



# Senate Memorial 25 Task Force

Committee Report



**New Mexico School to Work Task Force**

*in partnership with*

**Center for Development and Disability/UNM**

*and*

**The New Mexico Developmental Disabilities  
Planning Council**

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## Executive Summary

National data from the U.S. Department of Labor reflects that less than 30% of students with disabilities leave high school each year with employment prospects. In New Mexico, less than 23% of students leave high school each year with gainful employment. This sets a lifetime pattern and expectation of dependence on public assistance, poverty, inactivity, and segregation from the community (Butterworth & Migliore, 2015).

In response to these statistics, and the growing concern that too many New Mexican students with intellectual and developmental disabilities are leaving high school without prospects of gainful and inclusive employment options, Senator Michael Padilla (D-Bernalillo District 14) introduced Senate Memorial 25 at the 2016 New Mexico Legislative session. The Memorial was passed in January 2016, and called for the New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC) and the University of New Mexico Center for Development and Disability (UNM CDD) to convene a task force to conduct a needs assessment of the school-to-work transition process in New Mexico, and to develop recommendations to address identified barriers to successful transition outcomes (*see Appendix 1 for Senate Memorial 25*).

The task force was comprised of a wide range of stakeholders, including youth with disabilities and their family members, and representatives from local agencies and organizations, and was facilitated by the UNM CDD. Several meetings took place from January through September 2016. Four subcommittees were formed during this process, and over several months, an assessment of need was conducted.

The subcommittees implemented various methods of data and information collection, including a panel discussion, group interview sessions, reviewing reports, research and other materials, a phone survey, and stakeholder discussions.

This work culminated in the identification of five key areas of need across the State in the school-to-work transition: Communication and Outreach, Training, Collaboration and Coordination, System Capacity, and Post-Secondary Education Options. While there is overlap in several of these areas, they each emerged as a distinct area of focus, and this report includes specific recommendations for addressing all identified needs.

Included in the recommendations, where appropriate, are examples of innovative and best practices from around the country that can serve as models for New Mexican communities as we move forward with strengthening the transition process for youth with disabilities.

In addition to the needs and recommendations herein, the task force recommends that the School-to-Work Transition Alliance (SWTA) meet quarterly to review and discuss the progress of the SM25 task force and implementation of recommendations.

*“My hope is that my children have the opportunity to work at something that makes them happy and impacts the world in a positive way. We are all here to make a difference on those around us, even children with special needs.”*

*Cathy Salazar, Parent*



*Image courtesy of UNM CDD Partners for Employment*

## INTRODUCTION

### I. Introduction

Senator Michael Padilla (D-Bernalillo District 14) introduced SM25 during the 2016 New Mexico Legislative session in response to the growing concern that students with disabilities were leaving high school without prospects of employment options. For a young person with disabilities, years can be lost in between school and adult work opportunities if not bridged at the time of graduation from high school.

Studies have shown that transition for students with disabilities can be successful when systems work together while a student is still in high school (Taylor, Morgan, & Callow-Heusser, 2016). Senator Padilla introduced this Memorial with the goal of improving the collaboration of services to support students with disabilities to successfully transition from school-to-work supports in New Mexico.

In January 2016, SM25 was passed requesting the DDPC and the UNM CDD convene a task force to conduct a needs assessment and develop recommendations to:

- Address barriers to effective school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities;
- Provide more effective services for youth with disabilities as they make the transition from school to work;
- Increase the knowledge of students with disabilities and their family members on transition from school-to-work options; and
- Maximize outcomes, including lifelong opportunities, for persons with disabilities to obtain competitive integrated employment.

The purpose of the task force was to provide a forum for stakeholders, including young adults with disabilities and their family members, along with representatives from local and state agencies and community organizations, to identify needs, develop formal recommendations, and report these findings to the Legislative Education Study Committee by December 1, 2016.

Individuals and groups named in SM25 that participated in the task force include youth with disabilities and their families. State agency representatives for the NM Department of Health Developmental Disabilities Supports Division (DOH DDS) and the NM Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), representatives from school districts, NM Work Force Solutions, DDPC, and parent and advocacy organizations, were also represented. The task force was facilitated by UNM CDD staff, part of the UNM Health Sciences Center (*see Appendix 2 for complete list of participants*).

The task force agreed on a set of values as they considered the recommendations for the SM25 report. These values are:

- Collaboration
- Choice/Self-determination
- Youth and Family engagement
- Inclusion/Integrated services
- Use of competitive wages for employment

## TASK FORCE ACTIVITIES

### **Task Force Activities Since January 2016**

Once SM25 passed the Senate, the task force began the process of gathering information and writing the legislative report. The task force met at the UNM CDD in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on January 28, 2016, April 6, 2016, May 3, 2016 and June 7, 2016. Wendy Corry facilitated the May 3 and June 7 meetings to help the groups create norms, refine their vision, and organize into the following subcommittees: Needs Assessment, Communications and Outreach, and Collaboration and Innovative Practices. On June 7, 2016, guest speaker Faye Rencher, Senior Program Manager, Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), Workforce Solutions Department, provided a brief update on the status of WIOA in New Mexico.

Over the summer, the subcommittees met to identify recommendations in their category, and convened on September 13, 2016, to share findings. Needs and recommendations in the five key transition areas identified by the task force, and supported by national research, comprise this report. There are several areas of overlap between these areas, which are reflected throughout the report content.

## II. Assessment of Need

The UNM CDD staff applied the Results Based Accountability Framework (Friedman, 2009), a Quality and Results Management model, to guide the process of gathering input on needs and developing recommendations.

Information on the existing school-to-work transition barriers and needs in New Mexico were gathered from multiple sources utilizing various methods of data and information collection.

Information was gathered from:

- A panel discussion among youth with disabilities and their family members who provided their personal experiences of transitioning from school to work (Panel Presentation, NMSWTA).
- Two group interview sessions that were facilitated at the Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Family Leadership Conference in Spring 2016.
- A review of the 2015 DDPC Needs Assessment Report. The information and findings for this report were gathered from community group interviews and a statewide survey questionnaire disseminated in written, hand-delivered, and electronic formats.
- A phone survey conducted by PRO staff task force members with families of transition-age youth from around the State. Survey questions focused on existing knowledge about transition; barriers to transition; and knowledge of available local transition resources including DVR, DOH/DDSD, UNM CDD, and parent networking opportunities.
- Stakeholder discussions of the School-to-Work Transition Task Force and committee meetings held between January and September 2016.
- Literature review collected by UNM CDD staff of several national studies as examples of innovative transition practices that are being implemented in different states.



### III. Needs and Recommendations

The work carried out by the task force through the Assessment of Need culminated in the identification of five key areas in which increased capacity needs to be built upon existing resources to create a highly effective transition system in the State of New Mexico. These five areas are Communication and Outreach, Training, Collaboration and Coordination, System Capacity, and Post-Secondary Education Options. Please note that there is overlap between some areas.

#### A. Communication and Outreach



*"You look good.  
You feel good, you play good.  
It's all good."*

*Ben Maes, High School Student,  
with Maribel Garcia, Student*

The task force identified communication and outreach to parents and families as an important component of school to work transition. Communication is necessary to convey important messages, to engage parents in the school to work transition process, and is vital to building collaborative relationships.

Some parents of youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities (ID/DD) do not consider employment to be an option for their son's or daughter's future, nor do some youth with ID/DD. As a result, taking recommended steps and planning for successful transition from high school to adult life may not happen at the optimal time. The reasons for this are varied, but may include the fact that for many years people with ID/DD were kept in segregated settings and were rarely seen out in the community and holding meaningful jobs. This unfortunate reality may be one reason why many people, including family members, believe the myth that people with ID/DD are not able to work. The task force identified three key areas of communication and outreach: creating high expectations for employment in families, helping families understand the transition process, and creating a transition website with resources and upcoming transition events.

##### 1) High Expectations for Employment

The importance of communicating high expectations for employment to all children from a very young age has been identified as an essential component of future employment success, and particularly so for children with ID/DD. Starting from when a child is very young, these expectations can be communicated in an age-appropriate manner, and built into everyday life (White, 1997; Wehman et al., 2014; Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Carter, 2014). Families having high expectations for employment has also been recognized as critical to their active participation in the transition process.

## NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

### i. Needs:

- Families and youth often get negative messages from both professionals and society at large about low expectations of future employment, but to counteract this, they need to hear from professional service providers that meaningful employment is an option, even for people with complex needs.
- Address the longstanding myths, fear of the unknown, and a lack of real life experience and examples that can prevent families, youth, educators and other service providers from encouraging young people with ID/DD to pursue meaningful employment after high school.
- Address differing expectations of success between parents and youth with ID/DD.
- Address the fact that talking to parents about employment when their child is still young might “scare them off” or may be met with resistance.

### ii. Recommendations:

- Early childhood providers and educators can provide hopeful and useful information to families about what is possible for their child’s future so that families can start planning ahead. Strategies can include age-appropriate transition goals in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) starting at a young age, which may include working on independence skills, daily living skills, etcetera.
- Give families strategies for communicating high expectations to their child about their child’s future. Research indicates that high parental expectations and early work experience leads to improved employment outcomes for youth with ID/DD (Wehman et al., 2014). For example, asking a young person with ID/DD what they want to be when they grow up and requiring that the youth help out with household chores are ways that parents can communicate their high expectations to their child from a young age and teach important life skills.
- Give families strategies for parents and children to share their own ideas and expectations of success with each other.
- Create public awareness campaigns around the idea that everyone can work, including people with ID/DD. The task force identified the need for at least two public awareness campaigns:
  - Raise the bar/Raise expectations/Dare to dream type of message would be aimed at parents of young children with disabilities. The purpose of this message is to inform parents of their child’s potential, and that their future is bright with many possible opportunities, including employment, marriage, owning a home, etcetera.
  - **Employment First**, a framework for systems change reflects the premise that **all** citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life. This is a powerful message for parents and society at large, including prospective employers. Information should be provided regarding how businesses benefit from hiring people with ID/DD, including decreased turnover costs and improved morale and productivity (Employment First).
- Share success stories with parents, youth, educators, service providers and potential employers about youth who have successfully transitioned into adulthood and are gainfully employed in integrated, competitive workplace environments. Possible avenues are panel presentations, YouTube videos, public service announcements, social media, and agency marketing.

## 2) The Transition Process

The task force identified a tremendous need to keep families and youth with ID/DD informed about transition throughout the entire process. Current avenues of communication have not been effective in consistently reaching families, thus having up-to-date information about the transition process is key to family involvement.

### i. Needs:

- Address the challenge of reaching parents and youth with ID/DD in order to keep them informed throughout the transition process about what resources are available.
- Address low parent attendance at transition fairs, family nights, and information sessions, which are some methods schools currently use to keep parents and youth informed. Parent attendance tends to be low at such events due to their busy schedules and/or the timing of the event.

### ii. Recommendations:

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that school events such as plays, concerts, and talent shows tend to draw more parental participation. Schools and community organizations can consider creative ways to have parents attend informational sessions, such as an afterschool presentation co-led by the students.
- Multi-day conferences that include overnight stays are popular with some parents and families because they afford the opportunity to take leave from work, network with other families, and spend time focusing on the issues.
- Teaching a skill that parents perceive as useful tends to result in high attendance. For example, every year the New Mexico School for the Deaf offers a class on sign language that is consistently well attended.
- Create a visual “road map” for the transition process, including appropriate agency contact information for each step of the way.
- Place representatives of the school and each agency in a central location, such as a school, to create a one-stop that parents and families can easily access in order to gather information about transition, assessment and intake services, funding, and eligibility requirements.



*Image courtesy of Marc Gold & Associates*

### **3) Transition Website**

Task force discussions brought into sharp relief the need for a hub of transition information relevant to the State of New Mexico.

#### **i. Needs:**

- There are many transition-related training and informational sessions held throughout the year by different disability-related organizations, but there is not one place to find out about all of the upcoming events.
- There is not a website devoted to transition issues in New Mexico that explains the transition process in our state and compiles local information.

#### **ii. Recommendations:**

- Create a website to act as a hub for information about the events going on throughout the State and as a clearinghouse of transition information specific to New Mexico, including the specific services that different agencies offer. This website could be collectively maintained and updated by key organizations, including, but not limited to the NMDVR and local schools (example of a website from another state: Rhode Island: <https://secure.waytogori.org/>).

### B. Training

The need for training was identified by more than one subcommittee and from numerous stakeholder perspectives. Training needs are subdivided into the following sections: training for everyone, training in self-advocacy/self-determination for students, training for families, training for educators/transition personnel, training for adult providers, and training in work experience and soft skills for youth.

#### 1) Everyone

Training on the transition process, including details of the process itself, the role of each agency involved in transition, and employment needs of local employers would be beneficial for all stakeholders in the transition process.

##### i. Needs:

- Address the overall lack of knowledge among stakeholders about the transition process and about the agencies involved in transition.
- Address the need for everyone involved in the transition from school to adulthood to know that transition often involves many different agencies and can be a complex system to navigate.
- Address the need for everyone involved in transition to understand that not every person will be eligible for the same level of services and that there is not just one path to take on the journey to adulthood and employment.
- Address the many different definitions of employment used by families, schools, and agencies.
- Address the lack of information about industry needs and how to properly train and prepare youth to meet industry needs.
- Address the need to make youth with disabilities more marketable to local employers.

##### ii. Recommendations:

- Offer training workshops on how to navigate the system and other topics throughout the State to parents, youth, educators, and other professionals serving youth with ID/DD, and include all trainings in a training/event calendar on a transition website.
- Help families and students navigate the system by supporting them to work with different agencies and organizations during the school to work transition process. Knowing which agencies provide which services can be very helpful, as well as easy to understand instructions, checklists, etcetera, to help navigate through the system.
- Create easy to understand resources to help inform and empower families and students. These same resources can also help educators and other service providers who want to help families navigate these complex systems.
- Examples of navigation support can include a decision tree app like <http://www.mypathny.org/> as well as typical outreach materials, such as pamphlets, resource handouts, and tip sheets.

## NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: TRAINING

- Develop and share a clear definition of what employment is with families, schools, and agencies so everyone can operate within the same understanding and implement the same preparation techniques.
- Gather and provide information to families and agencies about local industry needs.
- Provide training on approaches to making youth with disabilities more marketable to local employers, including sharing with agencies the numerous benefits of hiring youth with disabilities and providing appropriate training and preparation for youth.

### iii. Innovative Practice Recommendation:

Family Employment Awareness Training (FEAT) was created in 2010 through a partnership between the Beach Center on Disability at the University of Kansas, the Kansas' state Medicaid agency, and Families Together, Inc. (Kansas' Parent Training and Information Center). FEAT was designed to help families, professionals, and people with disabilities develop high expectations for competitive employment and gain knowledge about employment services, supports, and resources.

High expectations of competitive employment and knowledge of available resources are key to successful employment outcomes. The findings from the FEAT pilot project indicate that FEAT not only positively impacted participants' expectations and knowledge, but also created the opportunity for coordination and collaboration among, youth, families, and professionals (Gross, Francis, & Pijem, 2015).

## 2) Self-Advocacy/Self-Determination

Through the Assessment of Need, self-advocacy/self-determination was identified as one of the most important elements in successful transition of students with disabilities. Self-advocacy means learning how to speak up for oneself, making decisions for oneself, learning rights and responsibilities, problem-solving, and identifying important resources.

*"We have learned more from Ben than he has learned from us."*

*Jim Maes, Parent*

### i. Needs:

- For training in self-advocacy skills/self-determination for high school students with ID/DD.

### ii. Recommendations:

- Provide students with opportunities for peer mentoring and support to become strong self-advocates to represent their needs and interests.
- Offer skill building to increase self-determination that will support students in preparing for their full participation in the transition to adulthood.

### 3) Families

In a 2012 analysis of data from a study involving more than 11,000 youth with disabilities, authors found that the strongest predictor of post-high school employment was high parent expectations of employment. They found that youth with significant disabilities whose parents definitely expected their student to be employed after high school were five times more likely to obtain paid community employment within two years of leaving high school. When the authors added other factors into their model, they found that high parent expectations still more than tripled the chances of employment (Carter et al., 2012).



Image courtesy of UNM CDD Partners for Employment

Other research has shown similar findings, indicating that family engagement in the collaborative transition process is a critical component of successful employment outcomes (Doren, Grau, & Lindstrom, 2012; PACER Info Brief, 2014).

There are, however, a number of interrelated needs with respect to families being partners in the school-to-work transition process in New Mexico, as in other states, that have been identified by the task force, which must be addressed.

*“When my daughter was first diagnosed, my family and I were thrown into a system that we did not understand. I met many kind and compassionate professionals who did their best to help me get through this difficult period. One thing that was missing was a message of hope – that although my daughter was just diagnosed with a developmental disability, there were other children like her who had gone on to graduate from high school, attend college, get a job, and were leading fulfilling lives. I could have benefitted from hearing those success stories and knowing all that was possible from the beginning, to give me the hope I desperately needed and to also act as a guide for the road ahead.”*

*Rebecca Roybal, Parent*

#### i. Needs:

- Address the lack of high expectations of post-secondary education or employment among both families and students with disabilities, due to negative reinforcement from many sources (Antosh et al., 2013; Carter, 2014; Landa, 2015; Roy, 2014).
- Address the lack of knowledge about the transition process and about how to begin working on transition beginning at a young age.
- Address the lack of knowledge about training and employment resources and opportunities.

## NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: TRAINING

- Address the lack of knowledge about vocational assessments for youth with ID/DD and how the information provided can be utilized to help identify areas of need, or areas of high interest that can assist in creating a path toward secondary education or employment.
- Address the lack of knowledge about federal laws beyond IDEA, including ADA and 504.

### ii. Recommendations:

- Educators, transition personnel, and other professionals set high expectations with families, from when their child is very young/first diagnosed, about post-secondary education and employment (Roy, 2014; TASC; PACER, 2013; White, 1997).
- Share success stories with families to help everyone envision and work toward positive outcomes. Having a panel of young adults who have jobs and have successfully navigated the transition process is an example.
- Include information and trainings for families with young children to explain available future transition-related services and the importance of getting on waitlists as soon as possible, as some waitlists are extremely long.
- Engage families in the transition process early, in a manner that is age-appropriate, and provide access to trainings, information, and support (Landa, 2015; Muthumbi, 2008; Quigley & Molfenter, 2014; TASC; White, 1997).
- Provide training for families that explains the transition process, including the importance of the role of family, and that increases the knowledge of vocational assessments and employment resources. This could be done through existing Parent Training and Information Centers (PTI), or by implementing specific training curricula, such as FEAT described in the Training section above (Gross et al., 2015; Roy, 2014; TASC).
- Provide training about ADA and 504, and how they differ from IDEA.
- Provide materials that outline resource “caps” for each agency/program (SSI, DD Waiver).
- Provide trainings that support agencies involved in the transition process to recognize family as a key stakeholder, and as a wealth of information and resourcefulness regarding their child and transition.
- Provide trainings about cultural differences and restrictions, and provide sensitivity trainings that include clarifying the correct language to be using when working with people with disabilities, and treating everyone with respect.

### 4) Educators/Transition Personnel

Educators and transition personnel play a pivotal role in the transition process, yet according to numerous studies they report feeling unprepared for how to effectively plan for and offer transition services (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013; Plotner, Trach, & Strauser, 2012). Plotner et al. (2015) state that there is “a gaping hole between what the research says that teachers and transition providers should provide and what actually happens at school”.



## NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: TRAINING

### i. Needs:

- Address the need for training in transition services among educators and transition personnel.
- Address the fact that special education and vocational rehabilitation university programs typically do not include comprehensive information about transitioning from high school to adult life.
- Address the fact that many educators and secondary transition personnel lack knowledge and access to transition evidence based practices (EBPs). Even when there is access to the many training and professional development resources to teach EBPs related to transition, a research-to-practice gap in implementing transition EBPs is well documented (Kohler & Green, 2004; Mazzotti, Rowe, & Test, 2012).

### ii. Recommendations:

- Infuse more transition content into special education and rehabilitation counseling university programs.
- Create sustainability and increase applicable services through:
  - Developing transition certifications/endorsements for educators and transition personnel, including vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors.
  - Requiring transition training for all secondary special education staff, teachers, and administrators, with increased focus on school counselors. Scarborough & Gilbride (2006) point out that, “school counselors and vocational rehabilitation counselors share similar education, goals, and values, and they bring complementary skills and knowledge to their work with students with disabilities” (Fish & Smith-Augustine, 2015).
  - Requiring the Public Education Department (PED) to adopt transition competencies as part of teacher certification curriculum.
  - Including training for education staff so they have knowledge of stages of career development and general career-related objectives that exist in various stages, to adequately prepare students to “gain an understanding of themselves and their abilities, interests, and values; gain an understanding of the world of work; and acquire effective decision-making skills” (Levinson & Palmer, 2005).
- Provide more professional development opportunities for educators and transition personnel, such as classes, workshops, and conferences. Effective professional development includes the following components:
  - Content focus: The link between activities that focus on subject matter content and how students learn that content.



*Image courtesy of family/parent*

## NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: TRAINING

- Active learning: Observing expert teachers or being observed, followed by interactive discussion and reviewing student work.
- Coherence: The extent to which teacher learning is consistent with teachers' knowledge and understanding.
- Duration: Ensures that professional development activities are of sufficient duration.
- Collective Participation: When teachers from the same school or department facilitate interaction and discourse (Desimone, 2009).

### **5) Adult Provider**

Prior to the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), youth with disabilities transitioning from school to work were served by Vocational Rehabilitation. Programs now responsible for implementing services under WIOA, such as "one-stops" or workforce centers, have had little to no experience serving youth with disabilities.

#### **i. Needs:**

- Workforce Centers need training to build their capacity to effectively serve youth with disabilities.

#### **ii. Recommendation:**

- Design and implement adult provider front-line staff training on working with youth with disabilities. Training can include awareness of basic information: Disability 101, universal design, disability disclosure, and community-based resources.

#### **iii. Innovative Practice Recommendation:**

PACER Center's "Project Swift: Building Program Capacity to Serve Youth with Disabilities" is an existing resource that is designed to train staff of WIOA-funded youth employment and education programs to understand the needs of people with disabilities, laws that relate to employment for people with disabilities, and disability awareness, as well as provide technical assistance to increase the capacity to serve youth with disabilities in their inclusive program (Pacer Center's Project SWIFT).

### **6) Work Experience and Soft Skills for Youth**

Work experience while in high school, including internships, work education programs, and summer employment, is one of the top predictors of post-high school success and is a critical component of preparing youth for transition to adulthood. Potential benefits for youth who participate in work experiences include: 1) Gaining career readiness skills including the "soft skills" that employers seek in entry level workers; 2) Increasing knowledge of specific occupational skills and workplace settings; 3) Establishing a work history and connections with employers that can aid in future job searches; and 4) Developing an understanding of different occupations in order to make informed career choices.

## NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: TRAINING

In addition, research studies suggest that work-based learning may increase school attendance, decrease dropout rates, reduce school suspensions, and increase school engagement (Medrich, Calderon, & Hoachlander, 2002). One study found students who participated in work-based learning were more likely to attend college or go to work compared to their peers (Jobs for the Future, 2007).

While work experiences are beneficial to all youth, they are particularly valuable for youth with disabilities. One of the most important findings from the research shows that work experiences for youth with disabilities during high school (paid or unpaid) help them acquire jobs at higher wages after they graduate (Colley & Jamison, 1998). Also, students who participate in occupational education and special education in integrated settings are more likely to be competitively employed than students who have not participated in such activities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Colley & Jamison, 1998; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Rogan, 1997).

### **i. Needs:**

- Address that not every high school student with disabilities will receive services in a school-based transition program.
- Address that if a student selects the standard graduation path in New Mexico, they will not go on to receive transition services. Often, work-based training and soft skills training are offered through the transition certificate option only.
- Training in soft skills for all students with ID/DD. Several studies have shown that the primary reason most individuals with ID/DD lose their jobs is due to a lack of soft skills (Greenspan & Shoultz, 1981; Hanley-Maxwell, Rusch, Chadsey-Rusch, & Renzaglia, 1986; Salzberg, Lingnugaris/Kraft, & McCuller, 1988).

### **ii. Recommendations:**

- Integrate work experiences and work-based training at the high school level for all students with ID/DD, blending independence training and academics as integral parts of the transition process. One way to do this would be to have a provider agency or other community provider be on site at the school providing this work-based training.
- Partner with local Workforce Development Boards to develop pathways for students with disabilities to be eligible for existing youth work subsidy programs.
- Target youth with disabilities at an earlier age, and provide pre-vocational and vocational supports at the beginning of high school. A 2008 study conducted by the New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council found that students in transition who were introduced to pre-vocational and vocational supports between 14 to 15 years of age were likely to experience more success. As stated by Muthumbi (2008), "it was evident that by reaching youth at an earlier age, they were better prepared for employment" (p.100).
- Recognize the importance of soft skills training for successful employment outcomes by integrating soft skills training at the high school level for all students with ID/DD, regardless of the graduation path they have chosen. A supported employment provider could carry out these trainings in the school setting (Butcher & Wilton, 2007; Fabian, Luecking, & Tilson, 1995; Harman, 2009; Luecking, 2011; Luecking, 2008; Tulgan, 2016).

## C. Collaboration and Coordination

WIOA calls for improved coordination between local, state, and federal agencies to increase access to the education, training, and support that job seekers who face obstacles to gaining employment, including youth with disabilities, need to enter into community-based, integrated competitive employment. This improved coordination requires that local and state agencies who are involved in the transition process collaborate to plan and provide services, and key stakeholders including youth with disabilities and their families who are experiencing transition and know the particulars of what this means in real life, must also be engaged (King County; Antosh et al., 2013).

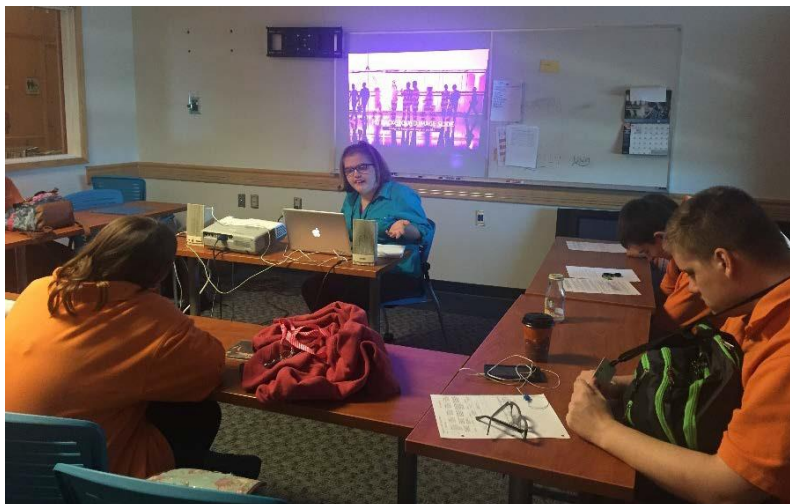
In addition to being a requirement of WIOA, several studies have shown that collaboration is essential to creating a successful transition system/process. Collaboration includes different partners working together and having: Definitions of roles and responsibilities for each agency/stakeholder, including clarity about funding streams; effective and consistent communication between all partners through established and agreed-upon channels; leveraged resources; and an established feedback loop that looks at system data to continue to strengthen the collaboration so as to increase successful employment outcomes for youth with disabilities.

There are a number of states that have thoughtfully and effectively established strategies to carry out these collaborations, and their best practices can serve as a guiding resource for New Mexico.

Collaboration findings are subdivided into the following sections: Families, interagency collaboration, funding, and data system.

*“Transition has been a very difficult and frustrating process. The system doesn’t work. Families are generally the ones who are struggling to find the resources and putting it all together for the children. When that doesn’t happen, there is nothing after graduation for our children with disabilities.”*

*Jill Tatz, Parent*



*Image courtesy of Project SEARCH*

## NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION

*“We were bombarded and pressured by the school staff. We didn’t even go over the IEP. They are not clear on what’s available. They spoke over each other and made us confused about what agency or program provided what service.”*

*Simone Byrne, Parent*

### **1) Families**

Family engagement is one of the eight elements in the High Performing States Transition Model used by the Partnerships in Employment Program. The model is a national federally-funded transition systems change project in eight states whose purpose is to identify, develop, and promote policies and practices to improve transition, post-secondary, and competitive employment outcomes for individuals with ID/DD. Although research indicates that families play a key role in successful transition outcomes, there continue to be challenges in the area of engaging families as partners in the collaborative transition process. The task force identified this as an area of challenge from both the family and agency perspectives (Carter et al., 2012; Doren et al., 2012; PACER Info Brief, 2014; PIE, 2015).

#### **i. Needs:**

- Address the lack of family inclusion in transition planning.
- Address the lack of high expectations among families about post-secondary and employment outcomes.
- Address the lack of agency support in recognizing that families are important partners in the transition process, who have a wealth of information about their child.

#### **ii. Recommendations:**

- Educators, transition personnel, and other professionals set high expectations with families, from when their child is very young/first diagnosed, about post-secondary education and employment to encourage partnering in the transition process (Roy, 2014; TASC; PACER, 2013).
- Provide information, training, and support to families that explains the transition process, including the importance of the role of family, that increases the knowledge of employment resources.
- Develop system-wide supports for families as they go through the transition process, as done by Missouri’s Show Me Careers (Landa, 2015). This support and information is key to supporting families to be actively involved in the transition process.
- Include youth with ID/DD in collaborative systems change efforts (Landa, 2015; Roy, 2014).
- Provide information and trainings that support agencies involved in the transition process to recognize family as a key stakeholder, and as a wealth of information and resourcefulness regarding their child and transition.
- Educate collaborating agency personnel about cultural differences and restrictions, and provide sensitivity trainings that include clarifying the correct language to be using when working with people with disabilities, and treating everyone with respect.

### **iii. Innovative Practice Recommendation:**

An innovative model for increasing family engagement and support is the abovementioned Missouri's Show Me Careers (SMC) collaborative. SMC identified these areas as a key part of their strategy for systems change with respect to improving transition outcomes. They implemented a research-to-practice model, and through analysis of data from a pilot project, determined that there was insufficient system-wide support for families in the transition process. These findings then informed the development and implementation of a community planning and technical assistance initiative pilot program that will support communities to develop and implement clear plans to increase family support (Landa, 2015).

## **2) Interagency Collaboration**

Interagency collaboration has been identified by Partnerships in Employment as a key indicator in states that are considered high-performing in the area of transition, and as a best practice in secondary transition (Partnerships in Employment, 2016; Antosh et al., 2013; Kohler, 1993; Kohler, 1996). The intent of interagency collaborations is to improve and streamline school-to-work transition through aligned strategic planning, coordinated service delivery, and the provision of integrated and appropriate transition, training, support, and employment services. The most important aspect of this collaboration is to provide a seamless transition for youth as they navigate the road from school-to-work. Best practices show that this is done by having a shared mission and goal that meets both the collaboration's needs and the needs of the individual agencies, having written memoranda of understanding between involved agencies that outline roles and responsibilities, and by providing an overlap in services over time and between services so that there are no gaps for youth to fall through.

Interagency collaboration requires careful planning and consideration. Some collaborations are simple, and others can be complex depending on communication, funding, the history of the collaboration, mutual respect and understanding, and whether each collaborator sees the project as being in their self-interest (Antosh et al., 2013; Matteisch & Monsey, 1992).

In New Mexico, some agencies involved in the transition process will be new to working together in this manner, and it is important to move forward in this area inclusively and attentively.

The interagency collaboration that is required under WIOA is between all key stakeholder agencies, including DVR, school systems, workforce development, DDSD, and others involved in transition.

### **i. Needs:**

- Address the lack of understanding among agencies of their own and other agencies' roles and responsibilities in transition.
- Address the lack of formal collaborative efforts among agencies involved in transition.
- Address the lack of familiarity among agency personnel around WIOA requirements.
- Address communication issues among agencies.
- Address the issue of agencies and school systems using different assessment tools that may not produce the same result in terms of identifying the student's strengths and needs.

## NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that separate assessments do not always produce the same results in terms of a student's needs and resultant vocational recommendations, and this can make it difficult to identify gaps and paralleling supports.
- Address the issue of some agencies not having enough staff to carry out their required activities; for example, DVR offices in rural parts of the State lacking necessary staff to send to all Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) or to attend transition meetings in their jurisdiction.
- Address the need for collaborating agencies to share and leverage resources at both a state and local level.
- Address the need for families to have access to information about all agencies involved, and about each agency's role in the transition collaboration.

### ii. Recommendations:

- Identify key agency stakeholders in the transition process. Stakeholders include schools, vocational rehabilitation agencies, workforce agencies, local training and employment providers, DDS, PED, and others (King County, Washington).
- Once appropriate agencies are identified, begin formation of local school-to-work collaboratives using a best practices model that best meets the community's needs.
- Collaborating agencies work together to define the collaboration mission and goals. The mission should be written such that it complements the missions of each individual agency, and the goals should be shared goals between the collaboration and the partnering agencies.
- Define roles and responsibilities (King County).
- Develop written memoranda of understanding (MOUs) that clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of each collaboration partner, as well as communication channels that will be used.
- Streamline assessment and intake procedures to be applicable across schools and agencies.
- DVR and the local school system use paralleling and overlapping assessment strategies and implementation.

### iii. Innovative Practice Recommendations:

Several innovative interagency collaboration models and best practices have been developed around the country, and all include these components for shared statewide interagency responsibility and authority for coordinating transition services:

- 1) Memoranda of understanding exist between state agencies to designate the way in which services can be blended and braided to support transition outcomes.
- 2) Partnerships exist between DDPC, DOL, VR, DOE, DDS, and providers to ensure frontline staff have access to employment related training and technical assistance.
- 3) There is an established interagency working group and mechanisms at the state level to support transition to employment policy and processes.
- 4) Schools coordinate funding with adult service agencies for employment placement while the student is enrolled in high school.

## NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION

- 5) Local transition councils are developed to coordinate and support local resources and outreach activities to ensure seamless transition services in each community.

A stellar example of successful interagency transition collaboration is the national Project SEARCH internship model. This model has been successfully implemented in New Mexico, and is a thriving example of seamless collaboration across agencies. In Project SEARCH, the business providing the internship experience, DVR, the school system, and the agencies providing job coaches and job developers, all collaborate to create an in-depth, highly rigorous internship experience for youth transitioning from high school to work (Daston Riehle, & Rutkowski, 2012).

Another example of effective interagency collaboration is Iowa's Coalition for Integrated Employment consortium (ICIE). Many ICIE members, from various agencies, were intentionally selected to create an overlap in staff between the consortium and the Iowa Governance Group's Operations Team, which has a long history of collaboration. The Operations Team develops policy and practices, and directs resources to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. This overlap in staffing with ICIE is a natural progression of the work done by the Operations Team, and brings with it a history of successful collaboration (Winsor & Landa, 2015).



*Image courtesy of UNM CDD Partners for Employment*

### 3) A Special Note on Exemplary Funding Models

“Neither schools, nor workforce investment programs, human service agencies, or any other single system alone can pay for and provide the array of services needed to effectively meet the often complex needs of youth with disabilities in transition to adult services. When collectively pooled, however, these resources can produce positive outcomes for youth, well beyond the scope of what any single system can hope to mobilize on its own” (National Governors’ Association, 2004).

Funding is a key area in which collaborating agencies will need to work together to clarify sources of funding for each aspect of the transition model being created, as well as to creatively braid this funding to create a more stable funding base, and share responsibility for funding. Examples of exemplary funding models include the following components:

- Funding allocations and reimbursement rates emphasize employment as a preferred outcome and service option for transition age youth and young adults.
- Multiple funding sources (education, DD, VR, SSA) are blended and braided to support employment. Clarify where there are allowable and billable expenses within existing funding regulations. Often there are assumptions and misunderstandings between schools and agencies that become unnecessary barriers.



## NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION

- The state Medicaid agency supports the flexible use of Medicaid waiver funding for employment.
- Transition age youth and young adults have access to self-determined and individualized funding models that promote employment.
- Goals or benchmarks for achieving integrated employment outcomes are included in provider contracts and operating agreements.
- Develop funding systems that encourage integrated employment outcomes.
- Providers receive greater financial compensation for integrated employment compared to other outcomes.

### 4) Data System

Through the work of all task force subcommittees, along with findings from various studies, it became clear that an essential component of a successful transition model is having a shared, effective data system through which statewide data on transition outcomes and employment is collected and shared among collaborating agencies and made available to the public.

#### i. Need:

- Address the lack of a transition data collection system in New Mexico.

#### ii. Recommendation:

- Create and implement a statewide data system that collects employment data, including transition outcomes. Innovative practices include the development of statewide cross-agency data collection systems that include these components to share performance measurements:
  - State and local education agencies make data on transition outcomes widely available.
  - PED provide the number of transition-aged youth and young adults who will be exiting school services to DVR and DD agencies at least one year prior to exiting high school.
  - Provider employment data is made available to transition age youth and young adults, families and local school districts to support youth in choosing service providers.



*Image courtesy of Project SEARCH*

## D. System Capacity

The recent changes to WIOA have provided guidelines to those working in transition for youth with disabilities on how to better collaborate with an overall goal of seamless transition from either school-to-work or to post-secondary options. While this new phase of regulation targets one of the biggest barriers in transition, it shines light on the needs and barriers that still exist on a systemic level.

### 1) Lack of personnel

As discussed above, interagency collaboration is an integral component of creating an effective transition system. Within this collaboration, agencies need to have adequate numbers of personnel to carry out the many transition-related responsibilities of their organization.



#### i. Needs:

- Although DVR staff are required to attend all student IEPs when invited to provide needed supports for employment and post-secondary preparations that enrich the mapping of a successful transition path, DVR offices throughout the State are routinely understaffed with counselors, and some locations in New Mexico are experiencing counselor vacancies for two years or more. As noted in the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis, “in April 2015, there were 126 schools in New Mexico, and a total of only 30 DVR counselors” (STWA, 2015).
- DVR counselors who are available are often expected to travel to different rural locations multiple times a day to attend IEPs.
- DVR counselors need to have direct communication with students regarding post-secondary or employment options well *before* their final year of high school. In most cases, the IEP is completed with identified personal interests and career goals only during freshman year. And when vocational rehabilitation system involvement is introduced, it is often not until the last two years of high school. According to Muthumbi (2008), “students with disabilities require significant pre-vocational supports to enhance their vocational skills, by delaying the provision of these services until the last two years of high school, students fail to acquire the requisite skills potentially contributing to their inadequate preparation for the workforce” (p. 100).

#### ii. Recommendations:

- Develop new hybrid positions funded by both PED and DVR resources to support students in navigating the transition process.
- Appoint DVR counselor positions dedicated to the role of transition for youth with disabilities to support creating sustainable presence in communities across New Mexico. Counselors

## NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: SYSTEM CAPACITY

dedicated to transition would be able to communicate with education entities and agencies to discover ways of overlapping services and dovetailing supports.

- When a counselor is unable to attend a meeting, DVR prepares pre-assembled information packets to hand out in place of the counselor's attendance. Packets would include all available resources and supports offered through DVR, as well as counselor contact information. Such packets would be representative of DVR participation in IEP team decision-making, while offering a direct line of communication for any follow up questions, concerns, and future IEP dates.

### **2) Systems Capacity – Internship Models**

Research has shown that early work experience, whether paid or unpaid, and whether in the form of employment, an apprenticeship or an internship, is a great predictor of future employment success, and an effective strategy for gaining marketable employment skills (Wehman et al., 2014; Daston et al., 2012). Project SEARCH, as discussed prior, is a very successful work internship model that is being replicated throughout New Mexico. There is a need, however, to increase the types and locations of internship opportunities available around the State.

#### **i. Needs:**

- Address the lack of applicable model internship programs, particularly in rural New Mexico communities. Those that are currently available carry specific eligibility requirements or allow only a small number of students into the program, leaving a large pool of students in need who are not receiving training on marketable employability skills.
- Address the lack of summer camps, apprenticeships, and other work-related experience and opportunities to learn employability skills.

#### **ii. Recommendation:**

- Seek new model internship programs that can be implemented or replicated throughout New Mexico, with emphasis on smaller, rural communities that have limited resources. Provide support to develop internship programs that promote cross-agency collaboration.
- Expand existing school-to-work apprenticeship and summer program opportunities that have shown success in employment placement.

### 3) Workforce

There is a need for services within Workforce Connection that are appropriate for youth in transition, and for the identification and implementation of assessment appropriate for youth with ID/DD.

#### i. Needs:

- Address the lack of services within Workforce Connection that are applicable and appropriate for young adults and youth in transition.
- Address the lack of use of assessments that are applicable for youth with ID/DD. The Work Keys assessment test that is currently used is designed to meet the needs of employers that place emphasis on the National Career Readiness Certificate. This type of assessment system may not be applicable for youth with more significant disabilities.

#### ii. Recommendations:

- From research in other states, there are examples of applicable assessment tools other than the traditional Work Keys.
- Integrate other assessment and employment skills instruction techniques into Workforce employment preparation, such as:
  - WorkAbility: Joint venture between department of Rehabilitation Center on Disabilities at California State University Northridge.



*Image courtesy of family/parent*

Provides tips and examples of: Resumes, cover letters, interviewing and post interview etiquette (Transition Toolkit, 2016).

<http://www.csun.edu/~hfdss006/workability/resumeservices.html>

- Partners in Employment: Six-hour self-study course designed to help people with developmental disabilities find meaningful jobs and plan a career. Resume and portfolio creation of strengths, skills, and interests; learn how to network and identify potential employers, for free (Transition Toolkit, 2016).  
<http://www.partnersinpolicymaking.com/employment/index.html>
- Employment Resource for Youth and Adults with Limited to No Reading Skills: Resource designed for youth in transition from school-to-work, adults with disabilities and individuals with limited reading skills (Transition Toolkit, 2016).  
<http://www.trisped.org>

#### **4) Adult Employment Providers**

Job coach positions tend to have very high turnover, and this is disruptive to job seekers gaining and mastering skills necessary to complete workplace tasks. Participants who do not receive steady and consistent job coaching are at a higher risk of losing employment status.

##### **i. Need:**

- Address the high turnover rates of job coach positions to provide on-the-job supports and instruction to young adults with disabilities transitioning into the workforce.

##### **i. Recommendations:**

- Require education and experience standards for job coaches hired into long-term provider agencies.
- Require continuing education courses to keep job coaches up to date on best practices, systematic instruction, and task analysis techniques.
- Research Alaska, a Partnerships in Employment state, for information on exploring approaches for personal assistants to be reimbursed for providing employment supports in the workplace.

#### **5) Transportation**

Transportation has been identified by families, youth, and professionals across the board as a major barrier in the school-to-work and school-to-post-secondary education transition. Lack of independent travel training, combined with lack of reliable transportation pose extensive challenges for youth with disabilities, limiting access to finding employment, and raising the risk of losing employment due to inconsistent arrival and departure times.

##### **i. Needs:**

- Address the lack of reliable transportation.
- Address the lack of independent travel training.
- Address the lack of public transportation options in rural communities. This interferes with independent travel training and places unnecessary stress on family to provide to and from transportation for youth with disabilities. Many families will refrain from enrolling their youth in available programs due to the demand of providing daily transportation.
- Address the lack of public transportation options available outside of the standard work day. Often, youth in transition are hired in entry level positions that may require off work hours such as nights, weekends, and holidays, limiting available public transportation options and placing more stress on family responsibility.
- Address the lack of family knowledge of financial supports for transportation that are available through DVR or DDS to obtain bus passes, paratransit passes, etcetera.

**ii. Recommendations:**

- Research Medicaid policy to identify if non-work services can be used to support work, such as transportation services to and from work.
- Replicate community models in which transportation is provided by long term provider agencies due to lack of public transportation options. Example: Santa Fe, New Mexico.
  - Provide funding for provider agency vehicles to provide transportation, with emphasis on smaller, rural communities.
- Access and utilize non-standard public transportation options that offer flexibility and individual services such as Uber, taxis, or Lyft.
  - Agencies provide funding to cover the cost of these transportation options.
- Research and implement best practices on how to initiate and maintain collaboration between the school system, local businesses, and transportation options for individuals with disabilities, such as paratransit. For example:
  - Parallel paratransit schedule and school schedule
  - Offer discounted ride passes
  - Provide funding for bus passes
- Integrate travel training for a full year for youth in transition preparing to exit high school.
- Provide a detailed map of the transportation options, routes, and times available in New Mexico.
  - Create pamphlets to be handed out to youth in transition throughout various stages of career or post-secondary exploration; in the IEP, during the job-seeking process and before independent travel training.
- Create additional public/private transportation services dedicated to individuals with disabilities that offer curb-to-curb pick-up and delivery.
- Research or develop an app to navigate bus systems.



*Image courtesy of Project SEARCH*

## E. Post-Secondary Education Options

Youth with disabilities who choose to go to college before seeking employment will likely encounter a number of barriers as they attempt to navigate this step of the transition process.

The transition from high school to college can be daunting for most students. For students with disabilities, there is a shift from being covered by IDEA to being covered only by ADA. It is a time when there is a tremendous shift from having the support of an IEP, that includes regular assessments and meetings to identify classroom supports and accommodations, to total independence and responsibility, on the part of the student, for their learning and accommodations. Once a student enters the college environment, they must self-identify their disability to that institution's disability resource office, and request the specific accommodations they need. There is no longer an IEP team guiding and supporting the process of obtaining needed accommodations.

*"During high school, my son was always high functioning and was always in inclusion classes. During transition, there was no support after high school. As a parent, I was lost. I had to do all the work. I went to CNM. I went to DVR, which took forever. Every year he had a new caseworker."*

*Nutan Patel, Parent*

### i. Needs:

- Address the lack of expectations among students, families, and educators for students to attend college.
- Address the lack of student, family, IEP, and school personnel familiarity with the transition process and transition resources.
- Address the lack of introducing the topic of post-secondary options before students are age 14.
- Address the lack of knowledge about transitioning from the entitlement system of special education under IDEA, to eligibility-based services that must be requested under ADA.
- Address the lack of access to dual enrollment to make a smoother transition between secondary and post-secondary environments.
- Address community college entrance requirements which make applying to that institution an impossibility for some students with ID/DD.
- Address the lack of resources to help navigate the post-secondary environment, which can be very challenging without guidance and support.
- Address the need for more special vocational programs. New Mexico has only one special vocational program, and it is located in Roswell, which is far from the majority of the State's population.



### ii. Recommendations:

- Introduce the topic of transition to students and their families at a young age, not waiting until age 14.
- Transition professionals to provide transition guidance to families and youth and address the common barrier of low post-secondary expectations.
- Develop training and/or handbook for students and families to understand and navigate the transition to post-secondary education process.
- Develop training for IEP teams to understand the transition-to-post-secondary education process and each team member's role.
- Develop inclusive career paths for high school students with disabilities to participate in dual college enrollment with joint support from both PED and DVR resources.
- Seek inclusive models at colleges that may include trained peer mentors/navigators, a buddy system, outreach programs throughout the State, peer-to-peer support among administrators, identified champions on campuses, pay students, or offer college credit to study partners to work with individuals with ID/DD.
- Disseminate information and tools to college administrators, financial aid offices, and Disability Resource Centers (DRCs) about the transition process for youth with ID/DD.
- Review college admissions processes and criteria for students with disabilities, and propose appropriate changes to those processes that would allow for inclusion of more students with ID/DD.
- Assist students with linking to college Disability Service Programs to gain access to available specialized services such as note takers, assistive technology, etcetera.



*Image courtesy of Project SEARCH*



## IV. Innovative Practices

Through research into best practices and effective models, the task force identified several innovative service/support models from around the United States that can serve as a guiding resource for New Mexico. Some models have begun to be piloted and replicated in New Mexico, such as the highly successful Project SEARCH work internship model that is being replicated statewide. Other models, such as the Linking Learning to Life project in Burlington, Vermont, can provide guidance for development of similar projects, tailored to meet the specific needs of New Mexico's communities.

Innovative service/support models include:

- Project SEARCH work internship model.
- Microenterprise grant programs that support young adults in self-employment and business planning.
- Post-secondary education pathways and scholarship programs, dual enrollment high school to college degree and certificate programs (THINK COLLEGE).
- Marriott Foundation's Bridges from School-to-Work internship program.
- Service projects and volunteer programs such as AmeriCorps and Project IMPACT.
- Summer Youth and after school employment programs (Ready, Set, Work).
- Charting the Life Course, a person-centered planning tool for life stages (UMKC Institute for Human Development, UCEDD).
- Alaska Transition Camp: Alaska developed a camp for high school juniors and seniors from remote villages in which groups of students and teachers came together to learn about daily living, career development and exploration, and other services available to help youth transition to adulthood. Employers also provided information about career options available in the region.
- The Linking Learning to Life program in Burlington, Vermont, has developed a school-based VR counselor role to work with students to develop goals, transition plans, and activities to prepare them for employment opportunities. An employment-training specialist role supports students and employers with work-site learning activities and paid employment and follows students a year after graduation.
- In Virginia, a statewide Youth Leadership Academy is held each year to provide an avenue for youth peer mentoring and growth and leadership activities and education. Youth are educated on benefits options, the value of self-advocacy, and wage and self-employment options. A wide range of community leaders and persons providing key information are in attendance. Youth plan and implement the activity. The academy is jointly funded by the workforce Board, Arc, and VR.
- SUCCEED, an innovative post-secondary education program for students with intellectual disabilities and autism in Burlington, Vermont, is provided by a community provider in collaboration with area colleges. Students have the opportunity to participate in four program areas: Student Housing, Education, Campus Life, and Career Development.
- Tennessee Customized Employment Partnership (TCEP) is a demonstration project using braided resources from the Department of Labor, special education, and the disability employment system to create model "customized" employment plans, and provide needed supports for youth and adults with significant disabilities. TCEP braids funds both on a systems level and on an individual level with differing purposes.

## CONCLUSION

### V. Conclusion

*“My dream for my child, when he transitions from school to the greater world and to employment, is that he find or create work that is deeply satisfying and sustainable, and that through this work he continues to grow, thrive, and help others and bring joy to people around him, just as he does now.”*

*Anonymous Parent*

The work carried out by the SM25 taskforce culminated in five major areas of recommendations:

1. **Communication and Outreach:** Develop and implement a statewide outreach plan to communicate the message of employment first expectations to transition-age youth and students, families, education personnel, and direct support school and adult service professionals.
2. **Training:** Develop and implement educational materials for transition-age youth and their families that address transition and employment, including manuals, training initiatives, and events. Develop training requirements and curriculum for local education personnel and adult service professionals involved in transition from school to employment.
3. **Collaboration and Coordination:** Develop collaborative networks and interagency agreements between the education and adult services communities at a state and local level.
4. **System Capacity:** Develop clear guidance and procedures for blending and braiding funding to support transition to employment goals. Develop new pathways for youth to participate in existing internship work experience programs.
5. **Post-Secondary Education Options:** Develop certificate degree tracks within existing community colleges to support the inclusion of young adults with disabilities to participate in career paths. Support the inclusion of youth with disabilities in existing dual enrollment programs while in high school.

The SM25 task force included participation of a number of youth with disabilities and their family members. These individual stakeholders provided countless examples of testimony from their own lives to illustrate the need to address the growing gap between schools-to-work services for youth with disabilities. The majority of the recommendations outlined in the report do not require additional dollars, but a realignment of existing resources, including strategies for braided funding, cooperative policies, and new ways of operating. One of the primary barriers reported was simply a low expectation by the youth themselves, their parents, and school and adult service personnel that persons with disabilities can or should work.

If we do not take steps to address this growing gap, the number of youth with disabilities graduating from high school without prospects of a job and ability to support themselves will only continue to grow. This will lead to an increased number of adults in a lifetime pattern of dependence on state and Medicaid funded programs, adding to the already significant number of adults with disabilities waiting for services in New Mexico.

The stakeholders of the task force wish to emphasize that when a young person becomes employed, they receive the obvious advantage of improved financial circumstances. But even more importantly, they also benefit from the fulfillment, maturity, and sense of belonging that comes with having a job.

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**Appendix 2: Senate Memorial 25 Task Force Members**

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