

Chapter 4: Meeting the Community Partners

*“Coming together is
a beginning, staying
together is progress,
and working together is
success.”*

—Henry Ford
1863-1947, American Industrialist,
Founder of Ford Motor Company

Introduction

As evidenced in the array of potential collaboration and partnerships, many people, government agencies, and organizations have distinct roles *and* responsibilities in ensuring the successful transition of youth to productive careers. Intuitively, it may seem that with so many people involved, successful student outcomes are inevitable. However, it is precisely because transition has a multidimensional face that it becomes increasingly important to outline respective roles and responsibilities. Roles of particular importance include: VR counselor, educators, additional transition team partners and employers. By highlighting these roles and responsibilities, it is anticipated that transition teams will work more collaboratively. In the end, everyone in society benefits from effective transition of youth with disabilities into productive careers.

Competencies of Transition Specialists Across Systems

Defur and Tavymans (1995, September) compared the competencies needed for transition specialists in VR, vocational education, and special education. The seven central competencies that emerged as central to this role of transition specialists are as follows:

- Knowledge of agencies and systems change;
- Development and management of transition goals of the Individualized Education Program;
- Working with others in the transition process;
- Vocational assessment and job development;
- Professionalism, advocacy, and legal issues;
- Job training and support; and
- General assessment.

This is a blend of skills required in the fields of special education, vocational education, and VR professions. These competencies will facilitate the interdisciplinary framework needed to support the successful transition of students with disabilities from school to successful careers.

VR Counselor

Competencies

The role of the VR counselor is instrumental in transition

planning for students who are eligible for services from the State VR agency. This role can take many forms and must incorporate philosophical and ethical considerations.

According to the Commission on Certified Rehabilitation Counseling Association (CRCC), the scope of practice for the VR counselor includes the following:

Rehabilitation counseling is a systematic process which assists persons with physical, mental, developmental, cognitive, and emotional disabilities to achieve their personal, career, and independent living goals in the most integrated setting possible through the application of the counseling process. The counseling process involves communication, goal setting, and beneficial growth or change through self-advocacy, psychological, vocational, social, and behavioral interventions. The specific techniques and modalities utilized within the rehabilitation counseling process may include, but are not limited to:

- assessment and appraisal;
- diagnosis and treatment planning;
- career (vocational) counseling;
- individual and group counseling treatment interventions focused on facilitating adjustments to the medical and psychosocial impact of disability;
- case management, referral, and service coordination;
- program evaluation and research;
- interventions to remove environmental, employment, and attitudinal barriers;
- consultation services among multiple parties and regulatory systems;
- job analysis, job development, and job placement services including assistance with employment and job accommodations; and
- the provision of consultation about and access to rehabilitation technology (CRCC, 2003, pp 4-5).

Roles and Responsibilities of the VR Counselor

1. Support empowerment and the exercise of informed choice by the student with a disability

- Convey a high expectation of youth with disabilities.
- Inform youth about the array of available community options.
- Assist youth in understanding information and options throughout the decision-making process.
- Connect students with peer mentors.
- Advocate for students' rights.

2. Build partnerships

- Provide leadership in the transition community to build a shared vision.
- Assist in the leadership of Local Transition Coordinating Councils (LTCCs) to develop solutions and strategies.

- Link to consumer groups and peer support. Develop mentoring opportunities.
- Partner with community rehabilitation providers, training facilities, and institutions of higher education.
- Involve employers in transition planning activities.

3. Provide technical assistance and consultation services (to groups of students, parents, educators, and/or other transition partners). Topics may include:

- Career exploration;
- Job readiness training;
- Soft skill development;
- Self-advocacy skills;
- Information about VR legislation, programs, available services, and comparable benefits;
- Career fairs;
- Transition planning; and
- Disability awareness.

4. Transition Planning

- Establish and maintain a process for receiving referrals of students who receive special education and Section 504 services.
- Develop comprehensive assessment.
- Determine eligibility.
- Develop and align Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) with the Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Provide vocational counseling and guidance.
- Provide and coordinate VR services.
- Coordinate comparable benefits.
- Develop accommodation strategies for employment.
- Provide assistive technology programs and services for employment.
- Provide placement services.

VR Administrator

Vision

The VR Administrator provides leadership at the State, regional, and/or local level to set the vision of transition initiatives. In a position paper on the reauthorization of IDEA, the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) bridges the special education and VR systems to support a common vision of transition:

The CSAVR agrees with the conclusion of the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education that more effectively implementing existing Federal policies and laws

will dramatically improve the low rates of individuals with disabilities currently obtaining competitive employment or accessing higher education. The CSAVR believes that the return on America’s investment in special education is closely linked to the success of the Public VR Program in meeting the multitude of employment-related needs of transitioning youth with disabilities. (CSAVR, 2002, ¶ 4)

Roles and Responsibilities

The VR Administrator is responsible to:

- Develop and implement collaboratively a State agreement to establish the framework for transition services in the State;
- Guide and support the development and implementation of local agreements to address the specific needs of students;
- Create cross-systems funding strategies;
- Provide leadership in the development and operation of the State and local transition coordinating council(s);
- Identify service gaps and creative cross-system solutions;
- Promote joint training and technical assistance initiatives with educators, agencies, parents, and students;
- Communicate the importance of providing transition services to students with disabilities as early as possible;
- Assign VR counselors as transition counselors to foster relationships and increase the availability of VR services to students with disabilities;
- Provide counselors with “credit” for providing technical assistance to students with disabilities, along with training and support of parent groups; and
- Promote a shared vision of transition for students with disabilities;

The strong support of transition as a priority by VR administrators will facilitate VR counselors to move from *compliance to commitment*.

Educators

Educators trained to provide effective transition services are key resources for students with disabilities and their families. Over the years, researchers and practitioners have identified promising practices that secondary educators can utilize in order to provide effective transition services (Hasazi, et al., 1999; Hughes, et al., 1997; Kohler, 1993; Kohler, et al., 1994; Storms, et al., 2000). Unfortunately, recent data from the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) (Carlson, Brauen, Klein, Schroll, and Willig, 2002) indicate that many secondary special educators are not utilizing what we know about effective transition practices. For example, special educators with transition responsibilities were asked how often they worked with students and parents to identify specific post-school goals, a critical transition practice. Twenty percent of this sample reported they never or rarely implemented this practice and almost 35 percent indicated only sometimes (Table 1). Only 45 percent of these special educators responded that they often worked with students and parents to identify specific post-school goals. The findings from the SPeNSE study with regard to the use of other

effective transition practices were similar (Table 1). Given these data, it is not surprising that the Expert Strategy Panel on Students with Disabilities in Secondary Education, Transition, and Employment (U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 2001) identified the need for pre-service and professional development for educators as one of five key issues to be addressed to improve results for youth with disabilities.

Table 1:
Secondary Special Education and General Education Teachers' Use of Transition Best Practices

In your work with secondary-aged students, how often do you...	NEVER	RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN
1. Work with students and parents to identify specific post-school goals? Special Education Teachers (n=2362) General Education Teachers (n= 214)	5.8 13.5	14.5 38.8	34.8 34.6	44.9 13.1
2. Work with students and parents to identify job opportunities that match student's competencies? Special Education Teachers (n= 2359) General Education Teachers (n= 215)	15.1 29.4	22.9 39.8	34.0 24.0	28.0 6.8
3. Develop community work-experience programs? Special Education Teachers (n= 2356) General Education Teachers (n=213)	42.2 59.5	26.2 24.0	17.8 10.5	13.8 5.9
4. Coordinate referrals to adult service providers? (i.e., vocational rehabilitation, community colleges, or employment service agencies). Special Education Teachers (n= 2357) General Education Teachers (n= 215)	33.9 56.2	23.0 28.1	25.8 14.1	17.3 1.5
5. Prepare students to participate in the IEP process? Special Education Teachers (n= 2358) General Education Teachers (n= 161)	7.6 66.3	9.9 24.5	27.9 6.5	54.6 2.7
6. Teach self-determination? (i.e. decision making, goal setting, or self-awareness) Special Education Teachers (n= 2366) General Education Teachers (n=216)	3.4 10.4	6.1 11.7	28.9 31.1	61.6 46.8
7. Develop career awareness? Special Education Teachers (n= 2365) General Education Teachers (n= 215)	4.6 10.3	8.7 13.3	33.5 43.9	53.1 32.5
8. Teach learning strategies? (i.e., note-taking, time management, developing mnemonic devices) Special Education Teachers (n=2367) General Education Teachers (n= 215)	3.3 5.3	4.4 10.6	27.5 45.3	64.7 38.9
9. Identify educational experiences that correspond to transition-related goals? Special Education Teachers (n= 2357) General Education Teachers (n= 211)	4.4 7.9	8.0 15.8	37.8 50.2	49.8 26.1

* Data represents percent
The Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE, 2002).
See www.spense.org

Kohler (1996) organized transition practices that could be supported by evidence of effectiveness into five categories:

1. Student-focused planning
2. Student development
3. Interagency collaboration
4. Family involvement
5. Program structure

These categories of promising practices form the *Taxonomy for Transition Programming* (Kohler, 1996; 1998) and have been endorsed by the Council for Exceptional Children, Division on Career Development and Transition (2000) as a foundation for transition-related skill development for secondary special educators. The transition practices from the taxonomy as they relate to the role of the secondary special educator are discussed below. The section ends with a brief discussion of the roles of other education personnel involved in the transition process.

1. Student-Focused Planning

An important promising practice for secondary special educators involves developing an IEP that relates the student's educational program to post-school goals and objectives. Using a variety of assessment information, the teacher can identify and document the student's post-school goals, strengths, learning preferences, and accommodation needs. Then, in collaboration with the IEP team, the educator can develop measurable transition-related goals and objectives that focus on preparation for post-secondary education or training, employment, independent living, and community and leisure activities. This important aspect of effective practice for educators includes recommending educational experiences that will provide the skills necessary for the student to achieve his or her desired post-school goals and objectives, such as participation in college preparatory curricula and/or in vocational and technical education.

Education personnel have the primary responsibility for monitoring and implementing the IEP in collaboration with students, family members, and personnel from other agencies. There are promising practices that help to facilitate meeting this responsibility. It is important to specify in the IEP who will be responsible for transition-focused instructional activities or services. It is also critical to evaluate progress on the student's goals, including the student's evaluation of his or her own progress.

It is important for secondary special educators to facilitate active student and family involvement in the IEP planning process. This will help to ensure that the IEP contains post-school goals that the student and family value. Educators can help students to develop skills for meaningful participation in the development of their IEPs and use student-centered planning procedures that facilitate student self-determination and decision-making. In addition, special educators can help prepare students and parents for the transfer of rights (from parent to the youth) that will take place when the student reaches the age of majority under State law.

2. Student Development

Historically, individuals with disabilities were subjected to unjust dependency and segregation in the name of protection. We now understand that these individuals must be prepared for full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency to the

maximum extent possible. It is important to focus on developing skills in students that will facilitate their success in post-school activities like post-secondary education or training, employment, independent living, and community and leisure activities.

There are a number of promising practices for secondary educators that facilitate such development. One critical practice involves teaching students self-determination skills. Self-determination involves “a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal directed self-regulated, autonomous behavior” (Field, et.al., 1998, p.2). Teaching self-determination skills includes focusing on instruction in areas like problem solving, choice/decision-making, goal setting/attainment, self-evaluation, self-management, self-advocacy, and self-awareness. It also includes preparing students to take an active part in their own IEP meetings.

Academic skills are critical for post-school success. Factors like higher reading and mathematics achievement levels, spending more time in regular classrooms and completing high school are related to better employment outcomes for youth with disabilities (SRI, 1993; Research Triangle Inst., 1998). In addition, research suggests that Braille literacy or reading in Braille is associated with better employment outcomes for individuals with vision impairment (Ryles, 1998). Promising practices in this area include teaching students academic skills in the context of real life experiences, focusing on learning strategies and study skills, and using mentors to facilitate student learning. Developing students’ career awareness is also critical. It is important to develop strategies for effectively teaching the student, including appropriate accommodations and/or modifications so the student can successfully access the general curriculum. The special educator should also facilitate a flexible program and curricular options to meet student needs.

A number of other areas are important for student development. The high school student’s access to employment skills instruction, structured work experiences, and career and vocational curricula may help to ensure success in a career. Other important responsibilities of secondary special educators include teaching social skills for school, work, and community living as well as teaching skills for living independently and family living skills. The secondary educator provides updated information on the student’s social and behavior activities in the classroom setting. The secondary educator must also develop accommodations and adaptations that meet student needs across a variety of settings, such as academic, vocational, home, and community.

3. Interagency Collaboration

Secondary special educators play a significant role in enhancing interagency coordination and collaboration, critical components in effective transitions. They are the professionals most often responsible for coordinating the IEP planning process; the main vehicle for interagency collaboration around transition. Successful approaches for linking students and parents to appropriate post-school services, supports or agencies before the student leaves high school are essential. It is important for the special education teacher to interact effectively with community service providers to identify and address students’ service and support needs. They will need to know and understand the roles and functions of the various service providers participating in planning for transition. The teacher has important information about current and upcoming service needs of students necessary for strategic planning purposes. With authorization from students and families, the special educator can also provide student assessment information to the appropriate service providers.

4. Family Involvement

It is essential that secondary special educators be skilled at facilitating the family’s active participation in IEP/transition planning and decision-making. This involvement is critical because of the insights family members often have as to what motivates the student and their ability to help clarify the student’s strengths, needs, and interests. This information is invaluable in helping the IEP team to adequately identify and plan for the student’s needs after high school. In addition, family members are likely to continue as a significant source of support for the student after high school.

Families may feel more empowered when they participate in transition planning in more meaningful ways. Secondary special educators can help to facilitate this by involving families in pre-IEP planning activities designed to prepare them for an active role in the planning process. Structured methods for identifying family needs can be employed. Additional strategies to enhance family involvement include arranging planning meetings at times convenient for students and their families and communicating to families in advance about the proposed agenda, the roles of participants and possible roles of family members. It is important for the educator to provide timely and understandable information to the family about transition services and program and/or curriculum options, as well as referral information about school and community services. Encourage family members to participate in transition related training opportunities on topics like advocacy, promoting self-determination, natural supports, legal issues and adult agencies and services.

5. Program Structures and Policies

Schools and instruction must be organized in ways that facilitate effective transition planning. While secondary special educators play a critical role in organizing instruction, the development of transition friendly policies guiding program structure, resource allocation, and human resource development are largely administrative functions. Secondary special educators may serve on workgroups or committees charged with strategic planning or making recommendations to facilitate changes in the school’s structure and policies. They may also participate in program and curriculum development and evaluation.

Secondary special educators are responsible for a number of instructionally based promising practices that support effective transition programming. The educator can develop outcome-based curricula that promote successful movement from school to desired post-school activities. In addition, they can facilitate and provide flexible program options to meet student needs and teach students in integrated settings.

Other Education Personnel

Special education teachers are not the only education personnel that should be involved in the transition process. In fact, secondary special educators may have inappropriately been held accountable for too many transition responsibilities. According to Kohler (1998), secondary special educators

...have been held responsible for connecting with regular and vocational education teachers, referring students to community service agencies, developing IEPs, scheduling and conducting IEP meetings, conducting student assessment, controlling classroom behavior, and developing and delivering instructional programs. In sum, they have been expected to develop transition “programs”, to direct planning for individual students, and to conduct the daily business of teaching. (p. 191)

Research indicates that secondary special educators would be most appropriately responsible for specific student development and planning activities rather than program development and coordination (Kohler, 1997).

A number of other education personnel should be included in the transition process. Education personnel that have important roles to play include general education teachers, vocational teachers, school counselors, school administrators, and transition specialists. General education teachers, vocational teachers, and school counselors can facilitate effective transitions by actions such as providing supports and accommodations, infusing career objectives into the curriculum, and preparing students for postsecondary education. School administrators have a critical role to play in ensuring that the education system is restructured to facilitate transition-related activities, sufficient resources are allocated for hiring personnel, and appropriate staff development is provided. Some school districts provide for transition specialists to work specifically on coordinating transition activities. A transition specialist has been defined as “an individual who coordinates, delivers, and evaluates transition education and services at the school or system level, in conjunction with other educators, families, students, and representatives of community organizations” (Council for Exceptional Children, Division on Career Development and Transition, 2000). It is clear that transition-related responsibilities are important components of the roles of other school personnel.

Additional Transition Team Partners

As required by IDEA of 1997 and the Rehabilitation Act, the roles and responsibilities of agencies should be clearly identified in the State’s formal interagency agreement. Also, it is critical for the IEP team to include other community agencies and providers that can build supports for the student with a disability transitioning from school to career. Consumer organizations and community rehabilitation providers can play an important role in transition planning. VR counselors can assist in this team building process thanks to their vast knowledge of community resources. The following are examples of the role of others in the transition process.

TRANSITION TEAM PARTNERS	ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
Career and Technical Educators	Curricular and instructional modifications to support career path. Hands-on learning environment. Linkages with employers. Preparation for higher education in technical field.
Centers for Independent Living Staff	Providing independent living skills evaluation and training, information and referral, peer counseling, and advocacy. Providing a peer mentor to talk with the student about preparing for transition from student role to adult role. Self-advocacy and self-determination skill development. Youth leadership development activities. Identification and application for services available through waivers (e.g. attendant care).
Children, Youth, and Family Workers	Programs and support to student in foster care or from an abusive family situation. Independent living skills programs. Family support and education.
Community Rehabilitation Providers	Community-based work assessments. Job coaching services.

Consumer Organizations (See Chapter 8, pg.68)	Programs to support the successful transition of students with disabilities. Youth development programs. Support systems for parents. Peer mentoring. Opportunities for real-life experiences for the student.
County Drug and Alcohol Program Staff	Specialized drug and alcohol treatment, programs, and services. Drug and alcohol prevention and education programs.
County Health Workers (e.g. Health care consultants, nurses)	Intensive wrap-around services. Medically-necessary services, including assistive technology.
County Mental Health/Mental Retardation Caseworkers	Independent living and employment services. Respite care. Community living experiences. Job coaching services, including follow-along. Intensive case management services. Supportive counseling. Medication management. Day programming.
Military Armed Services Recruiters	Education about military branches' entrance requirements. Identification of possible military options if student qualifies.
Other Professionals (Vocational evaluators, Physical therapists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, etc.)	Provide valuable information about adaptive equipment or assistive technology to enhance student's independent living and employment options.
Post-Secondary School -- Disability Services Coordinators (Representatives of business, trade, and technical schools; community colleges; and institutions of higher education)	Provide valuable information about adaptive equipment or assistive technology to enhance student's independent living and employment options.
Social Security Administration Disability Services Staff	Develop knowledge of SSDI and SSI benefits, work incentives, Plan for Achieving Self Sufficiency (PASS). Referral to Ticket to Work benefits counseling organization. Provide information on Medicaid buy-in programs. Information on Ticket to Work, vocational rehabilitation service options.
Social Workers	May provide bridge between school and home life, community participation, mobility skills.
Vision Teachers	For students with visual disabilities, teacher offers vast knowledge of learning styles and the students' ability and needs.
WIA One-Stop Youth Staff	Community-based work experiences. Summer employment options.

Consumer Advocacy Organizations

Consumer advocacy organizations play a critical role in helping to shape public policy that impacts youth with disabilities. Consumer advocacy organizations have actively promoted the inclusion of transition and choice provisions into relevant laws and regulations. It is safe to say that without their involvement, these provisions would not exist, or, at least, not exist as they are today. It stands to reason, then, that such organizations have an intense interest in

the implementation of transition (and choice) requirements. That interest is based on a firm commitment to the empowerment of each individual youth with a disability. This commitment is expressed in various ways:

- Positions on VR policies;
- Advocacy for individuals;
- Scholarships for youth;
- Literature regarding disability, appropriate accommodations and attitudes;
- Summer camps for youth;
- Self-advocacy workshops and seminars;
- Intergenerational activities for youth and adults with disabilities; and
- Leadership training.

It is imperative for all involved in planning for transition to understand the unique characteristics of consumer organizations. Only then can these organizations be tapped to play an effective role in the transition process. The scope and nature of the programs and services offered by consumer advocacy organizations are contingent upon many factors with which agencies and institutions do not typically contend:

- Consumer organizations have very different funding mechanisms and concerns. Whatever shortages VR agencies and schools may experience, they have a constant, legally mandated source of funds. Consumer organizations are constantly concerned with fund raising activities.
- Consumer organizations seldom have large staffs. Often the staff is support personnel only, and often only for the national office.
- Consumer organizations are membership-based. The source of manpower for programs and services is overwhelmingly dependent upon volunteers. The members with disabilities most competent to act as role models and mentors for youth, are also the persons most likely to have full-time jobs. They must literally take vacation days or weekend leisure time in order to engage in activities like advocacy, mentoring, and participating in IEP meetings. They are not paid for what they do and in fact, must often sacrifice in order to provide important services.
- Consumer organizations are flexible. They make their own rules. They may choose not to consider the income of individuals with disabilities when looking at eligibility for scholarships, camps, and other services they provide. They may personalize their programs or services and make changes in policies and procedures overnight if they choose. Operational procedures are based on history, precedence and personalities of leaders rather than procedures and policies adopted within a legislative framework and administered by a bureaucracy.

As suggested earlier, consumer advocacy organizations may provide a number of services, programs, and resources that are important for youth with disabilities in preparing for transition. For example, consumer organizations may provide:

1. Services and programs such as
 - a. Self-advocacy training,

- b. Scholarships,
 - c. Workshops on issues such as consumer rights and navigating adult service-delivery systems,
 - d. Recreation programs, and
 - e. Advocacy services (i.e., volunteers or paid staff who provide consultation, assist in IEP meetings, and assist the person to access services, assist in appeals, etc.);
2. Contacts for possible job leads and employment;
 3. Opportunities to develop and exercise leadership skills through involvement in the organization (i.e., serving on committees and task forces, speaking on panels at conferences, and testifying at legislative hearings);
 4. Information about adaptive techniques on the job and in independent living;
 5. Information about assistive technology from the perspective of how it works in the real world, problems to expect, and troubleshooting;
 6. Inspiration for students with disabilities and their families as well as possible mentors and models;
 7. Assistance to parents and families in understanding their role in preparing the youth for transition (i.e. giving the student chores at home, expecting the student to perform to a standard, insisting the student develop habits that are essential for later success in employment like being on time for appointments, finishing tasks, and following directions);
 8. Job shadowing and /or work experiences for students under the supervision of employed members of the organization or others; and
 9. Opportunities for meaningful volunteer and service learning experiences for the student.

Employers

The employer is an essential partner in planning and implementing transition services. Employment is often one of the measures by which transition services are determined to have been effective or ineffective. In addition, the literature on best practices has emphasized the importance of work experience in community employment settings for preparing high school students with disabilities for successful transition to post-school employment (Wagner, et. al., 1991). Thus, employers contribute to the student's successful transition by providing opportunities such as job shadowing, internships, and on-the-job training as well as a wealth of information about the world of work.

According to Thuli and Hong (1998), there are a number of important transition-related activities that employers may take on, including:

1. Articulating the needs of the workplace. This includes providing information on the demands of the business/industry with regard to foundation skills (i.e., reading, writing, and self-management) and occupation-specific skills. Employers, working in concert with educators, VR counselors, and other service providers, can help to ensure that student learning in school is good preparation for meeting the demands of the workplace;

2. Providing input into the design and management of work experiences by working with educators, VR counselors and others to identify the skills needed to perform particular jobs;
3. Preparing the workplace by ensuring that necessary accommodations for the young person and appropriate training for coworkers, as needed, are in place; and
4. Providing meaningful work experiences that allow the student to learn a variety of tasks in an occupational area and be exposed to as many aspects of the business or industry as possible.

While employers are motivated to provide work experiences and employment opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities, barriers still exist. In a survey of 800 private sector and 400 Federal employers, researchers found that 43% of Federal employers and 22 % of private sector employers cite negative attitudes of supervisors and coworkers towards individuals with disabilities as a continuing barrier (Cornell University, 2000). About one third of the survey respondents in each group of employers indicated that lack of knowledge about accommodations on the part of supervisors is a serious employment obstacle. In addition, both groups of employers expressed difficulty in providing accessible information to employees with visual and hearing impairments. Employers may also be concerned about the costs of employing people with disabilities when in reality, the typical costs for accommodation may be offset by the tax credits and subsidies that companies receive for hiring and accommodating an employee with a disability. The Job Accommodation Network is a useful resource for employers with questions about appropriate accommodations.

Many employers are committed to overcoming these barriers and recognize the need to expand the valuable contribution that people with disabilities make to our workforce. According to the National Business & Disability Council (2000), a letter was sent to the President of the United States dated October 25, 2000. In this letter, the CEOs of fifteen leading American businesses—including AT & T, Pitney Bowes, Johnson & Johnson, and many others—made a commitment that they will:

- Target disability in diversity recruitment goals as is done for minorities and women, including, wherever appropriate, specific hiring targets;
- Promote the recruitment of youth with disabilities through summer internships, mentoring programs, “career awareness” activities, and community education programs that provide employment and leadership training;
- Create partnerships with disability organizations to identify barriers to employment for people with disabilities and to identify job candidates;
- Include disability issues as part of the company’s diversity training for all employees;
- Incorporate images of disability in the company’s internal and external promotional and marketing materials;
- Ensure that equal access to all company programs, including social activities, is incorporated into the early planning of those programs; and
- Develop and promote reasonable accommodations policies, including the availability of assistive technologies. (p. 1-2)

There are a number of employers that are making progress in providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. For example, the Dupont-Merck pharmaceutical

company in Wilmington, Delaware, employs people with cognitive disabilities in a variety of positions including marketing clerk, laboratory assistant, and conference room coordinator. This program was created through a community partnership with The Arc of Delaware. Similar programs can be established in other communities.

The Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities operates the “Bridges from School to Work” project to enhance employment opportunities for youth with disabilities (Marriott Foundation, 2002). Bridges works with students exiting special education and local employers to provide high quality work experiences and mutually beneficial job placements. The project—first piloted in 1990 in Montgomery County, Maryland—is currently operating in Chicago, San Francisco, Washington (D.C.), Los Angeles, Atlanta, Fairfax County (VA), and Philadelphia. The Bridges project has helped over 5,000 youth find competitive employment with over 1,300 different employers.

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management developed the landmark plan, “Accessing Opportunity: The Plan for Employment of People with Disabilities in the Federal Government” and a companion employment guide (2000). These documents provide Federal agencies with resources as they recruit, hire, train and promote people with disabilities. In particular, agencies have been advised not to consider full time equivalent (FTE) limitations as a barrier to hiring people with disabilities. This policy provides Federal agencies greater hiring flexibility with regard to individuals with disabilities, including permitting them to participate in special programs such as those focused on providing summer jobs for youth with disabilities.

In summary, there are many members of the transition team roster that can offer assistance to students and their families during the transition planning process. It is critical for the key partners to “step up to the plate” to support the student’s career goals and aspirations.

TAKE ACTION TODAY

- **Take a leadership role in bringing key partners to the table, after taking an inventory of the transition team roster.**

FROM COMPLIANCE TO COMMITMENT: A Collaborative Interagency Approach to Transition Planning

TCARS and TRIPS:

In Dauphin and Cumberland counties in Pennsylvania, interagency team processes permit community agencies and school district personnel, with student and parent input, to quickly review the transition needs of high school students with disabilities. The program focuses on students in the 10th and 11th grades. The dialogue or brainstorming sessions utilized in this approach permit school district and many, diverse community agency personnel to schedule key persons to be present at future IEP conferences. Community agency personnel then have critical knowledge of individual transition needs prior to the IEP conferences.

For additional information, contact Joan Kester, PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, 717-787-6695 (voice), 717-787-4885 (TTY), joakester@state.pa.us to obtain name of program contact information.