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## **Position Paper on Transitioning from School to Adult Life**

Students graduate from secondary schools into an adult world in which they will need varying degrees of support in order to live, work, and socialize with their peers, both with and without disabilities. All too often, young adults with disabilities are unprepared to assume adult roles. A limited scope of academic, vocational, and social experiences has led to a limited future that is frequently segregated, lonely, and underproductive.

### **ISSUE**

Although transition planning is mandated by New Jersey administrative code 6:28 to begin when a student reaches age 14, successful transitioning is, in fact, more than a plan, it is a dynamic process. It begins on the first day of preschool and emphasized the child's sense of value and place in the community. Though the law mandates transition planning, the quality of the process varies from district to district. The combined expertise, commitment, and resources of individual school districts and parents determine the quality and outcome of the linkages forged with the people and/or agencies that will provide needed support throughout the student's life. And finally, even with the transition requirements of the New Jersey Administrative Code, the implied promise of a "continuum of services" is not kept. Many programs for adults with disabilities have waiting lists that preclude even the best-prepared students from transitioning into anything but a void.

### **POSITION**

Full integration and participation in the community, in work, home, and leisure, with whatever individualized supports are necessary, should be the goal for every student who is transitioning into adult life. The Arc of New Jersey will encourage secondary schools to design and implement transitioning courses of study based on that goal and will encourage the expansion of supported employment services, individualized housing opportunities, and integrated recreational activities.

**Rites of passage** are defining moments in everyone's lives. For young adults with disabilities the groundwork for transition from school to the adult world must be laid early and well.

**A positive sense of self worth**, as well as personal responsibility, are values that guide the educational process from early childhood on. Students have the right, as well as the responsibility, to be full contributing members of their communities. Teachers and families must challenge the student, rather than merely accommodate him or her.

**Successful transitioning** does not occur in a vacuum. It reaches beyond the school into the community. It includes real life experiences, not simulated ones. It depends upon close knit collaboration among families, educators, adult service providers, and most importantly, the students themselves, all working toward the actualization of a vision of a personal future for the student.

**Vocational and independent living assessments** should identify student preferences and strengths without regard to preconceived limits.

**Assessments** should lead to curricula that will develop student strengths into meaningful vocational and life skills. Standardized evaluations should be enhanced by situational assessments that reflect a broad range of experience, ability, and opportunity.

**Students with disabilities should experience the same daily, seasonal, and yearly rhythms of life as their peers without disabilities.** After school and summer jobs not only open the door to vocational experience and a paycheck, but leave the door open to the students full participation in the social and academic life of secondary school.

**The responsibility for an effective transition process** lies not in the educational system alone. Parents and adult service agencies, both public and private, should be actively involved in the process also. Their inclusion on the "transition team" is essential to break down the walls between school and community, between present and future, and to ensure completion of the process.

**Regular follow up studies of the young adults'** performance after graduation should be conducted, with the results shared on the local and state levels. This will permit evaluation of different approaches to transitioning throughout New Jersey and will encourage replication of successful programs.

Based on the issues presented and guided by the position and fundamental principles, the following recommendations for action are made:

1. The Arc of New Jersey will actively seek funding to support the staff position of Transition Specialists at the state level and at all local Arc chapters. The state Transition Specialist will provide support and technical assistance to the local units as they coordinate school to adult life planning in their counties.
2. One step in such planning will be the formation of local Transition Planning Councils that provide a forum for inter-agency collaboration between the public and private sectors: education, business and industry, government, adult service providers, and community organizations, with an advisory panel of parents and students.
3. The Arc of New Jersey will expand its advocacy efforts to address the issue of waiting lists for the jobs, training programs, and homes that adults with disabilities need in order to fulfill the promise of their youth.
4. Since transition planning in New Jersey is in its early stages, no systematic study has been conducted of programs and their aftermath. The Arc of New Jersey will encourage the interested divisions of state government (DSE, DDD, DVR) to conduct follow up studies of graduates and to disseminate information about transition programs that work.
5. The Arc of New Jersey will work with other interested organizations and agencies to research the experiences of other states that are further along in the implementation of transition planning in order to make available to New Jersey students the current, best practices throughout the country.
6. Transition planning should emphasize employment, not day programs, as a desired outcome and The Arc of New Jersey will actively seek the cooperation of business and industry in providing jobs. The Arc of New Jersey will publicize the various tax incentives available to employers and will disseminate information on the proven advantages to employers of hiring workers with developmental disabilities.

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