# Translating Research Into a Seamless Transition Model

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## Abstract

Recently, consensus among researchers and professionals has emerged about factors that contribute to postschool success of youth with disabilities. Prominent among these factors are targeted academic preparation, family involvement, youth empowerment, and service collaboration and linkages. Work experience and paid employment have been identified as being highly associated with positive postschool employment outcomes. These components are reflected in the Guideposts for Success, produced by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability/Youth (NCWD/Y), which represents professional consensus and extant research about what constitutes optimal transition service. The authors present a descriptive report on the implementation of a model for systematically delivering seamless transition services based on components of the NCWD/Y Guideposts. They report on how this model has been applied in 11 of the 24 county-wide school districts in Maryland for diverse special education populations, and provide preliminary data on its early impact on the students' transition to careers.

The challenges facing youth with disabilities as they prepare for the transition from public secondary education to adult employment have been well documented. These challenges are reflected in several distinct factors that distinguish youth with disabilities from their nondisabled peers. First, they are less likely than their nondisabled peers to finish high school (Chapman, Laird, Ifill & KewalRamani, 2011; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005). Second, they are less likely to pursue postsecondary education that will prepare them for good jobs and careers (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002; Wagner et al., 2005). Third, they are significantly more likely to be unemployed for much of their adult life (Harris & Associates, 2010). And fourth, some groups of special education students will need connections to ongoing support to sustain the benefit of public education (Clark & Unruh, 2009; Certo et al., 2009).

These circumstances are often compounded by several other factors related to transition planning and services. These include gaps and lack of coordination in school-based services (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006); sporadic availability of work experiences and employment during the secondary school years (Luecking, 2009); variable, and often limited, direct participation of youth in their own transition planning (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013); variable engagement of families in transition planning and services (Landmark, Roberts & Zhang, 2013);

and, the often sporadic, disjointed, or even nonexistent connections to postschool supports that are necessary maintain a path to long-term adult employment (Certo et al., 2009; Mank, Cioffi, & Yovanoff, 2003; Simonsen, 2010; Wehman, 2006). Thus, despite more than 25 years of focused federal policy on transition to employment of youth with disabilities, there continues to be a need for the identification of proven pathways to college, employment, and careers for youth with disabilities who are recipients of publicly supported education services.

Of significance, despite the strong research support for work-based educational services for transitioning youth (Test et al., 2009), the opportunities available for work experiences and competitive jobs varies widely. Available opportunities may be based on whether the student is on track to receive a diploma or certificate of school completion, whether the state education agency and/or local school districts embrace work-based experiences as essential adjuncts to the course of study, and whether there is strong collaboration with youth and adult employment entities which can assist in helping procure and support work

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experience (Fraker & Rangarajan, 2009; Luecking, 2009). These barriers must be must mitigated to minimize the impact of disjointed service delivery as schools and post-school service providers prepare youth for employment and careers.

These longstanding challenges to effective school-to-career transition for youth with disabilities have led to recent attempts to synthesize what works in transition and to suggest approaches to address these challenges. In fact, the increasing knowledge base about effective transition practice has resulted in an emerging consensus among researchers and professionals about the factors that contribute to the delivery of optimal transition services (Cobb & Alwell, 2007; National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition [NASET, 2005]; National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability/Youth [NCWD/Y, 2005]). Youth empowerment, family involvement, activities that connect transition resources, solid academic preparation in conjunction with transition planning, and work experiences have been found to be potentially important influencers of post-school employment outcomes. In particular, there is a growing body of evidence that work experience and paid integrated employment during secondary school years predicts successful postschool employment (Carter, Austin & Trainor, 2012; Fabian, 2007; Luecking & Fabian, 2001; Test, et al., 2009). The *Guideposts for Success* published by the NCWD/Y (2005) represents a concerted effort to synthesize research and what is known about service features that lead to effective transition. The *Guideposts* offers a framework, based on an intensive review of the research, for organizing approaches to achieving the desired transition outcomes of employment and career paths.

The *Guideposts for Success* present five elements of intervention that are important to successful transition to college and careers: *School-based preparatory activity*, that is, academic instruction and targeted curricula that lead to effective transition to employment and careers; *career preparatory and work experiences*, including vocational and technical training, employer-based work experiences, and jobs; *youth development and youth leadership*, especially as it relates to self-determined transition and career planning; *family involvement*, including that which supports the pursuit of employment and career goals; and *connecting activities*, that is, those activities that enable youth to be linked with organizations and services that complement their transition services and/or enable necessary postsecondary supports for enrolling in postsecondary education and/or finding and keeping employment. The value of the *Guideposts* is that it represents a promising framework across five distinct components that are based on extant research of transition service delivery. Each of the components of the *Guideposts* represents important influencers on the ability of youth to reach for the "gold standard" of transition: a job and a clear career path.

Although research documents support of individual components of the *Guideposts*, the efficacy of the *Guidepost*s framework, when applied as a single and coordinated process for seamless transition service delivery, is mostly unknown. This article presents a model for systematically delivering seamless transition services, based on components of the NCWD/Y *Guideposts* and its research-based framework, designed to address the lingering barriers faced by transitioning youth. We report on how this model has been piloted in 11 of the 24 county-wide school districts in Maryland for diverse special education populations and provide selected early results.

## Method

In 2007, the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), of the Department of Education, received a transition model demonstration grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, to implement and evaluate a statewide best practice transition model called the Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative (MSTC). DORS, along with its primary implementation partner, TransCen, Inc., designed a model of transition services, whereby youth presumed eligible for state vocational rehabilitation (VR) services receive, beginning in early secondary school, a sequential delivery of specific transition services designed to result in uninterrupted, or seamless, transition from public education to employment and/or postsecondary education. Other collaborating partners in MSTC include the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Department of Disabilities, other State agencies including the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration and the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, families, and community-based partners represented on the Governor's Interagency Transition Council. The Council provides oversight to the project.

### MSTC Conceptual Framework

The MSTC model of transition service delivery is informed and influenced by the *Guideposts*, and includes important additional attention to seamless connections to work supports and postsecondary education well in advance of secondary school exit. The MSTC intervention components are designed to address the known barriers to youth transition and to build heavily on nationally recognized and research-based transition practices reflected in the *Guideposts*.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the MSTC model. The intervention efforts and their various components are designed to have impact on youth with disabilities and the transition environments that are available to them, and the barriers which are known to impede effective transition to employment.
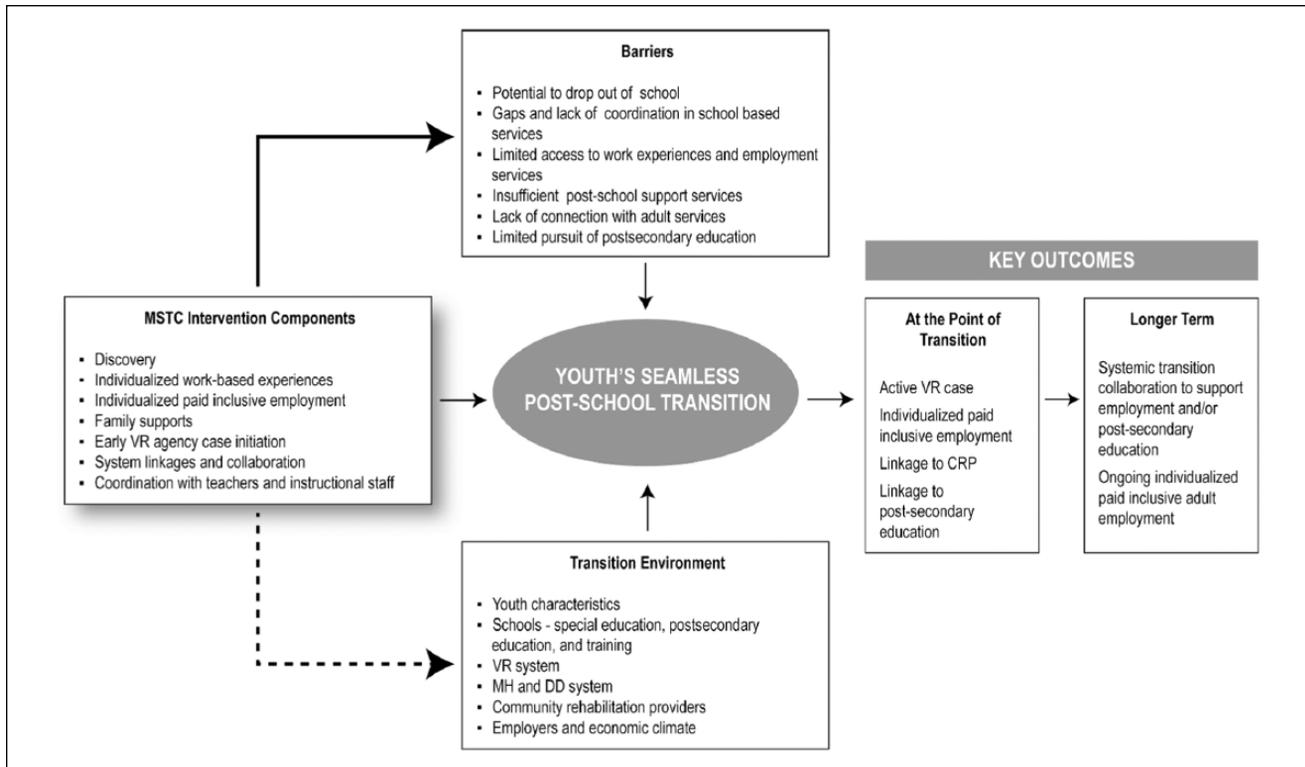
**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework for system seamless transition model: Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative (MSTC).

Seamless transition as it applies to the MSTC model refers to the following key outcomes achieved and in place at the point of school exit: (a) active VR agency case; (b) linkage to a community rehabilitation provider (CRP), as necessary; and (c) individualized paid inclusive employment and/or enrollment in postsecondary education. The latter constitutes the ideal, or optimum, measure of seamless transition, that is, employment or enrollment in postsecondary education is in place when the student exits secondary education. For the longer term, the desired key outcome is ongoing postschool individualized paid inclusive employment for youth participants as demonstrated by successful VR case closures. Thus, the evaluation of the model's implementation is driven by this question: *How does the delivery of the model impact on these key outcomes?*

## MSTC Flow of Services

As illustrated in Figure 2, the MSTC model is designed to be a systematic delivery of key transition services, which occur during the last 3 years of the students' secondary education with the intended outcome of each student exiting school employed in an individualized, integrated job of choice and/or enrolled in postsecondary education prior to school exit. Targeted students are those who are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services from VR, receive special

education or 504 services, are expected to need supports and service linkages to seamlessly transition, and have consented to receive the services. MSTC services begin in the 10th grade, or 3 years prior to projected school exit, and continue through postschool follow-up. In the 10th grade, students enrolled in the model begin a process of discovery designed to assist them in identifying preferences, attributes, strengths, and goals, which will inform transition planning and services. Central to the model is the active involvement of the VR counselor in each student's transition planning and receipt of services. In 11th grade, or 2 years prior to projected school exit, a VR counselor is assigned to the student and formally opens a case. The application process is initiated for projected postschool support services, including postsecondary education, developmental disabilities services, or mental health services as applicable and appropriate. As well, opportunities for paid work-based experiences are initiated, although these experiences can occur anytime during the 3 final years in school. Support for students to be directly involved in their Individual Education Plan (IEP) development is provided throughout the 3-year intervention, as is encouragement and support for family input and participation in MSTC model activities. All services are coordinated with school and academic preparation ordinarily provided to each student.
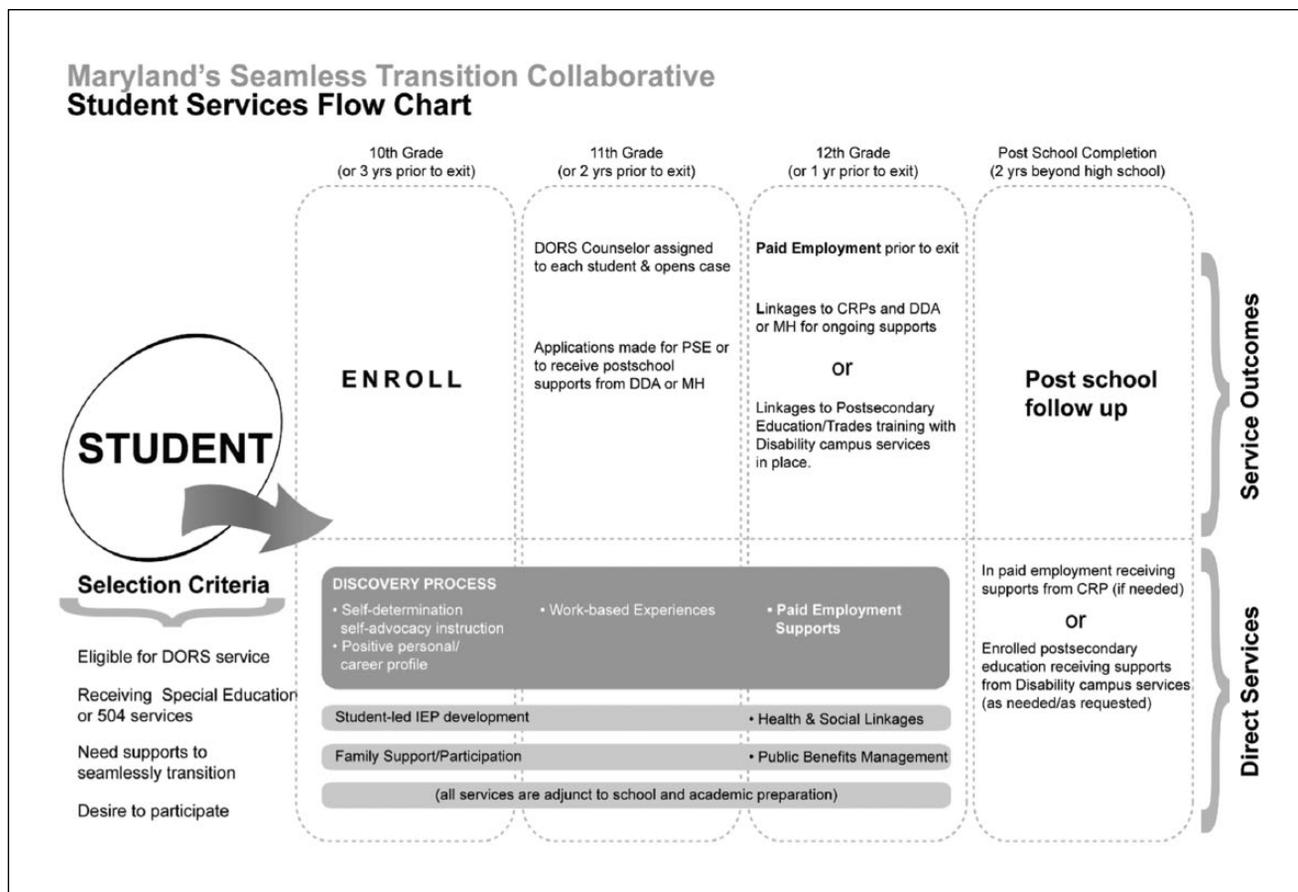
**Figure 2.** Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative: Students services flowchart.

In the last year before projected school exit, two key interventions are emphasized. First, by the time the students finish school they ideally have at least one paid inclusive employment experience. This is in the form of either a direct hire job, where the wage is paid directly by the employer, or a summer youth employment experience that may include a stipend wage, or both. Second, as appropriate and necessary, the student is actively receiving postschool support services, which often begin prior to formal school exit. The optimum outcome is that students exit with paid, individualized, integrated employment with the support of a CRP, if necessary and desired, and/or they are enrolled in postsecondary education with disability on-campus support as needed or requested.

### Intervention Components

As noted, the *Guideposts for Success* (NCWD/Y, 2005) includes components that address identified barriers to effective transition and as such offers the foundation from which the MSTC intervention components were tailored. Table 1 pairs the components of the MSTC model with the applicable Guideposts. Explanation of each of the intervention components follows.

*Discovery.* Before work experiences and employment begin, students undergo a process to explore their strengths and to uncover their employment interests, goals, and support needs. The process is adapted from what Condon and Callahan (2008) call Discovery. Students participate in a facilitated process in which professionals, family members, and friends identify particular student strengths, needs, and preferences which are documented in a Positive Personal Profile (Tilson & Cuozzo, 2001; Luecking, 2009) that is used as the basis for the individualized planning and employment process.

In addition to the development of a Positive Personal Profile, students may also receive self-determination instruction so that they may acquire self-knowledge and self-empowerment to direct and advocate for career and life choices (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2002). They apply these skills as they participate and make informed decisions during transition planning, are directly involved in the IEP process, and are actively engaged in decisions and activities related to the transition to postschool settings.

*Individualized work-based experiences.* These experiences are cumulative across the last 3 years in secondary school

**Table 1.** MSTC Model and Guideposts Components: Alignment and Comparison.

| MSTC Model Components | Applicable Guideposts Components (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth [NCWD/Y, 2005]) |
|---|---|
| Discovery | Youth development and youth leadership |
|    Self-determination instruction | |
|    Development of Positive Personal Profile | |
|    Student-led IEP | |
| Individualized work-based experiences | Career preparatory and work experiences |
|    Informational interviewing | |
|    Job shadowing | |
|    Job sampling/volunteer job | |
|    Unpaid internship | |
|    Paid internship, that is, summer youth employment | |
| Pre-employment activities | Career preparatory and work experiences |
| Individualized paid inclusive employment | Career preparatory and work experiences |
|    Job development/negotiations | |
|    Workplace supports | |
| Family supports | Family involvement |
|    Informational meetings | |
|    Transition fairs | |
|    Transition planning | |
|    Benefits management and information | |
| System linkages and collaboration | Connecting Activities |
|    Early VR agency case initiation, open case | |
|    Project Management Teams | |
|    Linkage with postschool and employment services | |
|    CRP job development and support before and after school exit | |
|    Linkage to postsecondary education disability support services | |
| Coordination with teachers and instructional staff | School-based, preparatory activities |
|    Partner participation in IEP meetings | |
|    Work experience coordination with school program and schedule | |
|    Case management | |

*Note.* MSTC = Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative; IEP = Individual Education Plan; VR = vocational rehabilitation; CRP = community rehabilitation provider.

and are generated from each student's interests, experiences, and strengths, with employment of choice as the intended outcome. Experiences could include combinations of informational interviews, job-site tours, job shadowing, volunteer job/job sampling, and unpaid or paid internships, including summer youth employment opportunities. These individualized work experiences begin no later than 2 years before the student exits from school and are intended to inform the job development efforts required for the student to acquire an individualized paid job in an integrated work setting prior to school exit. In many cases, CRPs assist in developing work experiences with local employers and provide on-the-job support. This early engagement provides an opportunity for CRPs to get to know the student and become the student's personal agent, as needed, in negotiating later-paid employment.

*Individualized paid inclusive employment.* Employment is not only the desired culminating outcome of transition services but also a critical intervention in the MSTC flow of services. The intent is for every student to have, prior to school exit, at least one employment experience where the student is directly hired by an employer and where the other workers are primarily people without disabilities. For many students, this entails a standard competitive job with the prevailing wage. For others, the job may be customized with tasks, productivity, and schedules negotiated to meet the student and employer needs in a similar fashion as that defined by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (2006). In all cases, the intent is that the job development and support is individualized to student interests and characteristics, as opposed to placements that are conveniently available but not necessarily well suited for individual students.

*Family supports.* Throughout the MSTC flow of services, supports are provided to family members through involvement in discovery activities, input into work experience and job search planning, informational meetings, formal events, such as transition fairs, and direct training in benefits management for those families of youth receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). It is expected that the level of involvement of families will vary due to individual family circumstances. However, it is desirable, when possible, for families to play a key role in identifying individual preferences and supports that are relevant to transition planning and transition activities. In addition, collaborating partners have various responsibilities to facilitate family understanding of, and linkages to, postschool services.

*Early VR agency case initiation.* The MSTC model features the active participation of VR counselors in each student's transition plan. A designated VR counselor is assigned to each school system participating in MSTC. Students are referred to VR upon identification as a participant in the MSTC model and, as noted, case initiation occurs no later than the second school year prior to projected school exit. The VR counselor works with the student and family to develop the Individualized Plan of Employment. which is updated as necessary throughout the student's participation in the model's services. The VR counselor is immediately positioned to authorize applicable VR services that may be required as student's progress through the MSTC flow of services.

*System linkages and collaboration.* Students who participate in MSTC services require some level of transition support before, during, and after school exit. A team structure, called a project management team, brings together the critical partners in each demonstration site to organize the collaborative planning necessary to make this support available throughout the MSTC process. The project management team is a cross-functional group of professionals that has a clear role and responsibility for supporting individuals with disabilities as they pursue their chosen career path. Typically, this team of professionals represents the school district, VR, postsecondary education (e.g., community college, technical schools), mental health services, intellectual and other developmental disabilities services, One-Stop Centers, and local CRPs, who may have an immediate or projected role in supporting the students in their transition. The purpose of this team is to coordinate the delivery of services for all participating students so that services are readily provided as needed and so that continuous, uninterrupted services are available as students exit school. The project management teams are constructed to operate in a similar fashion as local Interagency Transition Teams (Stodden, Brown, Galloway, Mrazek & Noy, 2004), with an additional and primary focus on individual students.

*Coordination with teachers and instructional staff.* For MSTC, student participants maintain their connection to those educational services they would ordinarily receive in the absence of MSTC model. However, with MSTC, educational personnel have additional opportunities to collaborate with the VR counselors, CRP representatives, and others who may be involved in the activities associated with the other MSTC components. These activities may be a part of or adjunctive to existing curricular focus. As noted, VR counselors and CRP representatives may participate in IEP meetings and discovery activities. Conversely, teachers will contribute, for example, to the development of the positive personal profile and related work experience and employment development activities.

## Participating Sites

Of the 24 county-wide school districts in Maryland, 11 were selected to pilot and implement the MSTC model through a competitive bid process. Since the demonstration grant has a finite duration (5 years), the selection of the sites were staggered so that one site was selected for the 2007–2008 school year (SY), three sites were selected in SY 2008–2009, three sites in SY 2009–2010, three sites in SY 2010–2011, and one site in SY 2011–2012. Each site receives 2 years of funding resources: 1 year to plan for implementing the model and 1 year to begin model implementation. The funds are accompanied with the expectation for the model to be sustained beyond the 2-year grant through existing resources. The grant to each district is also accompanied by intensive technical assistance to plan and implement the MSTC flow of services. The technical assistance, provided by Maryland Division or Rehabilitation Services partner, TransCen, Inc., supports the sites for the duration of the federal demonstration as the new practices are sustained and as the model is expanded to be available to students beyond the pilot groups.

The participating sites represent a mixture of urban, suburban, and rural communities. Because the MSTC model is designed to be applicable across multiple student disability categories, and because each community has distinct demographics and student circumstances, each site was given the option to pilot the model with a specific target population(s) of students eligible for VR services for whom better transition outcomes were desired by that community. For example, some sites targeted students on a track for a regular diploma who are at risk of dropping out of school. Other sites chose to target students on a certificate track for whom coordinated postschool supports to actively pursue their career goal had been lacking. Some sites chose to apply the model to both populations. Depending on the size of the school district, each site is expected to enroll up to 20 students per year for the life of the MSTC demonstration with up to 5 of these students in their last year in school, 5 in the

second to last year, and 10 in the third to last year. This enables a broader group of students to be exposed to at least some of the MSTC intervention components associated with the flow of services (see Figure 2), with roughly half of those enrolled receiving the full 3-year dose of the MSTC model. A total of approximately 400 students will receive exposure to the MSTC components by the conclusion of the demonstration.

### Student Characteristics

Since the initiation of the project through March 2012, 349 students have experienced the MSTC model in full or in part. Participating students are predominantly female (70%), between the ages of 16 to 18 years (69%), and the majority identify as White (55%), Black, or African American (43%). Primary disability was identified for each student as intellectual and other developmental disabilities (25%), psychiatric/serious emotional disturbance (PSY/SED; 19%), specific learning disability (SLD; 17%), autism (17%), or other health impairment (10%). The remainder of the student population reported their disability as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), speech/language impairment, multiple disabilities, sensory disabilities, brain injury, or mobility/physical impairment.

At enrollment, 63% of the students anticipated that they would receive a diploma and 37% anticipated a certificate of completion. The majority of the students received some type of public assistance, with about one-half reported receiving SSI or Medicaid. More than 80% of the students were linked to VR at enrollment as this was a part of the student selection criteria. About 20% of the students were linked to developmental disabilities services and a small portion was linked to mental health services. A few (9%) were already linked to a CRP and 12% reported no linkages at enrollment.

### Component Services Received by Students

The intensity of services received by students was consistently high across service components. All 349 students had a person-centered support team and the majority actively engaged in assessment and discovery activity to include self-determination instruction (93%), positive personal profile development (76%), career exploration through work-based experiences (65%), and were involved in the development of their IEP's and a part of their meetings (76%). Fifty percent of the students participated in summer youth employment, which was considered a paid internship that was subsidized by the state VR agency. Services received by students to support summer youth employment and/or paid inclusive employment prior to school exit included pre-employment activities (e.g., resume writing, interviewing techniques, problem-solving, etc.; 84%),

information on the impact of work on social security benefits (42%), job development/negotiations (60%), and workplace supports (40%). Students were supported as they connected with postschool systems to include early engagement with VR (94%), postsecondary entities (20%), and active service from the developmental disabilities agency (32%) or mental health agency (9%). Over 75% of the students received supports from CRPs to maintain their summer youth employment, inclusive job, and/or postsecondary education enrollment.

## Preliminary Results

As identified in the conceptual framework, the model was designed to address the known barriers for students to seamlessly transition to postschool settings. Of primary interest is to learn if the model may offer a promising pathway to employment, postsecondary education, and ultimately careers for students with disabilities. A description of preliminary results follows that summarizes key outcomes achieved by students at the point of their transition from school to employment and/or postsecondary education settings. Anticipated longer term outcomes are discussed as implied by the preliminary results.

### Key Outcomes at the Point of Transition

As of June 2011, 124 of the 349 participating students, or 36%, had exited high school. Of the 124 students who have exited, there were three cohort groups from 2009, 2010, and 2011 (24 students had exited high school in 2009, 32 in 2010, and 68 in 2011). Exit information collected on these students include postschool engagement (either competitive employment, postsecondary education, or both), VR involvement (i.e., open case), and systems connections (e.g., developmental disabilities, mental health, CRPs).

Student outcomes were generated from 7 of the 11 sites. Of the 7 sites, 3 sites have been implementing the model for 4 to 5 years (Charles County Carroll County, and Ann Arundel County) and are sustaining the model using existing resources. One site has been implementing the model for 3 years and is in process of developing its resource sustainability plan (Calvert County), 2 sites had completed their model planning year and are in their first year of implementation (Washington County and Baltimore City), and 1 site is in its planning year (St. Mary's County). The remaining 4 sites of the total 11 sites have not implemented the model long enough to have exiting students with outcome data.

Preliminary results indicate that the majority of the students at the point of transition, or exit from high school, had achieved key outcomes as identified in the model's conceptual framework. As noted in Table 2, all the 124 exiting students had an active case with VR and 76% were linked to

**Table 2.** Key Outcomes for Students At the Point of Transition.

| | At the Point of Transition | |
|---|---|---|
| Key Outcomes | *n* = 124 | % |
| Active vocational rehabilitation case | 124 | 100 |
| Engaged with community rehabilitation providers | 94 | 76 |
| Individualized, paid inclusive employment | 32 | 26 |
| Enrolled in postsecondary education | 28 | 23 |
| Individualized, paid inclusive employment | 17 | 14 |

CRPs for employment services and supports. Seventy-seven or 63% of the students had achieved the optimum seamless transition; that is, they were employed in individualized, inclusive jobs (26%), enrolled in postsecondary education (23%), or employed and enrolled in postsecondary education (14%).

It is useful to compare the MSTC component services received by students who achieved the optimum seamless transition with those who remain in the transition process. We refer to exited students who were not employed or enrolled in postsecondary education, but had an active VR case, as remaining in the transition process. Of the 77, or 63% of the students who achieved optimum seamless transition, 69% were engaged with a CRP, the majority had participated in self-determination instruction (96%), development of a positive personal profile (74%), explored careers through work-based experiences (60%), and participated in summer youth employment (68%) during their enrollment in the MSTC model demonstration.

Of the 47, or 37% of students who remain in the transition process, the majority (87%) were connected to CRPs to assist them as they continued to actively search for competitive jobs or to enroll in postsecondary education. Almost all these students engaged in self-determination instruction (94%), 68% had developed a positive personal profile, 55% had participated in work-based experiences, and 62% were involved in summer youth employment. In other words, there was no apparent difference between the two groups in the intensity of exposure to the model component services.

It is also useful to review outcomes of exiting students by identified primary disability categories. Students with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD), PSY/SED, autism, and SLD were the largest disability categories to exit from high school. It is important to note that the frequency of disability groups participating in the model was determined by each sites' selection of target populations. Achieving the highest level of optimum transition were students with ADHD/ADD (100%), speech and language impairment (88%), and autism (84%). Fifty-three percent of students with PSY/SED, 52% with SLD, and 48% with IDD

achieved optimum transition as well. Across the disability groups, all students had active VR cases. The highest level of engagement with CRPs was with students with IDD, SLD, and PSY/SED.

## *Longer Term Key Outcomes*

Because the data examined so far are at the point of school exit, we can only make inferences about ongoing individualized inclusive employment as defined by ultimate successful VR case closure. In considering the descriptive comparisons, however, of early outcomes and services between those students who achieved the optimum seamless transition of employment and/or postsecondary education with those students whose transition remains in process, we can make tentative observations. First, since all the youth whose transition remains in process have active VR cases, and since 87% of them are also connected to CRPs, it can be expected that eventual adult employment remains a possibility for a reasonable percentage of these youth. Second, because we do not know yet whether those who achieved optimum transition will remain employed and/or complete postsecondary education, we cannot infer eventual successful VR case closure. In other words, more examination of eventual case closures will be necessary to determine the long-term impacts of model participation. However, the prospects for achieving the anticipated long-term outcomes are promising, given the high level achievement of short-term outcomes.

## **Discussion**

The MSTC model demonstration is one of the first attempts to blend the components of the *Guideposts for Success* into a single systematic flow of transition service delivery. The components of MSTC are defined not by disability category or any other individual or system characteristic, but rather by what the *Guideposts* represent as extant research and contemporary professional consensus on what constitutes optimal transition services. This demonstration provides early indication that the model has potential to be applied across disability categories, across geographically and demographically diverse school systems, and irrespective of the type of exit document the student was pursuing, that is, a diploma or certificate of completion. As such, it has the potential to serve as a practice framework that mitigates the stubborn barriers that have so far impeded the achievement of the intent of federal transition policy. That is, by melding research-supported interventions (e.g., work experiences, youth empowerment, service linkages) into a coherent transition service model, longstanding barriers, such as disjointed service connections and limited work experience access are mitigated. The gold standard of transition, paid inclusive adult employment, is thus more likely. The model and preliminary results especially promote the

implementation of more recently reported evidence-based predictors of postschool employment success (Carter et al., 2012; Simonsen, 2010; Test et al., 2009). That is, work experience and employment during the secondary school years, family expectations and involvement, and direct connections to postschool support services are increasingly recognized as essential components for transition success. Thus, the model presented here potentially offers a more clearly defined pathway to employment, postsecondary education, and careers for youth with disabilities who are exiting from public secondary education.

## Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Although the model described here was applied across geographic and demographically diverse school systems and across diverse student populations, care should be taken in the interpretation of the early results. First, each site applied the model to a selected subset of eligible students. Thus, we cannot presume to generalize the findings to the larger populations of students in the respective school systems. Second, although the basic components of the model were required of each implementing site and each site received direct technical assistance in the implementation of the model, the fidelity of implementation across sites is subject to variations in staff and collaborating entity capacities in relation to each individual component. This needs to be further examined. However, the results provided here offer useful implications for in-the-field adoption of the model's practice framework.

Although, in this sample, more than 60% of the existing participants have achieved a direct seamless transition to employment, postsecondary education, or both, a more detailed picture will be obtained upon the completion of the demonstration, whereby additional exiting students will further illustrate model impact. As all the exiters in the MSTC sample maintained an open VR case, and since a large percentage are connected with adult CRPs for ongoing support in job acquisition and retention, the prospects of eventual employment success for MSTC participants is favorable but yet unknown. It is reasonable to expect that employment outcomes will likely continue to rise for these youth; however, a more detailed follow-up using VR closure data will provide an accurate picture of these participants. Subsequent analysis of the model's impact will include these data. As well, an examination of implementation fidelity across sites is in process to address the confidence with which we can fully interpret the outcomes.

## Implications for Practice

Among other things, MSTC is intended to address a broad infrastructure issue with which the field has been wrestling for years, that is, the fragmentation of service delivery, no commonly shared set of high performance expectations for youth with disabilities, sporadic participation by youth and families in transition planning, episodic and uncoordinated work experiences during secondary school years, and no consistently applied mechanism for connecting schools, VR, and other postschool services (Wehman, 2006). It is important to note that MSTC is not a "program" in that it is not intended to be a separate service from the ordinary flow of the student's transition. Rather it is a model, based on extant research, on which transition might be organized so that interventions are complementary to one another, coordination naturally occurs between education and other service systems, and students and families have clearer understanding of postschool career options. As well, it is a model that is intended to assist students to achieve adult employment outcomes through planned and uninterrupted attention to their path toward employment and careers. As such, it offers a blueprint that is informed by the *Guideposts* from which education professionals, VR, and other collaborators can organize their respective roles in the transition process. Furthermore, preservice and in-service education that take structure from the model, may find it useful in preparing transition professionals to fulfill the roles that are important to the delivery of effective transition service that is driven by the desired outcome of adult inclusive employment for youth with disabilities. Continued research is necessary to explore more fully the impact of these components as more practitioners employ them in the field and as more policies support their implementation.

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