

Arizona Comprehensive Assessment of Transition Services for Students with Disabilities

Statement of Need:

For many years, there has been a recognized need to provide services to high school students who experience disabilities, to assist them in the transition to adulthood. Referred to commonly as Transition Services, the purpose of these activities has been to help adolescents with disabilities to move into adult roles in society, and help them to exercise self-determination in accomplishing their work, education, leisure, and living goals. The post educational outcomes resulting from transition services that are reported by each school district (known as Indicator 14) include four primary metrics:

- 1. Enrolled in higher education** means youth have been enrolled on a full- or part-time basis in a community college (2-year program) or college/university (4- or more year program) for at least one complete term, at anytime in the year since leaving high school.
- 2. Competitive employment** means that youth have worked for pay at or above the minimum wage in a setting with others who are nondisabled for a period of 20 hours a week for at least 90 days at any time in the year since leaving high school. This includes military employment.
- 3. Enrolled in other postsecondary education or training** means youth have been enrolled on a full- or part-time basis for at least 1 complete term at any time in the year since leaving high school in an education or training program (e.g., Job Corps, adult education, workforce development program, vocational technical school which is less than a 2-year program).

4. **Some other employment** means youth have worked for pay or been self- employed for a period of at least 90 days at any time in the year since leaving high school. This includes working in a family business (e.g., farm, store, fishing, ranching, catering services, etc.).

This data is collected by conducting surveys of graduates of educational programs one year following graduation. The results represent the percentage of respondents who indicated that they were involved in each of the areas of interest. The data are aggregated in the following manner:

A = 1 (percentage enrolled in higher education)

B = 1 + 2 (percentage enrolled in higher education and/or working in competitive employment)

C = 1 + 2 +3 + 4 (percentage enrolled in higher education, and/or working in competitive employment, and/or involved in “other” education and/or “other” employment)

For each sub-indicator, each state also sets a target level to achieve. The most recent dataset available for Arizona (2016) shows the following:

Indicator	State Target	State Results
14A	31.10%	22.79%
14B	66.20%	63.55%
14C	78.00%	77.66%

These results are commensurate with the Median percentages reported by other states to the federal government. As these percentages are significantly lower than those of students’ peers without disabilities, and approximately a quarter of students are neither involved in education or work following graduation, it is clear that while some positive outcomes are occurring there continues to be room for improvement.

The purpose of the proposed project is to conduct a systematic evaluation of the transition services being provided in the State of Arizona, and identify areas of strength to build upon, as well as areas for potential improvement.

Description of the Project:

The proposed project will utilize a qualitative methodology to evaluate the current state of transition services in Arizona. The data collection process will be divided into two primary foci. The first, will be to conduct qualitative interviews with special education teachers from around the state. The semi-structured interview process will focus on identifying current effective practices and school systems, as well as challenges, in providing transition services related to the predictors of postschool outcomes. Test et al (2009) identified sixteen evidence-based predictors of postschool outcomes in the areas of employment and education. These include the following:

Predictors of Postschool Outcomes (Test, et al, 2009)	
1. Career Awareness	9. Program of Study
2. Community Experiences	10. Self-Advocacy / Self-Determination
3. Exit Exam / Diploma Status	11. Self-Care / Independent Living
4. Inclusion in General Education	12. Social Skills
5. Interagency Collaboration	13. Student Support
6. Occupational Courses	14. Transition Program
7. Paid Employment / Work Experience	15. Vocational Education
8. Parental Involvement	16. Work Study
	17. Transportation
	18. Goal Setting

	<p>19. Youth autonomy / decision Making</p> <p>20. Parent Expectations</p>
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The second focus of the project will be to gather input from special education administrators on the issues that were presented by the teachers. This will be accomplished by holding two focus groups of district level special education directors. Prior to the focus groups participants will be provided with executive summaries of the findings from the qualitative interviews with the special education teachers. They will be asked to comment on the barriers identified by the teachers, identify additional barriers from an administration lens, and offer potential remedies for the issues identified. In an effort to facilitate the administrators' ability to provide critical feedback without an apparent conflict of interest, efforts will be made to invite district administrators from school districts that did not have teachers participate in the first round of data collection.

Methodology:

The current project will utilize qualitative interviews with special education teachers, and focus groups with district level special education administrators to explore the questions around transition services. In an effort to have representation from a wide variety of programs, systems, and communities, the sampling will be based on a stratification process. School districts will be stratified based on two variables, Indicator 14 Outcomes and Population Density. In relation to the Indicator 14 outcomes data, they will be divided into three groups (High Outcomes, Moderate Outcomes, Low Outcomes). For Population Density, school districts will be placed into two groups, including Urban ($P > 50,000$), and Rural ($50,000 > P$; $P = \text{Population}$).

Participants: Special Education Teachers

Three special education teachers will be recruited from each of the six stratified cells to participate in the qualitative interviews, resulting in a total of 18 teachers to be interviewed. The interviews will be a semi-structured format. It is anticipated that each interview will last between 60-90 minutes. In cases where the teacher is within a reasonable distance, every attempt will be made to conduct the interviews in person. However, in cases where distance is an issue and precludes access to the participants, interviews will be conducted using Zoom video conferencing system.

Participants: District Administrators

Two district administrators from each of the six stratified cells will be invited to participate in the focus group process. In this case, it is anticipated that one focus group will include those individuals from urban areas, and the second will include individuals from rural areas. To allow for a similar experience across groups, and account for the challenge of coordinating the schedules of district administrators, the focus groups will be held online using Zoom. This will allow the participants to either login using the computer, or to call in using a phone.

Recruitment

Once the school districts are identified through the stratification process, teachers and administrators will be contacted directly to participate in the study. It is anticipated that some schools and districts may have policies regarding their staff participating in research studies. In the event that such policies exist, and additional approvals are required, the research team will follow through on those requirements. It is simply not feasible to be able to anticipate the many different contingencies that may exist among the approximately 260 school districts in Arizona.

Key Staff:

Dr. Jared Schultz will serve as the Principal Investigator for this project. Dr. Schultz is on faculty at the University of Arizona, and is the Research Director for the Sonoran UCEDD. He will have final responsibility for the project, including IRB approval, data collection, data analysis, final write up, and dissemination of findings.

Dr. Wendy Parent-Johnson is the Director of the Sonoran UCEDD, and will participate in this project in through data collection, analysis, writing, and dissemination.

Ms. Kirsten Lansey is a doctoral student in Special Education at the University of Arizona, and will participate in this project through data collection, analysis, writing, and dissemination.

Ms. Sara Robinson is a doctoral student in Special Education at the University of Arizona, and will participate in this project through data collection, analysis, writing, and dissemination.

Goals, Objectives, and Timeline:

The following are Goals and Objectives for the project, with their due dates and person responsible.

Goal / Objectives	Staff Responsible	Completion Date
Goal 1: Complete Data Collection and Analysis with Special Education Teachers		
Obj1: IRB Approval	Schultz	Feb 1, 2019
Obj2: Identify and Contact Participants	Schultz	Feb 15, 2019
Obj3: Conduct Qualitative Interviews	All Staff	April 15, 2019
Obj4: Complete Data Analysis	All Staff	May 15, 2019

Goal 2: Complete Data Collection and Analysis with District Special Education Administrators		
Obj1: IRB Approval	Schultz	Feb 1, 2019
Obj2: Identify and Contact Participants in Focus Groups.	Schultz	April 1, 2019
Obj3: Hold Focus Groups	All Staff	May 30, 2019
Obj4: Complete Analysis of Focus Groups	All Staff	June 30, 2019
Goal 3: Complete the Report Write-Up and Dissemination		
Obj1: Complete Final Report and Submit to DDPC.	All Staff	August 31, 2019
Obj2: Present Findings at Arizona Transition Conference	All Staff	August 31, 2019

Budget Narrative

Salaries – The total support for salaries will be \$49,500. Dr. Jared Schultz will be supported on the project at \$14,000 (.1 FTE), Dr. Parent-Johnson will be supported at \$10,000, and graduate doctoral students Kirsten Lansey and Sara Robison will both be funded at \$12,750 (\$25,500 total).

Fringe Benefits – The total support for fringe benefits will be \$11,058.

Supplies / Operating Expenses – Total for Supplies and Operating Expenses will be \$1,200.

This includes \$300 for recording devices needed to record the qualitative interviews, and \$900 for Participant Support Costs. Each of the participants being interviewed (n=18) will receive \$50 for their time.

Travel – Travel has a budget of \$3,000. This is to cover any travel costs associated with conducting the qualitative interviews, and focus groups.

Indirect Costs – The indirect costs associated with this project, at 10%, will be \$6,476

References

Arizona Department of Education (2016). Arizona State Performance by Indicator. Retrieved from <http://www.azed.gov/specialeducation/sppapr/state-performance-by-indicator/>.

Test, D.W., Mazzotti, V.L., Mustian, A.L., Fowler, C.H., Kortering, L., & Kohler, P. (2009). Evidence-based secondary transition predictors for improving postschool outcomes for students with disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 32 (3), 160-181.

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