



Blueprint for Success

A Strategic Workforce Policy Framework for Youth Job Seekers with Disabilities

Preparing America's youth for a successful transition to lifelong careers encourages policymakers and administrators to establish a robust framework to cultivate opportunities for youth by recognizing these two guiding notions:

1. All youth, regardless of disability, benefit from opportunities, services, and support tailored to their individual needs.
2. Policies and practices must provide full access to high-quality services in the community that foster educational, employment, and career development opportunities leading to independent living and financial self-sufficiency.

The Blueprint for Success builds upon the research-based framework of the Guideposts for Success 2.0: A Framework for Successful Youth Transition to Adulthood, initially developed in 2005 and updated in 2019. This framework establishes the idea that strong public policy and practice should:

- Increase opportunities for youth and young adults with disabilities (Y&YAD) to engage in various career development activities as they prepare to transition from school.
- Ensure Y&YAD have access to postsecondary education and training programs that promote informed decision-making and lead to employment.
- Require the systems supporting youth (e.g., workforce, vocational rehabilitation, and education) to coordinate all youth transition-related programs, services, and strategies.
- Establish state and local priorities to increase employment outcomes of transition-age Y&YAD.
- Determine an evaluation methodology, including the data needed, to measure the impact of agency programs and services and ensure the use of evidence-based practices.¹

The Blueprint for Success highlights the five evidence-based components of service delivery leading to successful transitions to lifelong careers. These domains include:

- 1. School-based preparatory experiences**
- 2. Career preparation and work-based learning**
- 3. Youth development and leadership**
- 4. Connecting activities and services**
- 5. Family engagement**



Broadly, the blueprint requires strong collaboration and connections across youth-serving systems, including secondary and postsecondary education, career and technical education, vocational rehabilitation, mental health services, developmental disability services, healthcare services, and other social services.

1. School-based preparatory experiences

The successful transition into lifelong careers begins with the educational environment. As policymakers, it is critical to ensure this foundation is set by developing school-based preparatory experiences that include rigorous and relevant academic and program options aligned with local industry needs, a safe, supportive learning climate and environment, and access to effective educators.

2. Career preparation and work-based learning

As youth and young adults look to the future, the world of careers can be overwhelming. Young people benefit from timely and diverse career preparation and work-based learning opportunities. Policymakers have a current legislative construct to ensure each youth has exposure to career preparation and work-based learning experiences, such as job shadowing, internships, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and summer work experiences. Work-based learning should prepare students with the skills needed by today's employers.

3. Youth development and leadership

Communities benefit when policymakers design and develop service frameworks that provide youth with opportunities to develop self-determination and leadership, self-advocacy, and social skills. Leadership can be defined as "influence,"² which is gained through integrity, creating positive change, problem-solving, attitude, vision, and self-discipline. Policymakers can foster opportunities to help Y&YAD develop into leaders through participating in youth leadership forums, student councils, and other advocacy and advisory groups. Young people are our future leaders.



4. Connecting activities and services

The needs of Y&YAD can vary over the course of a career pathway journey, including supportive services and supports (i.e., food, transportation, healthcare), education, employment, and housing. Often, the support needed to navigate access to these services is limited or does not exist. Y&YAD need bridges between core services (i.e., workforce, education, and vocational programs) and support. Policymakers are the bridge builders for today's youth. Connections are needed across general health care, mental health, benefits counseling, financial literacy, recreational activities, and life skills education to promote a future of independence and lifelong careers.

5. Family engagement

The importance of families – including parents, guardians, caregivers, extended family, and others, including mentors, allies, coaches, and friends – in the lives of Y&YAD is critical in the transition process. These systems often take an individualized approach to service delivery, but there is growing evidence for the need for a holistic family approach. To this end, policymakers should embrace an approach to service delivery that instructs family members on setting high expectations, being involved in their young person's education, helping their young person build strong advocacy skills, and creating a vision for a positive future for the Y&YAD. This should be done while supporting their Y&YAD's development of self-determination.

Endnotes

1. National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability. (2019). *Guideposts for Success 2.0: A Framework for Successful Youth Transition to Adulthood*. U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy.
2. Maxwell, J.C. (1993). *Developing the leader within you*. Thomas Nelson.