

## Domain ⑧: Professional Development

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, schools are responsible for undertaking a “coordinated set of activities” to prepare students with disabilities for post-school employment, education, and independent living. As noted by Certo et al., (2008), there are additional public service systems (i.e., rehabilitation system and the developmental disabilities system) that are responsible for the transition from school to work and adult living. There is a growing body of literature that discusses various aspects of professional development for transition service providers. At the school level, depending on the state, county, and district, the designated job title of the person responsible for overseeing that the transition process is effectively carried out varies. Some schools and school districts have a designated “Transition Specialist” or “Transition Coordinator.” In other locals, the primary responsibility falls on the Special Education classroom teacher. Then there are other entities, such as the Vocational Rehabilitation Department, that can also play a role in the movement from school to work. How professionals across multiple service systems are prepared to help students successfully transition is critically important.

Benitez, Morningstar & Frey (2009) bring to light some interesting discussion points regarding teacher perceptions of their transition competencies. Specifically, Benitez, Morningstar & Frey (2009) cite that “one reason students with disabilities face tremendous challenges during transition may be due to secondary transition education teachers’ feeling unprepared to plan for and deliver transition services (Wolfe, Boone, & Blanchett, 1998). Effectively preparing personnel requires focusing on specific transition competencies and knowledge that is often beyond what is currently included in most special education teacher preparation programs (Anderson et al., 2003; Morningstar & Clark, 2003)” (p.6).

Plotner, Trach & Strauser’s (2012) research comments on Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors identified transition competencies. They note that “previous research suggests that schools and transition service practitioners such as VR counselors may have been unsuccessful in part because school professionals have not understood the VR system. Conversely, VR professionals may not have understood the needs of students in transition. Furthermore, procedures to support collaboration between VR and public school have been questionable (Benz, Johnson, Mikkelsen, & Lindstrom, 1995; Oertle & Trach, 2007). It is essential that all transition professionals develop the necessary attitudes, knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to prepare students with disabilities to successfully transition to the adult world” (p.136).

Given the need to help professionals develop the necessary skills, in 2000, the Division on Career Development and Transition released a fact sheet outlining eight transition competency domains that align with the Council for Exceptional Children’s knowledge and skill standards. A summary of the competencies include:

1. Philosophical, Historical, & Legal Foundations of Special Education
2. Characteristics of Learners
3. Assessment, Diagnosis, and Evaluation
4. Instructional Content and Practice

5. Planning and Managing the Teaching and Learning Environment
6. Managing Student Behavior and Social Interaction Skills
7. Communication and Collaborative Partnerships
8. Professionalism and Ethical Principals.

Morningstar & Kleinhammer-Trammil (2005) highlight five areas critical to any program offering transition personnel development. They include:

1. **Knowledge of principles and basic concepts of transition education and service**—knowledge and application of transition services requirements under IDEA as well as emerging and recommended practices focusing on transition planning and the Individualized Education Program (IEP).
2. **Knowledge of models of transition education and services**—knowledge of specific program models that focus on individualized planning and align with general secondary education, including models of student-focused planning, student development, family involvement, and interagency collaboration, as described by leaders in the field (Blalock et al., 2003; DCDT, 2000).
3. **Skills in using strategies for developing, organizing, and implementing transition education and services**—skills needed to implement effective models of transition, as well as transition assessment, service coordination, and curriculum planning within the context of general and special transition instructional programs.
4. **Knowledge and use of collaboration competencies**—competence in service coordination with the complex array of agencies, programs, and services supporting young adults with disabilities.
5. **Knowledge and skills to address systemic problems in transition services delivery**—capacity to understand and address barriers and strategies for planning, developing, implementing, and promoting transition services and programs at local, state, and federal levels. The focus is at the programmatic structural and systems level (Kohler, 1998).

With a growing emphasis on making sure that students with disabilities are adequately prepared and supported to transition from school into adult life, there has been a spotlight placed on the professionals that are charged with helping to create that reality. Luckily, with improved technology and financial investments by federal and state entities, there are currently numerous transition professional development opportunities. In South Carolina, Ongoing efforts include:

- State and Local Conferences (e.g., SC Council for Exceptional Children and SC Division on Career Development and Transition)
- SC Department of Education's Research to Practice Institute (typically held in July each year)
- College and University coursework (e.g., Clemson, USC, Francis Marion)
- Online Transition and Supported Employment Coursework and Webinars (e.g., nsttac.org; apse.org; transitioncoalition.org)