

Exploring Transition in New Jersey:

Research into the Experiences of Emerging Adults with IDD & Their Families

Report on Key Findings

What is Transition?

The period of time that marks the movement from adolescence to adulthood includes **transitions** in many areas of life. Success after leaving school is often measured by entrance into higher education, employment, increased independence, financial stability, and social relationships. For students with disabilities, preparation for transition should begin by age 14 and focus on academic instruction, community experiences, employment and daily living skills to facilitate success in adult life.

About the Study

In 2014, the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities commissioned a research project to learn about the transition experiences of young adults with developmental disabilities in the state and to inform their priorities for the next 5 years. Conducted by The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, *Exploring Transition in New Jersey: Research into the Experiences of Emerging Adults with IDD and their Families* used a four-pronged approach to gather information about transition. These strategies included:



literature review



statewide school
district survey



regional focus groups



phone interviews

Altogether, the study reached 304 participants. Surveys were completed by 207 school district representatives from across the state. A total of 41 individuals with developmental disabilities and 56 family members participated in regional focus groups and/or phone interviews. A review of journal articles, reports, and data sets was done to analyze trends and best practices in transition. This report provides a summary of key findings.

Transition Experiences Across the Country

National research findings suggest that young adults with disabilities are less likely to be enrolled in secondary education, to be employed, live independently, to be married, or have a checking account or credit card than their peers without disabilities.¹ A number of practices are shown to improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities, including:

- self-determination and self-advocacy
- career preparation and work experience
- parental involvement and expectations
- community experiences
- self-care/independent living
- interagency collaboration.²

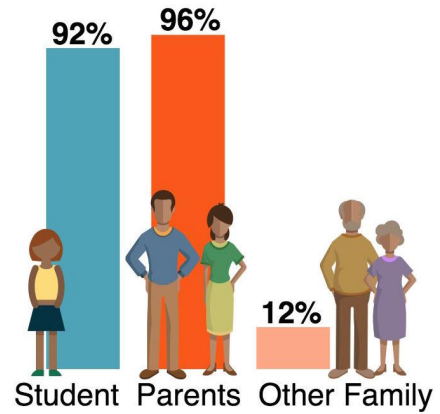
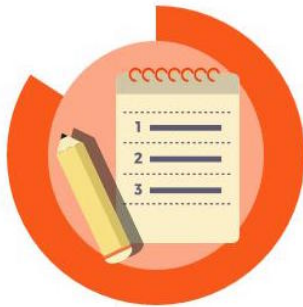


What Was Learned About Transition in New Jersey



Statewide School District Survey

Transition Planning



84% of school districts surveyed reported that transition-related instructional activities began ***by age 14***.

92% of school districts reported inviting students with disabilities and **96%** reported inviting parents to participate in IEP meetings as part of the transition process. Siblings and other family members were rarely invited.

Career Preparation and Work Experience

The majority of school districts (**63%**) surveyed had ***fewer than 25%*** of students with disabilities participating in Community-Based Instruction.



Self-determination and Self-advocacy



81% of school districts reported teaching self-advocacy.



59% of school districts “frequently” or “always” included self-advocacy as an IEP goal or objective.



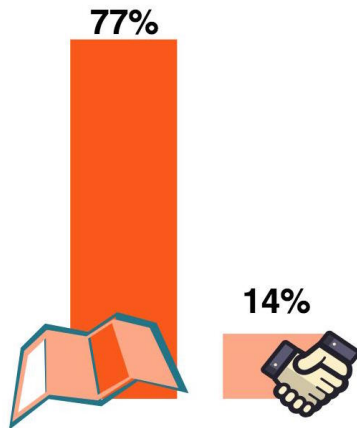
Of the schools that taught self-advocacy, about half (**52%**) provided opportunities to use these skills beyond IEP meetings.

What Was Learned About Transition in New Jersey



Statewide School District Survey

Post-Secondary Education



77% of school districts surveyed referred families to post-secondary education. **14%** were connected to post-secondary educational services.

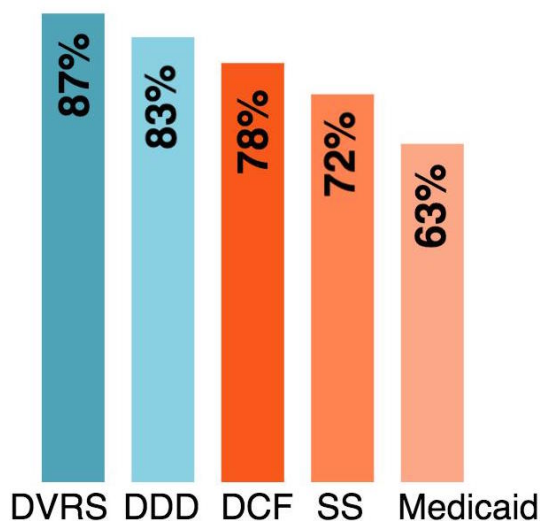
Independent Living



37% of schools and districts “frequently” or “always” taught students with disabilities to use public transportation.

Connection to Services & Supports

School districts reported referring students and their families to governmental programs available through the state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (87%), Division of Developmental Disabilities (83%), Division of Children and Families (78%), as well as Social Security (72%) and Medicaid (63%).



What Was Learned About Transition in New Jersey



Regional Focus Groups with Recent Graduates and their Families

Transition Planning



Recent graduates with developmental disabilities participating in focus groups did not begin preparing for adult life until well into their high school careers, many not until their junior or senior years. Most felt like they could have benefitted from more guidance, career counseling, and greater focus on transferable independent living skills. According to many, the most helpful support in preparing for adult life was that provided by family.

Career Preparation and Work Experience

The most common resource used by focus group participants to prepare for adult life was job sampling, through the school district or through New Jersey's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS). The majority of these recent graduates were working or looking for work. Jobs held by recent graduates were mainly part-time positions in food service and retail.



Post-Secondary Education

In focus groups, few recent graduates with developmental disabilities were attending post-secondary education programs.



Connection to Services & Supports

The most common services received by focus group participants were those available through DVRS. In general, services received by recent graduates with disabilities were not seen as individualized, nor a good match for interests and abilities.



What Was Learned About Transition in New Jersey



Phone Interviews with Young Adults with IDD and their Families

Career Preparation and Work Experience

The majority (**53%**) of those interviewed were not working.

Among those who were working at the time of the interview, most (**86%**) worked part-time.



Half (**50%**) of those not working do not want to work.



Half (**50%**) would like to work, but faced barriers including: lack of opportunities that matched interest and skills, need for supports, and limited access to reliable transportation.



Self-determination and Self-advocacy



When asked if their school district taught about self-advocacy, many graduates with disabilities and their family members interviewed had difficulty answering because they were unsure how to define “self-advocacy.” Ultimately, **66%** said “yes.”

Post-Secondary Education



Few young adults with developmental disabilities were attending post-secondary education programs, with 7 of 62 (**11%**) interview respondents indicating they attended college.

What Was Learned About Transition in New Jersey



Phone Interviews with Young Adults with IDD and their Families

Independent Living



Most (**89%**) of the interview respondents lived with their family members. **35%** indicated wanting to live at home with their family in the future.



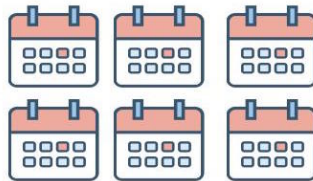
Close to two-thirds (**64%**) of graduates with developmental disabilities interviewed ***did not*** have staff who help them at home.



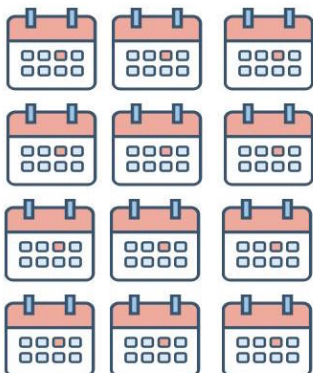
Over half of those interviewed (**51%**) relied on parents, family, & friends for transportation. Only 8% had a driver's license.

Connection to Services & Supports

For **44%** of interview respondents, services ***did not*** begin immediately upon graduation.



26% waited more than 6 months for services to begin.



18% waited more than 12 months for services to begin.



68% of interview respondents were ***not*** receiving all of the services they need.

Recommendations

Data from the study shows that while there are successes, continued effort must take place to ensure successful transitions for young adults with developmental disabilities. The following are recommendations for guiding future efforts to strengthen transition to adulthood based upon what was learned from young adults with developmental disabilities, their families, and school district personnel, as well as best practices in transition from state-based and national literature.

- Create a better understanding of the purpose of self-determination and self-advocacy skills for young adults with developmental disabilities.
- Increase collaboration among relevant state agencies to improve coordination and connection to paid services and other supports.
- Increase the availability of person-centered supports developed to meet the needs of each individual.
- Instill expectations of employment from a young age among students with developmental disabilities and expand the use of supports to increase success in competitive employment.
- Increase opportunities and education that provide young adults with developmental disabilities with the skills that can help them to live as independently as possible.
- Increase information and education for young adults with disabilities and their families about adult services, options for supports, benefits, and work incentive programs.
- Increase access to transportation, with the understanding that lack of transportation is a major barrier to independence and achievement of post-school outcomes.
- Increase availability of service providers to support young adults with developmental disabilities in their homes and communities.

References

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- Test, D.W., Fowler, C.H., Richter, S.M., White, J., Mazzotti, V., Walker, A.R., Kohler, P., & Kortering, L. (2009). Evidence-Based Practices in Secondary Transition. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*. 32(2), 115-128.

THE BOGGS CENTER ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

New Jersey's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service

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New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities

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RUTGERS

Robert Wood Johnson
Medical School

The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities
Department of Pediatrics
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Liberty Plaza, 335 George Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter
p. 732-235-9300
f. 732-235-9330