

Transition Bulletin - Summer Issue

To Coordinate... To Enhance... To Serve...Through Communication

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MRS 3RD ANNUAL SUMMER TRANSITION WORKSHOP APPROACHES

By Becky Curtis, Big Rapids Office MRS Counselor

August 7, 2012 is the date for the third annual Summer Transition Workshop at Lansing Community College – West Campus. Workshop planners are excited to present a day of learning and networking with a focus on Transition topics and issues.

Several months ago, MRS implemented new definitions of Transition Youth and Young Adults. After implementation of the new definitions, baseline MRS Youth data was generated. To help identify issues to be addressed at the workshop, the design team reviewed the new Transition data. In addition, the evaluations from the first two workshops were also reviewed. The goal is to make this training better than ever.

Because the Youth population has been redefined into two groups (Transition Youth and Young Adults), MRS data has greatly changed. Marcie Alling, MT-21 Coordinator and Virginia Thielsen, PhD, Project Excellence, will present an overview of MRS Youth Data in a general session to start off the workshop. The new definitions give us a clearer picture of Transition Youth and Young Adult customers.

Over the past year, MRS Consultant Bill Colombo has connected with many educational partners and has observations and trends to share on the state of our collaborative efforts. In addition, he will present a model to develop and maintain cooperative relationships based on Mutual Gains Approach. Collaboration and resource sharing are recurring themes heard frequently in both private and public sectors. This presentation will provide you with a few proven tools to lean on and build relationships that last.

Order of Selection is on the horizon and is concern for everyone, especially Transition Counselors, because our unique population could be affected differently by OSS. Garrett Pazur will be present to address this topic and address questions and concerns on how it will impact the Transition population.

Other engaging sessions will include Certificates of Completion and the ADA, Transition Policy Q & A, Using Motivational Interviewing with youth, Transition Stories from MRS Customers, Using Assistive Technology in Postsecondary Training, and Getting to Realistic Job Goals.

The planning team is gearing up to present this opportunity for you to attend a day of learning, sharing, and networking! Please consult with your manager and register on E-Learn for this year's Summer Transition Workshop.

MT-21 HITS THE ROAD

By Marcie Alling, State Coordinator, MT-21

The dust has settled on the new Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) definitions of Transition Youth and Young Adults*. Since the definitions were announced in March, corresponding changes have been made in MRS policy and procedures. Changes within the AWARE data system are also underway.

Meanwhile, Michigan State University's Project Excellence conducted an analysis of MRS' youth data, applying the new definitions. The MRS Executive Team and District Managers have reviewed the data and later this summer the MRS Site Managers will see it as well. The MT-21 Project staff will also present the data to Transition Counselors and others at the August 7th MRS Summer Transition Workshop.

Now that a baseline has been established, the MT-21 Project is ready to take the next steps toward identifying best and emerging practices in Michigan's vocational rehabilitation service system.

The team is currently putting its plan in place to gather qualitative information from MRS staff, customers, families, educators and other partners and stakeholders. First, the team will select three to six sites or areas around the state and do a "deep dive." That is, MT-21 will conduct an in-depth case study of the local transition system of each of the selected sites.

For the areas of the state not involved in the case studies, MT-21 will invite input from MRS and all of its stakeholders using a variety of methods - surveys, focus groups and interviews.

MT-21 expects the qualitative data collection process to begin this summer and continue into the next fiscal year. Look for updates in future issues of the Bulletin!

**New Definitions:*

Transition Youth (Enrolled in Secondary Education)

Age 14-26 at application AND enrolled in the K-12 education system at application

Young Adult (NOT Enrolled in Secondary Education)

Age 14-26 at application AND NOT enrolled in the K-12 education system

MICHIGAN REPRESENTATIVES ATTEND NATIONAL TRANSITION CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON D.C.

By Paul Mulka, Program Innovation Western Division Director

More than 800 researchers, educators, rehabilitation counselors, advocates, and other stakeholders attended the inaugural National Transition Conference: College and Careers for Youth with Disabilities, in Washington D.C. The three day conference was held by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). The content of the program was developed through a grant from DOE. With 90 individual presentations, the program was organized using the following tracks:

- Employment
- Secondary and Post Secondary Education (PSE)
- Program Policy Development and implementation
- Family Engagement
- Youth Development
- Partnerships that support successful transitions

MRS and MCB representatives that attended the conference were sponsored by the Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) which is part of a network of centers created by the Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA). Other agencies in Michigan were also in attendance including representatives from MDCH and MDE.

The stated purpose of the conference was to improve employment outcomes for Transition customers across the country. Although MRS Transition employment outcomes have trended slightly upward in the last few years, national Transition employment outcomes have decreased. The conference provided a forum for learning about innovative ideas and approaches, sharing research findings and networking with other states.

An issue for everyone in the field of Transition is the implementation gap between best practice and current practice in the states. There is recognition at the national level that employment outcomes for Transition youth need improvement.

Despite advances in education and disability rights policy, the support of federal mandates, and increased funding of programs and initiatives that impact all youth, the post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities are poor. Students

with disabilities lag significantly behind their nondisabled peers in graduation rates, enrollment in postsecondary education and employment.

Secondary and postsecondary education systems often struggle to provide youth with disabilities with equitable, individualized, and quality learning experiences to support completion of education into meaningful employment. Further complicating the issues many students with disabilities have difficulty accessing appropriate adult services and/or postsecondary education and training programs as they Transition from secondary education to postsecondary education and/or employment.

One area of growing interest at the national level is postsecondary education as a way to improve employment and other key life areas for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID). The 2008 Higher Education Act mandates that individuals with disabilities be integrated into postsecondary education. As a result, many colleges and universities have received grants to increase participation of individuals with disabilities in postsecondary education.

The keynote speaker was Ann Wilson Cramer, Director-IBM Americas who titled her presentation, "Preparing Today's Youth for Tomorrow's Workforce". Ann gave a very enthusiastic presentation about how IBM promotes k-12 education, job training and employment, community and family services, and literacy programs for people with disabilities and other challenges. IBM emphasizes education reform, especially related to using services, software and technology as tools for learning.

Information about the 2012 National Transition Conference is available at: www.transition2012.org.

2012 NEW MRS AGREEMENT NAMES

MRS has changed the names of agreements. The chart below states name variations that have been used in the past and the current term that MRS is using.

OUT	⇒	IN
Cooperative Match Agreement Cash Match Agreement Matching Cash Contribution Cash Match Partnership Agreement Partnership Agreements Match Agreements	⇒	Interagency Cash Transfer Agreement
Cooperative Staffing Agreement Certified Staffing Agreement Certified Agreements Staffing Agreements	⇒	Third Party Cooperative Arrangement
Donations	⇒	Private Contribution

MRS AND EDUCATION: WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

A Commentary by Dave Malott, MI-TOP Liaison to MRS

During my 18 years as an ISD Transition Coordinator and seven years as a member of the Michigan Transition Outcomes Project (MI-TOP) Core Planning Team, I have come to view the partnership between Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) and Education as an essential element in achieving positive employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. From my perspective, true collaboration is not just a nice thing, it is a **MUST** have. It is, however, not the perspective from which every ISD and LEA in the state approaches collaborative efforts with MRS.

If we step back from our personal situations (including histories of positive or negative experiences in collaborative efforts) and look at shared goals and responsibilities for successful outcomes for youth with disabilities, it becomes obvious that we must work together. **We** (MRS and Education) have clear commonalities in our interests and mandates. In this era of budget crunching, collaboration is essential in improving outcomes for youth in Transition.

What are our common interests and mandates? First, and perhaps most important is our humanitarian motivation. The vast majority of MRS counselors, like educators, do not go into the human service profession for the huge salaries they will earn. Rather it is a caring about improving life outcomes for individuals with disabilities that drives us toward these professions. This is evidenced by the large number of counselors and educators who become involved in personal and community efforts to improve the lives of others. Furthermore, since we are not just here to get rich quick and get out, we care about sustainability of efforts and initiatives started under our tenure. We really do care!

Second, we do believe that engagement in the adult world of employment and related lifelong learning is an important element in improving life for individuals with disabilities. MRS has always been clear that their target outcome is employment. While education sees their ultimate goal as preparing youth for adult life and employment, there is often a struggle to be transparent about this connection. Recent public and media attention has focused attention on the connection between math and science education and employment. The Transition community has long believed that we must be clearer on the connection between *all* education and preparation for adult life and employment.

Third, we have common goals. The Vocational Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and their subsequent amendments are clear that employment is an expected outcome. The purpose of the Rehabilitation Act is to support states in developing a system which is “designed to assess, plan, develop, and provide vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities, consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice, **so that such individuals may prepare for and engage in gainful employment**” (VRA amended 1998). IDEA requires the provision of Transition services which are defined in part as including “instruction, related services, community experiences, **the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives...**” (IDEA 2004). For both agencies our success or failure is measured in large part by a common outcome –the employment rate of individuals with disabilities. And, by the way, there is researched based evidence that when education and Vocational Rehabilitation work together outcomes improve (NLTS).

Finally (if that is not enough), we have mandates designed to set the stage for working together. IDEA requires that when appropriate “the public agency must invite a representative of any participating agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services” to the student’s IEP. If educators have reason to believe that a student will need further support to achieve employment after leaving K-12 education, the agency most often responsible for providing that support is Vocational Rehabilitation. The Rehabilitation Act requires an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) as part of the rehabilitation process. It is expected that the IPE be developed before the student exits the secondary education setting. In short, legislation and rules are saying **we must work together!**

It is a win-win situation. When we truly collaborate there is always potential for mutual benefit both in terms of improved employment outcomes for the youth we serve and for sustainability of systems and initiatives. It is important that all efforts at collaboration between MRS and Education begin with this perspective and understanding. Without this basic understanding, most collaborative efforts are doomed for failure.

Why don’t we always take advantage of this opportunity for mutual gain? Perhaps the answer has its roots in the history of education and vocational rehabilitation. There was once a fairly clear division of responsibility between Education and Vocational Rehabilitation. Education was responsible for developing the skills a student needed to succeed in adult life. Vocational rehabilitation was responsible for providing the supports and services to create employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This division of responsibility often led to finger pointing postures. Each side aligned behind an “it’s your fault” sort of position. Educators said “we did our best to prepare the student but VR didn’t offer the right supports or employment opportunities –it’s not our fault”. VR counselors said “we offered the best supports and employment opportunities we could, the student just wasn’t prepared –it’s not our fault”.

When such position taking is established in a local area it is often difficult to overcome. This seems to be especially true for some communities where the “old guard” attitude still prevails. Fortunately we are making progress and in

many areas of the state this attitude has been replaced with a true “we are in this together approach” to collaboration. This change is being pushed along by changes and clarifications in our mandates. For example, the Rehabilitation Act originally called for an evaluation which indicates "rehabilitation potential" thus implying that basic skill development was someone else’s responsibility. This was later amended with the directive that applicants are "generally considered to be feasible for employment, unless clear and convincing evidence indicates otherwise" implying that employment is a feasible outcome for all, regardless of their current skills or abilities. On the education side, the provision for transition services in IDEA implies that educators have to share the responsibilities for developing supports and employment opportunities consistent with each student’s skills and abilities.

We can no longer simply say “sorry, the student’s skills do not match the supports and opportunities available”. Both MRS and Education are challenged to figure out how to work together to improve skills of youth with disabilities **and** the supports and employment opportunities our communities have to offer them. We must accept as fact that improving outcomes for youth in transition is going to take a team effort. We are in this together and can each benefit from the expertise and resources of the other agency.

Communities who have accepted this challenge and are engaged in true collaboration are making progress. There are countless positive examples across our state from Menominee in the western UP to Monroe in the southeast corner. It always seems to start coming together when VR can candidly say “wow, this student you’re referring has very limited skills and abilities” and the educator can say “wow, our community has really limited supports and employment opportunities” and the prevailing question that rises is “what can **we** do about it?”

SAVE THE DATES

MRS Social Security Training
Best Western
6820 S. Cedar Street
Lansing, MI 48911
Wednesday, July 18, 2012

MRS Transition Training Workshop
LCC West Campus (M-Tec)
5708 Cornerstone Drive
Lansing, MI 48917
Tuesday, August 7, 2012

MI TOP Workshop
Ramada Inn
7501 West Saginaw Highway
Lansing, MI 48917
Tuesday & Wednesday October 9-10, 2012

MTSA Transition Conference
Bavarian Inn
1 Covered Bridge Lane
Frankenmuth, MI 48734
Wednesday-Friday, March 20-22, 2013

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