

## Domain ⑥: Interagency Collaboration

Adult services are a critical component of the success of students with disabilities, and a necessity for successful transitions. The providers who directly impact students' successful transitions to adult life (e.g., vocational rehabilitation counselors, community rehabilitation providers, and centers for independent living personnel) are all crucial partners. Public schools hold the key to long term success for the students they serve, as they can help build the relationships with appropriate partners prior to students exiting high school. To drive home this point, did you know that "students who received assistance from 3 to 6 community-based agencies (as compared to students with assistance from 0 to 2 agencies) were more likely to be engaged in post-school employment or education" (NSTTAC, 2011)?

Inherently, the idea of interagency collaboration stresses that by working together, the sum of what cooperating entities can provide together will be more powerful than what separate actors working independently can produce (Gajda, 2004). Interagency collaboration is a quintessential part of the transition and outcome conversation given the wide-ranging and diverse needs of people with disabilities. For example, not every person is going to have the same need for or interest in: advocacy/legal services, assistive technology, career planning, financial forecasting, vocational preparation, independent living, postsecondary education, transportation, social security work incentives, etc. As such, at the individual level, the unique needs and desires of the person should subsequently influence the entities that are at the table and working collaboratively to support them as they work toward the transition from school to adult life.

While there is recognition and evidence of the importance of interagency collaboration and schools are mandated to ensure a "coordinated set of activities" for transition age students, what that looks like in practice is inconsistent. Noonan et al. (2008) documented eleven strategies used by high-performing local districts and communities to improve interagency collaboration. The strategies included: flexible scheduling and staffing; post-school follow-up; administrative support for transition; shared funding; state-supported technical assistance; time and ability to build personal connections; participation of adult service agencies in student and family meetings; training of students and families; cross-agency training; LEA meetings with adult agency staff; and information dissemination. As highlighted by the authors and the respondents in their study, the interactions of these variables are complex and were identified across various levels of authority (i.e., practitioner, administrative, state level).

Just like there is documentation that identifies what facilitates collaboration, there is also evidence that identifies the barriers to collaboration. Some of the factors cited that inhibit collaboration include: educators, adult service agencies, and service providers ignorance of each other's systems (Hart et al., 2001); lack of cross-disciplinary knowledge sharing (Plotner, Trach, Shogren, 2012); the lack of flexible funding sources (Noonan, Morningstar, Erickson, 2008); absence of transition-related competencies (Plotner et al., 2012); lack of adult service provider participation in student transition planning (Agran, Cain & Calvin, 2002) and the research to practice gap in evidence-based transition practices (Kohler & Green, 2004).

Recognizing that multiple agencies can contribute to the transition planning process, share resources, and partner in preparing students for adult community life can lead to more effective and efficient planning and improved outcomes for all students with disabilities. It is exciting to know the state of South Carolina is embarking on a new era of transition planning and collaborative partnerships. The Transition Alliance of South Carolina is enthusiastic to help support capacity building in local transition programming and to foster the interagency collaborative work that is blooming at the local level in district transition teams.