

# **Transition Services in Mississippi for Persons with Developmental Disabilities: An Examination of Program Availability, Comprehensiveness, Satisfaction, and Outcomes**

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the current status of transition services for persons with developmental disabilities and their families in the state of Mississippi. The article further provides a measure of the impact of these services and the degree of satisfaction expressed by those stakeholders most directly affected by them. In essence, the data in this study forms a picture of the baseline conditions of such services as they exist on a statewide basis. Recommendations for policy and

practice in regard to the development and delivery of quality transition services for persons with developmental disabilities and their families are provided.

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The role of all professionals in the field of special education involves the primary focus of responding effectively to the comprehensive needs of persons with disabilities and their families. Those needs include specialized and personal advocacy, self-determination, normalized living and working arrangements, and functional, individualized education and training. This study focuses on one of those needs, transition training and services. Specifically, this article examines such services via a survey of the extent and depth of vocational and community transition services for persons with developmental disabilities in the state of Mississippi. In order to maximize access and opportunities for persons with developmental disabilities and their families to achieve the “good life,” philosophy, policy, and practice in our profession must, necessarily come into congruence with this goal.

Wolfensberger (1984) provided an outline of what the “good life” for persons with developmental disabilities would look like. While Wolfensberger’s picture was essentially focused on the spiritual side of a person’s existence, its basic premises hold credence for all aspects life for persons with developmental disabilities and their families. Expanding on Wolfensberger’s propositions, the “good life” for persons with developmental disabilities would include:

- the ability to choose for oneself
- supportive relationships from others including, family, friends, professionals, and advocates
- valued membership in a community
- abundant participation in the “Human Experience”

Similar characteristics of the “good life” were also identified and expanded upon in the 2008 Presidential Address of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (Rotholz, 2009) and Public Law 108-446, *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (2004).

With these aspects of the “good life” in mind, the need for extensive, effective, and comprehensive transition services for persons with developmental disabilities becomes paramount. Indeed, since the establishment of Public Law 94-142, *The Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975*, through the passage of Public Law 98-199, *The Education of the Handicapped Amendments of 1983*, to the most recent incarnation of national disability law, Public Law 108-446, *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004*, transition and transition-related services have been a federal and state mandate (Turnbull, Stowe, & Huerta, 2007).

In this study, the authors collected information from a wide variety of sources across the state to obtain a perspective on the nature of transition services for persons with developmental disabilities in Mississippi. This data form a baseline (Baer, Wolf, & Risley 1968; 1987; Hall, 1972) from which policy development and program planning can be initiated. The data included survey responses from teachers of persons with developmental disabilities in the public schools, state centers, supported employment workshops, and group homes. Program administrators in the public schools and state centers were also surveyed, as were individuals involved in workforce development at the community colleges of Mississippi. Finally, parents of individuals with

developmental disabilities were surveyed concerning their perceptions of the extent, adequacy, and their satisfaction with the transition services their children were receiving or had received.

The data was compiled across all respondents and, additionally, organized across the various categories of respondents (Mann, J. W., Blackbourn, Mann, & Scafiti, 1997; Mann, M. P., Blackbourn, & Scafiti, 2003). These data are presented in the results section of this report and yield both an overall picture of the nature of statewide transition services and the extent and depth of those transition services provided by different organizations across the state. A summary of the research findings and suggested recommendations for program planning and policy development based on the data are provided in the final section of the report. Further, the Summary and Recommendation sections draw on work from the affective domain, including social psychology, descriptive psychology, and postmodern philosophy to provide a perspective on “what actually happens” (Ossorio, 2005) in the lives of persons with developmental disabilities and their families in their “real world” interactions as they strive for the “good life” and to provide a means for actually impacting their lives in a positive manner.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants in this study consisted of several discrete groups of stakeholders involved with persons who possess developmental disabilities. These stakeholders included special education administrators in the public schools and in regional centers for persons with developmental disabilities and teachers of persons with developmental disabilities in both the public schools and the regional centers. Participants also included administrative and instructional personnel from vocational rehabilitation centers involved in serving persons with developmental disabilities. An additional group of participants in the study included those administrators at state community colleges, who oversee either workforce development or academic programs. The final group of participants included parents of individuals with developmental disabilities. Participants were randomly selected from each discrete group to receive survey instruments focusing on transition services provided to persons with developmental disabilities.

### **Instruments**

The instruments employed in this study were designed to elicit information concerning the nature of transition services for persons with developmental disabilities across the state of Mississippi. The surveys followed a general format and formed a foundation for surveys, which were designed specifically for each category of participants. This individualization of survey instruments for each category of participants allowed each group (e.g. administrators, teachers, parents) to express their perceptions related to the nature of transition services with which they were involved.

The survey instruments were developed and validated in collaboration with faculty at four different universities with expertise in psychometrics, measurement, and assessment. Validation was established through a pilot study, structured interview, and direct observation of transition programs and services. No data collected in the pilot study was included in the data presented in

the results section of the study. Validity for the survey instruments was in the high-moderate range (between .93 -.81) indicating that the instruments were yielding meaningful data related to the extent and depth of transition services for persons with developmental disabilities.

## Procedures

The surveys in this study were initially mailed out to the randomly selected individuals within each of the specified groups in September of 2010. While a target of 30 identified respondents for each specified group was the optimum, some groups were limited in number due to small overall populations or organizational structure. A follow-up mailing was initiated to all non-respondents in each group in December of 2010. The number of respondents in each randomly selected groups, return rates, and percentage of returns are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

### *Breakdown of Survey Respondents by Category with Return Rates*

Group	<i>n</i>	Respondents (1 <sup>st</sup> mailing)	Respondents (2 <sup>nd</sup> mailing)	Percentage of Return
<b>Teachers</b>				
Public School	30	17	11	93%
State Centers	30	30	0	100%
Rehabilitation Centers	30	23	4	90%
<b>Administrators</b>				
Public School	30	14	10	80%
State Centers	5	5	0	100%
Rehabilitation Centers	10	7	3	100%
Community Colleges	20	2	1	15%
<b>Parents</b>				
Public School	30	22	6	93%
State Centers	30	19	7	87%
Rehabilitation Centers	30	15	9	80%

Return rates following the second mailing were adequate across all categories except one. Administrators at the community college level generally failed to respond to the provided survey.

Data for each of the general categories were aggregated to reflect the overall nature and extent of transition services available statewide. The data were further disaggregated, by each of the subcategories listed above, to provide a comparison between the extent and nature of the transition services provided by the various organizations included in the study. Quality measures related to transition services were also measured via the surveys by focusing on responses provided by the consumers of those services (e.g. parent survey). Analysis of all data collected is provided in the Results and Summary sections.

## **Results**

The results of this study are presented across the major participant categories (e.g. administrators, teachers, and parents) provided on the survey instruments. Within each major participant category set, the primary response items are listed. Further, the subcategories (e.g. public school, community college, etc.) of each major participant category are presented separately. Quality measures (from the Parent Survey only) make up the final portion of the Results section and present data in a format similar to that outlined above. This format provides both an overall picture of the nature and extent of transition services in Mississippi and the degree of “customer satisfaction” (Deming, 1993) with such services. Percentages of responses are the primary data presentation mode. Means values of the provided responses are employed where percentages are not used.

The data from administrators as presented in Table 2 revealed both similarities in response rates for many items, yet responses to several items indicated widely differing perspectives and conditions related to the response items across the different organizations.

Table 2

*Breakdown of Administrator Survey Responses by Item Across Subcategories*

Item	Public Schools	State Centers	Rehabilitation Programs
Average # of Students with Developmental Disorders Served Annually	26	152	19
Age/Grade Level When IEP's Begin to Reflect Transition Programming	14	Preschool	16
Transition Services Offered for Non-inclusion Students			
Building-to Building	100%		
Center-to-Workshop		100%	
Work Activity			100%
School-to-Work	62%		
Center-to-Community		100%	
Workshop-to-Employment		100%	100%
School-to-College	3%		
Workshop-to-Employment			
Issues that Inhibit Successful Transition			
Lack of Transportation	55%	60%	30%
Lack of Appropriately Trained Personnel	83%	80%	70%
Lack of Employment Placements	41%	60%	40%
Lack of Appropriate Housing	11%	20%	10%
Lack of Interagency Support	9%	20%	10%
Lack of Interagency Resources	36%	40%	40%
Lack of "Wrap Around" Services	81%	60%	60%
Difficulties with Interagency Cooperation	47%	20%	10%
Existing Barriers to Successful Transition			
Lack of Jobs	60%	50%	
No Industry	67%	40%	40%
Poor/Nonexistent Public Transportation	76%	80%	70%
Supports Necessary to Enhance Transition			
Financial Resources	100%	100%	100%
Cooperation from Business Community	100%	80%	60%
Achievable Life Situations for Persons with Developmental Disabilities			
Supported Employment	100%	100%	100%
Competitive Employment	15%	60%	55%
Live with Family	100%	100%	100%
Live in a Supervised Setting	100%	100%	100%
Live Semi-independently	48%	80%	70%
Live Independently	14%	40%	35%
Utilize Community Services	36%	88%	91%

Open-ended response items and comment sections yielded additional data of a qualitative nature and explanatory information related to the more objective items. Commonalities among the various administrative respondents included:

- the need for training of personnel in methods and procedures specifically related to vocational and community transition,
- the need for consultants with expertise specific to developing and implementing transition programs and services for persons with developmental disabilities,
- the need for increased funding for transition programs and services,
- a pervasive lack of employment placements for persons with developmental disabilities and a greater degree of cooperation from employers, and
- a lack of transition services that “wrap around” persons with developmental disabilities and their families.

Administrators, across the board, cited the poor economy for the lack of job placements. Additionally, in terms of employer cooperation, though business owners/managers felt great empathy and support for persons with developmental disabilities, they were concerned with “taking jobs from the average person who has to support their family,” “the job requirements are beyond the capability of a person with developmental disabilities,” and/or “the amount of training/supervision required for a worker with developmental disabilities would make hiring them prohibitive.”

All administrative respondents also cited the need for “transition specific training” as a critical need to support and expand such programs for persons with developmental disabilities. The perspective of these respondents was that higher education programs that trained special educators (both administrative and instructional personnel) focused on persons with mild disabilities and how to provide interventions which would help school districts “raise their test scores” and that persons with undergraduate (and even graduate) degrees in special education required extensive staff development to provide appropriate, effective transition services to their students. This concern also related to the lack of available support from qualified consultants to support transition programmatic and service efforts. This problem was especially true of public school administrator responses.

Administrative personnel surveyed also expressed concern about a lack of transition services that completely encompassed persons with developmental disabilities and their families. Comments focused on gaps in services (especially after age 21) and services that were overburdened and had waiting lists (and a long wait) for services. The concern was especially apparent in the public school administrative respondents.

Finally, there was a consistent feeling among all administrative personnel surveyed that funding specific to transition programming for persons with developmental disabilities was woefully inadequate. Given the “labor intensive” approach necessary to conduct successful transition for persons with developmental disabilities, greater financial support was a prime requirement for improving such services.

The major differences in responses across the different type of administrator surveyed related to 1) the types of transition services provided, 2) the nature of the developmental disabilities populations served, and 3) the perceptions of administrators concerning the ability of persons with developmental disabilities to a) be successful in competitive employment situations and b) live

independently in the community. While both state centers and rehabilitation programs reported providing community transition services, the public schools did not. All respondents reported vocational transition as a service offered. The public schools further reported providing building-to-building transition as well as school to college transition.

Responses of teachers involved with students who possessed developmental disabilities tended to reflect those expressed by administrators who responded to the survey. However, levels of concern expressed by teachers tended to be somewhat higher than those of administrative respondents as shown in Table 3.



Table 3

*Breakdown of Teacher Survey Responses by Item Across Subcategories*

Item	Public Schools	State Centers	Rehabilitation Program
Percentage of Students Receiving Daily Transition Services	39%	100%	100%
Age/Grade Levels of Students Served	9-21	Preschool-Adult	16-Adult
Expected Outcomes For Special Education Program Completers			
Supported Employment	79%	82%	85%
Competitive Employment	6%	57%	33%
Live with Family	100%	100%	100%
Live in a Supervised Setting	77%	100%	91%
Live Semi-independently	33%	57%	63%
Live Independently	0%	36%	39%
Utilize Community Services	88%	100%	100%
Factors that Inhibit Successful Transition			
Lack of Transportation	81%	33%	30%
Lack of Appropriate Training	82%	85%	79%
Lack of Employment Places	41%	60%	40%
Lack of Appropriate Housing	12%	21%	12%
Lack of Interagency Support	9%	21%	18%
Lack of Interagency Resources	36%	36%	33%
Lack of "Wrap Around" Services	79%	45%	39%
Difficulties with Interagency Cooperation	47%	12%	12%
Existing Barriers to Successful Transition			
Lack of Jobs	79%	60%	51%
No Industry	67%	41%	41%
Poor/Nonexistent Public Transportation	84%	87%	72%
Difficulties with Interagency Cooperation	66%	15%	12%
Supports Necessary to Enhance Transition			
Financial Resources	100%	100%	100%
Cooperation from Business Community	100%	72%	60%
Appropriate Training	91%	82%	85%
Help Working with Business/Industry	71%	66%	33%
Help Developing Job Sites	91%	66%	30%

This difference is likely due to the fact that teachers were "in the trenches" daily and had to deal directly with issues that administrators faced only in a "tangential" manner. Those issues identified by teachers tended toward practical, everyday problems that involved the actual practice of applying

transition techniques and procedures to improve the functional abilities their students to participate effectively in the community and work settings.

While the lack of appropriate training, appropriate job placements, adequate funding, effective consultant support, and services that provided a comprehensive web of transition support for persons with developmental disabilities and their families were also identified as critical issues in the delivery (albeit at a higher level than administrative respondents), teachers also identified the following factors as being in need of serious consideration and attention:

- available transition-related transportation,
- greater cooperation and support from the business community,
- support in working collaboratively with the business community,
- support in developing job sites, and
- greater interagency cooperation.

It is important to note that teachers in the public schools expressed more concern over the factors listed above than did teachers who worked in state centers or rehabilitation programs. Several reasons could be cited for this difference. Those are presented and discussed in the Summary & Recommendations section.

Data collected from administrators at the community college level was extremely limited. Only 15% of those community college administrators surveyed chose to respond to the instrument after two mailings. This fact in itself is a significant finding, which will be discussed in depth in the Summary and Recommendation section. While the rate of return is far below the acceptable level necessary to draw meaningful conclusions, the data (and a deconstruction of the behavior and responses of the respondents) in Table 4 do allow for the identification possible factors and issues important to this group of individuals.

Table 4

*Breakdown of Community College Survey Responses by Item*

Item	Community College
Average # of Students with Developmental Disabilities Served Annually	2
Types of Disabilities Served	
Cerebral Palsy	100%
Transition Services Offered for Students	
Criteria for Admission to Vocational Training Programs	None
Workforce Development Programs Available	100%
Programs Available to Students with Developmental Disabilities	None
Criteria for Admission to Vocational Training Programs	
Admission to Institution	100%
Adequate Performance in Academic Prerequisite Courses	100%
Competitive Selection of Program Participants by Program Faculty	100%
Issues that Might Inhibit Successful Transition	
Lack of Transportation	100%
Lack of Appropriately Trained Personnel	100%
Lack of Employment Placements	67%
Lack of Appropriate Housing	100%
Lack of Interagency Transition Resources	100%
Barriers to Successful Transition of Persons With Developmental Disabilities into Your Institution	
Preparation and Prerequisite Skills for College Level Academics	100%
Supports Necessary to Enhance Transition	
Financial Resources	100%
Cooperation from Business Community	100%
Specially Trained Transition Instructors	100%
Specially Trained Transition Program Coordinator	100%
Achievable Life Situations for Persons with Developmental Disabilities	
Supported Employment	100%
Competitive Employment	0%
Live with Family	100%
Live in a Supervised Setting	100%
Live Semi-independently	67%
Live Independently	0%

Among those potential issues/factors identified are:

- the low number and limited categorical labels of students with developmental disabilities served in community college settings,

- the complete absence of any type of program at the community college level to which persons with developmental disabilities might have access,
- the intense focus on academic performance and traditional coursework as the criterion for inclusion in vocationally oriented programs, and
- the significantly lower expectation levels of achievable life outcomes for persons with developmental disabilities in comparison to other respondents.

The parent survey was unique among the instruments employed for data collection in this study, in that quality measures (measures of satisfaction) were incorporated. The rationale for this singular feature was that consumers of transition services (e.g. persons with developmental disabilities and their families) are best situated to evaluate the quality of those services. Satisfaction levels were reported utilizing a 7-point Likert Scale with “7” being “Extremely Satisfied,” “4” being “Neutral,” and “1” being “Totally Dissatisfied.” Otherwise, the parental survey reflected factors and issues similar to those included on the other survey instruments and were therefore reported in a similar manner, as percentages. The data from the parental survey are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*Breakdown of Parent Survey Responses by Item Across Subcategories*

Item	Public School	State Center	Rehabilitation Program
Average Age of Children	13	17	16
Types of Disabilities			
Autistic Spectrum	33%	56%	21%
Cognitive Impairment	67%	44%	79%
Weekly Transition Services	36%	100%	100%
Primary Agency Providing Transition Services	36%	33%	32%
Overall Satisfaction with Services	3.2 (3.1)	5.8	6.1
Expected Outcomes for Children With Developmental Disabilities			
Supported Employment	79%	82%	85%
Competitive Employment	71%	77%	81%
Live with Family	100%	100%	100%
Live in a Supervised Setting	88%	100%	100%
Live Semi-independently	82%	88%	91%
Live Independently	56%	67%	67%
Utilize Community Services	82%	96%	91%
Enter Post-Secondary Vocational Training Programs	76%	67%	79%
Factors that Inhibit Successful Transition			
Transportation	81%	33%	30%
Lack of Appropriate Training	96%	66%	60%
Lack of Employment Places	91%	60%	66%
Lack of Appropriate Housing	33%	16%	36%
Difficulties with Service Agency Cooperation	77%	21%	15%
Lack of Collaborative Planning	96%	21%	18%
Lack of Self-Advocacy and Futures Planning	96%	15%	15%
Satisfaction with Types of Services			
Transportation	3.4	6.1	6.1
Professional Training	2.3	4.7	4.2
Available Vocational Placements	4.2	4.8	4.5
Available Living Arrangements	3.8	5.1	4.8
Service Agency Cooperation	3.3	5.9	6.3
Degree of Collaborative Planning	1.6	5.5	5.9
Self-Advocacy and Futures	1.5	6.1	6.0
Supports Necessary to Enhance Transition			
Financial Resources	100%	100%	100%
Cooperation from Professional Personnel	91%	12%	18%
Appropriate Training	91%	67%	61%
"Wrap Around" Transition Services	82%	21%	24%

A consistent and noticeable feature of parental survey respondents was that parents whose child with developmental disabilities was served by the public schools consistently expressed lower levels of satisfaction with transition services than those parents whose child was served in rehabilitation programs or by state centers for persons with developmental disabilities. These respondents expressed significantly higher levels of dissatisfaction with their involvement in planning for their child's future, planning for their child's self-determination, and the degree of input, collaboration, and cooperation they experienced when working with public school professionals. Additionally, the expectations of parents of children with developmental disabilities, with respect to achievable life outcomes, were higher than any other group of survey respondents.

Otherwise, responses by parents of children with developmental disabilities were similar to those of other respondent groups, in that the critical issues and factors identified were consistent. Parents, like teachers and administrators, listed lack of appropriate transition training, lack of "Wrap Around" transition services, a lack of qualified, experienced transition consultants, low levels of funding specifically for transition services, and a lack of appropriate job placement sites.

### **Summary & Recommendations**

The findings of this study indicate several significant factors (and specific features of those factors) that must be considered in the development and implementation of policy and programs designed to positively impact the extent, depth, and quality of transition services for persons with developmental disabilities and their families. These factors involve issues of transition practice, infrastructure improvement, program support, professional training, and both organizational and community culture. This section of the report is organized around a format in which each major factor identified in the study is delineated, addressed, and associated with one or more recommendations for policy and practice.

One of the primary issues identified in this study is the need for professional training and professional support related to the design, development, and delivery of effective transition services for persons with developmental disabilities. This factor was identified by most of the respondents across all groups surveyed. Even the limited number of respondents to the community college survey identified the need for appropriately trained personnel (program instructors and program coordinators) as a requisite condition for the delivery and management of transition services to persons with developmental disabilities. Other program administrators, teachers in the different organizations represented, and parents (regardless of the organization that served their children), also rated the need for professional training of teachers and support of those individuals via highly qualified transition consultants as a critical need. While the responses of administrators focused mainly on the availability of appropriate training, teachers and parents additionally identified the need for effective support in relation to 1) developing job sites, 2) working effectively with the business community, 3) developing cooperative relationships with employers, and 4) integrating and infusing transition practices into curriculum. These four issues relate not only to professional training, but serve to emphasize the need for qualified instructional and consultant services. Based on these data the following recommendations are warranted:

- Develop and support university teacher training programs, which specifically address developmental disabilities and emphasize vocational and community transition. Most

Special Education/Disability Studies at Mississippi's institutions of higher learning focus on students with mild disabilities and how to enhance their academic content performance and test taking skills (with respect to state and federal regulations regarding student outcomes and state mandated test performance). While these university programs have courses and curricula which may address transition and moderate to severe disabilities, survey respondents indicate that what is available is not sufficient for professional personnel to meet the needs of persons with developmental disabilities and their families.

- Establish regional professional consultant services related to enhance vocational and community transition programs for persons with developmental disabilities. Respondents, particularly those providing transition services, overwhelmingly expressed a critical need for qualified support to provide quality transition services. Regional consultant services could be established within the boundaries of each of the state's congressional districts and associated with university special education programs, state regional centers, and/or university affiliated programs. It is the suggestion of these authors that the congressional districts prior to the 2000 U.S. Census be employed in implementing this recommendation. Prior to the 2000 U.S. Census, the State of Mississippi had 5 congressional districts. As of this writing, the state of Mississippi has 4 (much larger) congressional districts. Employing the previous model would reduce travel and prevent consultants being "spread too thin" among a higher number of transition programs.
- Select consultants from among a group of individuals who have extensive experience working with persons who have developmental disabilities and provide them with additional staff development related to: 1) the nature and operation of exemplary transition programs for persons with developmental disabilities; and 2) those empirically validated "best practices" employed by professional personnel in these programs.

The importance of addressing the issues is apparent when one considers, not only the high rate at which they were identified by survey respondents, but in the lack of parental satisfaction (especially among parents whose child was served in public school programs) with existing transition services. Indeed, the low levels of parental satisfaction related to available transition services are reflected in current research (Neece, Kraemer, & Blacher, 2009). The recommendations hold the potential to positively impacting transition programs across the state and thereby improving stakeholder satisfaction.

A second major factor identified by survey respondents involved issues related to job placement and vocational training for persons with developmental disabilities. All groups of respondents identified a lack of appropriate job placements and a lack of available transportation as critical issues impeding effective transition. Teachers further expressed concern over their lack of knowledge, skills, and training on how to: 1) develop job sites, 2) work cooperative relationships with employers, and 3) work effectively with the business community.

While these issues are related to the training issues listed previously, they also reflect both current economic conditions and social factors embedded within our culture. Meyen and Skrtic (1978) note that even in the best of economic conditions the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities is much higher than that in the general population. The authors also state that in times

of economic duress, people with disabilities are among the first to lose their jobs. Additionally, employers consider potential workers from the perspective of their capability to perform a specific job and the degree of training necessary to establish that capability (Clark & Kolestoe, 1992). Even in regard to vocational transition placements, this process is operational. The lack of available placements is therefore, at least partially, related to perceptions of “competence.”

A further feature mentioned, but also related is the noticeable lack (especially in rural communities) of available transportation to and from job placements. The situation therefore is, even if quality transition programs are implemented (including appropriate employment sites), without available transportation services persons with developmental disabilities may not be able to achieve full participation in the vocational aspect of life. Recommendations related to the already identified issues include:

- incorporation of collaborative futures and intervention planning among professionals, parents, and potential employers which emphasize general requisite vocational and life skills as early as possible in the program continuing until pre-adolescence, job sampling activities and the development of critical skills related to each potential job placement during adolescence, and ongoing, on-site training of those skills necessary to success in each placement and
- infrastructure development that will increase access to training and employment sites for persons with developmental disabilities.

Within these recommendations, several parental respondents reported what they perceived to be a lack of access to participate in their child’s IEP development. The comment, “The IEP is already filled out when I came to the meeting and all the school wants me to do is sign it” frequently occurred. Comments such as, “They don’t want my input” or “My ideas don’t matter” also were common. Many parents expressed frustration that the IEP’s focused only on academics and did not include skills that might help their child work or live away from their family. This finding is particularly disturbing in that Neece, Kramer et al. (2009) identified parental involvement in the transition planning process as one of the most critical factors in successful vocational and community transition. Future planning is a critical issue to parents in this and other studies (Chou, Lee, Lin, Kroger, & Chang, 2009; Hong, Seltzer, & Krauss, 2001) and will remain so given the extended life spans that persons with developmental disabilities are currently experiencing.

An additional widespread issue identified by survey respondents was a need to increase funding for transition programs across the state. Indeed, almost all respondents to the survey, regardless of the group or subgroup to which they belonged, rated this as a most important factor in developing and supporting transition programs for persons with developmental disabilities. Given the current economic situation in the state and nation, any significant increase in support monies is unlikely unless extremely creative approaches are employed (Gold, 1980). Among these could be:

- Legislation that targets transition support (and possibly vocational transition placements) with retail sales should be developed. For example, in the 1980’s and 1990’s the state of Iowa implemented legislation involving bottle and can recycling on a statewide basis. Money generated from a deposit on cans and bottles sold on the state was used as the “seed monies” to begin recycling programs located in local grocery stores. Though the deposit was refunded when the cans and bottles were returned,



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monies gained from the recycling center's sale of glass, plastic, and aluminum (and from deposits on unreturned bottles and cans) was used to operate the program. Aside for a supervisor/job coach, all workers in the recycling center were persons with developmental disabilities. This was a superb example of creative policy and legislation implementation to address transition support. An associated positive outcome was that several persons with developmental disabilities eventually moved from working for the recycling center to employment in the associated grocery store (T. Kelly, Personal Communication, September 18, 1987).

- Curricular reform in programs for persons with developmental disabilities to reflect best practices in exemplary transition programs should be initiated. This would necessarily require that academics would be "functional" in relation to vocational and community transition and not necessarily reflective of state standards, but of individual student needs. It would also necessarily focus on reducing the amount of "in school/seat time" in a classroom for persons with developmental disabilities and increasing the amount of time spent in vocational placements.
- Legislation that supports the community and vocational training of persons with developmental disabilities in a manner commensurate with that of persons who receive either a traditional or occupational diploma needs to be developed.

While each of these recommendations is worthy of serious consideration, the final recommendation deserves additional comment.

Currently, students with developmental disabilities who are not included in programs that lead either to a traditional or occupational diploma (as are many persons with developmental disabilities) are categorized as "Non-Completers" within the parameters of both their school district and the Mississippi Department of Education. While this "label" may describe the students' educational experiences in relation to the established curriculum, mandated test performance, and state standards, it also accurately reflects the perception of persons with developmental disabilities within much of society as a whole and within educational systems in general. Wolfensberger (1972; 1999; 2001) repeatedly speaks to the need to advocate in thought, word, and deed for individuals and groups who are devalued by society and its institutions. Wolfensberger himself refused to use the term "disabled" due to it being a "demeaning" descriptor, because its literal meaning is "not able."

The "Non-Completers" title is more than a category. It is a value judgment concerning persons with developmental disabilities on what they can achieve, and the value of their accomplishments. When test scores and AYP are the benchmark (and the "be all, end all") for schools, what need is there for exemplary community and vocational transition to exist? The performance and progress of students in such programs are not measured, so why commit valuable resources to their development and maintenance? Indeed, the responses of those surveyed (particularly those in administrative roles) as to the ability of persons with developmental disabilities to "effectively access community resources," "live independently" or "semi-independently" in the community, and work in a "competitive employment" situation indicates the "devalued" status of persons with developmental disabilities. The complete lack of post-secondary transition services and programs for persons with developmental disabilities at the community college level (though there is federal monies and interest in developing and implementing such programs) and the low rate of survey return from this group further reflect this position. Romano

(2011) stated, “The greatest barrier to employing people with disabilities is one of closed minds—not because of malevolence but because of fear of change, lack of information, and lack of belief in every person’s value” (p.4).

The nature, extent, and quality of transition programs is therefore limited by both our perceptions of persons with developmental disabilities and our own ability to adapt our programs, procedures, policy, and philosophy to *their* needs. We expect persons with developmental disabilities to adapt themselves to our programs as they exist, even though, by definition their functional adaptive behavior is low, while those of us with high levels of functional adaptive skills refuse to change our own behavior to better meet their needs (Gold, 1972). Indeed, Gold (1972) suggested that we “forget an adaptive behavior checklist for person with disabilities, but rather develop and use one for ourselves” (p. 68).

Much of our failure to provide adequate transition services is due to our perceived low expectations for persons with developmental disabilities (Gold, 1972; Sarason & Doris, 1979; Smart, 2009) and our perceptions of “competence” in persons with developmental disabilities (Ossorio, 1995; 1998; 2006). These authors remind us that expectation drives performance and that competent performance determines our “place” in our own world and the world of others (Shideler, 1998). Without a “place” in the world a person’s behavior potential (ability to act) is severely limited.

Since we expect persons with development disabilities to have certain limitations, our expectations have created a cycle in which we provide education/training that seldom pushes them beyond those perceived limitations. The result is a system of *Progressive Status Quoism* (Farber & Lewis, 1968), in which the impression is given that a great effort is being expended to solve a societal problem, but in actuality, the problem is not being addressed at all.

Further, our expectations are based on our perceptions of competence (in this case “competence” is a person’s ability to produce and engage in the accepted social practices of any given group, community, or culture). Competence is therefore developed by interacting with other persons in a world of persons and learning the accepted social practices through interaction and experience. In essence, expectations change by creating situations where persons with developmental disabilities can demonstrate and refine the accepted social practices in the context where they are expected to occur (e.g. community and vocational transition programs involving high levels of normalization).

Finally, this study indicates that while transition services are available on a statewide basis, they tend to exist, to a great extent, in a nominal state. Large numbers of students with developmental disabilities do not receive daily transition programming and the level of consumer satisfaction with those services that do exist are low to moderate. These stakeholders also reported problems with cooperative planning and delivery of interventions. Based on these, and other findings, the establishment of statewide community and vocational transition programs that mirror national “exemplary” programs should be a leading priority.

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