Understanding and Implementing a Seamless Transition Program

Your Step-by-Step Guide

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INDIANA INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY AND COMMUNITY
CENTER ON COMMUNITY LIVING AND CAREERS

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The Center on Community Living and Careers (CCLC) is one of seven centers located at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, Indiana University, Bloomington. The mission of the Center on Community Living and Careers is to promote partnerships between schools and support organizations to bring about positive changes in the lives of individuals and families as they live, work, and participate in their communities.

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Understanding and Implementing a Seamless Transition Program

Introduction

Understanding and Implementing a Seamless Transition Program is the first guide in our four-part series on seamless transition. It will lay the groundwork for understanding a seamless transition by exploring the core components and processes of the program. The second guide will fully explore the Indiana Seamless Transition Pilot, sharing key insights and practical strategies in developing and implementing an interagency team. Our third guide will provide a comprehensive checklist, including student-led IEP alignment and a detailed transition timeline. Finally, our fourth guide will wrap up the evaluation series by examining the crucial role of family team partnership in students' successful transition. Findings from the Indiana Seamless Transition Pilot will be shared throughout each guide.

Indiana's Department of Education and Division of Disability and Rehabilitation Services hope to increase the number of individuals with disabilities in competitive and integrated employment from 23% to 38% by 2027. To further this mission, the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services partnered with TransCen, a nationally renowned organization dedicated to inclusive education and employment, to pilot seamless transition programs across the state. The seamless transition pilot, "Improving Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities in Indiana," began in the spring of 2023. Eight schools joined the pilot, representing diverse regions across Indiana. The pilot aimed to improve team capacity, engagement of employers and families, and employment outcomes for students with significant disabilities. Schools were tasked with developing interagency teams that included, at a minimum, the student, their family, and external partners like Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).

TRANSCEN (2023) DEFINES SEAMLESS TRANSITION AS,

"The culmination of special education services for all youth with disabilities should be paid employment or being on a clear path to a career" so that the first day of a student's adult life looks like the last day of their school-work program.

At each pilot site, the Center for Community Living and Careers at Indiana University's Indiana Institute on Disability and Community evaluated seamless transition activities along with the perceptions and experiences of family members and transition professionals. The research revealed program areas of excellence and areas for improvement. In this guide, we first review common transition challenges and practices that promote success.

Next, we outline components, processes, and a timeline for a quality seamless transition. Finally, we share how Indiana schools are implementing seamless transition programs.

Rethinking Transition Programming

Many factors may diminish the quality of a school's transition program, creating common challenges. The most critical of these include a lack of coordinated school-based services, few or inconsistent opportunities for student work experiences, and students leaving high school without a job (Leucking & Leucking, 2015). In addition, status quo student and family involvement (i.e., limiting communication to scheduled conferences) and piecemeal connections to youth-and adult-serving agencies negatively impact the full potential of students' transition and post-school outcomes (Leucking & Leucking, 2015; Wehman, et al., 2015; Crane, et al., 2019).

In 2005, the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth presented five guideposts to improve transition programming.

- Provide school-based preparatory activities and ensure academic instruction is geared to employment and careers.
- Provide career preparation and authentic work experiences, such as vocational, technical & employer-based work experiences.
- Provide youth development and youth leadership, such as self-determined transition planning.
- Prioritize family participation that supports gainful employment and career goals.
- Ensure transition activities link students to complementary organizations/services that align with their transition goals during and after high school.

Kohler's (2016*) Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* further defined quality transition programming. They offer five transition practices and match IEP development, planning strategies, and student participation to each. Practices range from student-focused planning to program structure.

- Student-focused planning includes Transition Individualized Educational Program (TIEP) development, planning strategies, and student participation.
- Student development includes activities like assessments, academic, social-emotional, employment skills, and student supports.
- A collaborative framework and service delivery broadly define the third category, interagency collaboration.
- Family engagement focuses on cultural relevancy, involvement, empowerment, and preparation.

- The last category, program structure, includes strategies ranging from program characteristics and evaluation to strategic planning, policies and procedures, and resource development and allocation.

After many years, both the 2005 guideposts and 2016 taxonomy are still regarded as essential to quality transition programming. However, gaps persist even today between the research on quality transition and what is practiced in schools (Ross-Levesque, et al., 2024). Programs like Seamless Transition, attempt to address that gap, placing a high value on research and quality practices that often lead to more successful student outcomes (Leucking & Leucking, 2015).

Components and Processes for a Seamless Transition

A quality and comprehensive seamless transition program should include at least the following elements.

➢ **Full inclusion in general education with a defined program of study.**

➢ **Diverse interagency team membership that includes school personnel, adult-serving agencies, and families.**

➢ **Open and active Pre-Employment Transition (Pre-ETS) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services.**

➢ **Benefits planning with the assistance of a navigator or liaison.**

➢ **Early onset of varied student-driven work-based learning experiences**

➢ **Independent living and self-advocacy skill development.**

➢ **Obtain and maintain Competitive, Integrated Employment (CIE).**

➢ **Graduation with an alternative or high school diploma.**

Employment outcomes are the primary goal of a seamless transition wherein students' last days of high school look like their first day of adulthood (Luecking & Luecking, 2015). The end goal, therefore, is for students to leave high school employed and with community-living skills that promote and sustain independence (Certo & Luecking, 2011).

On the next page, Table 1 provides further details of the components and processes listed above. In the table, you will find links that provide additional resources, including fillable forms.

Table 1

Components and Processes for a Seamless Transition

Components of Seamless Transition	Process of Seamless Transition
Interagency Team	Interagency team membership includes: • Student • Family • School team (paraprofessionals, job coaches, teachers, administrators, ancillary service professionals) • Pre-ETS • VR • Medicaid waiver case manager
Positive Personal Profile (PPP) **Family Interview**	The Positive Personal Profile (PPP) is a fluid and ongoing transition assessment. • This inventories students' qualities that apply to employability, job searches and matches, job retention, and long-term career development. • Each team member should complete this step. Information from family interviews should be added to the PPP. • Information from the PPP and family interview is used to create student portfolios and resumes showcasing the student's strongest features, to help prepare for interviews, and to brainstorm and develop potential work experiences.
Shared Vision	Long-term goal attainment is more likely to be achieved when all team members establish a unified vision.
Employer Informational Interviews	Learn about employers' business operations and labor needs through an informational interview. • Using the Employer Informational Interview process builds relationships with employers.

Work-Based Experiences and Employment	Engage Pre-ETS and VR services.
	• Indiana students may receive simultaneous services from both providers.
	• Ensure students have multiple opportunities to explore employment options within their stated interests.
	• When labor needs match students' PPP interests and skill-base, write a proposal to the employer for a customized and competitive integrated employment (CIE) opportunity.
Make the Connection to Adult Services	A seamless transition to adulthood should account for independent living supports, such as:
	• Medicaid waiver case management
	• Health and mental health providers
	• Social Security benefits experts
	• Postsecondary education disability services

Indiana Schools Pilot Seamless Transition

The Center for Community Living and Careers at Indiana University's Indiana Institute on Disability and Community evaluated Indiana's Seamless Transition Pilot program. Our conversations with school staff mostly centered around *processes* and *procedures* of seamless transition. Specifically, education and non-education professionals must find multiple and varied employment experiences for each student. While we acknowledge that the primary goal of a seamless transition program is to facilitate students' desired postsecondary employment during high school, we contend that the journey itself holds equal, if not greater, significance. Further, we acknowledge schools' concerns that program expansion takes time. Below, we provide the vital processes to achieve a seamless transition program.

Vital Processes to Implement a Seamless Transition Program

1. **Develop interagency teams.**

   a. Identify a team leader who uses a collaborative and motivating style to organize and convene the teamwork sessions.

   b. Identify current team members.

   c. Recruit missing team members.

   d. Clarify functional team roles.

   e. Train each member on the principles of seamless transition (i.e., PPP, family and employer interview protocols, customized employment).

     f.   Maintain consistent group communication to remove siloed or isolated workflows.

     g.   Deepen school-family relationships through Parent Interviews and PPP assessments.

2. **Deepen school-family relationships using Parent Interviews and PPP assessments.**

     a.   Introduce the family and student to their transition team as equal members.

     b.   Conduct parent interviews and strengths-based PPPs.

     c.   Discuss outcomes of interviews and PPPs together as a team.

         i.   Group discussion helps schools, agencies, and families learn things from one another that they did not previously know about the student.

        ii.   Agencies and educators are better informed from the family and student perspective.

        iii.   Equal team involvement empowers families and students, fostering hope for their future.

     d.   Use interview and PPP outcomes alongside every team member's community connections to brainstorm potential employer matches.

3. **Expand employer relationships for mutually beneficial outcomes.**

     a.   Using the joint social capital of the team, reach out to potential employers and schedule an employer interview to learn more about their business and needs.

         i.   The interview allows team members to learn about the business and forge a relationship for one or more students as opportunities emerge. The employer interview should not be conducted solely to obtain employment for a specific student.

     b.   Conduct the employer interview using this [questionnaire](#).

Conclusion

States across our country are attempting to implement the strategies highlighted in quality seamless transition programming. The Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy provides a look at seamless programs in [Oregon](#) and [Michigan](#). In addition, they discuss [seamless transition in light of the Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act](#). Broaden your perspectives on the benefits of implementing seamless transition in your program by listening to the informative webinars linked above.

The following tips from participants in the Indiana seamless transition pilot will improve the sustainability of your seamless transition program.

- Hire or designate a Transition Coordinator to be the point-person for your seamless transition program and your interagency team.

- Designate a room or office in your school for Pre-ETS providers. This creates a professional space for providers and students to discuss career exploration.

- Parity with families creates stronger and more efficient teamwork.

- Continual training and technical assistance minimize the impact of education and agency turnover and fulfill professional development hours.

Our second guide, *Understanding and Expanding Seamless Transition Interagency Team Membership*, will explore the Indiana Seamless Transition Pilot, sharing key insights and practical strategies for developing and implementing an interagency team.

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