommendations. Let me touch on one other area. And the issue is focused on the fact that there's very little data or information on the performance of youth with disabilities in postsecondary education. There's also very little information on what happens to youth with disabilities after they leave postsecondary education.

A recommendation was assembled around the need to design something like the National Longitudinal Transition Study that was done by SRI for students in secondary school and after secondary school as they transition into postsecondary school, only it would also track their exit into professional employment after postsecondary school.

A recommendation that came out of the summit was to look at developing an authorization and an appropriation with IDEA that would fund such a study that would longitudinally track the progress of youth with disabilities in postsecondary education settings and identify what works in postsecondary education settings, also in secondary school in terms of preparing for postsecondary education

and the transition to postsecondary education. And, additionally the study would look at the relationship between what is identified as working in postsecondary school with successful completion and subsequent professional employment after leaving postsecondary ed.

That's a recommendation focused on getting a little better sense of what actually works for our youth with disabilities in postsecondary education, and during preparation in secondary school, in order to be successful in postsecondary education and subsequent employment.

**DR. JONES:** I'm going to talk about three issues and related implications that are a little more practically focused. First I'm going to touch on the issue of service coordination. Second I'm going to talk about the issue of the lack of opportunities to learn and practice self-determination and self-advocacy. Third I'm going to talk about the need to revise the expectations of who goes to postsecondary school, and how they're supported.

So the first issue is looking at lack of assistance with coordinating and managing support services and accommodations. We've definitely found that, first of all, people with disabilities often have a lot of different things that they need to manage above and beyond what the average postsecondary school student might manage. For example, you have academic services like perhaps note takers, readers, recorded books, testing accommodations, dealing with professors. You might have to deal with equipment, such as special computer equipment, a wheelchair, assisted listening devices. You might have a need for social support. For example, if you're deaf and you have trouble communicating, you might need help with managing an interpreter. You might have particular health issues you have to manage, financial things such as dealing with the Department of Rehabilitation, Social Security, employment accommodations, et cetera.

There might be particular housing issues, transportation issues. The list goes on. But the point being that the postsecondary student with a disability comes in and beyond the regular process of becoming an adult, the student with a disability has a lot of different services within and outside of the university that they're responsible for managing.

Another related issue is that a lot of agencies and institutions – this might be the postsecondary institution, the Department of Rehabilitation and Social Security, hospitals, often have very different criteria for the students who participate in their programs. A student, for some programs, might have to appear to be very handicapped. And in other programs, they might have to appear very able. For example, in rehabilitation, traditionally, the emphasis has been on the student being able. If it's Social Security, the emphasis has been on the student being handicapped.

So there's quite a lot of issues in this area that postsecondary student has to deal with. A recommendation that came out of the Summit related to this is that there needs to be a wider variety of supports for a wider of variety of students at postsecondary schools. And what this means at the practical level when you're looking at postsecondary institutions, for example, is that they need to start thinking about services being more individualized and supporting the student as an individual rather than as existing under a criteria or disability label. Another recommendation is for postsecondary education institutions and personnel to start looking at having more extensive services on the campus, so there's less need for outside assistance. And that doesn't necessarily mean creating a whole bunch of new services as much as making existing services responsive to the needs of students with disabilities. For example, the financial aid officer, the career guidance office, the tutoring center, housing, health services, and transportation should be accessible to the student with a disability. Postsecondary schools should consider that they will have students with disabilities using those services and that they need to meet those students' needs so that students aren't having to bring in so many outside supports and services in order to get through postsecondary education.

Bob touched on the next issue—that the IDEA, the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act differ in terms of their intent and application. A reminder that in secondary school, supports and services are mandated under IDEA, while in postsecondary school they are only mandated under the ADA and the Rehab Act. The intent of IDEA is to provide a free and ap-

propriate education in the least restrictive environment. So a lot of the focus in secondary school is on providing a lot of services to the student so that they can graduate from school. Supports are more individualized in secondary school than they are at the postsecondary level. There's a lot of focus in secondary school on involving parents and different professionals in making decisions about support for the student. In postsecondary school, only the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act apply, which are much more focused on reasonable accommodations and, as Bob said, on access to rather than success in postsecondary education schools say, we just have to provide reasonable accommodations. So we're not going to go above and beyond that.

The second thing that happens in relation to these laws is that intent translates into the application of supports and services. The roles of the participants change. For example, in secondary school, parents and teachers and professionals are much more actively involved in planning support. They make a lot of decisions for the student. And then, when the student gets into postsecondary education, all of a sudden, they have to be the initiator and manager of their supports.

As Bob discussed, the kinds and types of support change, not just across postsecondary education institutions, but from secondary school to postsecondary education and the kinds of support that the student might be entitled to can be quite different. This relates to coordination and management because it further complicates the entire issue of the students managing their services and suddenly being responsible for being a manager rather than a passive participant in the support provision process. The specific recommendation that came out of the Summit that is related to this has actually been touched on a little bit. It has to do with the technical assistance projects and that we need to raise awareness about the differences in legal language and obligations to better prepare parents and students for the switch. That needs to happen at a practical, as well as at the policy levels. In other words, professionals and parents need to start being aware that these differences do exist and that they need to work to address these differences.

The next issue is, in fact, the lack of opportuni-

ties to learn and practice self-determination and self-advocacy in secondary school. The roles in secondary school mean that the student is a passive recipient of services, while parents and professionals plan and manage these services. The student with a disability in secondary education is often a passive observer. They often don't participate in their IEP meeting. Even though the IEP team is required to invite the student, the student does not have to attend. And if they do, often as not, they are a token participant rather than an active participant. In other words, they're still a passive observer. Obviously, there are exceptions to this. But there's not always an effort to really and truly include students in the process. So just because the student is sitting at the table doesn't mean that they're participating.

The parents' role changes quite a bit, as well. The parent during secondary school basically represents the interest of the student. They are the student's voice on what the student wants and needs. When you get to postsecondary school, that changes. The student has absolute responsibility for themselves – the parent doesn't have rights anymore – in fact, the schools have to get permission from the student to even contact parents if there's some kind of a problem.

The role of a professional as the developer and manager of services changes from being a manager in secondary school to being more of a counselor in postsecondary school. The problem with these different roles and how they are in secondary schools as compared to postsecondary school is that students with disabilities often don't have an opportunity to learn what they need to learn to negotiate this role switch. They don't have the opportunity to learn about their disability and their needs, how to meet those needs, where to go for help, how to advocate or appeal when their needs are not met.

Additionally there may be goals that are set in the IEP meeting during secondary school that are short-term, and not the student's actual long-term goals. So, for example, goals might be set that the student will pass a math class or participate in a regular math class rather than a segregated math class, rather than a long-term goal such as attending a college that specializes in the sciences. There might also be an emphasis on social skills rather

than academic skills, not saying that social skills aren't important. But sometimes, the IEP team can be very shortsighted in terms of a vision for the student.

Another related issue is the lack of participation by rehabilitation and postsecondary support personnel in the IEP transition process. Often, the rehabilitation counselor comes into the picture only when the secondary school is done with the student. The rehabilitation counselor picks the student up and then takes them off and does their job with them, without having ever necessarily had previous contact with the student or been involved in setting goals for the student.

One recommendation that came out of the summit is that the student should be required to actively participate in the IEP meeting. And the student should not only be required to attend the IEP, but also to actively participate and have a specific role in the IEP. They might even lead their IEP by the time they're 16 or so. Obviously, the student can't just all of a sudden take this on. So coupled with that, parents and professionals need to prepare students to enable them to take a leadership role.

This might be through the self-determination and self-advocacy curriculum. It might be through gradually giving the student a larger and larger role in the IEP meeting. It might be through some sort of mentorship program so the student has contact with older people with disabilities who can help lead them down the road, as it were, and then give them advice. There are a lot of various recommendations related to the issue of self-determination and advocacy that came out of the summit.

Another recommendation was that rehabilitation and university support personnel should be more involved at the secondary and transition levels. This might mean a rehabilitation counselor attending IEP meetings during the last couple of years of high school. It also might mean some collaboration between secondary schools and postsecondary schools and support personnel to establish and communicate expectations and post-school requirements. If the postsecondary institution or support personnel had some sort of communication with secondary ed support personnel and let them know, hey, look, when the student comes to postsecondary

education their IEP is not going to count anymore as assessment. And they're going to be expected to do this and this and this and this. And this is what it's like at our school. These are the kind of supports we offer, etc. If people at the secondary and postsecondary level had more communication, then perhaps the IEP teams and parents, teachers could help prepare the student to make this transition.

The last issue I want to talk about is the need to revise the expectations of who goes to postsecondary school. Currently, although certainly expectations have increased, expectations are still pretty low for people with disabilities in terms of that they are going to actually attend postsecondary school, and particularly, that they're going to attend an academically competitive postsecondary school as opposed to a junior college or a technical college. This is particularly so for people with severe cognitive disabilities and people with learning disabilities.

One of the problems is that postsecondary education is based on the idea of merit, ability, and independence, which, to many people are opposites of disability. And so, when you have somebody with a disability, particularly a learning disability or a cognitive disability, establishing the goal of going on to postsecondary education, to many professionals and parents and the person with the disabilities themselves, seems unrealistic because they're not seen as being able. There is a perception that they are not smart and not able to be independent.

When you talk about learning disabilities, there's a lot of – don't want to call it prejudice – low expectations. A lot of questions in postsecondary education: Are they really disabled or are they just not smart? Shouldn't they just be pursuing technical careers? Students with learning disabilities have difficulties with faculty, with getting assessments. That's a particular challenge.

Along with raising low expectations is a need for support services to keep pace as we revise our expectations. So, in other words, you can have high expectations that all students with disabilities will participate in postsecondary education. But if support services don't keep up with those expectations, then students are not going to succeed. Of the summit recommendations related to this issue, is one to share more data and information on evidence-based

practices for supporting a wider variety of individuals in postsecondary education. This can happen on a policy level, but also on a practical level between researchers, between parents and professionals, between different schools. For example, there's been a lot of interest in supporting people with cognitive disabilities and starting postsecondary programs for this group of individuals. Programs that experiment with these kinds of supports need to share information with other people so that other programs can take on those models and make them not just experiments, but actual models of support provision.

Another related recommendation is to raise the profile of high expectations for postsecondary education. And this means that policy makers in the White House and in Congress, advocacy and public relation entities and parents, teachers, and people with disabilities need to bring to the forefront the issue of high expectations and related supports that are needed to achieve these expectations.

**MS. JOHNSON:** OK. Thanks, Megan.

Actually, I have a question before I turn it over to the rest of the audience for questions. Bob, I was wondering if your report included any information on factors that led to the creation of good practice in higher ed for serving students with disabilities?

**DR. STODDEN:** My sense is that probably the primary thing that is driving the provision of supports and services in postsecondary education for people with disabilities is the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) .

In working with AHEAD (Association of Higher Education and Disability) and a lot of the AHEAD members, there seems to be a tremendous focus with disability support providers in postsecondary education upon what they have to provide under the ADA. And there's also some focus on what you minimally have to provide. And so, there isn't necessarily a real focus on the effectiveness of practice. That's actually one of the things that would be great to change; to really have more attention paid to what works and what is effective in terms of supporting people with disabilities and to move rather than open what is minimally required.

**MS. JOHNSON:** Thanks. When you have questions, we ask that you announce your name and the state from which you are calling and let us know if

your question is directed to either Dr. Stodden or Dr. Jones. So go ahead, first question.

**DR. IZZO:** I have a question. This is Margo Izzo, from Ohio. Hi, Bob. Hi, Megan.

**DR. STODDEN:** Hi, Margo.

**DR. IZZO:** My question is – taking a look at your longitudinal study of postsecondary education programs. I think it's important to have more data on what works and what the outcomes are.

Currently, the president's Commission on Excellence in Special Education and CEC are both recommending that the new IDEA collect statewide data on students' attainment of postsecondary employment and education to ensure greater accountability for post-school results.

I would ask you to comment on whether you support that idea to mandate states to collect information through an interagency program, so Rehab and MRDD and the Board of Regents would be collecting information together. And would you want your study to be funded in addition to that? And who would fund your study?

**DR. STODDEN:** We support the commission's recommendation. And CEC and I think several other people have also come in line with support for that recommendation, that there be greater accountability for collecting post-school data on the part of local school districts in collaboration with adult agencies and postsecondary institutions. So we're very supportive of that. I think that data typically gives you a snapshot of what happens to the products of secondary education, what happened to your graduates.

The longitudinal study we're proposing would take the next big step from that. It would actually look at what happens to those students as they go into postsecondary education and what the outcome of that experience is, whether they graduate. Did they receive a degree, a license, or a certificate? And then, also were they employed in their field or profession of training?

And also, maybe looking at some quality of life indicators, because I think there's a lot of interest in discovering the impact of postsecondary education on the quality of life for people with disabilities. Assessing the study would involve some of those things and then looking at what worked in second-

ary school or what led to this success, and what worked within the transition, and what actually worked for that individual within postsecondary education in terms of support.

So I see the longitudinal study obviously within a bigger picture. It also gets into effectiveness, looking at effectiveness and different kinds of supports and services and programs, collaboration.

We're proposing that the reporting aspects of this are in IDEA just because it's part of that accountability and follow-up process in IDEA. We're looking at it as an extension of the SRI studies, because it's picking up a piece that those studies don't cover.

**DR. IZZO:** Thank you.

**MS. JOHNSON:** Any other questions for Dr. Stodden or Dr. Jones? No one else? Last call for questions.

**DR. IZZO:** I have a follow-up question. Getting states to collect statewide data on student attainments is quite a challenging proposition for states. And currently, Rehab collects different variables and actually has different definitions of disability than secondary schools use.

How feasible do you think that is, and how long will it take before we get our data systems and our coordinated management information systems working together to get some good data out of that.

**DR. STODDEN:** I agree. It's very complicated. One of the places we've been encouraged to start looking is with the state improvement grants, those states that receive SIG, state improvement grants. One of the requirements of those grants was to take a look at collecting post-school outcome data. And it didn't target quite, I think, what is being proposed right now in the commission report. But it was a beginning.

So one of the things we're looking to do over the next year is to survey particularly the first round of SIG states – they will be in their fifth year – and to see what they've done on this and to review where they are, what they plan to do and possibly make a number of recommendations for those states. There's some possibility there may be another round of state improvement grants, but to provide those with a set of guidelines for assisting SIG states to proceed on that.

The other thing we've done relating to the 17



projects funded back in the early '90s. Different states were funded to develop follow-up, follow-along systems in California, Hawaii. I think Minnesota was one of those states.

So those models are out there. All of the states developed follow-up instrumentation. They developed procedures and guidelines for collecting data. I know the Hawaii project actually designated certain personnel in secondary schools who had those roles. And then, they developed some guidelines for working within all agencies and vocational rehabilitation on ensuring the data got in place. So there's quite a bit sitting around that might be drawn on as examples and models in this area. And I think that's one of our first steps, to dredge all of that up first.

**DR. IZZO:** Good strategy.

**MS. JOHNSON:** Any other questions? OK. With that, I think we'll close the call. I would like to thank Dr. Stodden and Dr. Jones for presenting this information. I know it was very valuable to all of us.

END OF TELECONFERENCE

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