Youth and Adult Transition Systems Collaboration

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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CAPE-Youth

CENTER FOR ADVANCING POLICY
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About CAPE-Youth

The Center for Advancing Policy on Employment for Youth's (CAPE-Youth) mission is to advance inclusive policy-oriented research and provide state-focused technical assistance to enhance systems capacity, service delivery, and employment outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities nationally. CAPE-Youth is a collaboration between the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, The Council of State Governments, the K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University, the Interwork Institute at San Diego State University, and the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals.

Executive Summary

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014) created requirements for collaboration among core workforce partners (e.g., workforce, Vocational Rehabilitation [VR], and education), but challenges remain for effective collaboration at the state and local levels. Challenges exist not only for core WIOA partners, but also *between* workforce and other key systems such as developmental disability, mental health, social security, juvenile justice, child welfare, and postsecondary education. While interagency collaboration is a recommended practice to support transition from high school to adulthood for youth or young adults with disabilities (Y&YAD), we need to identify characteristics that underlie successful collaborations.

The research team conducted a nationwide study to identify the policies, practices, and processes that underlie strong collaborations. This study assessed the relationships of required WIOA partners and other key systems mentioned above. We asked the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What are existing levels of interagency collaboration among agencies serving transitioning youth and young adults with disabilities?

RQ2: What common elements are shared among states exhibiting success in coordinating services across VR, workforce, education, juvenile justice, foster care, social security, developmental disability, mental health, and other systems?

RQ3: What agency characteristics and practices underlie interagency collaboration in achieving transition and employment outcomes for Y&YAD?

RQ4: How do respondents perceive that their levels of collaboration have been affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and financial downturn?

Methods: The study had two phases, described in more detail in the Methodology section. In Phase 1 we developed a new survey, titled "Youth and Adult Systems Collaboration Survey" (YACS), and asked supervisory and frontline staff from all U.S. states and territories to respond. The YACS combined the "Levels of Collaboration Scale" (LCS) measure (Frey et

al., 2006) with five new subscales: (a) collaboration frequency, (b) partner knowledge, (c) collaboration quality, (d) data use and sharing, and (e) impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. After checking the quality of the responses, the team tested the relationship between survey results and state VR outcomes for employment and skill attainment. In Phase 2 of the study we selected 10 states, one per federal agency administrative region (Office of Management and Budget, 1969), with high scores on the YACS to participate in focus group interviews. The focus group interviews explored barriers to and facilitators of successful collaborations and specific practices for coordinating services across youth-serving agencies.

Results: Three hundred thirty-eight people from across the nation filled out the YACS. For the focus group interviews, 64 people from nine states participated. Findings from the focus group interviews confirmed many of these survey results.

RQ1: For RQ1, results showed an average nationwide level of collaboration score of 1.90, a score closest to "Cooperation" (2). Agencies collaborating at this level provide information to one another, have somewhat defined roles, and some formal communication, but make decisions separately. These results also showed on average across all levels of agencies that VR, Social Security Administration, and developmental disability agencies collaborated more with each other than with juvenile justice, Title II workforce, and higher education.

RQ2: Qualitative content analysis of focus group interviews identified four primary themes: formality, information and resource sharing, communication, and youth empowerment. Results suggested a high *interdependence* between collaboration and objectives of youth self-determination and case coordination. Some of the primary strategies outlined included the development of formal interagency agreements (e.g., Memoranda of Understanding, Data Sharing Agreements) at both state *and* local levels, cross-training opportunities, and braided positions that focus on building understanding and awareness across agencies and increasing informal points of contact, policy efforts to address service gaps in eligibility determinations, referrals, and resource sharing.

RQ3: Researchers ran a simple correlation analysis between the YACS and VR outcomes to explore the relationship between collaboration features and transition/employment outcomes for Y&YAD. Collaboration correlated moderately with employment but not with skill attainment.

RQ4: Four out of every five survey respondents indicated they collaborated differently as a result of the pandemic. In the future, agencies will continue to offer hybrid services and use more online meetings with collaborators.

Policy recommendations:

- Implement formal frameworks for communication with other agencies at both the state and local level.

- Expand One Stop Centers to include non-core programs to address collaboration gaps between VR, workforce, and agencies that are more peripheral to service networks (e.g., juvenile justice).

- Cross-train agencies on one another's service offerings, application processes, and desired outcomes.

References

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